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Spreewald

One of the most interesting spots for a day's visit while in Germany is Spreewald, a country Venice about fifty miles South east of Berlin. As the name implies it is the Wooded river – at this point the Spree river which flows through Berlin divides into 100 or more little narrow streams, and threads through this low swampy piece of land.

At the beginning of the Christian era it is supposed that most of this land was under water, but a hearty tribe of slaves came down from the North and finding the forest unoccupied began to drain the highest land and narrow the streams until almost all the surface has been reclaimed for agricultural purposes.

In some parts small lakes are formed and the only means of travel over the whole little province in Summer is by boat and in Winter is by skates. You go from Berlin to Lubben a distance of about 40 or 50 miles – and there you hire, instead of a carriage or a bicycle, a boatman who will lead you to a small flat bottom boat large enough for two or three – baggage included. You sit in the center or front end and he takes his place in the rear. And the power that is to propel you along is not the oar, or Naptha engine, but a long pole which he sticks in the bottom of the screen and pushes on, just as we push a row boat from the banks. Of course you can't go at a very high rate of speed, but if you watch the banks, you will find that you do move. Indeed, you don't care to go faster because the whole scene is one of such intense interest.

From the larger river you enter one of these narrow streams or straits, as you pass along with not a speck of dust from the wheels and no gurgle and rattle of cars, but in perfect silence, may be a very little ripple of water: there sinks into your soul a consciousness that you are near to nature and nature's God. All the scenes of a beautiful, rich, agricultural country will open their splendor before you. You are now passing through a marshy meadow with its great tall reeds and grass waiving before you. On either side is this luxuriant tapestry of green waiving and playing in the breeze. Above the blue sky with here and there white lazy clouds floating, while from the western sky

everything is gilded by the golden rays of the setting sun, and as you sit in your strange carriage with no noise to disturb you feel like saying with the poet:

“For wheresoe’er I looked, the while,

Was Nature’s everlasting smile,

And we feel like saying also, “Who can paint like Nature?”

From this low meadow of green you pass on through fine harvest fields of waving grain, and then through a long avenue of tall beautiful trees, which entirely shut out the sun, here and there a missing limb or tree sends a gleam of sunshine; the inhabitants all build their houses on the banks of the streams as we do on the side of the street, most of their houses are built of logs; here and there are small villages – a cluster of houses – a hotel, small stores etc.,

The little streams or canals, serve many purposes. The spree abounds with fish – and each household has its box for fish where after being caught by a net they are kept “strictly fresh” whenever the house wife may need them to cook – they cook them very delicately and pour over them a delicious butter sauce, which with the fine mealy boiled potatoes make a fine meal. The stream serves as a laundry also.

In manner the people are exceedingly simple and modest; the men dress about as other men, but the women have a peculiar dress of their own, they wear a great number of petticoats, their dresses are always of a loud color, or very often, bright blue, red, yellow etc., but only reach a little below the knees. The ladies waists are a peculiar combination of many colors, worked in together, for every day use they wear a small shawl over their head – but for Sabbath they have a pure white band somewhat like the white bonnets the Catholic sisters wear. The bride has a peculiar white collar which extends out over the shoulders.

Most of the women go without shoes in Summer but they carry them to church and stop at some near house and put them on before entering church, white stockings and black slippers, most of the people walk, small bridges span the streams. In church the men sit in the gallery and the women below. Brides in front – you can imagine what a pretty sight a whole church full of white bonnets would be - the preaching is in the Slavic language – their belief is protestant – they have schools and a government of their own –

like the state they are subject to the German Government – they teach now German in their schools and speak it among themselves – though the old people hold to the Slavic.

They keep cattle and sheep and horses for agricultural purposes – they have no grazing land – all the land is under cultivation, or water – the cattle are kept in the barn or yard the year round – they are no vehicles of any kind – they haul their grain and hay from the field by boat – and haul their grain to market by boat. They are, for all I could learn a very good moral people, simple and honest, no one has much, but each has enough. Would we could say that of Chicago and America!

I believe the maidens are greatly sought after in Berlin as nurses for children – and their peculiar dress never fails to attract attention. The fact that his people had to fight for their land and were willing to live in a humble way shows that much can be accomplished – if people are only faithful and persistent.

The Outlook in Education in Chicago

In Jan. 1898 the mayor with the concurrence of the city council, appointed a commission of nine persons, two from the City Council, two from the Board of Education, and seven from citizens outside, to study the school system of Chicago, and recommend such changes as would in their judgment improve the schools.

In Jan. of this year, this commission made its report to the mayor in a pamphlet of 250 closely printed pages. No such fearless and thorough study of the public school system of any city in this country has ever been made, and the report constitutes one of the notable contributions to the educational literature of the decade.

