



## Jan, the Polish Miner

By Walter E. Weyl

With Pictures by Wladyslaw T. Benda

THE dull sun breaking uncertainly through the April clouds fell aslant upon the brown floor of Battery Park and the gray walls of the tall office buildings looming up behind. It seemed to Stanislaus, who had been patiently waiting all the afternoon, that to-day the sky and earth in America were like the gentle neutral tints of the plains of his beloved Poland. He seemed to see again the little thatched huts, the gay little flower-gardens, the groups of picturesque peasants in their many-colored blouses, even the white grunting pigs streaked with the mud in which they wallowed. And yet he was not in Poland, which he had left three years before, but in New York, at Battery Park, awaiting the coming of his big brother Jan.

The tender arrived, and after a moment's pause the sea-wearied passengers filed out in bewildered groups. There were Galician Jews and Slovaks, and here and there a broad-shouldered German. Then Jan appeared. He was above the height of the other men of the boat, and

was broad and deep-chested in proportion. He had on a *sordak*, or sheepskin coat, with the fleece turned inside, and on his head, covering the yellow shock of hair and throwing a shadow upon the broad, flat nose, was a huge battered felt hat. He seemed unconscious of the strange-garbed Americans, and it was not until he had actually collided with Stanislaus that he seemed to recognize the little man in the derby hat, the ready-made overcoat, and the green-flowered tie as his own brother, his own mother's son.

Then the tears came to his eyes. He did not see the hand clumsily tendered him, but, incontinently dropping his bundles, he threw his flapping arms around his brother. Then he kissed him twice.

"Blessed be the Lord Jesus Christ!" he cried.

Stanislaus had the word "Hullo" on his lips, but it seemed incongruous after the ardent Polish salutation.

"Blessed be the Lord Jesus Christ!" repeated the tall man.

"For ages and ages! For ages and

ages!" answered the little brother Stanislaus.

Had Jan not been met at the Barge Office, had he taken his chances with hundreds of thousands of other Polish immigrants who have arrived during the last decade, his story might have been different.

The new immigrant, after lodging for a night at a Polish boarding-house in New York, might on the morrow have been shipped by some employment agent to an unknown point in Florida or Alabama to be sold into peonage. Perhaps the employment agent would not have been to blame; he, too, might have been ignorant of Florida and what work in a turpentine belt or lumber camp meant. But for the grace of God, Jan might have spent ninety-six hours in the hulk of a slow, tumbling freight steamer, and then been forced by the lash and the fear of death into inhuman labor, involuntary and unpaid. Had he sought to escape from this bondage, he might, like other Poles who have been sold into peonage, been chased with bloodhounds and beaten until almost dead.

Even had he been more fortunate and escaped peonage in the South, Jan might still have been little better off in some of the labor camps of the North. Like other Polish immigrants, he might have been sent to quarries or railway camps miles away from the nearest justice of the peace, where he would have learned, perhaps, to run when the dynamite was exploded, but not learned how to obtain his wages or safeguard them when he got them. He might have been defrauded of the scanty earnings given for his arduous work; he might have been mulcted for railway fares, for goods claimed to have been sold to him in company stores, for the attendance of non-attending doctors, and for the general good of his associated exploiters. Had he saved a little pittance, he might have confided his money to the omnipresent foreign banker only to find that riches take unto themselves wings. He might, like others of his countrymen in America, have been killed at his dangerous work, or, still worse, been maimed and thrown aside and deported as likely to become a public charge. Had Jan not met Stanislaus at the Barge Office,

