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THE MORAVIAN BRETHERN AND THE PILGRIMS OF ‘48

A good share of my talk last week was devoted to a history of the Czechs into the 17<sup>th</sup> century. I felt that it would give you a background for a better understanding of what sort of people the Czechs are and why they emigrated. I also told you about the first Bohemians who settled in the United States as refugees from their native land by way of Holland. You perhaps noticed that religion played an important part in their history throughout the centuries. Today I want to begin with the story of the Unity of Brethern or Moravian Brethern.

In the years following the Battle of White Mountain when King Ferdinand and his successors were attempting to destroy all traces of Protestantism in Bohemia and Moravia, some of the Hussites joined forces with the Waldensians, an evangelical sect which had for centuries led a religious life independent of Rome. During a crusade against them in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries large numbers of French and Italian Waldensian exiles found refuge in Bohemia, where they were allowed to use their national languages in religious worship. The Unity of Brethern, later known also as the Bohemian Brethern and the Moravian Brethern, were formally organized in 1457, at a time when they were fleeing to Saxony, Poland, and Hungary. Herrnhut in Saxony became a rallying point whence missionaries were sent throughout the worlds to Greenland, Labrador, England, the American colonies, the West Indies, Tibet, Africa, and the East Indies. They reached Georgia in 1734. Large numbers came to America in 1740 and founded the towns of Bethlehem and Nazareth in Pennsylvania. They cleared the forests, developed the farmlands, and carried the gospel to the Indians. As early as 1733 they had established missions in Greenland. The Brethern had inherited from Comenius, one of their early bishops, high ideals in the matter of education. Wherever they went they organized schools, academies, and other educational institutions, among them the first girls’ seminary in the United States. To this day Bethlehem in Pennsylvania is in the stronghold of the Moravian Church, which has a membership of about 31,000. The sect is today best known because its contributions to church music. In doctrine it is broad and radical, accepting the Bible as its only standard of faith and practice. Its chief stress is on behavior as opposed to doctrine and it insists on strict self-discipline in the personal conduct of its members.

Between the migrations just mentioned and the year 1840 there was very little migration from Bohemia. Economic conditions were fairly good. The Austrian monarchs, notably Maria Theresa and Joseph II, made reforms which alleviated the condition of the peasantry. The main features of serfdom were abolished in 1781, educational opportunities were improved, and a “Patent of Toleration” in the same year permitted non-Catholics to proclaim their adherence to either the Lutheral or Reformed confession. These reforms were combined, however, with a determined process of Germanization in which the German element was favored and industry encouraged in the Sudeten regions, where the Germans were most numerous.

These repressive measures aroused the national consciousness of the Czechs, kindled their patriotism, and brought about a renaissance in their literature and arts. It also aroused their longing for political liberty. A direct result was participation of the Czechs in the unsuccessful 1848 revolution and a further repression of liberty by the Austrian government. It was one of the direct causes for emigration to the United States. At first it was difficult to secure passports. In 1847 thirty-nine Czech soldiers deserted from the Austrian army and escaped to America. Their flight gave courage to others to desert. Most of them seem to have settled in New York, where they attracted others of their countrymen.

Discovery of gold in California and the work of immigration agents had their effect. Both church and state warned against emigration, but they went unheeded and by 1853 people were leaving Bohemia by thousands. There were almost equal numbers of men and women. The backward districts of the southern part of the country furnished by far the heaviest quota. By 1868 nearly 45,000 people had emigrated. Both the German and Czech press tried to discourage this exodus, but to no avail. The immigrants travelled to the United States by way of Hamburg, Bremen, Havre and Antwerp. Immediately they began to penetrate into the agriculture states. Before rail connections were established to Chicago, Buffalo was a sort of Mecca where they assembled for journeying westward, as much of the trip as possible by water. In the following seacoast, river, and lake cities, nuclei of Czech settlements were begun in the 1850's in New York, Baltimore, New Orleans, Buffalo, St. Louis, Dubuque, Cincinnati, Milwaukee, Detroit, Cleveland, Chicago, Racine, Manitowoc and Kewaunee, Wisconsin. Those in New Orleans, Buffalo and Dubuque soon disappeared by dispersal.

