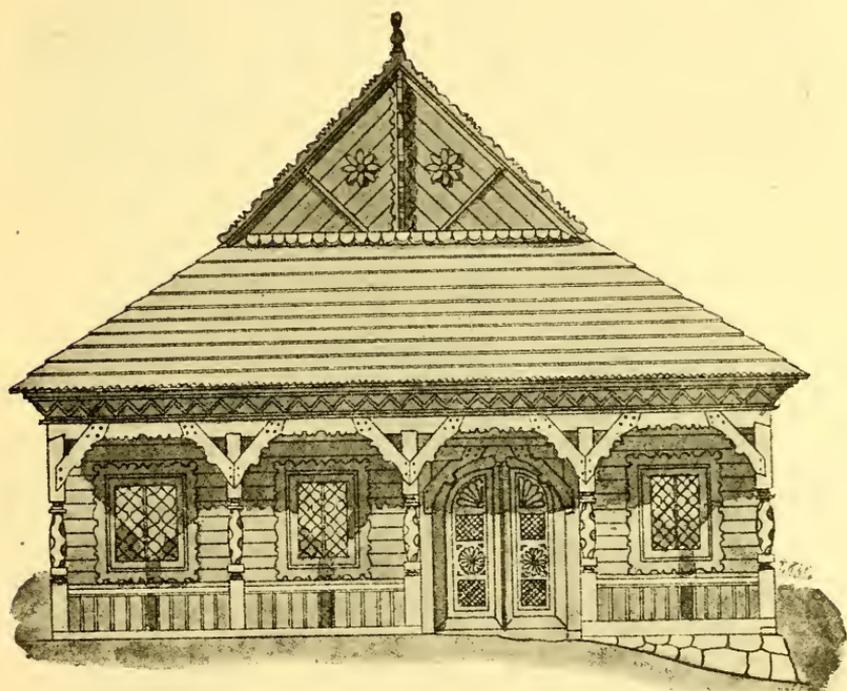


## THE POLES AND THEIR GOTHIC DESCENT.

BY THE EDITOR.

POLAND is a country whose people are counted as the most intelligent of all the Slav races, but unfortunately it has not for centuries held a position worthy of its national advantages and intellectual talents. It was torn by internal strife and fell a prey to its three neighbors, Russia, Austria and Prussia. The real situa-



A POLISH COTTAGE.

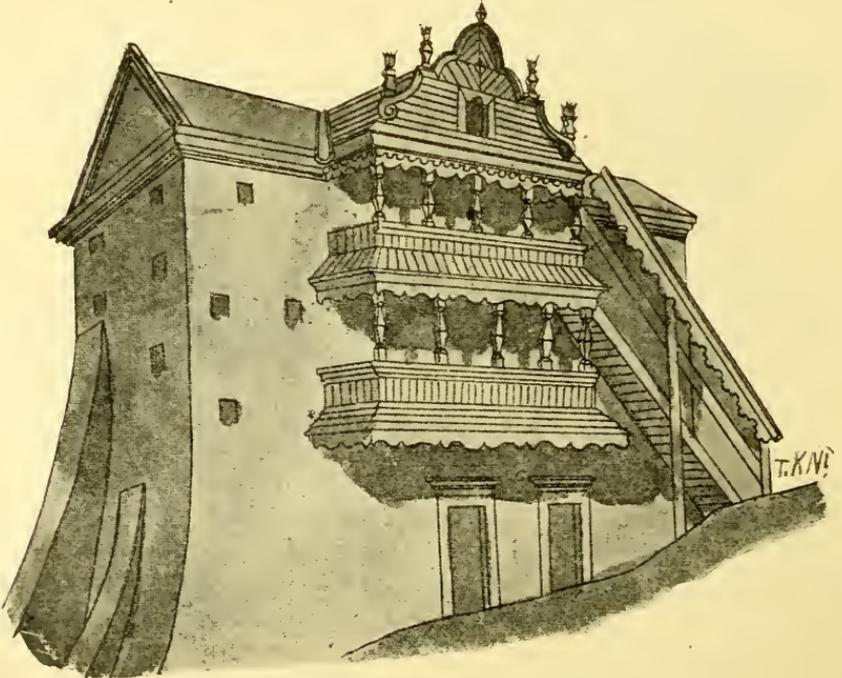
An evidence that the Zakopianian style is a return to primitive Polish art.

tion at the end of the eighteenth century was that Russia would have appropriated Poland gradually piece by piece, had not Frederick the Great and the Austrian emperor anticipated this result and come to an understanding that they would participate in the division of Poland so as not to leave the whole territory to the Russian bear. The Poles who fell to the Central Powers were well



A BARN OF RURAL POLAND.

The open passageway with its constant draft provides the threshing floor.



