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ELEMENTS OF POLISH CULTURE

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BY

PAUL SUPER

GENERAL DIRECTOR OF THE POLISH Y. M. C. A.

THIRD EDITION

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PUBLISHED BY THE BALTIC INSTITUTE

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CHAPTER 1

CULTURAL AREAS

The culture of Poland is found in four geographical distributions. First, an eastern and frontier culture, centred on two focii, Wilno and Lwów, but seen also in numerous towns near old castles and palaces all along Poland's border toward Russia; not, however, Russian in type, but the most eastern extension of true Polish characteristics. That is, in its architecture and manners it is European, Catholic, and Western.

The second cultural belt is composed of the somewhat primitive but well developed and artistic native culture of the Carpathian Mountains which constitute Poland's southern provinces, its western flowering being the costumes, architecture, and whole way of life of the *Górale*, as the mountaineers around Zakopane are called, and its eastern representation the picturesque *Huculi*, of whose houses, clothing, domestic utensils, and native art whole books have been written.

The third and richest cultural area is that connected with the Baltic by the Vistula River. Its southern glory is Cracow, ancient city of the Hanseatic League. Its modern capital is Warsaw. Then beginning with Płock where there is a fine old cathedral come the attractive mediaeval cities of Toruń, Chełmno, and Gru-

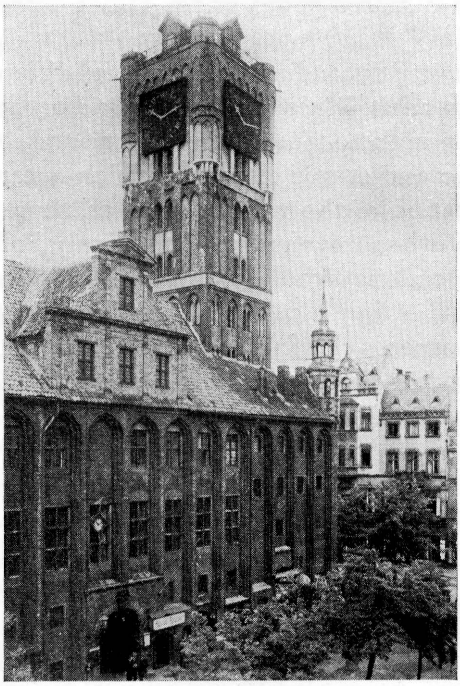
dziądz. Southwest of these lie the province and city of Poznań, older, richer, the very heart and soul of Poland and the Polish people, separated from the sea by its neighbouring maritime province of Polish Pomerania *(Pomorze.)* All of Poland's short sea coast on the Baltic lies north of the mouth of the Vistula. This small but important area is composed of Gdynia and its neighbouring Cassubian country, the Cassubians being an ancient Slavonic stock closely related to the main body of Poles.

The fourth of these centres of a special and typical civilization is Polish Upper Silesia, whose Polish character six hundred years of Czech and German ownership did not efface. Katowice is its chief town.

The cultural areas are not really quite so clearly delimited as this broad and general characterization may imply, for complex racial and historical elements complicate the matter, and there are groups within groups. A closer description of the eastern frontier, for instance, would take account of the White Ruthenian group in and north of the Pińsk Marshes, and of the Ruthenian group farther south, some of whom sometimes refer to themselves as Ukrainians, a geographic rather than ethnographic term. However, the division of Poland into these four cultural areas, the eastern frontier provinces, the Carpathian provinces, the Vistula valley, and Polish Upper Silesia, is not without merit. This is certainly a convenient approach to a study of the

different cultural manifestations of the Polish spirit and of the various racial cultures developing during the past four hundred years under Polish influence and leadership.

But notwithstanding the very real differences between the spirit, life, environment, and occupations of the people in these four parts of Poland and the variety of historic and ethnic elements which enter into the determination of the various cultures, there is something Polish and even very distinctively Polish about it all as a national whole, and it is to these more dominant traits of Polish culture, traits found everywhere, that this paper is chiefly devoted. So I shall either refer to or disregard regional differences as seems to be most helpful in specific instances.



Town Hall, Toruń

The Town Hall at Toruń is the oldest in Poland, the building of which was begun in 1259. It is a red brick quadrangle in the Gothic style. Its magnificent interior arrangement was damaged by fire in 1703 during the bombardment of Toruń by the Swedes. The second floor is used for the Municipal Museum.

CHAPTER 2

ORIENTATION

Next to geographical location one thinks of culture as having directional orientation. That of Poland to-day is toward the Baltic Sea and toward the West. One might say toward the West via the Baltic, through the province of Polish Pomerania (*Pomorze*). This is Poland's outlet to the sea. Let us consider all that means. It means unstifled economic life, political independence, a way to the rest of the world over purely Polish territory and that the most anciently Polish. This Baltic province, Poland's path to the oceans of the world, is vitally essential to Poland for her economic life and for her status as a power. There on a Polish shore, at Gdynia, a new and wonderful port has been built. Toward it new railway lines are laid. There significant ceremonies are held, such as the great annual Sea Festival. There its ships call and thence depart. Through Gdynia and Danzig 73 per cent. of Poland's foreign trade comes and goes. No wonder Polish culture to-day faces the west and has a seaward orientation.

The direct causes of this westward and seaward turning of Polish culture are geographical, commercial, religious, and intellectual. Poland's early commerce followed its great water routes, and its chief rivers flow

north and north-west. Largely along these waterways the country's products, grain, potash, wax, honey, hides, lumber, tar, and salt, found their way to the markets of England, France, the Low Countries, Scandinavia, and even as far as Portugal, much of it passing through Danzig. The west needed agricultural products, Poland's needs were for manufactured goods. The exchange was a natural one. The Vistula was the main artery of this traffic. The grain warehouses of stone along its shores, fourteenth century souvenirs, stand to-day, as at Kazimierz for instance, a testimonial to the size and organization of that commerce.

Of all specific dates, the year 1466 stands as the most significant in this historic determination of the direction of Poland's dominant interests. In that year the Treaty of Toruń was signed, returning to the Poles land that had been in dispute between them and the Teutonic Knights of the Cross since 1308, and settling them in Polish hands for the next 300 years, until they were forcibly taken by Frederick the Great of Prussia in 1772 and by his successor in 1793. This was the province of Polish Pomerania *(Pomorze)*, and its repossession by Poland gave the Poles access to the sea via their own river and their own port, turning the great currents of Polish commerce seaward and westward.

Overland commerce was less important, but it too was westward. The lodestone in that direction was the annual Leipzig Fair, dating as far back as 1170.

Later, when travel for study and for observation arose, it also went westward to the lands of higher culture. Toward the east there was less to attract one.

RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL FACTORS

Let us now consider the religious situation. Christianity could have come into Poland from Constantinople in its Eastern Orthodox form, or from Rome, through Germany, in its Catholic form. Political expediency settled which of these it was to be. The Polish dukes of 966 A. D. chose both to be Christians and to be Catholics in order to deprive the Germanic tribes of an excuse for invasions against the heathen Poles, and to gain the protection of the Popes. Thus the mighty agency of religion, reinforced by politics, gave Poland Catholicism, the Latin alphabet, and western culture, instead of the Orthodox faith, the Cyrillic alphabet, and an eastern outlook. German priests and French monks, the early instructors of the Poles in Christianity, did much to strengthen these ties and establish the nature and orientation of Polish culture. Material civilization and intellectual life came in over these same paths established by religion.

It is almost a thousand years since a Polish ruler settled that question as to which way Poland was to face, away from other Slavonic nations, toward the lands of Latin culture, but the developments of the

passing centuries have wrought no change: Poland faces west. There were and are other influences bearing upon this matter. Poland on the south is bounded by a considerable range of mountains, rising to a height of 8,000 feet. It has been something of a barrier in that direction. To the east lie vast areas of forest, marsh, and waste land.

In government, the taste of the Poles has always been for democratic forms and against the autocracy of eastern lands. It is so to-day. Furthermore, in his governmental processes the Pole prefers evolution to revolution, and has long found the sources of his political inspiration in the west. And yet further, four of the elected kings of Poland were chosen from Sweden, Saxony, and France, none from the eastern lands; Hungary, from which country was chosen the great Polish king Stefan Batory, is to Poles southern, not eastern.

National psychology enters in also. The Pole feels that in the west, more than in the east, he can find those qualities and ideas which will supplement his Slavonic equipment and even correct certain faults which he suspects are due to his Slavonic origin, of which subject more in another place.

In great national crises, from the west, if at all, has come his help. Not from the near west, indeed, for from Germany have issued since Charlemagne the Teutonic hordes that for over a thousand years have pressed him off his ancestral lands and toward the east. But in the

early nineteenth century, in the darkest years of his history, in Napoleon lay his hope, and a century later it was the names and work of Hoover and Wilson that gave him life.

