

POLANDERS IN WISCONSIN¹

BY JOHN W. S. TOMKIEWICZ.

The principal reasons for Polish immigration to the United States have been the grossly inadequate wages paid in Europe; the inability to procure farming lands; the unjust restraint and oppression of Poland by the three powers, Russia, Austria, and Germany—those nations having so restricted and limited the rights and privileges of the Poles that, in some instances, it became impossible for them to remain longer in their native country; religious oppression at home; and the economic advantages possessed in America by the ordinary working classes. To these may be added the stringent military requirements of respective governments, under which every Pole was obliged to serve in the army from three to five years. During the Franco-Prussian war in 1870, there was among the northern Polish provinces in Europe a widespread desire for migration to America; and many of the Poles came to this country, the cost of transportation being advanced to them in not a few cases. At the present time there are two million Polish-Americans in the United States, of which number sixty per cent were born in Europe. The city of Chicago has 150,000 inhabitants of Polish parentage, and it has a larger population of Polish-Americans than has any other city in our country. There are three hundred Polish churches in the United States—forty-five in Wisconsin; fifty-two Polish newspapers in the United States—five in Wisconsin; a Polish seminary, in the city of Detroit; a Polish college, in Chicago; a Polish high school, in Milwaukee; a Polish Catholic Union, with 12,000 members; the Polish National Alliance,

¹ Address delivered before the Wisconsin state historical convention at Milwaukee, October 11, 1901.

with 30,000 members, and several other similar organizations with 500 to 5,000 members each; a Polish singing association; a Polish gymnastic alliance; and many other organizations.

The first Polish settlers in Wisconsin arrived about forty-five years ago; prominent among these pioneers were Anthony Kochanek, Joseph J. Borchardt, August Rudzinski, Martin Krueger, and Ludwig Heller. About the year 1872, the Polish colonies in Milwaukee became conspicuous, and during the last few years their population has grown very rapidly—to the present number of fifty-thousand. Scattered through the state of Wisconsin there are important Polish settlements, especially at Marinette, Stevens Point, Berlin, Menasha, Manitowoc, Beaver Dam, La Crosse, and Independence. Several other Polish colonies are now being formed, as the Poles are fond of farming, and prefer country to city life. About one-fifth of the population in Stevens Point, and at least half of that of Portage county, are Polanders. The Polish inhabitants of Wisconsin now number about 200,000.

It is a natural instinct with the Poles to live in an economical manner; but, at the same time, they fully enjoy the pleasures of life, as well as others. It has been assumed that virtually all the Polish people are ordinary poor laborers. This is a mistaken and untrue notion; if any one will take the time to investigate, he will be convinced that such statements are erroneous. The majority of the Poles have properties of their own; and among them are not less than a hundred persons in Wisconsin who are considered to be worth from \$25,000 to \$100,000. The houses of Poles are neat and well furnished, and they live very comfortably. There are several Polish building and loan associations in Wisconsin; the largest of these are the Skarb Polski Mutual, and the Polish National. The former is regarded as one of the strongest in the state; it conducts business on a large scale, and makes more building loans than any other association in the city of Milwaukee. As a general rule, the Poles are industrious, sober, intelligent, and patriotic people. Few foreigners in this country possess more national characteristics than do the Poles, for they cling closely to the precedents of society and custom long established in Poland. On Sundays

and holidays their neat and tasteful apparel is conspicuous, and their preference is for garments clean, simple, and neat, rather than expensive or showy.