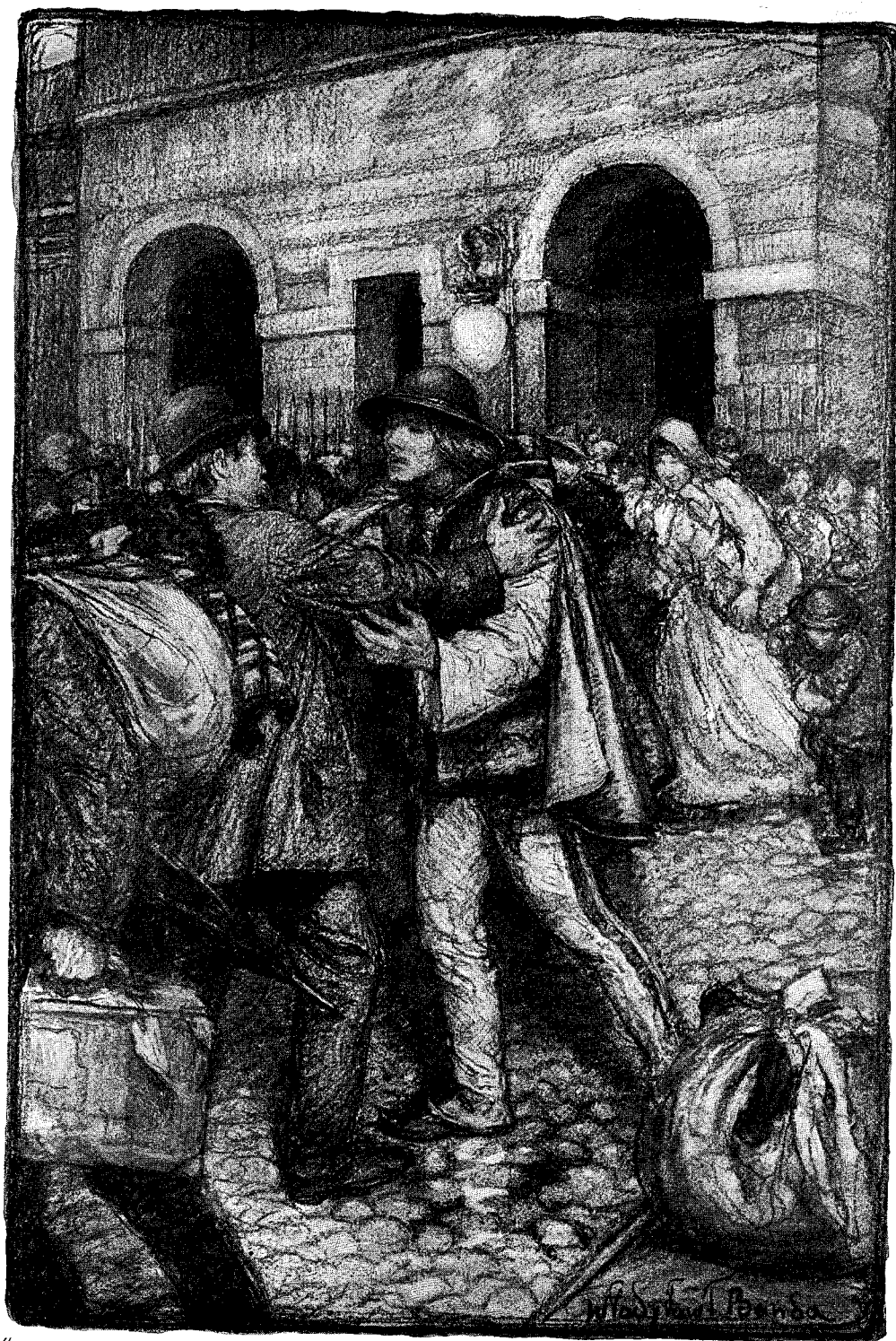
he might have run the sickening gamut of misfortunes that befall the ignorant immigrant upon these shores.

But Jan was born lucky, and he found a place in America as soon as he landed. In fact, he had found a place even before he landed. The great coal company working in the anthracite fields of Pennsylvania did not violate the Contract Labor Law by importing workmen from foreign countries, but the foreman *did* casually mention to Stanislaus and others that there were places for more men. So, on an early spring day in 1899, Jan sold all he possessed in the little Polish village, and twelve days later was walking the streets of Shenandoah.

Not many decades ago Shenandoah was an ordinary Pennsylvania mining town. The men who lived there were miners and mine laborers of American, English, Irish, German, or Welsh extraction, and their language was English. But strikes came, the Union was broken, and, to make the assurance of low wages doubly sure, immigrants from all the countries of Europe were imported. Soon there were Poles and Ruthenians and Slovaks and Hungarians and Lithuanians and Italians and Russians and men of all the nations of the earth. These men, brought there to force wages down, were kept there to keep wages down. Though there were more men than the mines needed, still more men were brought in. In the course of time Shenandoah ceased to be an English-speaking town, and on the streets, in the shops, in the churches and saloons, Polish, Ruthenian, and other Slavic languages became the current tongues.