So much of history and background. What of to-day? Like all the world the Pole does indeed want to sell goods to Russia, but his political and cultural interests direct his attention to France, England, and America; the great avenues of his present and future commerce lie through Pomerania *(Pomorze)*, through his own port, and onto the high seas; his hope of continued freedom and independence centres in his Baltic provinces and their sea front. The three sections of his torn country, now happily united after over a century of separation as parts of three enemy empires, constitute a powerful modern state; this state, the Pole feels, will find its destiny in the west, recognized, honoured, and received into close fellowship by the lands of Latin, Germanic, and Anglo-Saxon culture.

To treat this subject fully one should now give an account of the oriental influences which have beat upon Poland, especially since the Tartar invasions of the thirteenth century, and down to the Bolshevik invasion of 1920, a history full of romance and thrill. But whilst these forces have had important results they have never determined Polish orientation and therefore need here be no more than recognized.

Town Hall, Poznań

The Town Hall at Poznań was built in the fourteenth century in the Gothic style, but after having been destroyed by fire in the middle of the sixteenth century it was rebuilt in the Renaissance style, under the supervision of John di Quadro, an Italian architect. The picturesque loggia, superstructure and tower as well as the ornaments of the reception halls were all executed by the same artist.

CHAPTER 3

LANDSCAPE AND CULTURE

In no country in which I have lived or travelled have I been so conscious of the connection between landscape, or the character of the countryside, and culture, or the character of the local civilization, as I am here in Poland. Perhaps the observation of this is due to a certain development in me personally, perhaps it is an objective sociological fact; at all events, the people of the different cultural areas as I know them seem so well to fit their environment as to be veritably a product of the soil and scene.

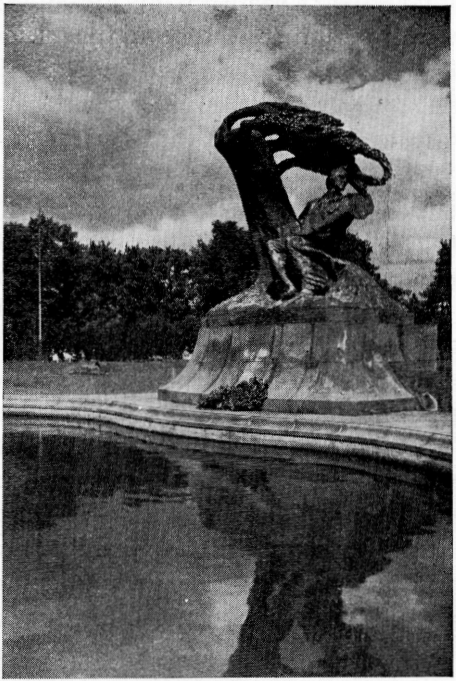
Therefore a few words on how Poland looks. In general it is a vast plain, broken a bit here and there, bounded on the south for almost its whole length by the Carpathian Mountains. From this prevailing flatness both the country and its inhabitants derive their name; *pole* (two syllables) means 'field', a *Polak* is a man of the fields and *Polska* is the land of the fields. Nowhere do these broad plains roll as do our American prairies in places. They are uniformly flat but surprisingly enough are not monotonous; indeed this seems even to give them a special character and charm. Centuries ago these plains were covered with forests. To-day they are largely cleared, with groves or replanted forests at not too infrequent intervals.

Now for the important exceptions. A hundred miles east of Warsaw comes the great Białowieża Forest, the largest primeval forest in Europe, full of game, including, until the late war, bison. Here the Czar hunted in the days of the Russian occupation. Farther east come the Pińsk or Prypeć Marshes, mile on mile, in the wet, trackless and tangled forests in which thousands of Russian soldiers perished in 1915 as they retreated before advancing German armies. South of this the land rises. You think you are going up onto a mountain top and are surprised that is has no other side. This table-land is Podolia, Poland's small piece of steppe, cut with deep narrow valleys called *jary*. Soil so rich that when ploughed it looks like curled-up chocolate. Here you can see for many unbroken miles and see nothing. The land seems treeless, houseless, hill-less. The trees and the villages are down in the valleys, by the streams, and do not appear until you are quite near.

So much for the surface and the landscape. In the richer western provinces, Poznania and Polish Pomerania, the land is well and scientifically cultivated. Good roads, pleasant villages, fine farm-houses and manors compose the scene. Toward Warsaw, more sand and less cultivation of the soil. Beyond Warsaw, much poor land and inevitably a lower culture. In and about the marshes, isolation and very primitive conditions. This is the frontier. It makes me think of the American West many years ago.

Silesia, south-western Poland, is a land of mine shafts and foundry chimneys, a rich industrial centre, ending farther south in beautiful low mountains. As you go east these mountains become higher, rugged, and soon we enter the Tatras where live those mountaineers called *Górale*, whose isolation preserved their ancient costumes and customs. Even more shut off from the world are the *Huculi* of the eastern Carpathians, with consequent effects upon their modes of life.

Types of land have led to the development of types of culture. The things the people made and used and wore and did all varied according to the requirements and possibilities of the area in which they lived. Mountains meant sheep and sheep meant wool for clothing. Flatter lands meant hemp and flax and another kind of garment. The kinds of clay available and the contiguous cultures determined local pottery forms. Snowed-in mountaineers carve wood. The hot summers of the Polish Ukraina induce loose linen garments. But a study of the co-ordinations of scene and civilization is a theme for a thesis and not for a short chapter in a pamphlet.



Chopin Statue, Warsaw

The Statue of Chopin by Szymanowski, erected recently, is a fine example of the artistic tendencies of restored Poland.

CHAPTER 4

ARTISTIC EXPRESSION

It is in the uses of materials that we find both the most obvious and the most enduring manifestations of that within a nation which we call its culture. In the universal fields of artistic expression the Poles have more often been adaptors than creators, but there are many things which are purely Polish, and where foreign forms have been copied, it has been with such a degree of modification that the result is Polish.

One finds two kinds of villages, the old original Polish type with houses close together facing a road and long strips of land extending back from this double row of houses, and a type introduced from Germany in the thirteenth century, a village built around a town square. As these villages grew into cities the town square arrangement prevailed as best suited to life lived in masses. These two accepted types of village life led to a rural culture quite different from that of America where farm-houses are scattered here and there in the midst of large farms. Villages are compact. The villagers graze their horses, cattle, and geese on a village common, and go away from the village to work the land. The only thing corresponding to the American farm and farm-house is the estate with its manor-house. These

estates are often vast ones, and the homes built within them, splendid broad one or two storey residences with numerous out-buildings, or even impressive palaces, are the centre of a life of much social and intellectual beauty.

ARCHITECTURE

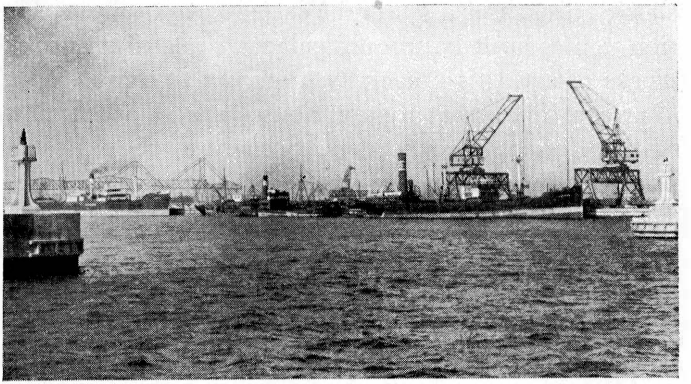
The standard form of architecture, the great styles, all found their due representation in Poland. The absence of stone in the Vistula Valley resulted in the development of the brick Gothic, with many fine thirteenth and fourteenth century churches of that type from Cracow to Danzig, several notable ones being found in Toruń, and a small one in Wilno, such a gem that Napoleon spoke of taking it to Paris on a silver tray. When brick city-walls were built at Cracow, Toruń, Chełmno and so on, they were Gothic in style. A purely Polish adaptation of Italian Renaissance architecture arose under Italian inspiration, and as this came in during the time of the arising of larger towns, many public buildings, notably town halls, are in this style; churches arose also, with a happy deliverance from an over-supply of baroque, a thing of which it is easy to get too much.

During the eighteenth century Poland was under French influence, and had a king who thought that he reflected Louis XIV. The result was a profusion of palaces in the French style, with large formal parks, imitation

classic ruins, and a general Watteau atmosphere. The rich nobles built handsome palaces, some of them real works of art, this especially applying to some around Warsaw. The great manor houses are all adaptations of the classic Greek orders. Somehow they fit this northern land strangely well.

Most Slavonic and Polish in their architecture are the wooden churches dating back to the fifteenth century, found chiefly in the southern provinces. This type of wooden building is an old Polish order, the form in which the wooden castles and fortified cities of the middle ages were built. And I know a huge wooden barn of 1400 down near Cracow that is an artistic joy to behold. There is not a single nail in the whole structure, for it is all hand-joined.