It is my purpose, on the basis of this report, to set forth a fair proposition about our public schools from the standpoint of one who sees things from the inside.

The fact, too that there are little folks in so many Phi Sigma homes, most of whom will doubtless receive their early education in our public schools, may justify a brief study of local school questions.

This report of the Educational Commission finds much to commend in local educational conditions, and the defects, many and glaring as they are, grow quite lengthy out of the antiquated methods under which the system is being carried on. The simple fact is that the school machinery of Chicago is practically the same as it was 20 years ago; and a giant city of 2, 000,000 cosmopolitan and heterogeneous, is trying to administer its school affairs with the methods adapted to a homogeneous community of 10,000. Any radical change, therefore, in the school system of the city makes necessary radical changes in the school law of the state. The Educational Commission has, therefore, as a natural sequence to its report, recommended certain changes in the school laws of the state, which changed have been embodied in a bill now finding before the state legislature.

The details of this bill are numerous and touch the school system at various points, but the essential features of the bill are only three in number.

1. The number of the Board of Education shall be reduced from 21 to 11. The membership of the Board has been increased from time to time as the city has grown on the ground that it should be representative of all sections and classes of the city. The

Board is not representative of all sections geographically as socially, and from the very nature of the case cannot be. The unseemly wrangles that have characterized many of the meetings of the Board with the last months have grown out of the large number of the Board and the impossibility of harmonizing 21 persons upon questions that strike personal and local interests. The sooner the membership of the Board is reduced and its meetings take on the dignified bearing suited to the sacred interests entrusted to it the better.

2. The second important provision of this bill is that the Supt shall be elected for six years, instead of one and shall be in fact, as in name the executive head of the educational department of the school system.

This is a vital point. Right here is the source of the friction between the Board and the Supt. today. A few weeks ago the daily papers came out with glaring headlines about the quarrel between the Board and Dr. Andrews. The point at issue was, and is, whether Dr. Andrews shall have the initiative in purely educational questions, such as the appointment and transfer of teachers, or whether he must have to [do] the bidding of members of the Board. The fight is (asxx;) it is not yet won by Dr. Andrews. He is resolute and fearless, a good fighter, and right is on his side. No greater calamity could come to our schools than to have him displaced, as he may be, at the end of this school year. Some other man just as good or better than Dr. Andrews may be found, but if he is displaced now, it means the triumph of the political element in the Board. His retention and support mean the recognition of the Supt's right to perform the basic and apparent duties of his office without dictation or interference from self-seeking members of the Board. Politics in a national sense has never entered school affairs in Chicago. I do not think any teacher has ever sought promotion on the ground that he was a Democrat or Republican. But political in the sense that preferment must come through friends on the Board and not upon recommendation of the Supt. For merit has been, and is, in the Chicago schools. The system is all wrong and tends to demoralize the teaching force. To overthrow this system and to establish the principle of advancement for merit only is Dr. Andrew's contention. The proposed law would give the Supt. unquestioned authority to control the educational side of our school system and make him, too, responsible for its success or failure.

3. The third important recommendation of the Educational Commission relates to the business affairs of the Board. The Business Manager should be elected for six years with greatly enlarged powers over the present incumbent. Indeed the administrative work of the Board would fall under two responsible heads – the Supt with full power to act upon all purely educational matters, and a Business Manager with equally large powers over the business and financial affairs of the Board. The present conduct of the business affairs of the Board as they relate to erecting, repairing and equipping school buildings, to purchasing and distributing supplies, is puerile and often wasteful. No large business corporation that is spending millions every year would fail to appoint a general manager and hold him strictly responsible for the management of its affairs. Much has been said in the last years about the extravagant expenditures of the Board of Education. So far as this charge has any foundation in fact, it should be laid to the business management of the Board. No doubt a competent business manager with authority commensurate with his responsibilities, conversant with values, fearless in dealing justice to all, would save every year many times his own salary.

Another point relating to the business affairs of the Board which the Educational Commission recommended is giving to the Board the right to condemn sites for school buildings under the right of eminent domain. This power is given to corporations without number that are supposed to serve the public interests, indeed it is give by state law to boards of Education in rural districts in Ill., but has been withheld from the School Board of Chicago. In New York City, for instanced, the Board of Ed decides where a school building is needed, and if the owner of the property declined to sell at what is adjudged a reasonable price, a condemnation suit is entered and the matter settled through the courts. Not so in Chicago. Where there comes a demand for a school in a certain locality, the Board must advertise for a site, haggle with half a dozen different owners, it may be, and then ask the concurrence of the City Council before a purchase can be consummated. The consequence is great delay in the purchase of proper sites, and often at prices that are scarcely less than extortionale.

