

OUR BOHEMIAN POPULATION¹

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The chief causes for Bohemian emigration to this country are common to all other industrial countries of Europe. Political oppression, militarism, low wages, overcrowded labor markets, the prospect of improving their material condition, and the love of liberty—such are the causes which bring foreign settlers to this country. Bohemian emigration did not begin as early as in other countries, although a number of Bohemian and Moravian families migrated to the American colonies after the defeat of White Mountain in 1620; history mentions them as fighting for American independence. After that the Bohemian emigration was very limited, and hardly noticeable until it was revived in 1848; but today there are in the United States over half a million of Bohemians, over 50,000 of whom made their homes in this state.

The Bohemians do not come here with the intention of amassing riches and then returning to the old country; they come here to stay. When they come to America they are not different from the immigrants of other countries. They bring with them the customs and habits of their native land; they remember with sadness and pride their old homes; but none the less do they love and cherish their new homes, and are always ready and willing to offer their lives and goods whenever this country is in need of them. Many a Bohemian fell fighting under the stars and stripes during our late War of Secession; many a

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Bohemian mother watched in vain for the return of her son who went to help liberate an oppressed people.

In this state we find the Bohemians engaged in nearly all the useful avocations. They are good tillers of the soil, of which many beautiful farms all over the state bear witness. We find them in the factories, shops, and stores, and there are Bohemian physicians, lawyers, druggists, teachers, etc. Many large Bohemian settlements may be found, especially in the counties of Manitowoc, Kewaunee, Oconto, La Crosse, Adams, and Marathon.

In their social life the Bohemians of this state are in no way behind other nationalities. They have benevolent, religious, dramatic, musical, educational, turner, and other societies. They own their halls, churches, and schools. In Milwaukee alone there are at least fifteen Bohemian societies; they own a beautiful hall on the corner of Wine and Twelfth streets, and two churches.

The Bohemians are assiduous readers of newspapers and books; consequently, wherever there is a Bohemian settlement there is a Bohemian newspaper. There are published in the United States twelve Bohemian dailies and at least twenty weekly papers. In Wisconsin, Bohemian weekly papers are published at Racine, Kewaunee, La Crosse, and in Milwaukee two, the *Democrat* and the *Bornost*—the former, a family paper, having a large circulation all over the United States. It may further be truthfully said that the Bohemians, as soon as they land on our shores, try their best to familiarize themselves with the language and institutions of this country; and it was to aid them in this praiseworthy effort that newspapers were published in their native tongue.

In political affairs, the Bohemians of this state have been taught that one of the essential qualifications of good citizenship is reverent submission to law. Consequently their political history will show that they are not inclined to abandon individual duty and responsibility, or to prostitute the privileges and opportunities afforded by a free and generous popular government to the behest of corrupt selfishness and disloyalty to public trust. They take great pride in their citizenship, and

fully appreciate our generous laws that vest them with the speedy right to vote.

Aside from an exceedingly personal interest which the Bohemians always take in every election, their duties to their homes and families have overshadowed any temptation to become political leaders or conspicuous public characters. Thus far in this state they have proven themselves content with gradual financial success as laborers, farmers, mechanics, and business men. They follow admirably the wise saying that "an unwise thirst for public employment is the worst of social maladies." Of course, if either of the two great political parties recognizes them with an appointive office, they take great pride in the fact; or, when one of them is elected to an office, he always, so far as I know, tries to perform its duties honestly. I am still looking for a Bohemian-American who, whether appointed or elected to an office, proved himself false or dishonest. It may be said of the Bohemians that, just as Hollanders are and always were unswerving Republicans, so the Bohemians were always loyal Democrats; but in recent years many of them are changing their political views and are joining the ranks of the Republicans. Let scorn or wit exhaust their sneers and jibes, one fact must be admitted and cannot be truthfully denied of Bohemians—that as "Mugwumps" they have always exerted themselves for something higher and nobler than mere official patronage, and they cannot be accused of office-begging. This alone gives them a right to respect, and in it can be discerned a principle of political action, which should be an inspiring and elevating force in a government like our own.

Among the few men who have held positions of political prominence, and have been more or less influential in shaping the political choice of the Bohemians in America, was the lamented Charles Jonas of Racine, who, serving this country as consul to Germany, came to an untimely death. With deep affection for and trust in his own people, he made it his life-work to try to better their condition. He was recognized as the Bohemian authority of this country. His close application to literature and journalism, and his own ambitious efforts, undermined his health. He was editor of the *Slavie*, and author of various use-

ful books; among these were translations of American laws and the constitution, and English-Bohemian and Bohemian-English dictionaries—books which may be found in almost every Bohemian home.

In conclusion, I will only add that the Bohemians do not pretend to be better than any other of the many nationalities that establish their homes in this state; but I do claim that they try their best to be good American citizens, and they only ask from their American fellow-citizens charitable indulgence for their imperfections and deficiencies. In a decade or two there will no longer be Germans, Bohemians, Irish, Hollanders, Poles, or other foreign elements, but one great, invincible, and liberty-loving American nation. The many nationalities that now occupy the United States will only live in history. And the Bohemians, like others, try to bequeath to their children and descendants an honest and untarnished name, so that in after years they need not be ashamed of their Bohemian ancestors; but may with pride own that they are Americans of Bohemian descent.