The first Polish invaders of Shenandoah had been badly treated. The English-speaking miners felt a legitimate distrust of men who were willing to work cheaper, and the general population disliked the newcomer because he spent little and was not overclean and not always sober. The first Polish immigrants were beaten by the miners, arrested and clubbed by the constables, and generally maltreated by the whole population. Their wages were not always paid, they were charged exorbitant rates by men willing to lodge them or by grocers who condescended to feed them. But the Slavs persisted and





"... HE THREW HIS FLAPPING ARMS AROUND HIS BROTHER. THEN HE KISSED HIM TWICE"

survived. Though housed in miserable, deserted shanties, though feeding on what they could get, though maligned and persecuted by every one, they stood their ground until new immigrants came to swell their ranks. In the twenty years prior to Jan's arrival they multiplied twentyfold, and while in 1880 there were less than 2,000 Poles in the anthracite regions, there were by 1900 over 37,000 of them.

You can't maltreat a people when it grows big. The Poles soon grew to be too large a contingent of the many-nationed population to be defrauded and insulted at pleasure. Like the Hungarians, the Italians, the Lithuanians, the Slovaks, the Austrians, and all the other non-English-speaking mine-workers, they increased so rapidly that soon they were in a majority in the Shenandoah district, and thenceforth they became comparatively free from the persecutions of the older inhabitants.

There were other reasons why the Poles and their fellow-foreigners became immune from the earlier attacks. It soon came to be realized that the hard-saving Poles were in possession of money, and men with lands and houses to sell sought out the despised immigrant. The old English-speaking miner had been displaced. He had been defeated by these men with lower standards imported by the coal companies, and he was anxious to leave the country and seek his fortune elsewhere. So he sold his house, and where one English-speaking family had lived before, three or four Polish families now lived, or perhaps only one Polish family with seven or eight Polish boarders.

It was in such a house that Jan first lived, with six other lodgers. He did not pay much, for the men clubbed together for the cost of their coarse, simple food, and the one woman in the group cooked for all. It was not a clean establishment nor an attractive one. If some of the men were drunk, the others were obliged to sleep harder to shut out the noise, and if, as sometimes occurred, there was fighting, it was the better part of valor to leave the place for a while until the drunken brawl was over. Jan did not drink or fight, and he did not like the life with these rougher men, and he longed for the time when he, like Stanislaus, could be married and live in a shanty by himself.

It happened sooner than he had anticipated. By living on one-third of his slender income Jan saved enough to enter upon the perilous matrimonial venture. The imported bride looked out with wide, curious eyes from beneath her flowered kerchief, and obediently she followed Jan to all the Shenandoah stores, where the bridegroom, according to the Polish custom, bought her trousseau. The picturesque kerchief was discarded for a much-bedecked American hat, made in a sweatshop for the immigrant trade, and Jan spent other dollars for American shoes, American gloves, and for a strange article of apparel unknown to the staggered bride—a very stiff and very new corset. The trousseau purchased, there remained no further obstacle to matrimony, and so a year after Jan's arrival the marriage took place.

There were many wedding guests who wanted to dance with the pretty bride, and each man who claimed that honor placed, according to the Polish custom, a quarter of a dollar in the bride's apron. Then the wit went around. To each of the guests he made his address, ascribing hyperbolic virtues to the young girl about to be married, and speaking of the many necessities and expenses that marriage entails. Each of the beer-drinking guests gave to the marrying couple a financial token of sympathy, and when the protracted wedding was over, Jan found that he had not only paid all expenses, but had made by the marriage a substantial gain of twenty dollars, to say nothing of a blushing wife.

The house to which the new couple moved was not sumptuous. It consisted of two small rooms, about sixteen feet square, built of hemlock boards, with weather-strips nailed over the crevices. There was no ceiling, plastering, or wall-paper, and there was nothing to keep the place warm or to make it attractive. The owner of this miserable shanty was a great mining corporation, and although the rent was but four dollars a month, the profit was high, for the house had cost only three hundred dollars at the beginning, and since its erection, twelve years before, not a dollar had been spent upon repairs or improvements.