A word more must be said about the magnificent castles and luxurious palaces of the richer nobles, many of them possessed of truly regal estates whose vast acres stretched over huge areas. Owned by people of taste and travel as well as of wealth, these palaces became the centres of a richly splendid life. Some of them have escaped the ruin of repeated wars and specially of the Great War and the Bolshevik invasion of 1920, and reveal to-day what were the heights of yesterday's culture. I have in recent years visited two, Podhorce, over toward Russia, a partial ruin within, and Gołuchów, south of Poznań, in fine repair and so filled with art treasures that I wonder if there is another such private

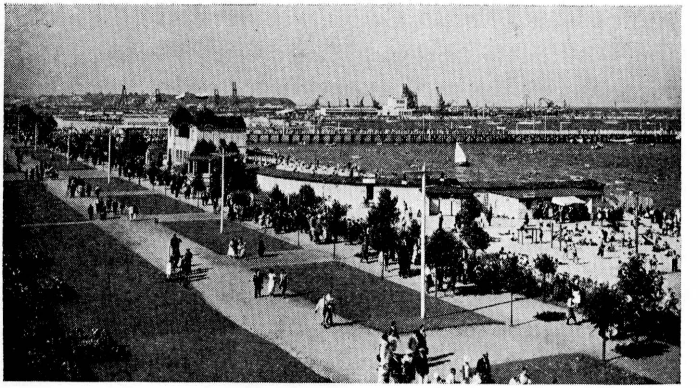


Entrance to the Harbour, Gdynia

palace in Europe. It takes more than wealth to produce such things, and the Poles had and have that essential.

PAINTING, WOOD-CARVING, POTTERY

Painting in Poland developed a little late, and only in the nineteenth century became significant as compared with that of western and Latin Europe. But after 1830 there arose men worthy of the best of continental galleries; painters of historical canvasses, landscapes, portraits, outdoor life, military scenes and the customary run of topic; and to-day the modernistic painters are painting things just as strange as those of the modernistic painters of other lands.



Promenade and Beach, Gdynia

A wood carver named Wit Stwosz came to the fore in Cracow about 1470 and by 1500 had carved his glorious altar-piece in St Mary's Church in that city, filled Nürnberg with beautiful things, and inspired Albrecht Dürer; quite enough for one man. If his equal has ever existed in Europe I have not seen his work.

In 1774 the first Polish ceramic works were founded in Warsaw, backed by King Stanislas Augustus, patron of all the fine arts. A few years later the manufacture of white porcelain was begun in several of the eastern cities of Poland, near the necessary deposits of clay; all these early products are to-day collectors' and museum pieces, beautiful things much prized by the Poles and by those foreigners who come to know these famous

brands, such as Korzec, Ćmielów, Baranówka, Belvedere, and Wolff. The National Museum in Warsaw lists 95 porcelain and other pottery factories in old Poland. I would not class these products with the wares of Sevres, Meissen, Chelsea, Delft, and Vienna, but a complete history of European porcelain and faience must take account of them.

Oddly enough, hundreds of peasants all over Poland learned the trick of firing pottery, and to-day pieces of much charm and simple artistic value are produced in quite plain domestic factories; 'people's pottery' it is called.

Rug making also became a people's art; the old designs are now being studied and improved, and *kilims* of a special Polish character are gaining a wide market; they are known for their quality, design, and colour scheme.

Lace-making is also a native occupation; beautiful hand-made lace of fine texture and excellent workmanship is produced in many regions but especially in Polish Upper Silesia.

COSTUME, LITERATURE, MUSIC

The Polish costume worn by the gentry of the seventeenth and early eighteenth century was one of the most beautiful in Europe. It is hard to describe costumes so that one can see them, and I shall not try. One item, however, indicates the quality and elegance

of this handsome dress, the silk belts, or sashes, nearly a foot wide and ten feet long, woven with silver and gold threads, valued now at never less than 100 dollars and frequently at 1,000 dollars. The land was rich and the gentry dressed the part. The peasant costumes which gradually evolved and are still widely worn are varied and beautiful.

Literature and music, though not material things, are divisions of artistic expression, and therefore belong to this section.

As to literature, in Poland, just as in Russia, there was nothing of international significance before the nineteenth century. But in the very years that Pushkin was laying the foundation stones of Russian literature, Mickiewicz, also a poet, was doing the same for his native Poland. Now he and his spiritual successors Krasiński and Słowacki are widely translated, but more so Mickiewicz, whose *Konrad Wallenrod* I have read in three different English translations, and whose *Pan Tadeusz* I have read and re-read. The end of the century brought forth such Polish writers as Henry Sienkiewicz, Reymont, both of Nobel Prize fame, Joseph Conrad, and Stefan Żeromski, all men of stature in any literary gathering.

Poles are not the musicians the Czechs are, where every citizen plays and many compose, yet among Polish musicians are numbered Chopin, Paderewski, the de Reszkes, Adam Didur, Kiepura, and other names

much at home on Metropolitan Opera House and Carnegie Hall programmes. Polish music is in a minor key. The national spirit does not burst forth into song. Its expression is more philosophical, literary and intellectualistic, than musical.

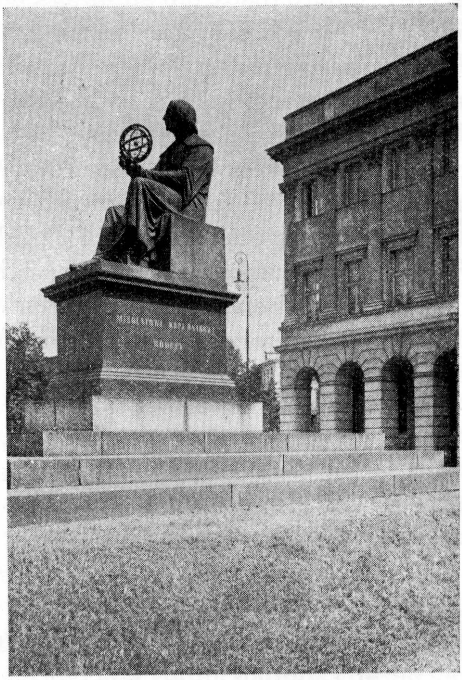
Of the plastic arts, sculpture remains to be mentioned. Modern pre-war Polish sculpture has not interested me, but just now some really big sculptors are at work, for instance Wittig, in stone and bronze and several brilliant workers with wood as their medium, all in the modern spirit.

Modern western dances are not culture, or at least so it appears to the eye; but the old Polish dances are. The stately *polonaise*, the dashing *mazurka*, *krakowiak*, the *oberek*, and the brigand dance of the mountaineers, these are all Polish and I believe they are truly culture. Such certainly is the march-like polonaise. Modern dances are replacing them, more is the pity; yet frequently one sees the mazurka danced by young people with excited dash and enthusiasm.

Several cultural tendencies of to-day reveal Poland both as an old and as a young nation. The old deep roots of native or peasant art are sending up new shoots and expressing themselves in schools of sculpture, furniture and textile design, decorative materials and motives, and other forms. On the other hand, Poland as a vigorous and progressive nation, young in its reborn life, is eagerly alert to receive and utilize the cultural products

and inventions of other countries, such as airships, the radio, the YMCA, hard roads, tall buildings, progressive education, votes for women, and sound banking. To be sure it still hangs on to that quaint old custom known as the gold standard, but it may yet give this up as other nations have done.

Here then in relatively brief space I have touched upon many subjects, indicating somewhat sketchily some of the elements and phases of Polish artistic expression that have impressed me during the fifteen years of my residence here, things seen first when past forty with the somewhat experienced but fresh eyes of a foreigner.



Copernicus Statue, Warsaw

The Statue of Copernicus, the model of which was made by Thorvaldsen, expresses Poland's homage to her famous astronomer, who was born in 1473 at Toruń.

CHAPTER 5

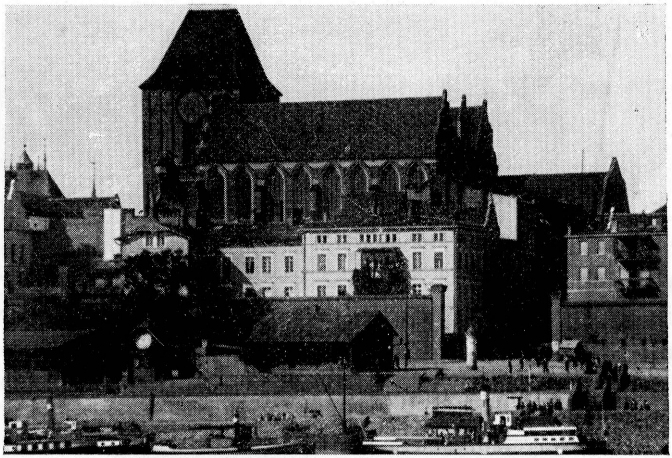
SPIRITUAL QUALITY

When one disengages the mind from more material considerations and centres upon the expressions of culture as found in a distinctive spirit, seven qualities of the Polish mind and way of life at once crowd for description, all so true, so characteristic, so Polish, that one hardly knows which to mention first. One finds them in daily contacts to-day and recorded in all the past history of the Polish people.

