

Czecho-Slovaks.

WHEN in the fourth century the nations were seeking their new homes, and the Slavs, who had their cradle in the South of Russia, parted in different groups, the Czecho-Slovak, although he was the least with regard to the number of his subjects, had the greatest energy, and went the westernmost of all his Slav brethren. There were just a few Slavs more who went still further west, but they soon drowned in the German sea. The Czecho-Slovak remained in the west, and his land looks as a finger of the great Slav hand, showing to other Slavs the Western culture, of which he became the interpreter. His situation being the very centre of Europe, and having high mountains as his natural frontier, the Czecho-Slovak was able, during the many hundreds of years of Germanizing efforts of his neighbours, to remain a Czechish peninsula into the German sea, his only connection with his Slav brethren being the Poles and a short frontier with the Russians.

The Czecho-Slovaks accepted soon Christianizing when it was preached to them by the two noble Greek brethren, Cyril and Methodius. The fact that Christianity was introduced to them by Greeks produced the second fact: the Czecho-Slovaks were never true followers of Rome.

The Reformation ideas found a good home in Bohemia and in the rest of the Czecho-Slovak countries. The greatest man that the Czecho-Slovak nation produced, John Hus, was not the first reformer, and by no means the only one; he had many fore-runners. His very clever colleague, Jerome of Prague, and his spiritual successor, Peter Chelcicky, are men of world's importance. The last one, a man who was born too soon, an apostle of world's peace and separation of State and church, the spiritual father of the "Unitas Fratrum," and the introducer of believer's baptism in the Bohemian Brethren Church, an unknown Baptist saint of the fifteenth century, is the man of whom Tolstoy professed himself an admirer and disciple. And the Bohemian Brethren Church is generally recognized to-day as the most beautiful blossom on the tree of Christianity since the time of the apostles. Comenius, the greatest and last religious leader of the "Unitas Fratrum," the teacher of nations, is a man who is not valued enough; and we are only at the beginning of trying to understand what he meant, not only for the Czecho-Slovaks but for the culture of the whole world.

Czecho-Slovaks are the only Slav nation who had a full Reformation which succeeded for two hundred years. It was an eminently religious country: "The land of Book and Cup." They printed the second Bible in a living tongue; New Testament in 1475, full Bible in 1488. So attached were they to the scripture that for a man who daily reads and meditates in the Bible they coined a single word, *Pismak*. Nowhere in the world is held so high the Lord's Supper as in the country of the Czecho-Slovaks, because they suffered so much for the "cup." The independent Protestant Czecho-Slovak State was really a paradise with the king-democrat George of Podiebrad, who was just a Czecho-Slovak citizen, chosen a king because of his spiritual nobility.

There is another fact which not only shows the missionary spirit of the Czecho-Slovaks in the dawn of the Reformation, but which is of spiritual interest to all Anglo-Saxons. When Scotland was still Roman Catholic but had already some friends of Reformation ideals, they sent to Prague a message in which they asked for some good representative of the Reformation-ideas in the cradle of Reformation. The Czechs sent their best people, a whole expedition, the leader of which, Pavel Kravar, was professor of the Prague University. In his adopted country he became known as Paul Cramer, or Cramer; he preached the gospel in Scotland for three years, and was burned as a heretic at St. Andrews in 1431.

When America was discovered, and at the same time when in many inhuman souls was discovered a selfish thirst after wealth, and many people left their own country to seek gold—at that very time the Czecho-Slovaks discovered in their hearts a healthy thirst after pure religion. Therefore they sent abroad a whole expedition to travel round and to find out the best Christians in the world and to bring home their valuable gold of experience.

Meanwhile the religious divisions were serious, and when civil war broke out in 1618, the Austrians invaded with a great army. The tragical battle on the White Mountain, near Prague, meant the beginning of the end of the independent Protestant Czecho-Slovak State. The Emperor Ferdinand proclaimed he would rather see Czecho-Slovakia a desert than a Protestant country. In the history of the world, there are few pages so dark as the pages of the persecution of Protestants in Bohemia by German Catholic Austria. After the terrible battle the Jesuits with soldiers entered the land and tried to "convert" the people to Roman Catholicism. They did it with sword and fire. First of all they beheaded twenty-seven Czechish religious leaders in the chief square in Prague before the eyes of the nation. Then they passed a law that everybody who will not be Roman Catholic

must leave the country, but without any property, or die. Many died, many left the country; and so, although Bohemia had before the thirty years war over three millions of inhabitants, after the war there were only 800,000 people. The property of the Protestant Czechs (which amounted at that time to 500 million crowns) was given to the Roman Catholic Church, Roman Catholic nobility, and to the Emperor. Three hundred years of terrible persecution followed, the history of which a Czech can read only with a blood-shedding heart. The Roman Catholic German Austrian tried and partly succeeded to make out of a Czechish Protestant country a Roman Catholic German country.

