

THE POLISH COLONY IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA.

Where Henryk Sienkiewicz Made a Failure of His Experiment as a Farmer.

POMONA (Cal.), February 23.—A long list of heterogeneous attempts at co-operative colonization and idyllic existence have been made in California in the last generation. Almost every theory that socialistic philosophers and hygienic, religious, political and communistic cranks ever proposed has had a trial in some colony in California. Still the problem of co-operative colonies, where living is perennial bliss and each soul may attain its highest and noblest ideals, is indeed enticing and of wide range, but is as far from solution as it ever was. The New Jersey men and women who came bravely around the Horn in 1869 and lived in huts among the lonely mountains of Lower California, across the national line, determined to be exactly like the early Christians in Palestine, and to have nothing to do with the sinful world, were each an object lesson, but when the drinking water failed and crops burned up, the colony, one by one, came back, hungry and forlorn, to their degenerate brothers and sisters. The half dozen Bellamy colonies in California were watched by an interested public a few years ago, when it was believed that at last the problem of years of study by socialists was solved. The trustees in one colony ran away with the general treasury, in another the communal deeds proved worthless, while in other colonies there was rebellion at an unequal distribution of labor and grumbling at class privileges.

Probably the most interesting colony that ever settled in California was that of the Poles at Anaheim, in Orange county, in 1877-78. It was composed of thirty-three painters, actors, editors, orators and litterateurs of Poland. While other colonies have been formed to work out freak problems in life, the Poles came solely for the purpose of living a delightful pastoral, free-from-work existence and to study art. Most of the usual colonies have had some bigoted, fanatical idea at their foundation. The Polish colony came to enjoy the blessings of a lovely climate and the freest Government on earth. They had no problem in life to settle, no theory to prove, no cause to wage for down-trodden humanity, no degeneracy to regenerate. They came as a company of brilliant, happy, ambitious young men and women, who loved art, and purposed to help one another in their several artistic pursuits, and, at the same time, to flee the persecutions of Russia upon Poland, and live in a semi-tropic land. In many respects their colony is more interesting than the famous Brook Farm experiment in Massachusetts in 1841.

The attention of the reading world has recently been drawn to the Polish colony at Anaheim, for among them was Henryk Sienkiewicz, whose "Quo Vadis" and "Fire and Sword" have been the literary sensations of the world for two years. Some of Sienkiewicz' work, as the "Charcoal Sketches," in his short stories, was written while he was in the Polish colony at Anaheim. Another, and a leader in the colony, was Madam Helena Modjeska. Another was the painter, Michael Kroschki, whose portraits in the Russian department at the Paris and Chicago Expositions won the admiration of the foremost art critics of Europe and America. Still another in the colony, who has since become worldwide famous, is Vladskot, whose patriotic odes have sold by the millions in Europe in the last few years. Since the days of Thoreau, Charles A. Dana, George William Curtis, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Margaret Fuller, at Brook Farm, there has been no such assemblage of brilliant men and women living in daily association as that at Anaheim twenty years ago.

At a convention of editors in Santa Barbara a few summers ago Madam Modjeska told how the Poles came to colonize in California. There had been a club or association of genial, literary, editorial, histrionic, artistic and musical young men and women at Cracow, Poland. The club met in frequent salons at one another's homes. At about 1875 Russia was bearing more heavily than usual upon the freedom of political speech and opinion among the Polish. The salons took up the subject of the hour for discussion. Life in a republic became the dream of some in the club. It happened that about that time a lot of circulars printed in French, and telling of the profits and delights in Southern California, came to the attention of one of the club young men, along with a description of the California climate, the fertility of the soil and roseate pictures of the agricultural products. That circular was the seed from which grew the Polish colony in California. At that time co-operative colonies were a hobby of socialistic writers in Europe, and the Poles' idea of a home in California were blended with theories of agriculture and co-operation in colony life. For weeks the plan of a huge Polish colony in the warm sunshine of California, at the base of the Sierra, with the broad Pacific twenty miles away, was discussed by every member of the club. The Russian Government caused several hundred arrests for petty political offenses in the winter of 1876, and the plans for co-operative farming beneath the Stars and Stripes went forward more enthusiastically.

"Ah, how idyllic it all seemed to us as we used to gather in our little salons at Cracow that last spring and talk over the plans for our colony farm in California," said Mme. Modjeska, in relating the story of the colony. "We all had powerful imaginations. We could imagine ourselves living amid perennial sunshine and fruits and flowers, and having a good income from our joint farm, while we cultivated the arts and lived a dreamy poem of a life. We hired an Englishman to translate for us the many articles and pamphlets that we had ordered from the United States for our information. All of us followed his work bit by bit, so absorbed were we in the stories of how blissfully one might live for years and years close to nature amid the fleecy flocks, the song of birds, the droning of insects in the semi-tropics and nevermore have to work and scheme for a livelihood amid snow and ice. Nothing in literature ever quite captured all of us shivering Poles in our northern homes as did the beautiful pastoral scenes represented in those articles written by land agents and boomers."