DEMOCRACY

This is a deeply rooted principle in this land, ancient in its origin, virile in its expression. The old kings were elected by the people, and from 1572 without regard to their being of a Polish royal family. After election they found themselves bound and guided by many democratically imposed regulations and with very little personal authority. An elected parliament determined the budget, made the laws, decided whether or not to go to war, and about maintaining a standing army; usually deciding both these latter questions in the negative.

So democratic was Poland that all during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the determined protest of one member of Parliament defeated any



St. John's Church, Toruń

proposed measure, the most astounding expression of democracy that ever entered into the laws of any land, the famous *liberum veto*. Poland was a republic of freemen, each in political and social theory as good as another and equally available for the highest offices. There were no titles of nobility. All Polish titles except that of *książę* 'prince', are of foreign origin.

This historic spirit of democracy is also the Polish spirit to-day. Once in my earlier years here I proposed a measure based on my American ideas of efficiency, only to be met by an astonished 'But Mr. Super, that would not be democratic', a conclusive argument

Silesian Parliament House, Katowice

against my proposal. One minor illustration. In popular organizations it is Polish custom for committees to elect their own chairman, not to have the chairman designated by the appointing body. More than once I have had it impressed upon me that certain groups must be permitted to choose their own leaders. Democratic procedure is an important aspect of Polish culture.

TOLERATION

This trait of the Poles one could illustrate with an impressive wealth of historic and contemporary in-

cidents. The two classic instances are the treatment accorded the Protestants and the Jews. Poland is the only great country of Europe where the Protestant Reformation was given a trial without war and without official persecution. Neither the people nor the rulers permitted anything at all corresponding to the Inquisition. 'I am not king of your conscience' said their ruler, and all the influence of the government was on the side of a fair trial for the new religion. And a fair trial Protestantism had, failing not because of repression but for the reason that it simply did not suit the Slav. This treatment of Protestantism is one of the brightest gems in Poland's crown. It continues to-day, as I, a Protestant, can testify. The result of this policy of toleration is, that probably nowhere else in the world are Catholic-Protestant relations so good and wholesome as here in Poland.

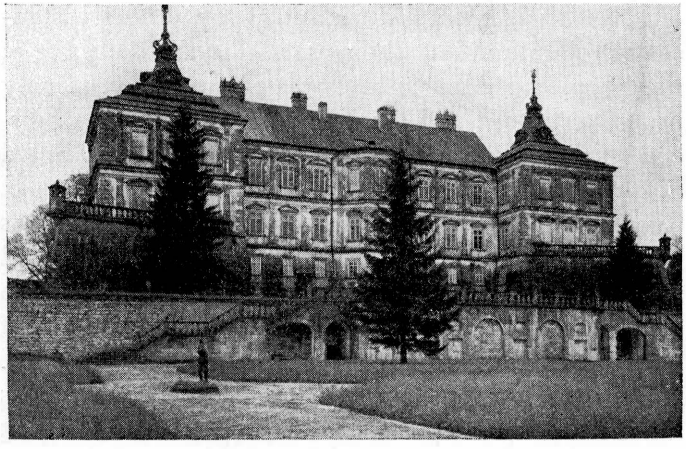
As to the Jews, Poland was the only country open to them in the thirteenth century, and it is open to them to-day. That every tenth person in Poland is a Jew is ample proof both of historic and contemporary toleration. Official persecutions in a neighbouring country where only one person in 100 was a Jew find no parallel here in Poland, where the actual number of Jews is five times as large as it was in Germany before Hitler. The active expression of this toleration of Jews to-day is found in the late Marshal Piłsudski's policy of getting this sorely troubled people the best possible conditions of life.

Now these great historic and governmental instances of toleration find their parallel in the daily life of the people to-day. Once I was at a meeting largely pro-government and Christian, when during our discussion of policy one man rather loudly proclaimed himself as a communist and atheist. The patient toleration with which his views were received was typically Polish. Those were his opinions and he had a right to them. Even though no one else in the group of thirty had the slightest sympathy with his points of view, they neither threw him out nor insulted him. I like the Pole for this; he wins my respect. He does not consider force an argument. He likes to argue, but he does not shut you up. Toleration is a real element in his culture.

IDEALISM

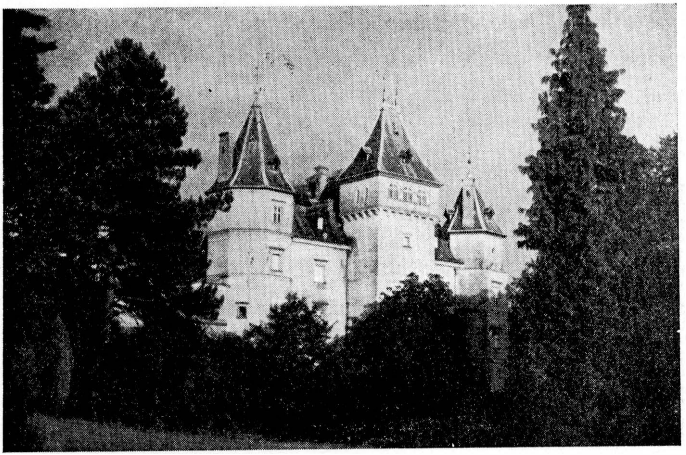
Most writers speak of this as the outstanding Polish characteristic. The word is used here to describe a general valuation of spiritual and ideal considerations above material ones, and a desire to do things, if at all, in the right way. It also implies a somewhat romantic and non-realistic view of things. It shows itself very often as a tendency on the part of the Poles to live in the world of the mind rather than in the world of matter. Indeed, quite generally the mental eye of the Slav turns inward.

The trait has numerous expressions in daily life. The Pole likes a thing to be correct in hypothesis,



Podhorce Castle, Podolia

and the practice to be consistent with the idea. He likes to see the outcome before he sets out. He appreciates consistency and continuity of theory; as he puts it, if you say A, B you must say C. Oddly enough, his very idealism makes it possible for him to put up with material conditions and arrangements not acceptable to people from the west. He is simply mentally superior to these things, or at least not so subject to and dependent upon them as are we of the western world. Here lies the explanation of the splendid spirit, dignity, poise, and nobility that continues to be characteristic of Poles



Gołuchów Castle, Poznania

formerly rich and privileged and now impoverished by the war and post-war conditions. Their culture is of the spirit, not material. It is mental, not made in a factory, nor even in a mint. It is independent of bank balances.

Thus the good side. The characteristic is not all virtue, just as the spirit of toleration and of democracy is not all virtue. But good or bad, this idealism is a reality, and it must be realized to understand Polish culture. This much is certain: it is one of the traits of character and culture that make the Pole interesting, attractive and admirable.

Oddly, indeed, this nation of idealists has produced a disproportionately large number of engineers, many distinguished soldiers, and such great scientists as Copernicus and Madame Curie, vocations practical enough. The railways and bridges of pre-war Russia were largely laid out and built by Polish engineers. A Polish engineer, Modjeski, builds America's largest bridges to-day. Poland builds its own locomotives and other rolling stock, and also exports such products to other countries.

As to soldiers who combined idealism and practicality, the English speaking world need only be reminded of Sobieski, Kościuszko and Pułaski and the strategy and work of Marshal Piłsudski which upset and ended the Bolshevik invasion of Europe in 1920.

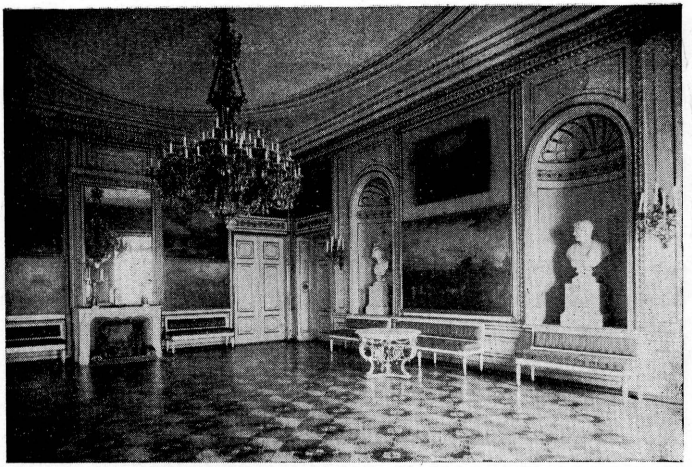
An intense, even passionate love of liberty is another expression of Polish idealism, the measure of which, in other years, was the number of Poles who, when part of Poland was under Russia, ended their days in the mines of Siberia or died in the snow on their way there; and to-day its measure is the deep joy of the Pole in his regained freedom and national independence, one good fruit of the World War, Woodrow Wilson's efforts, the Treaty of Versailles, and the Pole's own hard work.

This section is longer than others because the theme is so important in the study of the culture and character of the Pole. It should be a whole book. Idealism; the belief that ideals will prevail over brute force; dev-

otion to principle; vision of the future; high valuation of spiritual considerations; relative indifference to the material situation; enjoyment of thinking; joy in ideas; the quest of the ideal; the habit of forming ideas and of striving after their realization; here are the roots of much that Poland was, is, and shall be. It helps one to understand her faults and her failures, her sufferings and her surviving, her splendid achievements and her abiding worth.