Luckily for them, neither Jan nor





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Marya had ever been used to comfort or the material decencies. A home was a place, not to live in, but to save in. After all, the house, though wretched, was superior to some of the Polish houses in which the roof was so rotten that the rain came through and formed puddles on the floor. The furnishings of Jan's house were of the simplest description. He had not reached the oilcloth stage of development, and carpets were as yet beyond the range of his wildest hopes. The cooking-stove, picked up in a junk-shop, was both a necessity and an adornment, as were the plates and one or two china dishes which reposed upon the kitchen table. A large bed, four plain chairs, a number of clothes-hooks upon the wall, a chromo of Vice-President Hobart, and a prayer-book in Polish completed the appointments of the new home.

For the time being, at least, Jan was satisfied. He had a wife and a home and enough to eat. He did not, of course, endeavor to compete in expenditures for food with the lavish English-speaking miners, who lived in houses that might rival the mansion of a mayor, and, though workmen, dined, no doubt, on unheard-of luxuries. Still Jan, with his average of nine dollars a week, could buy his meat and eggs and cheese and sardines, and his cabbages, potatoes, pickles, and apples, to say nothing of coffee and beer, and so he and his wife felt that they had the run of the American markets.

The labor through which Jan earned the money to buy all these luxuries was by no means to the immigrant's liking. It was very hard work in the close little mine chamber, and Jan, who was only a miner's laborer, envied the full-fledged miner with whom he worked, and who for less labor got more pay. Besides, it was dangerous. The very first day of his work Jan saw a Polish mine laborer in an adjoining chamber carried out senseless, and before the man reached the upper air he was already dead. There were many widows in the Polish district of Shenandoah.

Then the Union came. Jan had known nothing of unions, and after he had asked the priest he knew little more. But soon he noticed that a change had come over the stolid mine-workers, a strange excite-

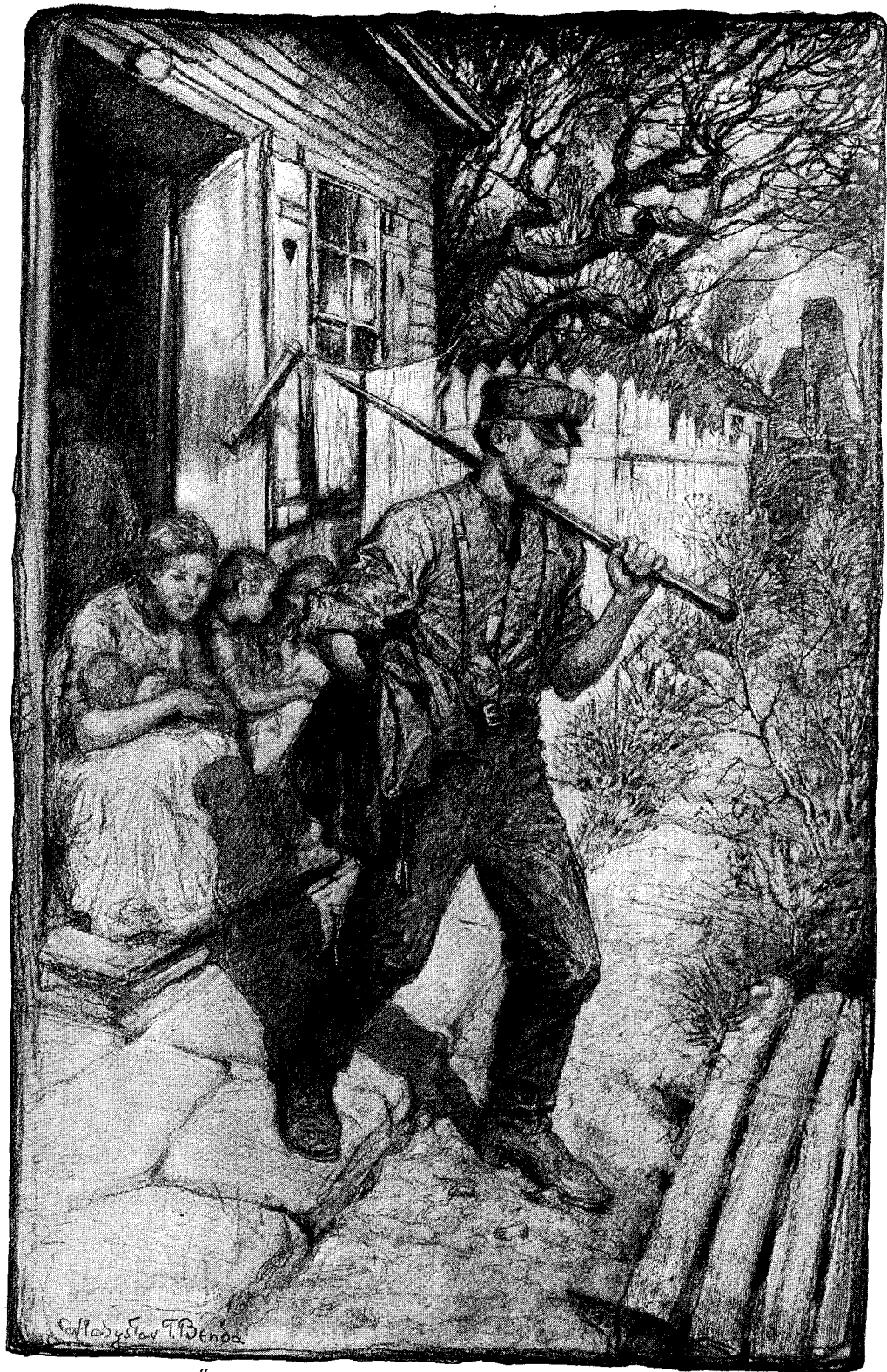
ment filled them, and new words, like "grievance," "wage-scale," "powder-charge," came to him in mutilated and unintelligible forms. The English-speaking men were friendlier, and one day an Irish miner met Jan in the up-going cage, and, putting his hand upon the immigrant's shoulder, said, "Hullo." Thenceforth Jan was an ardent unionist.

