

WILL AUSTRIA DISSOLVE UNDER STRESS OF WAR?

Czechs and Other Races Challenge Ruling Classes.

“WE are marching against the Russians, but nobody knows why.”

Bearing this defiant banner “The Children of Prague,” comprising the 28th Czech Regiment from Bohemia, left for the front early in the war. Not long afterwards the whole regiment took an early opportunity and passed over to the Russians.

The incident is now recalled to illustrate the forces of disintegration at work in Austria-Hungary and which now show in revolutionary acts which appal the Teutons and give hope to the peoples of the Entente. Of the 46,500,000 in the dual monarchy less than half comprise Germans and Magyars, the chief stocks, and twenty-four and a half millions are Slavs. Originally the polyglot empire was created as a bulwark against the Turks, who were still powerful and conquering two centuries ago. Such an enemy led to Christian forces uniting against the common foe. The unwieldy wars with its relics of feudalism was tolerated for generations, despite cruel oppression of the subjugated races, because the other powers did not want to risk a general conflagration which might follow interference.

Balkan Powder-can.

There have been many things in the past generation to lead up to the present war, but it remained for this powder-can of the Balkans to start the awful blaze. “Austria sent her ultimatum to Serbia in July, 1914, because she could no more resist the separated tendencies of her own people,” says Pierre de Lanux in the New York Outlook, “and she needed to crush their hopes by crushing the little independent nation with which they wanted to unite. So many other factors have interposed since then that one easily forgets that this was the direct cause of the war.”

Since that declaration of war there have been many ups and downs for Austria, but internal conditions seem to be leading her nearer peace than is her more powerful ally. Restless races within the dual monarchy have been persecuted mercilessly, and always in her crucial hour Germany has come to the rescue to prevent final defeat. Yugoslavs and Bosnians in the south have been brutally treated, and hundreds have died from starvation after being driven to the mountains.

A Polyglot Army.

An illustration of the mixture of races in the Austrian army is given by Dr. De Lanux:—“An Austrian archduke, surrounded by his staff, which included officers from various provinces, was watching a critical movement of the day. A soldier came running up, and, waving his arm, explained something which seemed to be of great importance. The archduke, who spoke only German, turned to his chief of staff, who was a Magyar and said: “I suppose this man is speaking Hungarian. Do trans-

late his words to me.” The chief of staff listened, and said: “I don’t get a word, and I understand Croatian also. Maybe it is Roumanian dialect.” He turned to an aide-de-camp:

“You are a Latin, and can understand this, can’t you?”

“General, this man is neither Roumanian nor Italian.”

A Czech officer was not happier nor was the Polish doctor who accompanied the staff. After trying two or three more nationalities, the archduke had to give up and send the man to some professional interpreter at the rear to have his message translated. Evidently some province of the monarchy was not represented on the staff, and that soldier was disloyal enough to have been born there—luckily for the enemy, too.

Glacier-Like March of Czechs.

For generations a great silent battle has proceeded between the Teutons and the Slavs for the upper hand in Austria-Hungary. The Czechs have swarmed over the land as silently and as irresistibly as a glacier. They remind one of the invasion of northern and eastern Ontario by the French-Canadians. The struggle began first of all in doctrine when John Huss carried the anti-Catholic beliefs of John Wycliffe to the wilds of Bohemia. The German professors condemned and burnt the heretical propositions of Wycliffe, but the partisans of the Czechs brought pressure to bear on the king, who reduced the voting powers of their adversaries.

Seeking More Room.

In recent years the struggle has been mainly the national economic and social contest between the two races, both fighting for life. The territory occupied by the Czechs is too small and they are reaching out. In the larger towns there is a superficial assimilation, but in the small towns and rural districts each race lives in its narrow fixed little world. At a municipal election a new crowd of obscure people appears one day, raised and organized no one knows how. They overturn the customary authorities and set up a new Slav Government which at once changes the names of the streets and publishes the municipal ordinances in Czech. Then everything German is banished and in a few years the face of the region is changed.

With 300,000 Czechs in Vienna it is not surprising that disorder if not revolution, comes in the hour of economic stress. It follows that a prophecy of importance was made by the German democrats who emigrated to Switzerland and published the following in their organ, Die Freie Zeitung, last October:—

“The interior composition of Austria-Hungary was the source of all European troubles, and will continue to be if the monarchy subsists in one form or another... Austria’s dissolution is the only way of making its democratization possible... To let Austria persist after this war, through some petty political ‘opportunism’ which only the Governments know and of the peoples, would be to betray the future peace.”