In order that the nation may forget their national hero, their big John (Hus), the Jesuits brought out another John (Nepomuk), a man who never existed, as the historians of to-day found out, and this Roman Catholic "saint" John Nepomuk was given to the nation as their patron saint in 1729, so that the real big saint and martyr John Hus may be forgotten.

After the glorious first part of the Czecho-Slovak history a dark intermezzo followed. But the enemy could not destroy all, although he could destroy something. In the forests and mountains remained always true "pismaks," readers of the Bible, although the Bible was proclaimed a poisoned book. From the pulpits the Jesuits advised people not to touch a Bible; it happened many times that the church janitors, who were true servants of the priests, brought Bibles which they had taken away from their owners by force. In order not to touch the poisoned book they carried them bound in chains, and their lords, the priests, burned them solemnly in the churchyards. One Jesuit leader proclaimed openly that he himself had burned 60,000 Bohemian Bibles and religious books. In order to find the hidden Bibles the Jesuits used to go round having shoes with nails; and they went to the fields where the people were working bare-foot, and trampling on their feet, they asked them where they had their Bibles. But the spiritual hunger deserved to be satisfied. Therefore it often happened that there came people with a big loaf of bread from one village where there was no Bible, to a village where they knew there still was a Bible, and asked to be allowed to read and learn parts by heart, in order to be able to share its contents with their neighbours when they returned.

Very dark three hundred years passed away, in which the Protestant Czecho-Slovak nation had to fight with two enemies: with Vienna and with Rome, who together tried to Germanize and to Romanize the nation. It was no real life, it was a poor existence, which the Czecho-Slovak nation had as its share. Therefore it became a psychological necessity that every Czecho-

Slovak was born already with a hatred against this dualism, and when he started to read his history the hatred was doubled.

The third period of the Czecho-Slovak nation starts at the moment when the great world war broke out. It was only natural that every Czecho-Slovak was meditating as follows: Our oppressor, from whom we expect nothing, as the last three hundred years have taught us, is in fight with the Entente. The Czecho-Slovaks at once resolved to be on the side of the Entente, as they saw in her the liberator. The resolution was natural, but how to realize it when officially they were Austrian subjects? Many came with the problem to the leader of the nation, to Prof. Masaryk, and proposed a revolution. But his plan was better. He foresaw that a revolution at that time would mean a suicide for the nation, and that it would not help anybody. Therefore he recommended another plan: the leaders ought to divide their task—part of them ought to go abroad to inform the Entente and to organise the revolution outside of the native country, and part of the leaders ought to stay at home to lead the nation. The soldiers he advised to follow the Austrian mobilisation orders, to get their guns and ammunition, but to try in the front to go over to the Entente as soon as possible. And this really happened. Whole regiments, with their colonels, and with music in front, marched to the other side. Thus it happened that the Czecho-Slovaks had a considerable army in Russia, France, and Italy. For this deed the Entente recognised the right for independence of the Czecho-Slovaks. But, of course, this deed, and the passive resistance at home, was not appreciated by Austria. And Austria punished the Czecho-Slovaks for their thirst after freedom in a most terrible way.

The children suffered especially. "Who saw the sufferings of men, did not see anything, he must see the sufferings of women; who saw the suffering of women, did not see anything, he must see the suffering of children," says one poet. The children were found on the streets seeking in ashes remainders of food. Many of them knocked on their knees at the door for a piece of bread. Many mothers were obliged to hide the bread from their children, that they might not eat on Monday what ought to last for the whole week. Children were sleeping in the schools because they were weak, and when they awoke they started to weep because of hunger. And when the war was nearly at an end, the Austrian minister for foreign affairs dared to say to the Czecho-Slovak leaders: "When we shall be bound to leave your country we shall leave a cemetery." And they tried to do it. A terrible message was sent to America by an American medical expedition just after the armistice: eighty-two per cent. of the Czecho-

Slovak children had consumption, and two children out of three who were born in the last year of the war died because of the weakness of their mothers. But in spite of this persecution the nation kept the motto of John Hus: "Woe to those who, for a piece of bread, sell the truth!"

When the war was near to an end, the Czecho-Slovaks had no patience any more to wait for the armistice, or even the peace. When they saw that their oppressor grew weaker and weaker, and their friends on the Entente side stronger and stronger, then they thought that the psychological moment had arrived for their liberation. It was the 28th of October, 1918, the greatest day in their history. The capital city, Prague, was in enthusiasm which scarcely can be described. Crowds crying, "Liberty, hurrah for the Entente!" were marching through the ancient streets. The nation, which to that time only dreamed about liberty, was making poems and songs on liberty—had to see their dreams fulfilled. People were kissing each other and embracing each other because of joy. The Czecho-Slovaks are proud that their greatest day was not spoiled by a single drop of blood, even blood of the enemy. The Germans feared that the day of liberation of the Czecho-Slovaks would be a day of vengeance—therefore they closed the doors and windows of their houses and in fear they expected what would come. But the new government sent their messengers at once to the Germans to open their houses, with the message that they ought not to be afraid as the nation did not intend to persecute anybody in the new state, not even the enemy.