The nature of the idealism of a nation is indicated in no small measure by the kind of people to whom it builds monuments. The most conspicuous monuments in Warsaw are built in memory of men whose achievements were in the realm of intellect and idealism, namely, Copernicus the astronomer, Mickiewicz the poet-patriot and Chopin the musician. Two other monuments which attract attention are erected in memory of the king who brought the capital to Warsaw, Sigismund III, and to Prince Joseph Poniatowski, one of Napoleon's marshals, who in the Polish mind represents the idea of the Polish struggle to shake off the domination of Austria, Prussia and Russia. A less conspicuous monument is that to King John Sobieski who in 1683 raised the Siege of Vienna, turned back the Turks and saved Christendom from a great Mohammedan inundation.

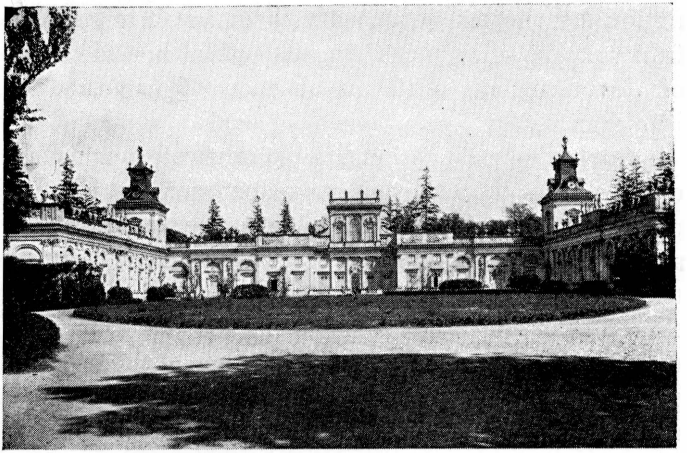
Poland's heroes are heroes in the realm of idealistic achievement.



Room in the Royal Castle, Warsaw

RELIGION

This is a religious nation. I know of no other just like it, and I have travelled extensively on three continents, most of my adult life having been spent outside of my homeland. By religion I mean fundamental attitude toward God and special practices based upon that attitude, rather than morals, for the Poles are neither more moral nor less so than the English or the Americans. But in the matter of religion in Poland, the elements that at once appear to one are: a general respect for religion, absence both of the raw atheism and contempt for religion one sometimes finds else-



Wilanów Palace

where, frank expression and reality of faith, large church attendance, and decency of life and deportment. Practically all Poles are Catholics, using the word Pole here to designate race and not nation, for in this latter sense there are, of course, Poles who are of German, Ruthenian, and Jewish origin. But the Poles of pure Polish blood are almost all Catholics.

Now, I happen to have seen a good deal of five great Catholic countries in Europe and I know something of the rest, and, of course, know something about North and Latin America. Based on this knowledge my conviction is firm that the Poles are the great Catholic

nation; by the tests of loyalty to their Church, faithfulness to its ordinances, sincerity of faith, and reality of devotion, all with an absence of bigotry and intolerance.

Such a generalization needs qualification and elaboration more than there is space for here, but after all necessary limitations and deductions the statement will still stand. For instance, one must distinguish between the faith and practice of the peasants on one hand and those of the educated classes on the other. They are not the same. And cognizance must be taken of the fact that thousands of the intelligentsia maintain but a nominal connection with their Church. But after all possible negative points have been presented, the fact remains that this is a religious people and very wholesomely so.

To be specific: the churches, both urban and rural, are full on Sundays and holidays, though in spite of the cold northern winter they are as a rule not heated. During these services the attitude of the people is reverential and real. There is a fair number of religious holidays and on these there are always religious processions, sometimes great and magnificent ones. Vast pilgrimages visit churches and shrines held specially sacred, attended chiefly by peasants and city working people, but often with a sprinkling of the upper classes. Fields and roads are dotted with dedicated shrines and crosses and these are not treated with indifference. Hats are removed while passing churches. In rural parts the

old religious salutations are widely used, the most common one being, 'Jesus Christ be praised', with its answer, 'For ages and ages'.

But here also we have the materials for a book and not for a section. Indeed, this description of the part religion plays in Polish culture is far too brief, omitting the work of the great monastic orders, general religious education in the schools, the moral authority of the Church, and its helpful charities. The Protestant Church, strong chiefly among Poles of German ancestry but loyally Polish, would also need extensive treatment in any full discussion, as would the Orthodox and Uniate Churches. But these latter two are little found in the Vistula-Baltic regions, the cultural area most in mind in the preparation of this article.

INDIVIDUALISM

Something in Polish nature, history, and environment has tended to make Poles individualists. They are not proud of this, and see it as a national fault. But it is an element and factor in Polish culture and must be included in our inventory, be it good or bad. However, it has its good side. It is undoubtedly in part the basis of the fact that the Poles are such a different, varied, and interesting people.

But through all Polish history Polish individualism has been a disturbing factor, making it hard to secure wide co-operation, group decision, submission to specific

proposals and rulings, even in matters vitally affecting the very life of the nation. Too often, each Pole wants to be his own law. It is not that he wants all others to do his way or accept his plan; he merely wishes to be free to plan and accept for himself. Dealing with young Poles to-day one often sees their inherited individualism and their modern conviction as to team work and co-operation in conflict. The growth of group work in social organizations such as the Boy Scouts and the YMCA is helping develop a new technique of working together.

However, individualism gives life a charming variety. The average male Pole wears the hat and coat he happens to like and not necessarily the one momentarily in style elsewhere. He has a fine spiritual independence not easily beat down by 'everybody is doing it'. He is not greatly disconcerted on being told nobody else thinks or does so. He believes in his own private right to think and do, and the trait is by no means all fault.

CHAPTER 6

PERSONAL CULTURE

INTELLECTUALITY

The Slavs are a serious racial group, and their intellectual equipment often strikes one as superior. The general level of conversation is higher and more intellectual than in the west and mental life seems to be richer. The Poles have not the general mechanical and manual skill that some nations have; at least their native tendencies have not thus far pushed them into a high technical civilization; but with their fine mental parts one is often deeply impressed. The most observable evidence is a wide range of intellectual activity, a general interest among the educated classes in history, art, literature, music, philosophy, and such things, with no thought of acting 'high brow'. Conversation is by no means limited to the weather, business, sport, and current politics.

Let me give two simple illustrations. Walking along a country road with a peasant who had worked up into a wider life, he turned to me and asked, 'Mr. Super, what do you think of Hegel?' During seven years in a large university in America no one but my philosophy professor had even mentioned him. Luckily my professor had, and I was able to preserve my peasant friend's

respect for the west by having an opinion of Hegel and being able to express it. One night a group of six or seven garden-variety young Poles were in my home for a social time together, and I raised a problem in — yes, and these were men — aesthetics! They tackled it, and worked on it for an hour. And so through most of Polish life wherever white collars are worn. Perhaps the peasants are so also. I do not know. But I know their sons, and they have both good brains and deep interests.

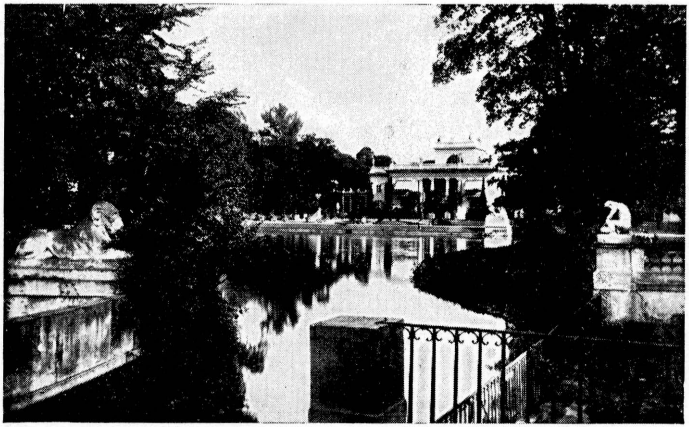
That leads directly to another aspect of Polish post-war culture – the replenishing and refreshing of the upper classes with fine material, both physical and mental, from the hitherto less privileged classes, chiefly the peasants. It seems to me that a sort of stock renewal is in process. This process has always been in operation here, due to an ancient custom of granting the social status of gentry to whole villages the inhabitants of which had rendered distinguished service in battle; but since the war a sort of new liberation both of body and of spirit has taken place and people of quite simple origin are winning and filling places of high and wide opportunity. This is a very wholesome cultural trend. The post-war opening of new doors to peasant men and women of superior parts is fruitful and promising. I know personally and well some of these hopeful entrants into higher social levels. It is good for them and it will strengthen the nation.

Here I want to speak very highly of an institution much abused by those who know little about it and its results — compulsory military service. Its contribution to raising the cultural level of the more retarded peasants is so great and obvious as to outweigh all that may be said against it. Here are humble young peasants from backward areas, say the eastern provinces, for over a century purposely held back and kept in ignorance by the Russian authorities who had seized this Polish territory. Crude, coarse, awkward, undisciplined, they go into the army for their eighteen months of service. What a change is wrought! Splendidly worth while!