In September, 1876, the colony was composed in Cracow. Its total funds amounted to about \$48,000. Count Bozenta and Mme. Modjeska put in the savings of several years, and the younger unmarried men, as Sienkiewicz, contributed all their petty savings. The colony rendezvoused at Berlin, and sailed from Bremen, reaching New York in the last days of the Centennial Exposition at Philadelphia. Probably no more expectant, enthusiastic people ever landed in New York. All were beaming at having exchanged the political harassments of Poland for free America. They were brimful of plans for a garden of Eden in Southern California, and were restless to begin life in their co-operative colony. They had a boxful of architectural plans for their houses, and a wagon load of newly bought books on agriculture and horticulture.

"How we laugh ourselves now at the memory of what fond fools we all were then," said Count Bozenta a few months ago. "Why, we were like so many eager, dreaming children in a strange land."

The Poles visited with fellow-countrymen in New York and Boston for a few weeks, and went down to Washington. Through an introduction at the Agricultural Department by the Russian Minister, they got several great bundles of books and pamphlets covering every conceivable subject that any farmer from Alaska to Key West might wish to know through the centuries. In February, 1877, the Polish party, headed by Count and Countess Bozenta, started across the continent for San Francisco. From there the Poles came down the Coast in a steamship. There are hundreds of Los Angeles people who well remember the day the Poles came there from Wilmington harbor. For weeks the real estate agents took the party out to view land, and there was no end of rivalry to sell property to the newcomers. Only a few could speak much English. Finally the Poles decided on a location for their co-operative farm. They settled on some 150 acres in Santa Ana valley, near the quaint old German settlement of Anaheim.

By the summer of 1877 the houses and barns at the Cracow colony were finished, the fields were laid out, the irrigation ditches dug, and the ground made ready for planting fruit trees. All this had eaten a big slice out of the combined capital of the expectant colonists, and there were schemes for expending thousands of dollars more before the anticipated wealth from the product of the property began to roll in. The Poles, unable to talk fluently with the small army of carpenters, orchard-platters, plowmen and irrigators about the property, stood by, smoked cigarettes, built air castles, and watched the progress of affairs with delighted interest. They realized, however, that they were paying some mighty heavy bills, and that the Americans knew the full value of everything they sold or the work they did. But the Poles were serene in their faith that the books and printed articles they had read were so accurate in the details of the certain profits of American ranches, especially co-operative ones, that they never begrudged the checks they gave on their Los Angeles bank account. Then the big farm had to be stocked with horses, cattle, sheep, chickens, mules and a thousand and one things the colonists had never dreamed of, and which, they were assured, were absolutely necessary.

When the spring of 1878 came and nearly all the capital that the Polish party had brought to California was gone, the necessity of hard ranch work started them in the face. Notwithstanding all the books and magazine articles they had read to the contrary, the colonists found co-operative ranch life beset with trouble and subject to daily losses. The idyllic existence that had been their dream for several years floated away among the Sierras. The men and their wives, who had been accustomed to studios and to libraries, were disgusted with the work of following horse and cultivator among the orchard trees for hours, and of cutting alfalfa and plowing and harrowing soil for frequent irrigation of the young orchards. There are many other colonists in California who had the same dispiriting experience of coming from the drawing-room, the counting-house, the law office or the store, believing that they could at once become happy Arcadian fruit growers and get rich while swinging in shaded hammocks, reading and smoking cigarettes. Some were overcome by hard work and they failed miserably. Others took hold bravely and earnestly, and met all obstacles with a determination nothing could defeat. Modjeska and her husband belonged to the determined class. She put on an apron, rolled up her sleeves and went to work. While others in the Polish co-operative colony rebelled against any ranch labor and sat beneath the shade of the oaks on the farm, rolled cigarettes and denounced the scheming Americans for their advertising, tricks, she and Count Bozenta labored.

Many residents in the vicinity of Anaheim recall to this day how cheerfully Bohemianlike the artists and literary men in the colony viewed losses

that would have driven crazy a colony of ordinary farmers. Mrs. Ada Lawrence, who used to visit the Polish colony occasionally, tells of how one day, when the last work mule and cow on the place had died from some improper feeding by the theoretical colonists, and troubles of scores of varieties were coming thick and fast, she found a dozen of the young men having the happiest kind of a morning in their upstairs assembly-room in practicing the latest Wagner music for an orchestral concert that evening. At another time, when the dearly bought water right had almost dried up and the year's crop of alfalfa was fast withering under the midsummer sun, the Poles gave no heed, and had an elaborate amateur dramatic performance, in which every one in the colony had to perform some part. Their laughter and cheers at one another's wit and merriment could often be heard half a mile away, even when the colony food supply was a pressing and serious problem.

