

THE HEART OF POLAND

WILLIAM J. ROSE, M.A.,

British Student Movement Secretary in Silesia.

CHAPTER II.

SCHOOLS.

"THE nation with the best schools will lead the world; if not to-day, then to-morrow!" Words like these I seem to have read somewhere—some Frenchman said them. One really must wonder that the world has advanced as much as it has in view of the fact that schools for the people are so wholly a modern thing. In this fact may, perhaps, be found the reason for the comparative rarity of true culture—for the conviction of not a few modern Platos that the crowd can never be philosophers.

But crowds have become sane, even if crowns are not all just; and they have celebrated the fact by at once getting insane again. That is because they were not schooled. With the French Revolution an end was put to all pre-emption of the right to think and impose its thinking on others, which until then belonged to the few. With the Russian Revolution an end is being put to the right to impose their will on others, which has still belonged to people who did not think at all!

The tragedy of Prussianism has taught us where pedagogy can lead to when it is perverted. The redemption of Russia may show us where society can get to when it is converted. In the former land the schools were bad; in the latter they had none at all. Neither of these *modi vivendi* will get us out of the wood.

After the home, the school!

The problem of the new industrial age has become this: that the home has tended more and more to disappear, and the school must learn how to take its place. When parents are in the factory from morning till night, someone must be found to mother the bairns, or else there'll soon be no bairns at all. Thus is the order reversed: After the school, the home!

Warsaw, like the land around her, has had good and evil fortune—to be full of homes and to be almost empty of schools. Of Russian ones there were plenty, but no one would attend them if he could help it. For long years no others were allowed. If then they came into being as the result of private enterprise they could only reach a portion of the people. What the home could do was done by a patriotic people, whose one possession was their language and literature—relics of a great past and promise of a certain future. They knew the value of these things far more than we Anglo-Saxons do.

I heard in Silesia, early in the war, how the folk of Russian Poland speak better Polish than those of Galicia or Silesia, although here the language of instruction was Polish, simply because the parents felt their personal responsibility in the matter and assumed it. I proved this later to be true.

Warsaw is to-day fearfully in need of schools. I have said in the next chapter that eight times as many good city schools are needed for boys as exist. Yet there is no comparison the country over between the state of affairs to-day and what was before the war, or even when the Germans were expelled in November.

In Warsaw itself I saw two of the newer institutions, both under Protestant control, the one, the "Nicholas Rey," the other, a ward school for girls. The former is a boys' High School, and has twenty classrooms. It swarms with boys; there are 800 of them, Protestants, Roman Catholics and Jews. The visitor in the Red Triangle uniform was surrounded at once by a sea of eager faces. No such curiosity had ever been in their halls before.

The Director was kindness itself, giving an hour of his valuable time to the answering of questions and showing his guest the various features of the institution. Everywhere cleanliness and order; not a quarter of the noise in the

recess-time one is likely to find in a Canadian school. Yet there is a lively interest in everything. One-third are Protestants, one-seventh are Jews. The percentage of the latter might easily rise enormously if it were allowed.

To my question whether "co-education" of the creeds was successful, the Director said, "Yes and no. We must be careful not to let the proportion of Jews grow over our heads. Every week I'm refusing applications. Our reputation and our central position in the city are alone enough to account for this. But there is another reason—a curious one. I have said to parents: 'Why don't you take your boys to your own Jewish school?' and I named one of several good ones. The answer I got was this, 'Because we don't want them to be where there are so many Jews.' That, of course, is a compliment to us, and means a great opportunity; but we are forced to keep the ratio at about what it is, 15 per cent. The lads of Jewish parentage are either very clever or very dull. Both kinds, for their very industry, present a problem."

I was shown the room set aside for the eleven o'clock lunch of soup for the boys who came from poor homes. In spite of the war they have been able to keep the pot boiling. In the gymnasium we found the physical instructor putting a class of twelve-year-olds through vaulting exercises. Some of them balked badly. Each class gets two hours' teaching in the week. A great lack is felt (a) of a suitable playground for outdoor sports, (b) of a swimming-bath. These must one day be found.

Of special interest was the painstaking system shown me of keeping personal contact with each pupil, and educating the best in him for the highest. Of the fifty teachers, some twenty are "preceptors," i.e., each has charge of a classroom, with the resultant responsibility for discipline and the like. His task is to keep close check on the boys' progress, on their industry and punctuality. He watches over their health—teeth, skin and all the rest. He prepares the monthly reports, and keeps in constant touch with the parents. The lads look to him as to a father. Unfortunately, there are class-rooms with fifty boys, where the number ought never to exceed thirty. This makes the best results impossible—*c'est la guerre!*

I asked about discipline, to be told that the tide of patriotic self-respect has run so high that almost no punishment is necessary. There are three sorts of this latter: reproof before the others; detention, with impositions, only employed in the case of younger boys, and suspension, with eventual expulsion.