When Czecho-Slovakia was liberated from national oppression, it seemed only natural that the national liberation should be crowned by a religious liberation. The Czecho-Slovak Government prescribed for the first time in the new state a census. Everybody had to say to what nationality he belonged, and what kind of religion he professed.

In the old Austria it was not easy to leave the church, but the conditions changed in the liberated state. There is complete religious liberty now. And there starts the new movement. Many a Czecho-Slovak who was even a nominal Roman Catholic was ashamed to put down that he belonged to the church which burned the greatest Czecho-Slovak that ever lived, John Hus, the church which robbed our greatest men of their property, and either killed them or sent them abroad as beggars, and which, with this dishonest property, made the cruel propaganda of their "faith" in our land. "We do not wish to be any longer in a society of executioners and robbers," said many. "Our leaving is a protest against keeping our name in the statistics of that church to which we never belonged. We cannot read the history

of our nation and not feel ashamed that we still belong to those people who destroyed the whole life of our nation."

Now the statistics will show how many people left the church. The Roman Catholic Church admits that "no more" than one-third of the population left the church, and that the worst people left the church; that she has cleansed herself now. . . . But the movement is only at the beginning and is continuing. It started formally, it is true. But there are signs already of a pure religious movement. Some of these people remained "without confession," but not all. Great numbers join the new Czecho-Slovak church. This church broke all ties with Rome, recognizes the great men of our Reformation as their spiritual leaders, uses the Czecho-Slovak language in the church, has pictures of John Hus on the altars, sings old Husitic hymns, the priests marry, and the church is growing in members as well as in inward evolution daily. They are eagerly learning from the Protestant churches new methods, such as the Sunday school and young people's societies.

Many join the different Protestant churches. There are Protestant churches which have accepted in few weeks more members than their own church had formerly, not hundreds only, but thousands. In the west of Bohemia, in a country town with a big Romish church, all the population left the Romish church, and all joined the Protestant church; in the Romish church there remained only three members—the priest, his lady-cook, and the janitor of the church.

In the Protestant churches are many people who appeal for deepening of our spiritual life. Denominational polemics cease, dogmatic battles are at an end; but everybody feels that we must start to be more pious, better, deeper, nearer to Christ. The Protestant churches resolved to send their pastors from the lukewarm churches to those religious regions where there is the greatest work and the deepest movement, in order that they may be influenced by that movement and bring it home.

There is no doubt this time means a great responsibility for all the Protestant churches. They feel it, and they have conferences in which they discuss what to do with the new members. It is true they cannot in one night become full-blooded Protestants, but it is touching to see how eager they are to learn and to know what they ought to do to be real "Bohemian Brethren."

And again, it has a great effect on the Protestant churches. Many a lukewarm church became a living force because of the new opportunity. The greatest movement is in the south-west of Bohemia, just where there was the greatest stronghold of the Romish church; but it is a holy ground—it is the birthplace of John Hus and the Czecho-Slovak Reformers.

It is just as in the Reformation time: people in the street, in the railroad cars, in the public places, speak about religious topics. No other topic is so popular in Czecho-Slovakia to-day. "Have you yet left the Roman Catholic church?" "Which church did you join?" "What is your idea about the Lord's Supper?" "What do you believe about God?" These are the questions which you would hear mostly in the streets of Czecho-Slovakia.

The most favourable kind of meetings is the discussion. If you wish to get the people together, announce a public discussion about religion. Let me describe one of these meetings. Two representatives of Protestantism and Roman Catholicism meet on the platform in a dogmatic battle. The Protestant representative criticizes the life of the Popes in the past. The Roman Catholic priest tries to defend the attacked Popes by the fact that even Christ had among His disciples one traitor, Judas. The ready Protestant answers, "Yes, but Judas had so much sense of honour that he went, took a rope, and hanged himself; so the immoral Popes ought to have hanged themselves and not deceive the world by playing at being Holy Fathers."

Czecho-Slovakia is the window to the East, the door by which everybody from the West must pass if he wishes to reach the Slavs. Win the Czecho-Slovaks and you have done a great step towards winning all the Slavs. Win the Czecho-Slovaks and you can use them as successful missionaries to the rest of the Slavs. Win Prague, the "Slav mother," and you have won the heart of the Slavs.

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