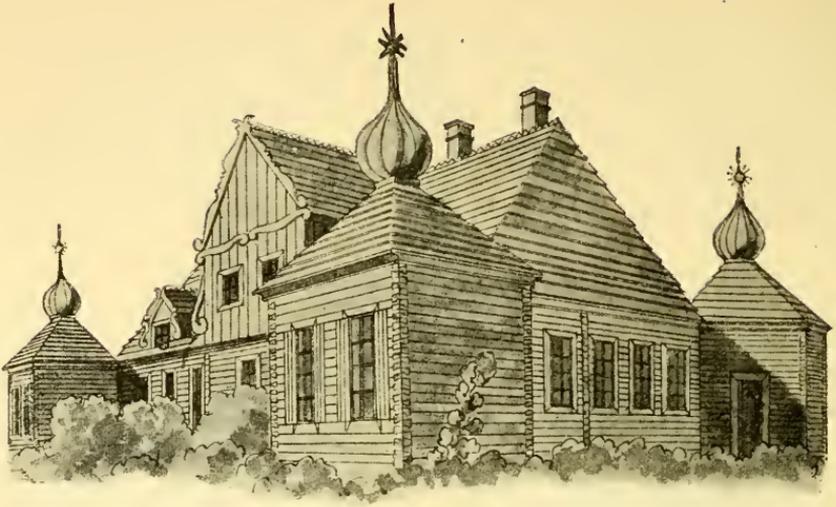
A STATELY GRAIN ELEVATOR.

off in comparison to their brothers who fell under Russian rule; for though they were governed by strangers they were treated with justice and benevolence whereby their growing children received a fair education in their own language. This is especially true in Austria where every nationality possesses its own rights and builds its own schools and churches. In Prussia the Poles have also their own schools, including the higher schools such as gymnasia,

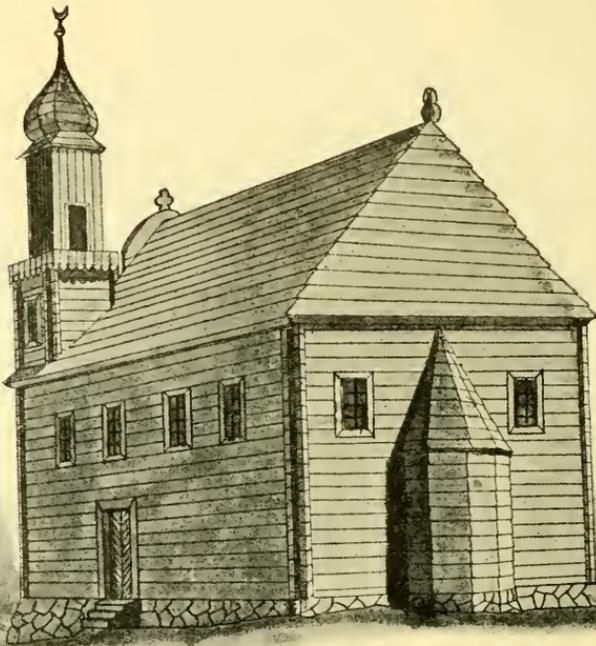


TYPICAL TOWN HALL AND MARKET-PLACE OF A SMALL CITY.  
Note the artistic decorative style.

but for some time under Bismarck's régime an attempt was made to Germanize Polish-speaking districts. This was done by expropriating the Polish landowner by a law subsidizing German buyers whenever land was for sale. This means that whenever an estate was offered for sale a German bidder had official support by law which naturally gave him a great advantage over any Polish rival. The plan was to expropriate the country in this way,

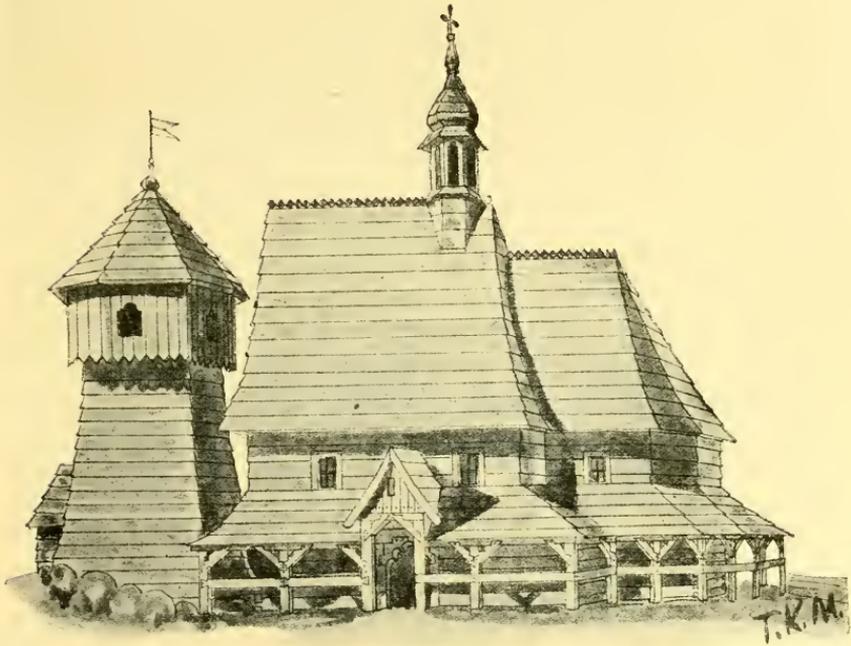


HOUSE OF POLISH NOBLEMAN.  
Note the Oriental influence.