By May, 1878, the Polish colony had spent all its money, and there was no income. Mme. Modjeska and several energetic young people in the colony worked hard to make the co-operative plans successful, but disaster followed disaster. Horses died from unknown troubles; sheep had diseases that not one of the Poles knew of before; cows died of bloat while the artists and litterateurs discussed art and their ideals; the alfalfa died for lack of

them I got language lessons by listening to the sermon in church and reading my prayer book for hours. Many and many a day I have studied English from early dawn until 11 or 12 o'clock at night, barely stopping for meals. I once knew the 'Vicar of Wakefield' by heart, and I could recite 'The Lady of the Lake' without halting for a word, so thoroughly did I read them in my language lessons."

In September, 1879, Modjeska, with a company of players got together for her on the Pacific Coast, appeared in San Francisco. The play was "Adrienne Lecouvreur," her favorite drama. In one night Modjeska became famous on the Pacific Coast. All her days of financial distress and hard work were passed. Mme. Modjeska has never lost her love for an agricultural life in Southern California. About ten years ago she bought another ranch amid the mountains and at the head of Santiago canyon. There she and Count Bozenta have made a beautiful home, surrounded by flowers of every description and a small corral of horses and cattle.

"Do I remember the Polish co-operative colony farm down at Anaheim?" said gray-haired Lyman Busby, in reply to a query the other day. "Why, I was nearest neighbor of the Poles, and I used to see them every day. Never had finer folks about. Talk about good nature, you ought to have seen how jolly they used to be when everything on the farm was drying up in the sun and the animals were all sick and dying. They never wore long faces. When they all saw that farming was a mighty hard, dirty job, totally unfit for educated gentlemen like them, they fiddled, painted and scribbled and cracked jokes. If ever there was a set of happy, smart men anywhere it was that colony of Poles. They lost every dollar they put into their co-operative farming scheme. They were no more cut out for plowing, harvesting and doing the round of chores of a farm than a Hottentot can figure in Algebra. It was ridiculous to see those soft, white-handed, pale-cheeked fellows come out of their cabins and with cigarettes in their mouths try to cultivate. They soon found that breaking the raw land on their ranch was impossible, so they hired neighboring farmers



attention, the young fruit trees withered while Sienkiewicz wrote day after day, and the colony barn burned up one day, while the colony symphony club was reveling in Bach out among the oak trees. When June came the colony went quickly to pieces. All but Mme. Modjeska and her husband, the Count Bozenta, left Anaheim one by one, and went back to Poland and Paris. Sienkiewicz went to Los Angeles and lived in cheap rooms at old Pico House for four or five months. He wrote hard, and by the sale of his American sketches in Cracow and St. Petersburg he got enough together to return to his native home.

With the breaking up of the Polish colony, Mme. Modjeska and her husband settled on a smaller and private ranch near Anaheim. Money was very scarce and the brilliant, brave woman dreaded to return to the theater, trying her art in the English language in America. With the aid of a teacher in a public school in Los Angeles she mastered the language sufficiently in seven months to go upon the stage. In speaking of this period of study she said to the writer:

"I am amazed now that I ever dared attempt to go on an American stage with so short a preparation, but it was a stern necessity. We were living on borrowed money, and we could not bear to think that precious time and money were squandered. For five months I studied English from early morning until I was tired late at night. I never missed a day except Sundays, and

like me to do that. They did try to cultivate and do chores, but I pitied them from the bottom of my heart. They soon abandoned that also.

"Only a few of the Poles could speak English, and that was broken. They were all gentlemen, and were constantly afraid that we men working for them would overdo ourselves. Every one in the colony, men and women, was a smoker, and each rolled and smoked cigarettes in ceaseless succession.

"Oh, yes, I distinctly recall Mr. Sienkiewicz. We used to call him Sankwitz. He was a short, black-eyed, thoughtful man of about 22 then. I remember that he was writing even then and that he was one of the orchestra of the colony. He lived in Los Angeles several months after the colony went to pieces. I remember seeing him several times walking about Los Angeles with Mrs. Chlapowski (as we knew Mme. Modjeska before she became the famous actress) and her husband, the Count Bozenta. I believe that Sienkiewicz' job used to be to milk and attend the stables, but, like his compatriots, he soon became disgusted with menial work and let things go. He had a table rigged up beneath a live oak tree over at the north of the colony lands, and there he used to read, smoke and write all day long. Like all others in the colony, he felt the dire straits that the failure of the colony farm had brought him, but even in his seedy clothes he was as cheerful as the rest. He spoke a little English then, but his speech was so fast that one had to listen closely to understand him."

HENRY G. TINSLEY.