These young men go back to their old homes as completely made over personalities. They have travelled and seen higher culture, learned to read and write and figure, been taught simple lessons of order, hygiene, discipline, cleanliness and civic responsibility. This is a cultural gain of the highest value to the nation.

GRACE OF LIFE

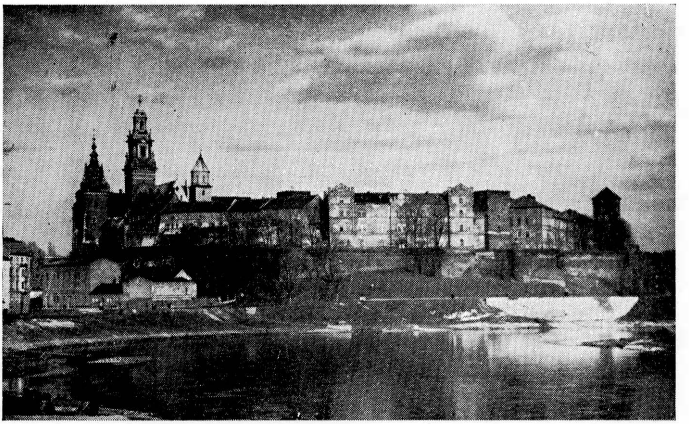
The Pole's natural idealism, romanticism, toleration, taste, and mental parts combine to provide a peculiarly graceful social atmosphere. Two visits to Japan and half-a-dozen to France have familiarized me with the social graces of the two nations which are generally known to have done most to cultivate such qualities. The corresponding Polish social circles have a more sincere note, an even deeper grace. It is hard to state



Łazienki Palace, Warsaw

the details which go to make up an atmosphere and impression. The way the thing is done probably signifies more than the thing itself. Its elements are courtesy, dignity, physical grace, consideration, and basic forms. These latter are easily stated.

For instance. Even old friends greet each other respectfully. Men take off their hats to men as well as to women, and always remove them in stores and shops as well as in offices; the hands of women are kissed in a most reverential and sincere manner; you always rise to speak to people who are standing; 'please' is ever on the lips, and 'thank-you' generally replaces 'no'. Age and seniority are important considerations, and an older



The Royal Castle on the Wawel Hill, Cracow

person, a woman, a guest, or one of higher position in life is always given the place on the right, walking, sitting, or standing. These seem like little things, but how a little oil does improve the running of the machinery! Such customs smooth social contacts and give life an air of grace, dignity, and kindness.

This is no new thing. In 1573 the Poles elected Henry of Valois King of Poland and sent a delegation to Paris to notify him of his election. The elegance of costume, manner, and language of this Polish delegation put the French, who rightly considered themselves cultured, to shame, and they so testified. The leader of the Poles was John Zamoyski, and a word about him as a re-

presentative Pole of the sixteenth century will throw light on old Poland. After experience as a page in the Court of France and studies in Germany, he went to Padua in Italy to study. There he soon became a leading student, wrote a distinguished treatise on the Roman Senate, and was elected Rector of the University; all while still in his early twenties. Returning to Poland he was made secretary to the king, spent three years putting the royal archives into classified and catalogued order, and later became Crown Chancellor. He distinguished himself as a soldier and statesman. While in the field with the army he continued his writing of a Latin rhetoric. His correspondence, copies of which I possess, is in Latin, and his private secretary wrote the story of his chief's life in Latin; a copy of this is one of my treasures, as is also an original document signed and sealed by him, for I greatly admire this fine representative of the culture of sixteenth century Poland.

SELF-CRITICISM

Among themselves and with foreigners whom they trust the Poles indulge in a great deal of self-criticism. Slavs are naturally meditative and introspective, and in their self-examination their faults by no means escape their notice. This habit of depreciation of themselves could well be a virtue were it not carried too far; as it is, this phase of their mentality is frequently a source of weakness, resulting in an altogether undue lack of

confidence in their own qualities and forces. It must be admitted, however, that it is a fault not hard to forgive, — much more easily forgiven than its reverse would be.

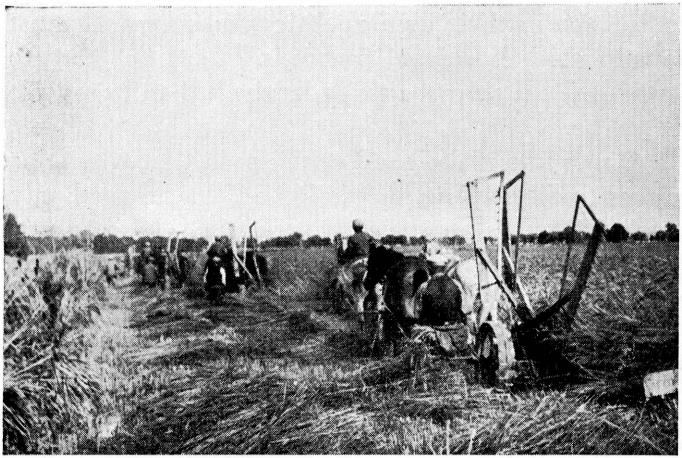
One result of their self-criticism is, that when one wishes to discuss the faults of the Poles he need only use their own catalogue and descriptions; he need, and indeed can, say nothing against them which they have not already said about themselves.

What are some of the self-accusations most often heard?

1. 'We are individualists, and find it hard to co-operate. Somehow, we lack a sort of cement that would bind us together. Each of us has his own plan and idea and these we find it hard to surrender'.

When I first came to Poland shortly after the war a Pole who later became Minister of Social Welfare came to me and said that to help me in my work he would like to give me a little insight into Polish psychology. 'Do not call ten of us together and ask us what to do', he said. 'Explain your plan and assign each man his duties. Do not ask us for our plan, for we will have ten plans, each man his own'. And then he quoted the famous saying, 'two Poles, three opinions'.

No better illustration of this individualism could be found than a national election, when formerly over thirty parties prepared lists of candidates. Hard to co-operate indeed.



Harvest in Western Poland

My most recent experience with this self-criticism was the following. 'We are like sand', said this friend to me, 'units not easily held together; we are not like clay, easily moulded into a united mass'. Perhaps no fault of the Pole distresses him more than this, which worries him a great deal. Yet when great national and social crises arise there is all the unity that is needed. They rally to a standard and to a cause and in that find a real social cement.

2. 'We are awfully unpunctual'. You surely are. It seems to me that I have shed buckets of tears over this fault of yours, friend Pole, and the end is not yet. Your unpunctuality has led me to revise an old pro-

Harvest in Eastern Poland

verb so that it now runs, 'Punctuality is the thief of time'.

There is a national custom of observing 'the academic quarter-of-an-hour', the professor's right of being fifteen minutes late in arriving at his lecture room.

It is not only a matter of meetings and engagements; it applies to the delivery of goods and the completion of work. While his individualism grieves the Pole, it is his unpunctuality that grieves the foreigner.

3. 'We blaze up like a straw fire and as quickly die out'. As a matter of fact I doubt if they are worse than other people in this respect. It was a New Englander whom I first heard say of himself, 'I am a good starter',

with its implication that he soon stopped. The very fact that the Pole so dislikes to be 'a straw fire' usually keeps him from becoming enthusiastic too soon and quitting too quickly. And I want to ask the Pole if it was straw-fire quality that kept him loyal to the idea of freedom and of nationality during the long dark nineteenth century of his captivity, when his blood dyed the paths to Siberia red and his body rotted in Siberian prison mines.

To these three self-indictments of the Pole, three others need to be added which trouble foreigners not a little.

4. Lack of precision and finish in workmanship. In expert circles this does not apply; I have often admired the fine workmanship in the railway passenger cars turned out by a Warsaw firm. But many of the ordinary workmen are less careful than the workmen of the west in giving their products the final finish a western man expects.

5. Disorder. The Pole is personally clean of body and clothing, and in this respect he has a fine pride, but his desk and room and yard do not exhibit an extension of the same quality. He is too frequently indifferent in his care of property, new buildings for instance. Perhaps this is due to faulty early home training. But a contributory element in the situation is a former general lack of anything corresponding to our American magazines dealing with good housekeeping, the practical conduct of life, and home making. And another element is that

characteristic Slavonic tendency to be indifferent to material things. Anyhow, good housekeeping and order is not the great national virtue.

6. Indirect methods. The Anglo-Saxon likes open and direct dealing. The way of the Oriental is mysterious. The Pole comes in between. He rather dislikes direct dealing and prefers more indirect methods. Perhaps his long subjection to foreign powers has deepened or even produced this characteristic. I do not here refer to honesty and dishonesty. As the general director of a large organization with Polish personnel handling hundreds of thousands of dollars I have found them fully as honest as other folk. My reference is to the general management of matters. We Americans go to the front door and knock. A Pole prefers first to find out through a friend if the approach through the front door will be successful. The fact that he hates to be put in an embarrassing position or suffer rebuff, or lose 'face' as the Chinese say, partly explains this trait. It is no sin, but it sometimes annoys foreigners, just as our more direct ways annoy the Pole.