MOHAMMEDAN MOSQUE NEAR MINSK IN LITHUANIA.

for it was expected that, like master like man, the farm hands would thus begin to speak German. But the result was the very opposite. The new German landowners became Polonized and the Polish-speaking population only increased. Prussia's worst fault consists in the attitude of the government, for while the literary people of Germany sympathized with the Poles in their struggle for liberty against Russia, the Prussian government sided with Russia and went so far in abject submission to the then omnipotent Czar as to surrender to Russia the Polish fugitives who had sought an asylum in Prussian territory.

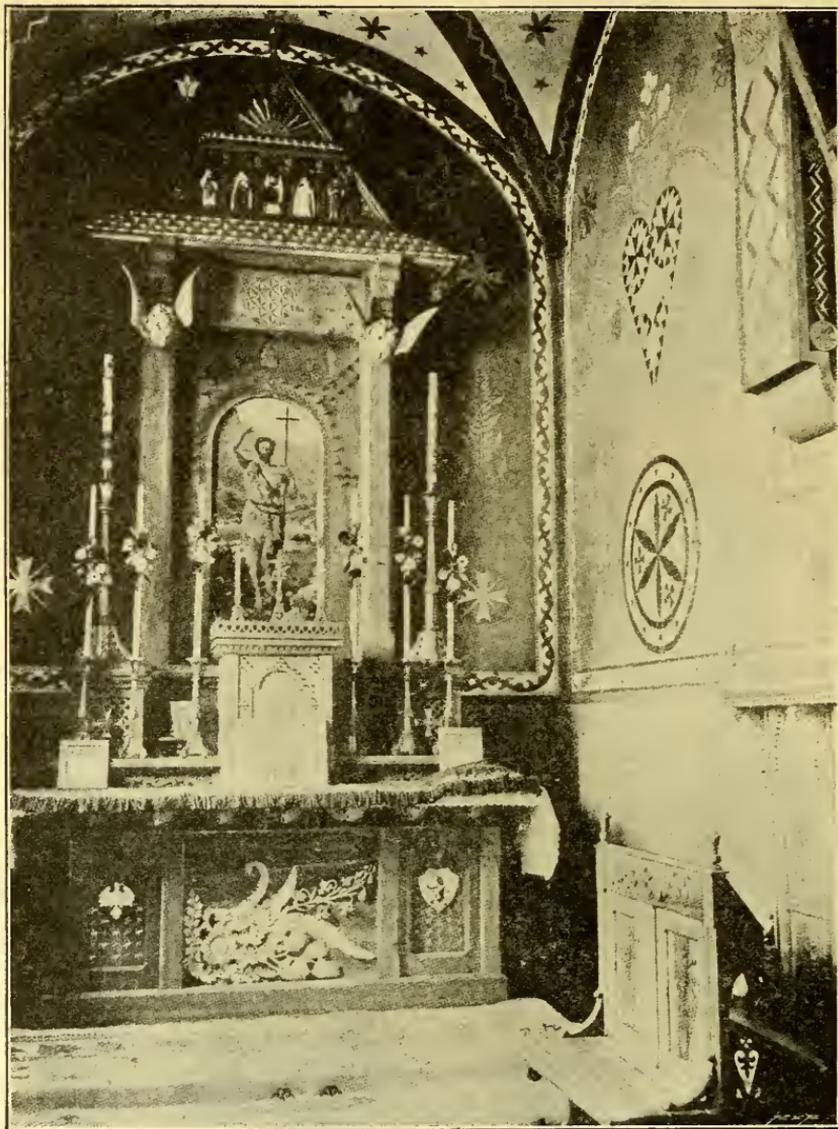


A VILLAGE CHURCH AND BELL-TOWER.

The fate of those Poles who were incorporated in the Russian empire was sad, for their portion was a systematic oppression and merciless impoverishment of the large masses of the people without any fair chance of procuring an adequate education for their children.

Poland attained her highest glory in history under King Sobieski when her possessions extended from the Baltic to the Black Sea, not only over the present Galicia but also over Ukraine in southern Russia, and in the north over Lithuania and Mazuria. She then held a high rank in the arts, poetry, music and architecture.