This report of the Mayor's commission makes various other recommendations over which discussion has arisen and in regard to which opinions may rightly differ, but upon these three points - the number of the Board, the power of the Supt., and the

conduct of the business affairs for educational systems all well wishers to our schools must seemingly be in agreement.

It remained to say a few things in general upon the educational outlook in our city. I believe this outlook on the whole is most encouraging. Superintendents may come, and superintendents may go; school boards may act wisely or unwisely but the vital force is the teacher that comes in daily contact with the child. In devotion to duty, scholarly attainments, well poised character, I believe the teaching force of Chicago is improving every year. Everything in Chicago lacks the stability that characterizes an Eastern city. Teachers share in this lack and so have less of real culture than could be wished, but they have such an abundance of enthusiasm, such high daring for new problems, such dash and rigor that they move from good to better in a way that would make a slow going Eastern teacher hold her breath in wonder.

Our course of study is broad and liberal. There are no fads. Everything much (pris?) or what not, that makes for the upbuilding of the child, is the child's right. We are teaching many things today besides the traditional three r's. The child is the gainer. He may lack a certain thoroughness that used to go with a more intensive study of a limited number of subjects; but he goes from school with more that makes for a happy and useful life.

I believe that the discipline and general conduct of our schools is good and improving. Children love their schools and are loyal to them. In the poorer districts, the school is the one bright spot in the child's life, and in the well-to-do neighborhoods in which we live children turn to their schools with interest and enthusiasm.

The best proof that the public schools of Chicago are meeting the demands of the time is that they are so well patronized. Chicago has fewer private and parochial schools in proportion to its population than any other large city in the country. Further ever since the great fire of 187[1] it has been impossible for the Board of Education with the resources at its command to provide school accommodations for the school population.

There is, then, much to encourage in the local educational outlook. Our schools are not perfect – far from it-, neither are our homes, or our churches, or the civic conditions that surround us. But to the solution of the intricate social problems that

confront us, and so to the uplifting of mankind, the public school of Chicago is contributing its due proportion, and it is doing its work with a singleness of purpose and a devotion of spirit not informed by any other human agency set for improving social conditions.

Extract from letter of Miss Gertrude U. Wilcox of Kobe, Japan

That afternoon, armed with our numerous wraps and rugs to keep off the cold, we bid adieu to our kind friends and set out for home. We bought third class tickets and though our object was to save money, I decided before the trip was over that I would have been willing to pay first-class fare to see so much of human nature. The care we rode in was very much crowded. Through the centre ran an aisle, which was strewn with dust and scraps, the peanut shells of America being represented by Mandarin orange peels. In either side of this aisle was an elevated platform covered with one layer of ordinary Japanese matting and divided by crosswise fences into sections about five feet long. Here, with the blankets which the Japanese always carry in winter, the people were making themselves as comfortable as possible. Each compartment was apparently made for four people. We went to a place where there was only one woman, but she strongly objected to our sharing it with her, so we managed to sit on the very edge of two different sections, each of which contained three or four already. Soon the husband of the woman came in and she and he were quite comfortable with a whole compartment to themselves and their package of bottles crowding me in the next compartment. They stared at me with a long and deliberate stare such as I never expected to encounter. It was as if I were a new specimen under a microscope and they learned professors. When we stopped at a station the man, for whom the woman had so carefully reserved a seat, went out and bought two small neat wooden boxes, one containing plain boiled rice and the other a variety of dainties, pickles, fish, seaweed etc. This one of the lords of creation squared his shoulders, almost turning his back on his wife and, for all the world like Jack Horner, opened the boxes, "and stuck in his" – chopsticks, without offering the woman a bit. She sat sociably by apparently considering it quite the proper thing. After he had eaten about four fifths of the rice and half of the extras, he shut the boxes and handed them over to the woman. She ate every scrap that was left, even picking off a few grains of rice which had stuck to the cover. This is an example of Japanese manners, untouched by Christianity or western civilization.

After a time we took out some tracts, when the journey had become sufficiently monotonous to make them acceptable. They went like the proverbial hotcakes. No one declined them, and when the people near at hand had been supplied, several men came

from the farther end of the car, asking for them. The tracts were read most attentively and as far as I saw, put into satchels afterwards. May the prayers that went with them be answered and some at least be led to Christ through their influence. At seven oclock we reached Kobe and it seemed as if the best part of our trip, delightful as it had been was the home coming and the hearty welcome we received.

Gertrude U. Wilcox

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