WOMEN AND CULTURE

People from abroad who come to know Poland, even superficially, are usualy impressed with the place of women in the daily life of the nation, and as they learn more of the history of the country, they find that all through the centuries women have played an

important role in the management of affairs and in the development and preservation of the national spirit.

One seeks the reason for this. Seeing the peasants one is for the moment misled by the toil of the women in the fields and their heavy back-borne burdens as they carry their garden and dairy product in to the city and town markets. But what one at first considers as contradiction, one later sees is a confirmation. For the peasant woman is not a slave and a beast of burden. She is a competent and equal sharer in the heavy duties of life. In the first place she is physically qualified for it, for purely from the animal point of view she is on the average more strongly and solidly built than the men, a perfectly obvious fact for which I have been able to secure no explanation. And in the second place she is spiritually and mentally and morally qualified for this broad sharing of life's duties; her wisdom, economy, and devotion are consequential elements in the life of the nation.

Therefore respect for women is a basic fact in Polish life, and their participation in harvesting and marketing is not evidence against this respect but at once cause and proof of it and a demonstration of her worthiness. It is a recognition of her full equality.

In the earlier days when the men went to war, she was of course left at home in charge. During the long dark years of foreign oppression it was the women in

the home who kept the forbidden Polish language alive and who brought up the children in their ancestral tradition and faith. To-day they enter the universities to the extent of almost one-third of the student body, enjoy the vote, and serve in parliament, the senate, and in the ministries. Their qualification for this part no one doubts. The extent to which they spiritually supplement and reinforce the men is a fact and a factor in the welfare of the nation.

Church of the Holy Virgin, Cracow

The Church of the Holy Virgin is the most beautiful specimen of red brick Gothic style in Poland. Its building was started in the first half of the thirteenth century. The high altar was carved in linden wood by Wit Stwosz between 1460 and 1480 and is considered to be one of the finest pieces of Renaissance wood-carving in Europe. The interior of the church was decorated in polychrome by John Matejko, the famous Polish historical painter. The higher of its two towers is 250 feet above the street; there is a sentry box at the top, from which the traditional *Hejnał* (a beautiful bugle call) is blown every hour.

CHAPTER 7

SOCIAL CLASSES

One must see social classes in Poland to-day against the background of the Middle Ages and subsequent evolution. This is too big a theme for the limits of this pamphlet, but a few essential facts are soon and easily stated. In the sixteenth century we find the population of Poland composed about as follows: a large peasantry attached to the soil, a very large landed gentry who were, with their retainers, Poland's knighthood in time of war, and at the top a limited number of very rich magnates. The aristocracy of this legal democracy, a republic with an elected king, were the magnates and the richer and more cultured landowners. Between the gentry and the peasants there was no real urban middle class.

The magnates and gentry combined to legislate against the cities, and the result was an agricultural civilization, with an urban class developing under great legal and social handicaps and composed to no small degree of non-Polish elements. After the partitions of Poland and during the nineteenth century, when other countries were developing a large and intelligent middle class, Poland was doing no such thing for foreign domination and political and educational

restrictions prevented it. The middle class is a social grouping produced and nurtured by democracy, freedom, and education.

Is it not an axiom to-day that the middle classes are the backbone and hope of a nation, a class composed of higher artisans, manufacturers, merchants, the professional classes, and owners of medium sized farms? But that is just the class that Poland, until 1919, could do little to produce. Its absence is observed and regretted by all students of the Polish social situation.

THE NEW MIDDLE CLASS

Since the war this class has grown, fed by several influences. The rich landowners have lost their wealth. Consider this: 90 per cent. of the capital of Poland was destroyed during the war, when its area to the extent of 87 per cent. was the scene of battle. This situation has enriched the middle class by an influx from above. Universal education and good universities where living is not expensive have brought thousands of the proletariat and peasantry into the educated classes, enriching the middle class, now called the intelligentsia, from more basic sources. Gradually a most regrettable social vacuum is being filled, and with good solid material. This unheralded fact is one of Poland's most important gains from the war.

The situation to-day then is this: a rich, powerful, and selfish aristocracy is in post-war Poland a thing of

the past. A middle class intelligentsia is growing up, fed with culture from one direction and potentialities from another. An increasing industry is developing a working class superior to that of before the war. The lower middle class, small merchants, is becoming more numerous. The peasantry, notwithstanding great poverty due to the world-wide agricultural depression, is on a much higher cultural level than in all its history. And all these wholesome tendencies are supported and stimulated by freedom, restored national life, and universal education. Growing assurances of prolonged peace with Russia and Germany give these tendencies a hopeful future.

Which leads me to reflect upon what great storms have swept this country since 1914, and the calm and dignity with which it now rides the sea of international affairs, great hands at the helm and order within the ship, sound social tendencies moving toward their goal of a better life for all the people.

The centre and focus of culture in old Poland was the landed gentry class. To-day it is passing over into the cities, and apparently the intelligentsia, that new social order of the twentieth century, are to be the bearers of the torch of civilization and progress. The class, in terms of the long view, is historically new, mentally able, physically sound, and possessed of the best moral quality of the period.

A forest road

The north-eastern part of Poland was once a country of forests. Though largely cleared to-day, they still cover large areas and add charm to the Polish landscape.

CHAPTER 8

POLITICAL EVENTS AND CULTURE

For those who like history it is a fascinating thing to take the great political events and circumstances in the life of a nation and see how they have affected culture. In 1386 the Polish Queen Jadwiga married the Lithuanian Grand Duke Jagiełło and united the two countries under one dynasty. The union was made more extensive in 1413 and brought to a final complete merging of the two lands and nations in 1569. Till that time there had been two capitals, Wilno in the north-east for Lithuania, and Cracow in the south for Poland proper. Cracow had from the fourteenth century been a vital cultural centre as well as the focus of political activity. Now that the two nations were really one, two capitals were no longer necessary, and a more central city, Warsaw, became the seat of the kings and of the government in 1596.

Two major effects upon the culture of this part of Europe resulted from the above events. The first was the Christianization of hitherto pagan Lithuania, and the second the arising of an entirely new centre of cultural life in the at that time not important city of Warsaw, henceforth and until to-day the political heart of the nation and increasingly the focal point of its culture.

The last king of Poland, Stanislas Augustus (1764–1795), whose reign witnessed the three partitions of 1772, 1793 and 1795 and Poland's final downfall, was a man of superior intellectual and artistic parts. To indicate the cultural influences of his administration and leadership it is sufficient to mention his appointing the first European national board of education, 1773, his founding of royal potteries, his famous Thursday dinners for the intellectuals of his day, the building of beautiful Łazienki Palace in Warsaw, and the reform constitution of 1791. His reign was politically unfortunate, but the intellectual enlightenment which emanated from his court was of value in the life of the nation.

AFTER VIENNA, 1815

Poland's unhappy destiny was sealed for a century by the 1815 Treaty of Vienna. The shrinking liberties of the three dismembered parts of the country and the despair of the nation prepared the soil for the arising of a school of national poets, Mickiewicz, Krasiński, and Słowacki, whose writings contributed mightily to the preserving and arousing of the spirit of the people. What these men did with the pen, Matejko and for the same reason did with the brush; and so far as I know there is no other nation which has from one hand so vigorous and authentic a series of paintings displaying the great events of its history for the reinforcing of the national spirit. The next great artist to carry on this work was

Henry Sienkiewicz, through the medium of the historical novel, whose *Quo Vadis* is much less important to the Poles than are the books of his Trilogy, stories of seventeenth century Poland. The fourth of the fruits of the loss of liberty was the Cracow school of historians, who sought in historic prose to reveal to the people the causes and the meaning of their captivity.

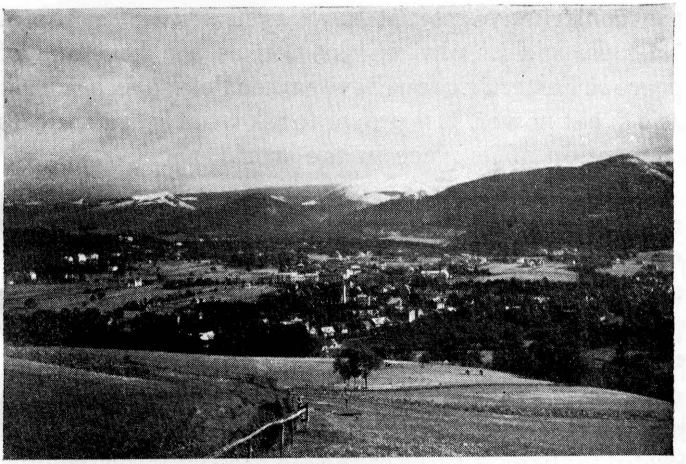
After Poland had several times risen in armed attempts to shake off Russian rule the authorities in St. Petersburg adopted the policy of trying to divert the attention of the Poles from politics by giving them abundant opportunity for entertainment and amusement. To this end they subsidized the theatre and the opera in Warsaw, encouraged musical organizations and large concert halls, and in general created an environment favourable to the development of the best forms of cultural entertainment. Though the Russians certainly had no interest in promoting Polish culture and indeed took other measures against its spread, their policy relative to occupying the minds and time of the restless Poles directly furthered the development of music, the drama, and the fine arts in general. The result is that to-day Warsaw stands high in all these art forms, with first class opera, two large theatres of the first rank, several good smaller ones, a fine large Philharmonic Hall, a good museum of national paintings, and other accessories of culture brought forward from the Russian rule and owing something to it, though in the indirect way here indicated.