The strike came. Ostentatiously and with an almost reverent enthusiasm Jan quit work. He did not quite understand the intricacies of the situation. He did not know of the impending Presidential election or of the financial and political problems involved, but he was unreservedly for the strike. A great new feeling of brotherhood with all these men of all these nations filled the heart of Jan, and when the strike ended in a victory, the immigrant almost forgot the higher wages and the better conditions in the glorious sense of a great vague destiny fulfilled. For the first time since landing in this country Jan felt himself to be an American.

Before the next strike came Jan was a full-fledged miner and an ardent and devoted unionist. He was now earning better wages, but his standard of living had risen and his horizon widened. A carpet had come into the little house, a baby had followed, and a second was on the way. Jan now read not only the Polish but even the English papers, and when one day he was elected as a delegate from his local, his pride knew no bounds. On the very day he bought the piano Jan heard that the convention had declared for a suspension, and within a short time, after many abortive conferences, the final clash came, and the great strike of 1902 was on.

Striking is very slow, very undramatic work. When you are sweating in the bowels of the earth you like to think of the green fields above, but during the long, dull, strike-enforced vacations you almost wish yourself back in the mines with your pick in your hand. There were picnics and baseball games and other diversions for the striking mine-workers, and there was always work to be done in your house and in your garden. Then there were strike meetings, when the crowds of many-tongued miners standing under the cool green trees listened for





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OF HIS DAYS HE IS LIKELY TO REMAIN A MINER"



hours to the harangues of English, Polish, Italian, and Hungarian orators. Jan attended all of these meetings and spoke at many, but he avoided saloons where the more turbulent unionists gathered, and when a bloody affray broke out between strikers and imported strike-breakers, Jan was away and took no part.

The time had come for the immigrant to maintain the foothold that he had gained. The foreign-speaking mine-workers, with their greater economy and their lower standard of living, were in a good position to fight out the battle of starvation, and long after the English-speaking miners were in receipt of relief the Poles and Italians and Hungarians were cheerfully drawing upon their past savings. But Jan was less fortunate. He cursed the wretched piano which he had bought to mock his distress, and he almost deplored the advent of the new baby, which added to the expenses of the household. Stanislaus had his own children to look after. To cap the climax, Marya was ill, and sometimes the querulous wife upbraided Jan for all these strikes, for which she seemed to hold him uniquely responsible. But Jan, despite subtle suggestions, refused to return to work. The piano was sold for a fifth of what it had cost, other articles of less value went to the pawnshop, and finally the family came down to a diet of potatoes and coffee. But still Jan refused either to give in or to accept aid from the Union.

At last the strike was over and the victory won. It had been a dearly fought battle, and there were blanched cheeks when the struggle was over. But the conditions against which the men had fought were at least improved, and, more than all, there was born in the hearts of many thousands of men a new sense of brotherhood and a new feeling of solidarity.

