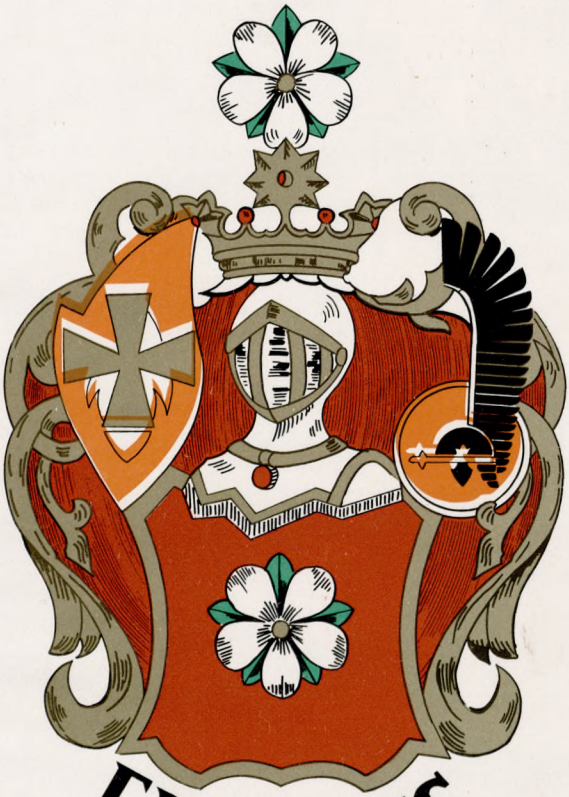
Pamiątka po Władysławie Krawczewskim, stary wiarus urodził się w Polsce, 11-go sierpnia 1882. Związek wtenczas liczył sobie dwa lata. Patriota, pracowity dla ZNP, były dyrektor ZNP, był prezesem Wydziału Oświaty przy ZNP. Przez 14-cie lat był prezesem Grupy 523 oraz delegatem na kilka Sejmów ZNP. Został obywatelem Stan.Zjedn. w roku 1913. Z zawodu był budowniczym.

E.C.R. archiwista KPA



MODERN POLISH LITERATURE

A COURSE OF LECTURES

Delivered in the School of Slavonic Studies
King's College, University of London

BY

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P. Krawczewskiemu
z wyrazami czci i braterskiej
życzliwości od autora.
Kraków, 15. VI. 1924. R. Dyboski

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PREFACE

THE present book is intended as a companion volume to the author's Ilchester Lectures on *Periods of Polish Literary History* (Oxford, 1923).

Those lectures, delivered in the academic quiet and historical atmosphere of Oxford, were devoted to epochs of Polish literature which lie entirely behind us and have become, in the fullest sense, part of the past.

The lectures collected here were delivered in the heart of London, 'beside the roaring Strand'. They have for their subject Polish authors who are still alive, either in the body or in spiritual influence upon the present generation. Some have been included because of a marked revival of their influence, whose fame dates from a hundred years ago—such as Fredro, Father of modern Polish Comedy. Others dealt with in this book have but yesterday gone from us—like the great Henry Sienkiewicz. Some—for instance, Reymont and Żeromski—are in the zenith of their living renown; some are young still and full of promise, and have risen into recognition in the new Poland since the war; and some were cut off by that war in their early bloom—like Małaczewski.

In dealing with writers and works too near us still for mature historical judgement, a critic runs the risk of appearing arbitrary both in his selection and in his opinions. The present writer can only repeat the words used by the Poet Laureate in a book which brought comfort to many in the darkest days of the war, *The Spirit of Man*—that, in selecting his authors, he has had no wish to conceal 'his

honest likings . And his honest dislikes may perhaps occasionally be apparent in the treatment of certain authors.

It can, however, fairly be claimed that the *consensus omnium* has not been disregarded in the case of any writer of outstanding importance. The weight of this agreement is, in fact, the reason for the re-introduction into this book of some authors already discussed in the Ilchester Lectures, and here considered in other aspects—such as Słowacki the tragic poet, and Prus the novelist.

If this book stimulates English curiosity concerning modern Polish writers, and results in some of their works being translated and read in this country, the author will be richly rewarded.

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THE MODERN
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FROM ROMANTICISM TO REALISM

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THE predominance of the novel over all other kinds of literary production in the second half of the nineteenth century is as marked in Poland as elsewhere. Slower in reaching full growth in its history, the Polish novel yet attains in this age the same level, both in quantity of output and in literary quality, as the novel-writing of other European nations.