I saw the physics laboratory; "the theatre," where the lantern is used for various subjects, with its close-curtained windows; then the small dispensary, where the boys are examined, weighed and measured—in short, all that belongs to a school which, in spite of every opposition and trouble, has been trying for nearly a quarter of a century to make useful citizens. I went away, sorry that time did not permit me to attend a few classes in Polish literature or history, now at last permitted to be taught freely and thoroughly in the mother tongue.

A WARD SCHOOL.

Across the court in one direction is a huge ward school for boys, and in another a smaller one for girls. This latter we visited. The lady principal, whose fresh countenance was only enhanced by her grey hairs, has five helpers to assist in caring for two hundred girls. As a result, she herself teaches all the day, and it was not until "recess" that we could see her. (I say we, meaning myself and the lady who acted as my guide, the wife of my school inspector friend of Swiss-Italian origin, while she herself is of American birth.) I put a number of questions, and learned (a) that here no Jewish

girls are received at all; (b) that as good as no mention of punishment is necessary, for discipline is maintained as health is, by steady compliance with nature's rules; (c) that singing, sewing and the like play a large part in the work of the school. Here, of course, the results of the training are not as evident as in the boys' high school, where the upper classes even have their own orchestra and glee club; (d) that the teaching of religion is done by pastor and priest alike, who come in at the appointed hours.

At my request to hear some singing we were led to one of the nearest class-rooms, where the priest was even then beginning his lessons. He greeted us cordially, gladly permitted the interruption, and the girls, arranging themselves in two groups, sang, under the direction of the music teacher, two songs in two parts, soprano and alto. The first was a rollicking soldiers' song, the second, the stately national hymn. When they finished I asked permission to say a word, and I drew the attention of the class to the true meaning of liberty, a prayer for which they had just sung. I discovered that they sing both Roman Catholic and Protestant hymns. The priest smiled at my look of surprise, and said, "We don't quarrel here over the matter of belief. We have all one Gospel and one God." I wrung his hand by way of thanks, for I felt that he meant it. Would to God that what he said were true of his Church as an organization—and of all the others as well! Few things pleased me more during my time in the city than just this episode: hearing such a declaration from a Roman Catholic priest who was teaching in a Protestant school in a land that had been until recently under an Orthodox government.

The same evening I heard words from a Lutheran pastor which almost took my breath away. "We Poles don't fear here now as much the Catholic Jesuits as we have learned to fear Lutheran ones." Then he told me of his experiences with German army chaplains, who, in the teeth of the Independence Proclamation of November, 1916, where the best of intentions were avowed, commandeered Protestant churches up and down the land, held propaganda meetings among the people, founded school unions (those organs of Germanization), and in general made hell-on-earth for the Protestant pastors of loyal Polish sympathy, who refused to bow down and worship the image the Kaiser set up.

It was the following day that I was taken to the outskirts of the city to see the new Welfare Institution founded by the truly great apostle of Protestantism of the last generation, Dr. Leopold Otto. There are here three large buildings, with an open field lying beside them, part of which is used as a cemetery: an Old Folks' Home, an orphanage, and an asylum for weak-minded and undeveloped children. I paid a short visit to the orphanage, heard the children sing and recite, and looked in at the little hospital. In the office I saw the records. By mere chance my eye fell on a name, and underneath it the remark, "Parents living." I at once enquired how that was. "Ah," said the warden, "you have hit upon the one exception in our hundred inmates. The girl is here and her parents are in the home for old folks across the garden." I turned to the pastor who was with me. "It must be a special case," was his reply to my glance. "Probably an aged father and a ne'er-do-weel mother. You see what we are up against here."

It was the other institution which concerned me most. I was only annoyed at not being able to take enough time to study as praiseworthy a piece of work in educational methods as exists in Europe. This asylum, under the direction of Pani Velfe, must be set beside that described already, the Jewish orphanage, as a credit to the nation which possessed the first ministry of education in Europe.

Boys and girls are taken from the age of three onwards, only, of course, from well-to-do homes, as the work is an expensive one. They are kept indefinitely, either until results are obtained or until parents give up the effort. The usual type is the lad who has been sent to school, but could not learn anything there—not to save his life.

(Continued on page 450.)

From

"Spectator"

SATURD
garded
world's
the people
to, and to
meaningful
the time m
it was a f
for the wo
We shall c
shall mean
struction o
Bitter as l
because of
of the Ger
our hearts
are concern
true, that
compulsion
new heart
hood to-da
will come
years. The
be cast out
be restless
the admin
offender, t
eye for an
reclamation
often our
change of
blessings.
upon us t
who ruin
them to e
doing. Th
world are
crime and
Not for
for the sa
who sin a
cation of

It is ex
pose of s
minds of
the impre
to a cong
the power
ourselves
condemn.
manifest.
that mov
condemne
tion of a
the murd
public th
arise. It
who, not
He publi
stating t
knocking
to kicking
to say th
man, inde
had desti
then, bec
the poor
the safet
lence is
for hum
nor good
or citizen
to seize
trade or
the free
not grea
the horr
immedia
he might
afresh h
is to be
a boxing
perial w
to enfor
demands
every cl
involves
the door

Speech
of the i
Mothers
place to