The first farming communities sprang up in Wisconsin. This state possessed advantages over others which strongly appealed to the Czechs. The climate, though severe, with long winters, was healthy and free from the yellow fever and malaria which afflicted those farther south. The soil was adapted to raising a variety of grains and vegetables with which the Czech husbandman was familiar. There was no fear of competition with negro labor. Wisconsin's attractions were widely advertised in German and Austrian newspapers. The state had the largest proportion of foreign citizens, in 1850 more than one out of three. A large number of these were Germans, where language was familiar to the Czechs. Taxes were low and a person could become a citizen within one year. Good land was available at \$1.25 an acre. The state maintained an immigration commissioner in New York who advertised widely in the foreign language press as well as by distribution of pamphlets.

For a long time Wisconsin stood at the front of Czech effort in the United States. Racine was called the Czech Bethlehem and in it was published the first Czech newspaper in America. It was the Slovan Amerikansky and appeared January 1, 1860. Its publisher was Frank Korizek, a stonemason and amateur musician, who had arrived from Moravia about 1853. We are told that he was inspired to try his hand at journalism after reading the life story of Benjamin Franklin. He was also influenced by the work of a Czech contemporary, Karel Havlicek, who had been a leader in revolutionary journalism in Bohemia. In his initial struggles Korizek was

helped by a fellow immigrant, Jan Barta Letovsky, who later moved to Iowa City and there in 1869 established a weekly with almost the same name, Slovan Americky.

The best known Wisconsin Czech was Korizek's son-in-law, Karel Jonas, who came to the United States as a political refugee in 1863. Being a young man, he learned the English language readily. By 1865 he had published his first book, the Bohemian English Interpreter and in 1876 his Bohemian-English and English-Bohemian dictionaries, which are still in use. He had been called to America as the editor of Slavie, a paper formed from merging of the Slovan Americkansky and the St. Louis Narodni Hoviny, both of which ran into financial difficulties during the Civil War and were on the point of bankruptcy when merged. Jonas became a power among the American Czechs. Friend and foe looked up to him as an authority. Wisely, he refused to pen the columns of Slavie to religious disputes. In politics he aligned himself with the Democratic Party and as a result many of the Czechs followed him. He published several more books. In 1883 he became a state senator, a consul to Prague in 1885, lieutenant-governor of Wisconsin in 1890, consul to St. Petersburg in 1894, and in the same year consul to Crefeld, Germany, where he died in 1896.

Wisconsin now ranks fifth among the states in the number of Czech inhabitants. Milwaukee is their only large city, but there are colonies in Caledonia, Cobb, Kewannee, Manitowoc, Muscoda, Pilsen, Slovan, Yuba, and over a hundred other communities. Racine and Caledonia soon became points of dispersal for other states. In the early 1850's agricultural lands were being opened in adjoining states and thousands of Czechs migrated to Nebraska, Illinois, Iowa, and Minnesota, where together with Texas, they still predominate in the number of rural settlers of Czech extraction.

The only southern state with many Czech communities is Texas, where immigration began before 1850. Most of it was by way of New Orleans and Cat Spring, which was merely a point of dispersal and never became much of a Czech settlement itself. Most of the Texas Czechs were union sympathizers during the Civil War and the few who served in the Confederate Army did so under protest. In Missouri Bohemians appeared as early as 1845 and St. Louis was soon a large Czech center. It had the distinction of several firsts, among them the first Slovanska Lipa in 1859. This was an organization founded for the entertainment of its members. It consisted of a dramatic club which staged amateur plays, a singing society and a library. St. Louis also established the first Sokol in America in 1865. This was only three years after the founding of the parent society in Prague. The Sokol or Falcon is a gymnastic society devoted primarily to physical training, but emphasizing also good citizenship. The Sokol idea has spread to almost every Czech-American community. Its members are most active in the cities, where they appear to have the necessary leisure for intensive training.

St. Louis had the second Czech newspaper in America, losing the honor of first place to Racine by just twenty days. It had the first Czech-Slavonic Benevolent Society in 1854. This was an insurance society with sickness and death benefits, the predecessor of a number of other benevolent organizations of which at least one exists in every American community with even a few Czech residents. In 1854 also the first

Czech Catholics parish in the United States was organized there by a missionary priest, Father Jindrich Lipovsky. However, Monsignor Josef Hessoun was the great leader of the St. Louis Czech Catholics for many years. In addition to organizing two parishes he founded and edited two Czech Catholic newspapers. Missouri gradually lost its leadership and now ranks tenth among the states in its number of Czechs.

In my next talk I want to tell you about the Czechs who have settled in the rest of the United States and particularly about those in Minnesota.