Of the many elements which went to the making of the modern European novel, few seemed at first to have any immediate effect in inspiring other literary work of the same kind. Some, in fact, did not appear to be yielding fruit anywhere in Europe. This isolation of the great individual achievements in various lands in the evolution of the international type of the modern novel is, indeed, a remarkable feature of the history of fiction. The family chronicles of old Norway and Iceland—that wonderful and unique early body of vernacular prose in medieval Europe—were too remote in language and region to become known to other nations. The prose stories of Boccaccio and his Italian precursors and successors were used by the Renaissance age as a storehouse of literary materials rather than as literary models; so were the earlier *fabliaux* and the later *Heptamerons* and other collections of France. The monumental magnificence of *Don Quixote* at first

exercised rather a destructive influence on old-fashioned romances than a stimulating effect on new writers. Even the fascinating picaresque novel of Spain was tardy in producing on other ground such a masterpiece of its kind as the *Gil Blas* of Lesage.

It was only in the seventeenth century, when the France of Louis XIV set a standard of fashion in all things to civilized Europe, that in literature there began to spread abroad a certain practice of novel-writing, induced by the example of such works as Honoré d'Urfé's *Astrée* and Mademoiselle Scudéry's many-volumed *Cyrus*. But in Poland, where these models found admirers under the auspices of a French queen, verse still reigned supreme in fiction when prose was coming into ascendancy elsewhere; the seventeenth century produced little in that country that is worth notice in the way of prose fiction, though the rhymed romances of the age are at least remembered as curiosities. In the eighteenth century, however, the Polish literary atmosphere was stirred more deeply by foreign currents, as models of greater and more permanent value began to exert an influence in the West, and the Polish Court, under its last king, became a brilliant centre of literary activities. Epoch-making works of French fiction, like Voltaire's *Candide* and Rousseau's *Émile* and *Nouvelle Héloïse*, were imitated in the two didactic novels of Bishop Krasicki, which are the first outstanding works in the history of the Polish novel, and real milestones on its early road. The English masterpiece of an age of great novels—Fielding's *Tom Jones*—like a new planet, swam into the ken of Polish readers in a translation by the brilliant satirist Zabłocki. The fashionable novel of sentiment, spreading in Europe under the threefold influence of Richardson's *Clarissa*, Rousseau's *Nouvelle Héloïse*, and Goethe's *Werther*, produced its Polish masterpiece as late

as 1816, in the extremely popular work of Princess Mary Czartoryska (herself unhappy in a loveless marriage with a Duke of Württemberg) under the characteristic title of *Malvina, or, The Heart Guesses Quickly.*

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In the meantime, another new literary force in the shaping of the modern novel had been added to these eighteenth-century factors. Romanticism, sweeping over literature like a revolution, found, in the sphere of the novel, its leader in Sir Walter Scott. It is not matter for surprise that his European vogue should have communicated itself to Poland. He was promptly translated and universally read, and the extent of his spell over the Polish minds of the age can perhaps best be estimated from the fact that, even outside the sphere of prose fiction, his mastery was potent enough to leave its imprint, both in the construction of the story and in some of the principal characters, on the greatest work of Polish poetry, Mickiewicz's epic poem, *Pan Tadeusz.* Even more readily did the Polish prose novel of the earlier nineteenth century come under the universal dominance of Scott.

His peculiar excellences of wide historical range, wealth of realistic detail, and wonderful productiveness, were emulated above all by the Polish Walter Scott, the purveyor-general of historical and other novels to mid-nineteenth century Poland, Joseph Ignatius Kraszewski. The five hundred volumes which, on a rough estimate, he produced in the course of a long life are a record indeed in literary annals; nobody now can, and few ever could, boast of having read all his works, and the indefatigable industry of one of Poland's greatest literary historians, the late Professor Peter Chmielowski, did not perhaps better reveal itself in any of his numerous works than in the bulky

volume of his monograph on Kraszewski, produced only a very few months after the novelist's death.

The productiveness of Kraszewski is equalled by another quality, the wonderful versatility of his genius both in fiction and in other forms of literary activity. While novels based on Polish history mark the course of his life in almost unbroken succession, he by no means confined himself exclusively to historical novel-writing. Novels and plays on contemporary life and manners flowed unceasingly and with equal ease from his pen. So did elaborate historical treatises and annotated collections of historical records, journalistic contributions to current discussion on social and political problems, and essays in literary history and criticism, while he was simultaneously pouring forth reviews of books and plays of the season, a stream of occasional verse, together with a multitude of long and interesting letters to countless private correspondents.