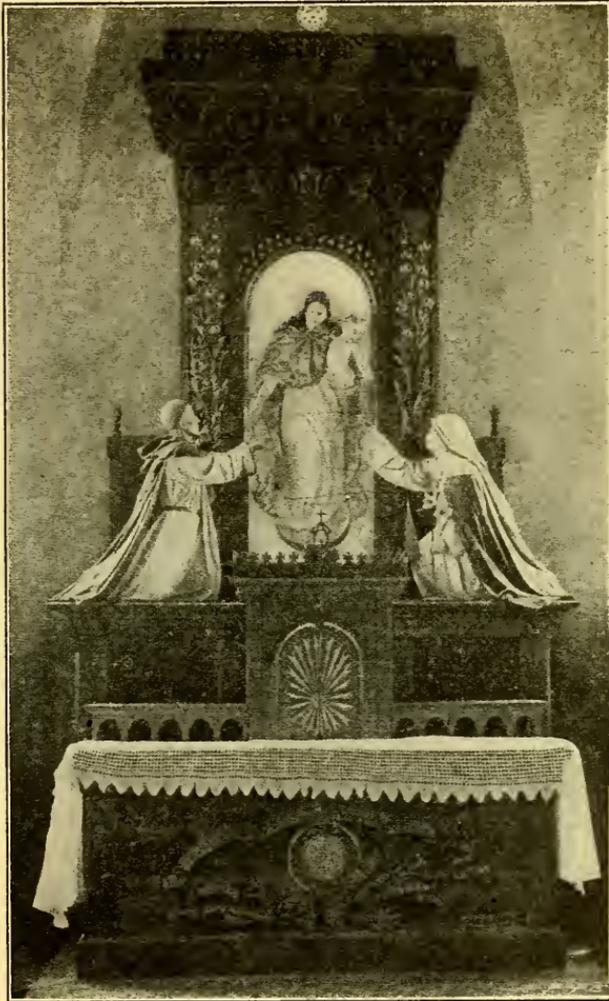
To-day Poles are known for their jovial mirth, artistic spirit, sociable temper and chivalrous generosity.



ORNATE ALTAR IN THE CHAPEL OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST.  
Designed by Stanislaw Witkiewicz.

Who are the Poles, and to what family do they belong? Their language no doubt is Slav, but it is strange that our anthropologists

have not solved the problem of their origin. One of the most recent theories (which possesses some probability) is that the Poles are not one homogeneous race but a mixture of two. A traveler whose object is to take note of the inhabitants of Poland will be



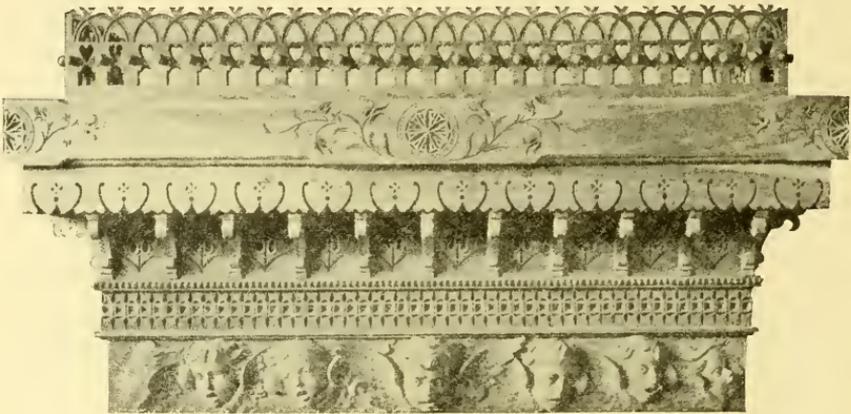
ALTAR-PIECE SHOWING VIRGIN AND CHRISTCHILD.

The kneeling saints are St. Dominic and St. Catharine of Siena. Also by Witkiewicz.

struck by the presence of two very different and quite distinct types which are prominent in the country. The large mass of the people are able-bodied and strong-boned muscular men and women, blond

haired and blue-eyed ; but the nobility are usually of a very different type. They are slim, agile, and in contrast to the mass of the people black haired and brown eyed. While the mass of the people are frugal in their habits, thrifty and industrious, the aristocracy is inclined to extravagance and even profligacy. This is the reason why so many of the noble families have become impoverished. They are apt to lose their possessions and bankruptcy is not uncommon among the owners of large estates. They love to spend their income in Paris, enjoying themselves in revelries, and are absolutely careless as to the result of their thoughtless lives. The two characters are as marked as their outer appearance ; and the question naturally presents itself, what is the cause of this difference ?