Górka Lake

POLISH MESSIANISM

Poland's awful sufferings under Austria, Prussia and chiefly Russia led to the formulation in Polish thought of the idea of Polish Messianism, the theory that Poland was the crucified nation and that such national crucifixion must indicate a spiritual mission to the rest of the world. This mission was never thought of as political. Its essential character was cultural and more particularly, spiritual, having to do with the welfare of man's character and the salvation of his spirit.

This Messianic philosophy of Poland's history and destiny was naturally never extensively held, but it was



Zakopane and the Tatra Mountains

taught by influential persons and it coloured the thought even of those who never accepted it as a working formula. Now Poland is free. Though it has just half the territory it held before the first partition of 1772, it is still a large country, 150,000 square miles in area, and the home of over 33,000,000 inhabitants, a nation growing by the addition of 500,000 souls every year. It has quietly risen to world esteem and European power since the war. The demonstrated strength of its international relations, its internal peace and consolidation have contributed to this merited respect. Its recent treaties of non-aggression with Russia and Germany,

the constructive part it has played in the League of Nations, and its obvious position as the keystone of peace in Eastern Europe have gained Poland recognition as a great power. It is proper to ask what is this nation's conception of its place in the world.

Long the victim of expanding empires, its gaol is neither expansion nor empire. Torn by war as was no other nation, it certainly has no longings in that direction. The heart and soul of Poland's ambition is to preserve and enjoy peace, to contribute worthily to the enlightenment and culture of the world, first by developing and enriching its own civilization and then offering to others such of its fruits as they may deem useful to them. A tinge of the old Messianic idea colours the ideals of the men of to-day, though it finds much less romantic and mystical form. Yet a trace of it is there. The Pole desires to rule no country but his own, cares to impose nothing of his upon others, to infringe on the rights of no man's territory or spirit. But as far as he can, he would like to make high use of what he has, improve both himself and his nation, and play a useful, constructive, worthy part in the intellectual, spiritual, social, and political culture of the modern world. Both his history and his personal worth qualify him for such a role.

CHAPTER 9

CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS

The most obvious of all cultural institutions is the elementary school system. Suffice it to say here that 95 per cent. of the children of school age are enrolled in the schools, that 15 per cent. of the national budget goes for public education, and that the 12 institutions of university grade enroll some 50,000 students, of whom 19,000 are studying in Warsaw. For these figures I am indebted to Professor Roman Dyboski of Cracow University, most brilliant and illuminating of all commentators on Polish life through the medium of the English language, whose recent book *Poland*, published by Benn in England and by Scribners in America, is beyond all doubt the best single book on Poland ever written in English, and whose contributions to *The Slavonic Review* always throw broad floods of light upon whatever subject relative to Poland this talented writer chooses as his theme. Those who wish a detailed account of education will find it in his writings. My own purpose in this pamphlet is not to describe the educational system of Poland but merely to give a foreigner's impressions.

THE SCHOOLS

For several years I lectured in the Free University of Warsaw on educational methods in America, and to get background for my material I studied schools and teachers as I found them here. They are progressive, eager for new ideas of tested value, seeking to develop an educational system clearly related to Poland's conditions and needs, and making splendid progress in the face of huge problems left over from the former regimes and with both buildings and other educational equipment and a teaching staff so inadequate at the rebirth of the republic in November 1918 as to daunt the most hopeful spirit. To-day normal conditions are being approached and good foundations are being laid for general culture in the providing of public education for all the children and young people of the nation. I forego the temptation of describing some of the fine new and progressive schools with which I am acquainted, and of telling about the Ministry of Education, a visit to which always inspires and encourages me. It is even harder to pass over such subjects as Cracow University, the Warsaw Commercial Academy, and the Polytechnic Institute where the streams of Poland's long tradition of engineering education are fed.

These more formal educational agencies are mentioned thus briefly in order to devote the paragraphs of this chapter to the less general institutions of enlightenment and culture.

BOOKS AND LIBRARIES

Several years ago during the sessions of the International Historical Congress in Warsaw there was held in the same building an exhibition of books on historical subjects printed in the Polish language. Later in a local club building there was another exhibition of Polish publications on all subjects and at the same time but in another building there was a most interesting display of Polish works translated into other languages. These three collections, the first of them of astounding proportions, gave one an extended foundation for a high estimate of Polish writing on serious subjects.

No Carnegie has arisen to build large free public libraries for Poland, but several of its great families have developed private libraries and museum collections of such importance that with time they have become housed in fine buildings open to research students. I became acquainted with the riches of one of these while gathering material for a life of its founder, John Zamoyski (1541–1605), and this same research carried me into three other palace-library-museums, at Kórnik near Poznań, and the Czapski and Czartoryski Museums in Cracow. These would be a credit to the intellectual life of any country, as are also the Krasiński Library in Warsaw and the Ossoliński Institute in Lwów. Studying certain aspects of Polish peasant life and native culture gave me a personal experience of the valuable collections in other libraries and museums, especially

the Dzieduszycki Museum in Lwów and the Silesian Museum in Katowice. These which come within my own personal experience by no means exhaust the list; they merely indicate avenues through which I have come to know something of Polish culture, and point out a phase of cultural development in the land of whose mind I am writing.

SCIENTIFIC SOCIETIES

Come down Sławkowska Street with me in Cracow. That solid permanent-looking building of the Florentine palace type on the corner of St. Mark's Street is the property and home of the Polish Academy of Science. As year by year I become better acquainted with the scientific, literary, and historic work of this institution in the fields both of research and of publication my admiration and respect for it reach ever higher levels. Its list of members, its achievements, and its great library of its own publications give it a high place in the intellectual world. It is a proud thing for any nation to possess such an institution. There are other learned societies in Poland, but this one speaks for the group.

Poland a few years ago founded an Academy of Letters with its seat in Warsaw. It is more important as a promise than as an achievement but it represents and indicates a cultural tendency of no small significance.

PHYSICAL CULTURE

Of physical culture something need also be said. Before the war this was of small importance in Poland apart from the Sokół gymnasiums and a few rowing and tennis clubs. But once post-war Poland was stabilized Marshal Piłsudski turned his attention to this vital side of life and important developments began to materialize. The YMCA played an active part in introducing physical education into this county after the war. Now leadership lies with a great national commission, the State Bureau of Physical Education, with branches in all the provincial capitals and a worthy trained leadership. One of the chief achievements of PUWF (*Państwowy Urząd Wychowania Fizycznego*), as the initials of the bureau appear in Polish, is the erection of the Central Institute of Physical Education near Warsaw, whose plant is said to be one of the three largest of this sort in Europe.

Thus nurtured both by private institutions and a national policy, physical education, compulsory in all schools, and sport, eagerly entered into by both men and women, boys and girls, is in a fair way to rebuild Polish manhood and womanhood in body and to make no inconsiderable contribution to character and culture. Literally every form of sport is in vogue. The latest rage is skiing, to secure the benefits of which the winter vacation of the elementary schools has been extended to three weeks, and for which Poland's beautiful Carpathian Mountains provide superlative facilities.

RESPECT FOR LEARNING

Seeking now one final point in which to sum up and illustrate Poland's aspirations, attitudes, and achievements in the matter of culture I choose this fact – the high respect in which learning is held and the value set upon men who embody it; and as a vivid illustration I cite the fact that all three of Poland's post-war Presidents were chosen from the ranks of university professors. Several of its prime ministers also have been professors. Cabinet ministers are frequently men having doctor's degrees indicating higher studies in the field of their specialized service. These things are not without significance. Perhaps they bring my discussion of elements of Polish culture as seen by a foreigner to an ending much in keeping with my theme.

* * *

If in a pamphlet as unpretentious as this, I should assign credit to those to whom I am indebted for a deeper introduction into Polish culture, let me gladly acknowledge special debt to three persons: Professor Dr. Roman Dyboski, whose writings and conversations always both inform and inspire me and to whom I am under immeasurable obligations in this field; Professor Dr. W. J. Rose, a Canadian formerly long resident in Poland and a mine of information; and Margaret L. Super, my wife, an American who shares my interest in and enthusiasm for Poland and upon whose research

work I am constantly drawing. Beyond these three persons no special names need be mentioned, for they become merged in a total of hundreds of conversations with Poles in their homes and in mine, in a large library on Polish matters, and numberless visits to almost every corner of the land.

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