To-day Jan is still a miner, and to the end of his days he is likely to remain a miner. "There is no life," he thinks, "like the life underground, where it is warm in winter and cool in summer." True, men are killed every day, and others are maimed, but is life aught but the readiness to die? To-day Jan earns more wages than he did before the strike, but his struggle is harder. He has now six children, besides the four that Stanislaus

left when the mine explosion occurred. There is less space in the six-roomed house than formerly there was in the two-roomed cabin.

For another eight or ten years Jan's life is likely to be hard. He has become imbued with the American idea of educational opportunity, and his children will not be sent to work until they are sixteen. Though enthusiastically a miner, and loving his *métier*, Jan intends all his children for more genteel occupations, perhaps as clerks or stenographers or school-teachers, or perhaps—perhaps even as lawyers.

Sometimes poor Jan is troubled by the recognized superiority of his children to himself. He will never speak English fluently, though every evening he religiously reads his newspaper; but for his children English is as natural as is praying to a priest. The children do not seem to be as obedient or respectful as Jan remembers his own brothers to have been, and they do not seem interested in the least in the woes of Poland or in the dream of that great country's future rehabilitation. "America is a wonderful land," thinks Jan, "but it is a land of forgetfulness. My children are not my children, for my children have forgotten that they are Poles."

Jan has never forgotten. Ten years in America, ten thousand thousand æons in America, would never efface from his mind the doleful memories of his native land, the persecutions of the Russian or the petty tyrannies of the Prussian. Even his Union card and his certificate of citizenship are less cherished by Jan than is his membership card in the Polish National Union, which exists for its tens of thousands of members in America and for the greater glory and profit of the future republic in Poland.

The Poles in America are excellent citizens of the land of their adoption, but they would be unworthy of their glorious national heritage if their hearts did not throb with the wild hope of a regenerated Poland. And wherever you find Poles—in the steel mills of Ohio, in the mines of Pennsylvania, in the congested sections of Chicago and New York City, in the country districts of Wisconsin and Michigan, on farms, in factories, in labor camps, in little villages which bear such historic names as Pulaski, Sobieski, Krakow,



Wilno, and Tarnow—you find always the high aspiration of a Free Poland. The Poles gain their foothold in America, but they do not, in the first generation, lose their love for their native distressful country.

It is because the children are less Polish than their fathers that many far-seeing, patriotic Poles regret the enormous immigration to America. "The Poles are gaining their foothold," a Polish intellectual recently said; "but what will it profit the nation if it loses itself in the millions of America? Already you have over two millions of our citizens; already Chicago has a quarter of a million of Poles, and Buffalo, Milwaukee, Detroit, and Pittsburgh more Poles than any city in Russia except Warsaw and Lodz. These people, when they are not exploited and plundered, and when they have a job, are doing well—but their children?"

It is the penalty of gaining a foothold. America is the great melting-pot of the world, the solvent of races, the mitigator of national jealousies and hatreds. Even the Pole or the Bohemian hates the German a little less cordially in America. As for the children or the grandchildren, who can tell one race from another among the knickerbockered youngsters, with their foreign names abraded and their language standardized?

Had the Poles settled extensively on the land and gained their foothold in compact, indissoluble agricultural groups, like the Germans of Pennsylvania or the French of Quebec, they might perhaps have had more chance of maintaining their national identity. But insuperable obstacles prevented the Poles from going on the land *en masse*. At home the peasant either owned no land at all or merely a tiny strip, and he arrived with insufficient means to purchase a one-hundred-and-sixty-acre farm. The life of a farm laborer did not attract him. He did not and still does not wish to go out alone among an alien people whom he cannot understand. He does not understand the large, extensive cultivation of American farms, and he misses the traditional feasts, holidays, processions, national music and pastimes that make the hard life in Poland so cheerful. Better one's native tongue and friendship and

companionship than any number of dollars. And, finally, it doesn't pay. Farm work is for only a part of the year, and the wages of the hired man cannot compete with the wages of the mine or the foundry, or even of the slaughter-house. By the time the Pole has saved enough to go to the country he no longer feels the desire. He has already gained in the city his foothold.