There is a theory, which may be stated in a few words, that



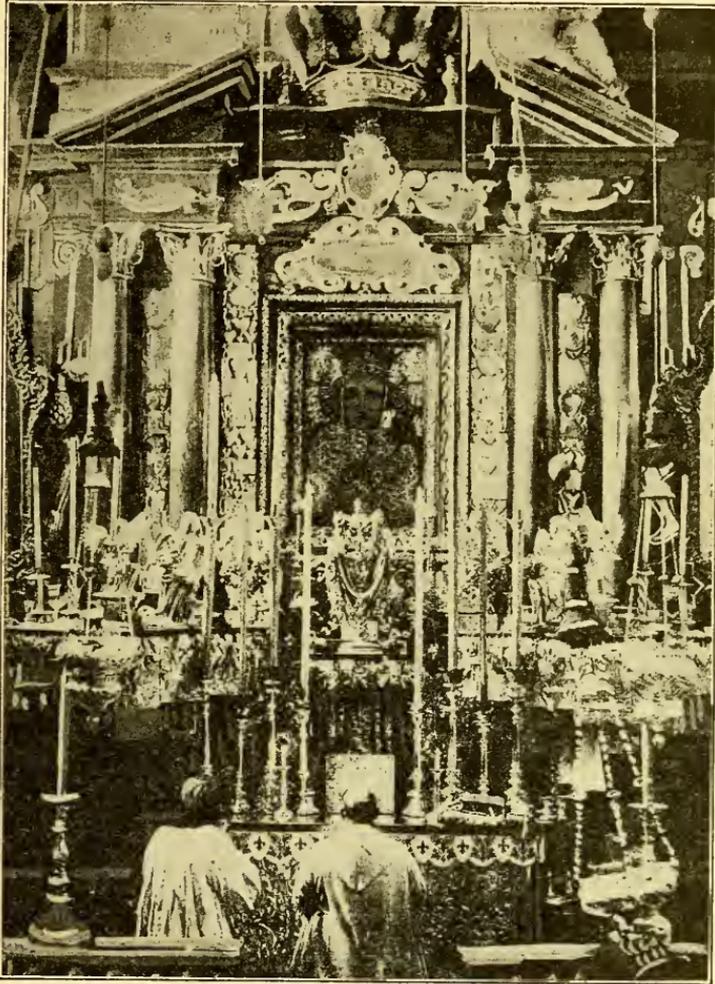
TOP OF THE FOREGOING ALTAR-PIECE.

Said to be a fine example of Zakopianian ornament, including six-rayed stars and vine motives.

the mass of the people are not Slavs but of Germanic descent, that they are the remnant of the Gothic inhabitants of the Vistula Valley who lived there before the Ostro- and Visigoths left on their venturesome expeditions southward to look for more prosperous lands in Italy, southern France and Spain.

The famous struggle of the Ostrogoths is well known and has been splendidly told by Felix Dahn in his historical novel *Der Kampf um Rom*, and the character of this race is well described in Charles Kingsley's book *The Roman and the Teuton*, which is well worth reading at the present time. It is instructive in considering the present struggle between the Entente and the Teutons, a struggle in which we again have the sad spectacle which carries

out the spirit of the principle uttered in former days by a Roman leader, that the essential way to dispose of Teuton superiority is



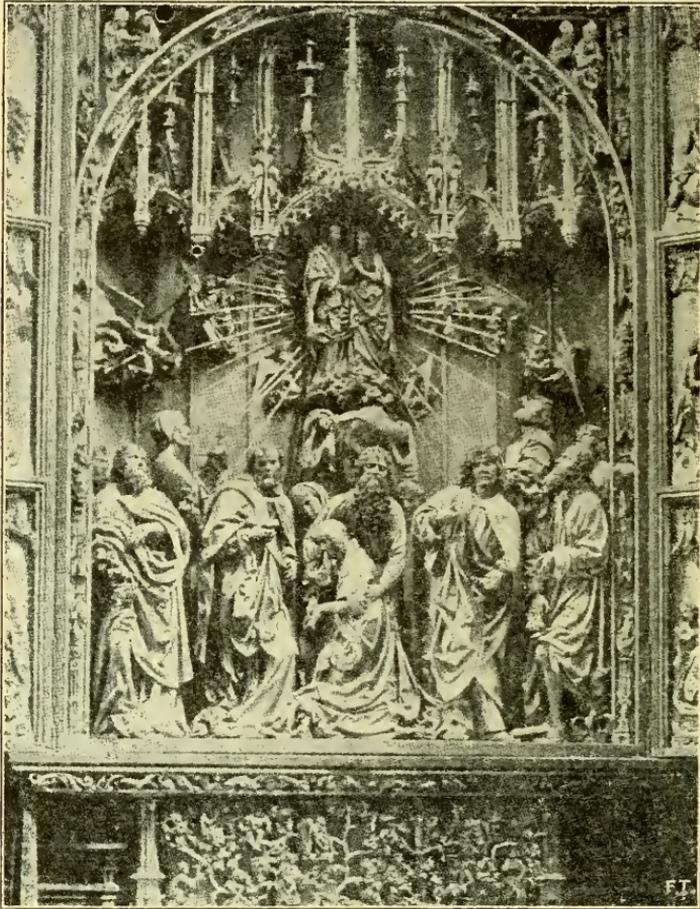
ALTAR AT CZENSTOCHAU IN RUSSIAN POLAND.

With picture of the Virgin credited with miraculous power and greatly venerated even by the Russians. It clearly belongs to the Byzantine period, and legend attributes it to St. Luke. It has been in this church since 1382.

to make Teuton fight Teuton, and so the Anglo-Saxon stands against the German. Eastern Rome succeeded in overcoming the Ostrogoths in Italy, but she succeeded because she enlisted in her

armies other German tribes, such as the Heruli, Gepids, some Franks and later on the Longobards also.