This many-sidedness is a characteristic feature of his early literary productions, during his student days in the University of Wilno, the common *Alma Mater* of many of Poland's greatest writers of the age, from the poet Mickiewicz onward. Even when first trying to make a living by his pen, Kraszewski treats with equal facility subjects drawn from remote Polish history and from the bustling life about him. In fact, his native sphere—the life of a country gentleman, and the idyllic, old-fashioned quiet of the manor—seems forgotten in the young writer's absorbed interest in town life, both intellectual and convivial, historical and contemporary. This sensibility of Kraszewski's artistic imagination to the impressions both of his social surroundings and of the ideas of his day, is another characteristic of his genius: he always seems to be floating down the full stream of life, and reproducing, with his irrepressible habit of writing, the tendencies and the pageant of the world

around him. He has been idolized and attacked in turn by reactionaries and radicals, by obscurantists and free-thinkers, by opportunists and revolutionists, by optimists and pessimists. There are passages in his writings which seem to be the very voice of each of these groups in succession, and passages again which have the appearance of condemning them; he eludes and disappoints them all by seeming for a time to speak whole-heartedly in favour of each opinion, but never permanently adhering to any. As a result, many came to think of him as a shallow chronicler and a barren critic both of current life and of national history, without constructive faith, comforting hope, or helpful suggestion. It was accordingly to the surprise of the whole Polish world that, at the end of fifty years of literary activity, on the occasion of a public homage rendered to him in the old University town of Cracow, he emphatically declared his belief in the progress made by the Polish nation in every respect during his lifetime, and his confidence in its unbroken vitality as the earnest of a better future. Such a public act of faith was a worthy close to a long life of unremitting service.

Manifold from the outset as were his interests and the subject-matter of his writings, equally manifold were the literary influences to which Kraszewski showed himself susceptible. Born into a Romantic generation, he is inclined to introduce in his work the high colours and rhetorical sensationalism of Victor Hugo, and the plots and mysteries of Bulwer's romance. But, from the first, the realism which was distinguishing certain works of French literature, from the two isolated masterpieces of Stendhal to the vast array of Balzac's *Human Comedy*, counteracts and supplements his romantic tendencies. The union of romance and realism in Scott is a constant model to Kraszewski, and so are Scott's love and lavish use of antiquarian detail. And

similarly, just as for Scott, full of the milk of human kindness, nothing human was alien or uncongenial, so nothing human in the field of literature seems foreign to Kraszewski, or too slight for his active interest. Even the ephemeral frivolities of Paul de Kock leave their tinge on his youthful pages, and in his old age he occasionally endeavours to rival the detective novels of Gaboriau, much as Dickens in his later years found the suggestion for a new manner in the popularity of Wilkie Collins. Critical as well as receptive in this as in other matters, he began in 1830 by deriding the defects both of Classicists and Romanticists in his first published novel, a story from the literary life of Wilno; and he ended by censuring the younger generation for its devotion to scientific materialism and economic progress, though he supported it in its fight against old routine and superstition. An entire history of public opinion and literary taste in Poland during the greater part of the nineteenth century could be constructed out of Kraszewski's novels. The outstanding result of his life's work is the establishment of an assured position for Polish literature, and particularly for the Polish novel, in the estimation of the masses of his countrymen. The daily food which he so assiduously supplied to his readers at last succeeded in supplanting the popularity of French novels, and in view of this great merit he may well be pardoned if, in his anxiety to furnish literary material and to attract attention, he occasionally was careless in manner or hasty in the expression of opinion, or if he sometimes had recourse to high colours and dramatic situations, to mystery and sensation in his plots, or to a vivid representation of foreign capitals and fashionable health resorts by way of attractive scenery. In this, as in more distinctly literary tendencies, he is susceptible to fashion as it reigns in the world around him, and by changing with it he attains his end of always securing public interest in what he has to say.

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When Kraszewski began his career, Wilno was an important focus of Polish life, both on account of its flourishing university and as a rallying-point of the country gentry from the border provinces. Accordingly, Kraszewski's earliest novels centre round this town, its men of the day, and its old churches and palaces. In addition to a number of contemporary romances, diligent research in local antiquities not only yielded several novels based on the history of the town, but it also furnished materials for such voluminous later productions as a *History of the Town of Wilno* and an account of the land and people of Lithuania.

There followed a sojourn of a dozen years and more in the country, where the Muse had to be invoked to eke out the scanty profits from the writer's indifferent farming. Stories from the life of country squires were the natural result, and these, pointed by a keen sense of the contrast between the enlightened amenities of the university town and the intellectual sterility of provincial circles, readily took the form of caricature. Kraszewski, in fact, seemed to be developing into an all-round satirist, as in his articles of that date fashionable literature and the small-talk of progress are scourged quite as mercilessly as is squiredom in the novels.