Nevertheless, despite our congested districts, a surprising number of our Polish immigrants have actually found their way to the land. Father Kruska, in a voluminous work upon the subject, estimates that there are seven hundred Polish settlements in America, containing seventy thousand Polish farm-owners. It is estimated that these farms comprise a total of over five million acres, or the combined areas of New Jersey and Rhode Island, and that the whole Polish population on this tract, including hired laborers and women and children, is no less than five hundred thousand.

In the early days before our Civil War the first Polish immigrants traversed without stopping the Atlantic and North Central States and settled on the wide prairies of Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota, and later in Iowa, Nebraska, and the Dakotas, while other Poles, arriving at New Orleans, made themselves farms in the vast domains of Texas. Even to-day there is a stream of hardy Polish immigrants from New York City to the decaying farms of New England, and where once the early settlers were concealing fugitive regicides there now live and work hundreds of plodding Polish peasants, whose little boys and girls attend the same village school to which in former days the old New England families sent their children.

These little schools form the second step in the gaining of a foothold. The immigrant must struggle against great odds, he is despoiled and cheated and insulted, but he gains a foothold. In the public schools, which are open to all, in the other public and private institutions which seek to improve the hard conditions of industrial life, the child of the immigrant is prepared for a newer struggle on a higher plane.



OVERS of the work of George Meredith will be interested in the poem printed in facsimile on the opposite page, for which The Outlook is indebted to the courtesy of Mr. E. V. Lucas. Mr. Meredith sent the verses as a birthday greeting to Mr. Lucas's sister-in-law, Mrs. Perceval Lucas, when she was a child. Mrs. Perceval Lucas, whose familiar diminutive was "Dimpling," is the daughter of the well-known English essayist and writer Mrs. Alice Meynell, and the Sylvia of Francis Thompson's "Sister Songs." The fact that Mr. Meredith himself grew the violets which were sent with the poem adds to the interest of the incident that suggested the poem. There are those who find it difficult to decipher Mr. Meredith's writings sometimes even on the printed page. For their benefit, lest they shall feel that his handwriting adds to the difficulty which sometimes confronts them in his literary style, we make the following transcription of the poem in type :

Box Hill,  
Dorking.

April 22nd

Dearest Dimpling,

We believe  
We of violets are the last,  
And to die we do not grieve,  
If on Dimpling's lap we're cast.  
All that follow, they will be  
Prouder flowers of maiden state;  
Good perhaps to decorate;  
Not so one with her as we!

At the time these lines were written Meredith was living in a vine-covered cottage of typical English charm at Box Hill, Surrey. In front was a small but well-kept lawn with flower-beds; back of it rose a steep hill surmounted by a dense forest growth of pine trees. In his Box Hill home the novelist and poet did not confine himself to the intricate psychology of human life that characterizes his written work. He was also a lover and student of nature, especially interested in the life of flowers and birds—and children. "Live in the open and study nature" was one of his favorite maxims. Meredith's intimate understanding of Nature, as Wordsworth understood her, is delightfully disclosed in the following passage from some reminiscences of his friend the late William Sharp:

After luncheon Grant Allen said he would accompany me back to Box Hill; as, apart from the pleasure of seeing Mr. Meredith, he particularly wanted to ask him about some disputed points in natural history (a botanical point of some kind, in connection, I think, with that lovely spring flower "Love-in-a-Mist," for which Mr. Meredith had a special affection, and had fine slips of it in his garden) which he had not been able to observe satisfactorily for himself. I frankly expressed my surprise that a specialist such as my host [Grant Allen was a scientist diverted into literature] should wish to consult any other than a colleague on a matter of intimate knowledge and observation; but was assured that there were "not half a dozen men living to whom I would go in preference to Meredith on a point of this kind. He knows the intimate facts of countryside life as very few of us do after the most specific training. I don't know whether he could describe that greenfinch in the wild cherry yonder in the terms of an ornithologist and botanist—in fact, I'm very sure he couldn't. But you may rest assured there is no ornithologist living who knows more about the finch of real life than George Meredith does—its appearance, male and female, its songs, its habits, its dates of coming and going, the places where it builds, how its nest is made, how many eggs it lays and what-like they are, what it feeds on, and what its song is like before and after mating, and when and where it may best be heard, and so forth. As for the wild cherry—perhaps he doesn't know much about it technically—but if any one could say when the first blossoms will appear and how long they will last, how many petals each blossom has, what variations in color, and what kind of smell they have, then it's he, and no other better."