Concerning Poland we must state that a new view of migration is spreading at present, and the idea that in the middle ages emigrants left their homes behind them in desolate emptiness is



A FAMOUS MASTERPIECE IN THE CHURCH OF THE VIRGIN MARY AT CRACOW.

By the Polish sculptor Wit Stwosz (d. 1533).

now subject to a new interpretation. The traditional conception speaks of the migration of the nations as if whole nations had left their countries either on account of enormous inundations that flooded their country or because famines are assumed to have spread, or because nations for some unknown reason deemed their

homes undesirable territory and came out in search of new fields to settle and a better soil to till. Large armies with their women and children reached the Roman Empire and took possession of the fertile lands that were badly defended. They came in uncounted numbers and so it naturally appeared to the Romans that whole nations had abandoned their old lands, and yet is it probable that people would leave their homes behind them and surrender their property to any one who would take it? Are the countries from which the Goths came such deserts as not to deserve the trouble of tillage? Certainly they are inhabited now, and so far as we know have always been inhabited; the soil was then as good as it ever has been afterward and it is not considerably improved now; there must be some mistake in our old traditional theory.

Suppose that here in America we knew nothing about Europe except that we saw large ships land in New York, in Boston, in Philadelphia or in other harbors, loaded with European immigrants, men, women and children, by thousands and thousands. We would know very well that in spite of their large numbers these immigrants do not leave their homes because they are driven away on account of famines and inundations, and that they do not leave their countries empty or desolate behind them. On the contrary they leave prosperous homes. They are the surplus of the large European population, and have sold their goods to brothers, cousins and relatives and have come here in the hope of improving their condition. Is it not probable that at the beginning of the Middle Ages the actual facts were similar?

We know that in Cæsar's time Ariovistus, a Swabian chief, led an army of many thousands of men over the Rhine and the Swabians intended to be followed by their women and children. The Cimbri and Teutones whom Marius beat first in southern Gaul at Aquæ Sextiæ in 102 B. C. and in the *Campis Raudiis* in 101 B. C. in northern Italy had come in heavy wagons with women and children in search for land and would have settled down peaceably if the Roman authorities had given them land for cultivation anywhere in Italy and Gaul. It was not an army of armed men, it was a tribe of men, women and children, and their request was for homesteads. They did not come with swords only, but were equipped with wagons in which their families lived, and after Marius had beaten the men he had to fight the women entrenched behind the heavy wheels, and the fight with the women was almost as hard as with the men, for they would rather be killed than surrender.

We may very well picture to ourselves the situation in those days. The country was relatively prosperous, yet the tillable soil was not sufficient to nourish the overpopulation, and some leader proclaimed his willingness to lead an expedition south to Italy in which all men who would join him would be welcome. The younger sons would sell their inheritance and with their young wives join him with the best equipment they could procure. But the main proportion of the population would remain behind.

We may imagine that among the Goths who lived in the valley of the Vistula, the enterprising spirit was so strong that all the vigorous men and women sold out their property, their acres and their cattle and houses, and left the country with the hope of great gains in the more fertile and prosperous countries of the Roman Empire. They settled first in southern Russia and in the valley of the Danube. In a similar way the Vandals had taken their course as far south as northern Africa, and the Roman Empire was overrun with such venturesome people who simply relied on their sword and were feared all over the civilized portions of the ancient world.

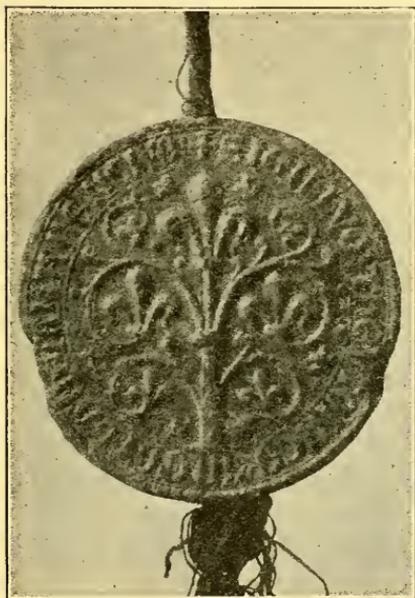
In his historical novel *Hypatia*, Charles Kingsley introduces to us such Germanic tribes on their expedition south into Egypt. They are in search of Asgard, the land of the gods, and the Roman governor informs them that they will probably find the happy land farther south in the upper parts of the Nile valley, hoping that they would go to wrack and ruin in the hot climate of Abyssinia.

Now let us consider what became of the Goths left in the Vistula valley. We cannot assume that all the Goths had gone. We must believe that the mass of the people remained behind, and that only the venturesome portion of the population went south into Italy, but the remainder were considerably weakened like a nation whose warfaring men have gone to the front—even more weakened by the fact that the emigrant Goths were accompanied by their brides and growing families. Further we know that there were other Goths besides the Ostro- and the Visigoths among whom the Tetraxitic Goths, a branch of the Ostrogoths, settled in the Crimea and preserved their language down into the sixteenth century. They are almost forgotten now.

