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BACKGROUND TO THE CZECHS

(continued from previous page)

mous importance for the future: the Sokol (Falcon) organisation founded by Tyrš and Fugner. Like much else in Czech life, it had a foreign inspiration but adapted to different purposes. Tyrš found in physical education a means not only to fitness of the body, but to inner discipline and patriotic devotion. "We must march freely, with head held high. Perish on the way or be the first to reach the goal. All or nothing. There are mottoes for you." Unlike the Nazi youth movement, the Sokol did have a

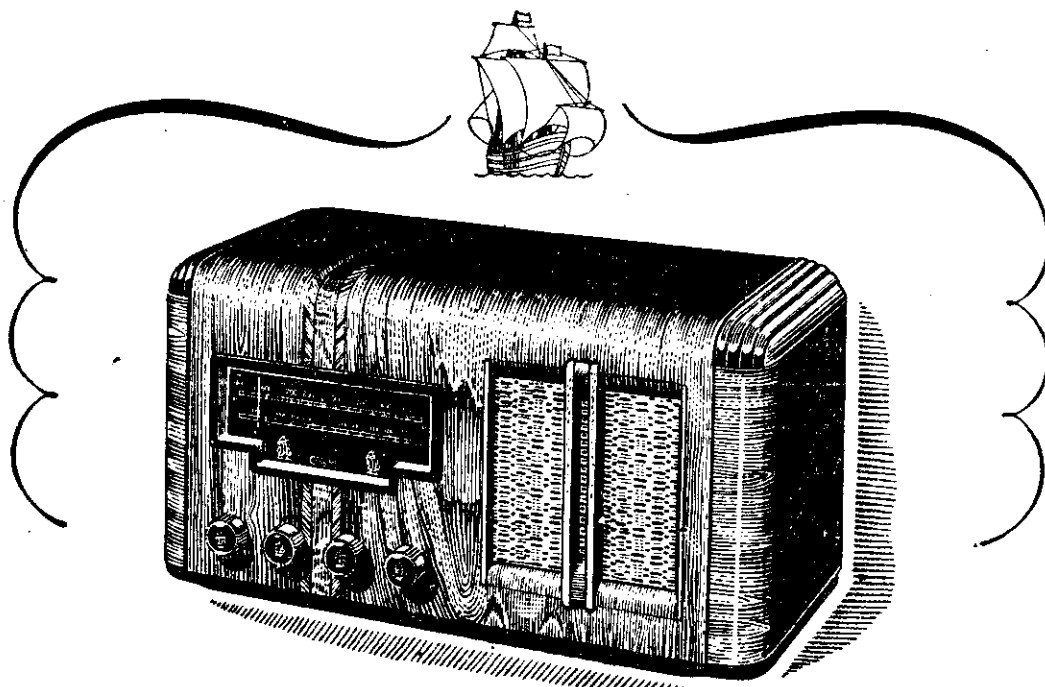
fundamental democratic basis, and prepared its members, men and women, for active citizenship; but it taught that citizenship meant self-sacrificing loyalty to comrades and above all to one's fatherland. "It is not the past, even the most flourishing, that can guarantee the existence of a nation," wrote Tyrš, "but its activity and health in the present." Nevertheless it was in their past history above all that the Czechs found the inspiration and character of their movement. Here was the root of their

democracy, to which Tyrš strove to dedicate the services of disciplined youth, and here lay the root of their cultural affinity to western Europe. For two hundred years, so the Czechs now felt, their history had been interpreted for them by aliens. Scholarly and indeed patriotic works in Latin or German had written Bohemia's past in terms pleasing to Jesuits and Viennese. Now Czech scholarship found in that history another meaning. Led by Palacky, whose great history began to appear in 1836 (in German) they found the flowering of Bohemian history in the heroic period of Huss and those who followed him. This was seen not only as a struggle against foreign rule, but as a struggle for freedom and individual rights. The true tradition of Bohemia, Palacky taught, was that which spoke again in the liberalism of the 18th Century enlightenment, in the idealism of the French Revolution, in the absolute moral values of Kant. "Whenever we were victorious," he wrote, "it was always more as the result of spiritual forces than of physical might, and whenever we succumbed there was always the insufficiency of our spiritual activity and of our moral courage responsible for it."

Democracy and Social Change

This was explosive and dangerous thinking, but its democratic intention was in tune with the temper of the people and with their political situation as well as with their history. Unlike the nobles of Poland and Hungary, the Bohemian upper class mainly stood aloof from the national revival, and thus threw leadership on to peasants and bourgeoisie. This is perhaps what saved it. Such men were interested not only in the traditional demand for "national rights"—the independent status of the Crown of St. Wenceslas—but in the human rights of individuals. Hence the rise of the "New Czechs" from about 1870 onwards—men who insisted that social change must accompany the new order. Here lies the true significance of Masaryk, Palacky's great pupil and successor. Himself of peasant stock, he knew how vital was economic change to anything that could be fairly called democracy; and he taught that Czechs must build the future by their own efforts, not relying on the help of Tsarist Russia. It was he who pulled together the threads of the Czech tradition, and provided the leadership to give them political reality.

The fate of Masaryk's Czechoslovakia is too tough a subject for this article; and indeed it cannot yet be written. Meantime it may be said that the Czechoslovakia of the 1920's and 1930's with all its faults went a long way towards embodying western ideals of democracy and personal freedom; and that it valiantly defended them in the heart of reactionary Europe. In 1935 Benes, whose name had long been honourably associated with Masaryk, succeeded him in the presidency of the republic as well as in the spiritual leadership of Czech democracy; and Benes's fall before Hitler in 1938 was the effective beginning of World War II. And it scarcely needs to be added that in the trials that followed the Czechs fought the foreign tyrant with a persistent heroism worthy of their highest traditions.



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MANTEL DESIGN: "EXETER"

"EXETER" is a recent modification of the attractive COLUMBUS chest design mantel cabinet. It is now available as a 5-valve dual-wave model (Model 27), or as a high-power 6-valve broadcast model (Model 32)—an option which will enhance the already widespread popularity of this design.

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