The military spirit of the Poles was early displayed in our state, and rendered them prominent in military affairs. In the year 1877 a Polish company, the Kosciuszko Guard, was organized in Milwaukee; and in the same year it became a company in the Wisconsin National Guard. Its officers were: Captain, Francis J. Borchardt; first lieutenant, Jacob Nowak; second lieutenant, Martin Schubert. During the captaincy of Borchardt, the Guard was in its prime, and displayed fine technique in drill and military discipline. The adjutant-general of Wisconsin, in reporting to Governor Smith in 1879, said of this company: "It makes an exceedingly fine appearance; is well drilled and disciplined; and under their able commander can safely be classed as one of the best companies in the state." Capt. Borchardt took an active interest in the maintenance of military interest among the Poles. In 1886 he originated the scheme of building a large and substantial armory for the guard; it was successful a year later and the building erected,—on First avenue, between Lapham and Mitchell streets,—and named the Kosciuszko armory. It is the largest armory in the state. Its interior is artistically decorated with various well-selected emblems of Old Poland and of America. During the conflict between the United States and Spain, the Kosciuszko Guard, then commanded by Capt. Thaddeus Wild, was one of the companies that volunteered for the war. This company was stationed at Jacksonville, Florida, during the war, awaiting orders to march to the front. Several Polish youths have gone to the Philippine Islands, and have been actually engaged in bloody battles there.

In regard to the congregations and schools in Milwaukee, it may be said that there were several groups or colonies of Polanders who early came to the Cream City. One colony settled on the East side in the first, eighteenth, and thirteenth wards. This group erected a Polish church on the corner of Franklin and Brady streets. The other colony settled down on the South side, in the eleventh, twelfth, and fourteenth wards. They

erected a church on the corner of Grove and Mitchell streets, known as St. Stanislaus church. In the year 1865 some of the pioneers had organized the first Polish Catholic church in our state. There were then only thirty Polish families in Milwaukee; they purchased a small church from the St. Stephen's Lutheran congregation on the corner of Grove and Mineral streets. Among the beautiful and costly churches (now seven in number) since erected by the Poles of Milwaukee, the magnificent St. Josephat's, on the corner of Lincoln and First avenues, is pre-eminent. It cost \$250,000, and is the largest Polish Catholic church ever erected in any city of the United States. Unusual features of this edifice are the artistic interior decoration and beautiful statuary.

Connected with all the Polish churches are commodious school buildings, with good teachers and instructors. The St. Josephat's school has the largest number of children, averaging 1,000 pupils. The Polish high school—connected with St. Josephat's church, and known as St. Josephat's normal school—was built in the year 1890. Shorthand, type-writing, book-keeping, and general business courses are taught, and its work has been very successful. Of late, a large percentage of Polish children are sent to the public schools, immediately after confirmation; and many would attend the public schools only, if accommodations therein would allow. The majority of the Poles speak the German language with ease—indeed, they are often taken for Germans; and the younger members of Polish families are thoroughly familiar with the English language. The Polanders deserve credit for loving their native language—as a rule, more than other nationalities, for they speak it at all times, and in all places. The Polish language is one of the most refined, and the Polish literature the most interesting, in the world. True sympathy and feeling can not be expressed in English, as it is susceptible of being expressed in the Polish language. As a rule, when the attempt is made to translate Polish poetry and other literature into English, it is immediately stripped of its sympathetic quality, and seems almost meaningless.

The Kuryer Publishing Company is the leading Polish publishing firm in the United States. It is the proprietor of the

Kuryer Polski, the oldest Polish daily newspaper, which has a large circulation. Michael Kruazka, the president of the company, has individually published this paper for the last fifteen years, and he has been prominent in politics; in 1892, he was elected to the state senate.

The Poles have become known everywhere for their political ambition and their influence in local politics. The majority of the Poles are Democrats; but of late years they have changed, and now they include Republicans as well as Democrats. Many Poles have held or now hold positions of trust and confidence.

The Poles never forget their patriots, and always praise their deeds in fighting for the liberty of their beloved native land. In Milwaukee, there is on the South side a public park, which has been named in honor of the Polish hero Thaddeus Kosciuszko. In the spring of 1901, a corporation was organized by the Poles of Milwaukee, under the name of the "Kosciuszko Monument Association," for the purpose of erecting a monument in honor to Kosciuszko. Active measures have been taken for the purpose of raising the necessary funds; thus far over \$5,000 worth of stock has been actually subscribed for; and it is expected that in the near future there will be \$35,000 subscribed for, and paid into the treasury of the association for the monument. It is hoped that in less than two years the Kosciuszko monument will be erected and dedicated in Kosciuszko park, in the midst of one of the largest Polish settlements in the United States.