Better known are the Goths of the Baltic Island Gotland, especially in its capital Wisby, and we may mention that in Sweden the Swedish tribe of the "Gauten" have also been identified with the Goths. This view has been (rightly or wrongly) refuted and is regarded as antiquated, but the existence of the Gotland

Goths as a Gothic branch is assured; and the Goths were known as the first explorers of the Baltic. We have documentary evidence that here German settlers and Goths lived in communities with separate churches, but as citizens of equal rights, each group using its own language and living according to its own laws; and there were two magistrates, a German *Vogt* for the Germans and a Gothic for the Goths. Besides, the two portions of the inhabitants possessed their own seals, that of the Germans bearing a lily and that of the Goths a lamb with Christ's banner of victory.

It can scarcely be denied that the Goths continued to exist in



SEAL OF THE GERMAN MERCHANTS IN GOTLAND (1280).



SEAL OF THE GOTHIC OF WISBY (1280).

eastern Europe after the emigration of the Ostrogoths and Visigoths from the Vistula. In fact we know that the reason of the Gothic emigration is reported to have been of a religious nature. Ulfilas had converted many to Christianity, but the pagan part of the population compelled them to leave their homes; but it would lead us too far here to enter into details.

An unlucky star seems to have hovered over all Gothic enterprises. We know of the tragic end of the Ostrogoths, and the city of Wisby where the Goths must have played the leading part still bears a monument in the shape of a cross standing in an open field

before the city gates. The inscription on it announces the defeat of the Goths at the hands of the Danish king Waldemar on July 27, 1361, and reads: *Ante portas Wisby in manibus Danorum ceciderunt Gutenses.*

These Goths are reported to have been very prosperous before their calamity overtook them as the Goths in Italy had been. We find evidence of this in a verse which tells that the women spun with golden spindles and their pigs fed from silver troughs:

“Nach Zentnern wogen die Goten das Gold,  
Zum Spiel dienten die edelsten Steine,  
Die Frauen spannen mit Spindeln von Gold,  
Aus silbernen Trögen frassen die Schweine.”

[The Goths weighed gold by hundred weight,  
Most precious jewels were used for games,  
With golden spindles spun Gothic dames,  
Their pigs from troughs of silver ate.]

There is no report extant to explain how the original Gothic home in the Vistula valley changed into Poland. All we know is the fact that the most vigorous portion of the population of the Gothic nation had left their original homes on the Vistula, and we can easily understand that the remnant was not sufficiently protected against conquerors, with the result that a Slavic invasion could not be resisted.

This theory furnishes us with an explanation of the two different races in the Polish nation. Slavs did come in and they are the nucleus of the rulers of Poland, just as the Normans established themselves as the nobility of Anglo-Saxon England. While the original inhabitants, being Gothic, were blond-haired and blue-eyed like their German cousins and like other Germanic nations—the Norse, the Dutch and the Anglo-Saxons—the new race was typically Slavic, and they easily made themselves masters of the country, divided the estates among them, and left the burden of tilling the ground to the original population of Gothic descent. At the same time they impressed the Slavic character upon the country and introduced the Slavic language.

We know that the Goths were people who adapted themselves easily to conditions. When the Ostrogoths came to Italy they learned Latin with great facility, and we know that they ruled the country with a wisdom that carefully took into consideration the national characteristics of the Italian people. We know that Roman scholars were welcome at the court of Theoderic, the Gothic king,

and the famous philosopher Boethius was a teacher of his daughter Amalasuetha. When Boethius was accused of treason he enjoyed the privilege of being pardoned twice by the great Theodoric, and was executed only when the evidence grew overwhelming. Charles Kingsley is inclined to believe that even here Boethius was innocent, but while we grant that at the present time it is difficult to know the facts of the case there seems to be a great probability that Theodoric finally and hesitatingly came to the conclusion to condemn Boethius only because the evidence was too conclusive, and we must understand that a Roman like Boethius naturally cherished a deep prejudice against the foreign barbarians who had made themselves masters of his country.

But since the Goths adapted themselves so well in Italy we must assume that the remnant of the Goths in their old homes were as adaptable to the new conditions imposed upon them by Slavic invaders. When they were subjected to Slav barons they adopted their language just as the Ostrogoths in Italy finally adopted Latin. The same is true of their German cousins who emigrate to-day. Germans who settle in France become Gallo-Romans in the second generation, and in the United States they speak the English language as freely as if they were to the manner born.

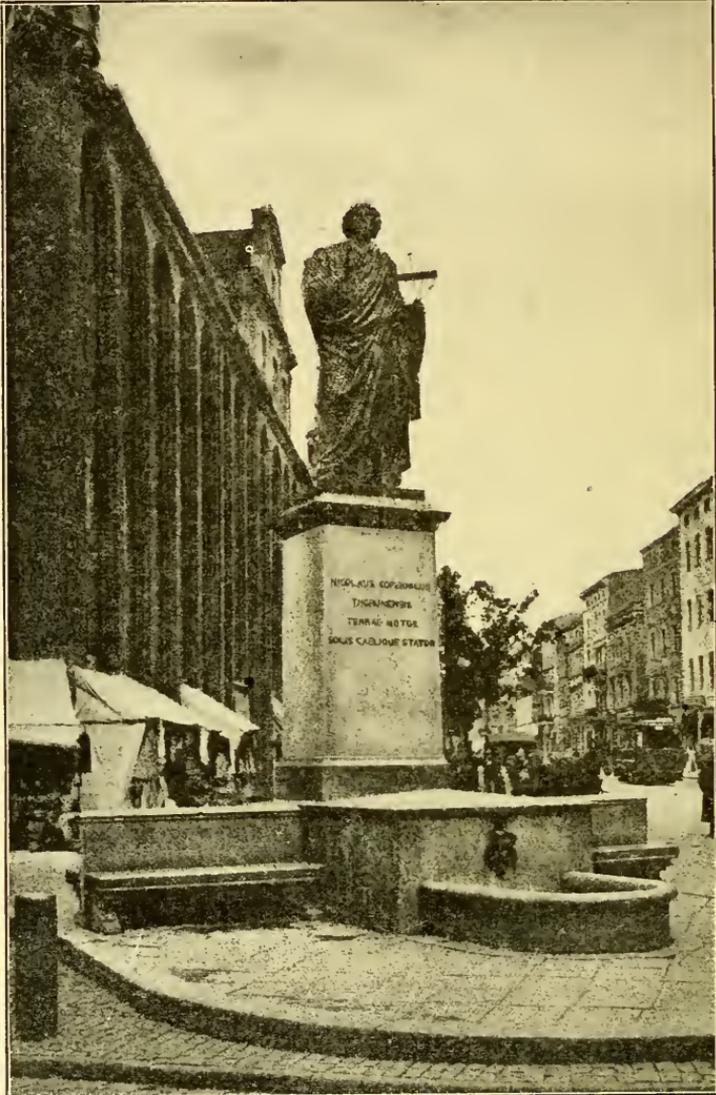
At any rate the truth remains that the Poles of to-day are divided into two different races, the agile and probably Slavic aristocracy, light-hearted, somewhat frivolous, and artistically inclined, and the large-boned blue-eyed farmer population of the masses with broad square heads which would invite the title of *têtes carrées* as much as the Alsacians who were given that name by the French.

The modern Pole learns German easily. He learns other languages, especially French, without great trouble, but so do all the Germans, and German comes so naturally to the Pole that most Poles who have occasion to learn German at all speak German as well as they do Polish.

The Slavic infusion into the originally Gothic country may not have been greater in numbers than the Norman invasion of Britain, but considering the fact that the Goths in the Vistula valley had not yet developed a Gothic literature, their language had less power of resistance than in Britain among the Saxons and was naturally replaced by the Slavic speech of the conquerors; and the old Gothic traditions were quickly forgotten when with the introduction of Christianity new ideals dawned upon the population which antiquated at once both the Slavic and the Gothic gods.

The new development of events has delivered Poland into the

hands of the Germans, and the German emperor has promised to restore the old kingdom of Poland. It is an act of diplomacy, not of generosity. It is to Germany's own interest to have Poland re-



STATUE OF COPERNICUS IN THORN.

stored; for Germany needs a buffer state against Russia and it would be a wise policy to have such a friendly buffer state in Poland. Therefore it stands to reason that Germany will deem it best to

bury the hatchet of old quarrels from the times when Russia still dictated the politics of Europe.

It is natural that a restored Poland will be a kingdom that in her future development will have to stand among the nations as an ally of Germany, but the main thing to be desired by the Poles will be the enjoyment of perfect home rule. They will either elect a king or accept one who will not be opposed to the Central Powers, the empires of Germany and Austria-Hungary. There is no expectation that the German or Austrian provinces of Poland are to be incorporated into the new Poland, for, so far as we can see, it is the Russian province, to be known under the name of the Kingdom of Poland, that is to constitute the new Poland; but we may assume that this new Poland will be benefitted by imitating German methods of government and of education. Schools will enable the people to acquire education in the same way and it will be possible for the people to develop their intellectual abilities in the Prussian provinces, and that alone will be an incalculable benefit for the population of Lettish and Polish extraction. Whether Lithuania will be an independent kingdom by the side of Poland or whether both will be combined in one kingdom under one and the same leadership is perhaps not yet decided, but we may be sure that the people's wishes will be respected, and we may hope that the new kingdom, or the two new kingdoms, will develop to advantage their innate talents and the possibility of their national character.

The Poles are a gifted race. It was a Pole, Kopernik of Thorn, who laid the basis of our modern world-conception by working out what is known as the Copernican world-system, and in modern music Chopin, a French Pole, ranges second to none but Mozart and Beethoven.

What Poles need is the schooling which both Copernicus and Chopin enjoyed, i. e., a German schooling, and the new Poland that is now rising under our eyes will have that fully. It will be administered in friendship without the ugly by-taste of oppression and on the sole condition of an inalienable national alliance with Germany.