But a deeper note was struck, and great success achieved among a still Romantic generation, by a strongly sentimental novel, *The Poet and the World*, permeated by the disgust of the idealist at the materialism of society, and at the same time by a glorious belief in the high mission of art. A number of works of the same type followed, and one of them, *The Sphinx*, a story of court painters under the last King of Poland, stands out by the skilful presentation of the studio and its atmosphere: Kraszewski was himself

a dilettante of considerable skill in drawing, as well as in music.

These productions are very different in sentiment from the satires and caricatures of the same date. But they do not exhaust the variety of the author's interests and capacities as displayed even in this earlier period. He not only acts as chief editor of a periodical called *Athenaeum*, but continually fills its pages with the most varied matter, both literary and historical. He even produces elaborate epics on the early history of Lithuania, which are as completely forgotten now as they were highly praised in their day.

Finally, rustic nature and peasant folk, the two forces which contributed powerfully to transform Polish literature from fantastic Romanticism into modern realism, exercise their spell on the writer, mellow his youthful temper, and widen his sympathies. A series of novels drawn from White Russian and Little Russian peasant life are especially noteworthy, and the last and maturest of them, *The Cottage at the Village End*, furnished the libretto for Paderewski's opera *Manru* in our own day; those rural outcasts, the gipsies, are treated therein with as warm a sympathy as were the oppressed peasants—serfs still at that time—in the former novels.

But these democratic sympathies declined. Familiarity with the illiterate peasant bred contempt, while meditation in the peaceful monotony of the country and study of the Hegelian philosophy of history (then made popular by Polish thinkers) induced a sceptical attitude towards sweeping changes of conditions and institutions which had been evolved through the centuries. Moreover, the author's growing absorption in antiquarian studies was deepening his admiration for the chivalrous and patriarchal virtues of old feudal times. Kraszewski, although in some of his best novels emphatically denouncing the aristocracy as an

effete and dying class, and in others exposing the weaknesses and class prejudice of the minor gentry, yet was, at heart, increasingly identifying himself with that minor gentry class (which was his own). Indeed, in certain significant novels of his manhood, he became almost a complete reactionary both in social views and in religion. He there idealized and glorified both the manorial community of the old-time Polish village and the more remote idyllic rural communism of the primitive Slavonic world. Some of the highest talent he ever showed was directed to contrasting, very much in the manner of the Russian Pan-Slavists, the virtues of the uncultured aboriginal Slav in the East with the cultured and immoral materialism of what those Russians called 'the rotten West'.

Soon, however, the attitude of Kraszewski was affected both by a voyage in Western Europe, and by the movement in favour of the abolition of serfdom in Russia and Poland. He began to advocate that great coming reform in certain eloquent novels, to bestir himself with radical social projects at the meetings of the Peasant Commissioners for his province, and to work on the organization and spread of elementary education.

The resistance of the Russian bureaucracy to all efforts of this kind soon repressed the new enthusiasm, and Kraszewski accepted the editorial chair of a Warsaw newspaper. This stay in Warsaw opened a new epoch in his life. At first he devoted himself chiefly to journalism, and quickly gained the widest circulation for his newspaper. He pleaded in it for those same liberal ideas of freedom of conscience, social equality, and economic progress which he had lately opposed in his reactionary period. As the ferment of discontent among the younger generation in Poland grew towards the open revolt of 1863, Kraszewski leaned in his sympathies increasingly to the side of the radical 'Reds'

against the Conservative 'Whites'. He published abroad a violent revolutionary tract *The Polish Cause*, and when the insurrection at last broke out, his known sympathies with it led to the loss of his post and to banishment. Like most eminent Poles of the age, he spent all his later years in exile. During the Warsaw years which preceded it, filled with active interest in the movement about him, there had been a pause in his historical work, although he never ceased to produce historical novels; some of the best he wrote at this time are, significantly enough, stories from a not very distant past, from the last decades of the old Poland. And, as significantly, they dwell chiefly on the corruption of that old social and political system which he himself had idealized and extolled in earlier books.

iv

In his life of exile, Kraszewski, no more fettered by the duties of a farmer or a newspaper editor, made literature his only occupation, and it is at this time that both the extraordinary breadth of his historical intuition and his marvellous productiveness come into full play.

Besides writing novels at the rate of a volume a month and more, he found time for an astonishing amount of reading in several languages, and showered articles concerning foreign literary movements on the Polish periodicals at home. Side by side with contemporary literature he studies the old writers, and a translation of Dante and an introduction to Shakespeare's Plays in their first complete edition in Polish are characteristic products of his later years. And over and above it all, he for a long time continues his excursions into political journalism, dealing with Polish domestic questions in the form of annual chronicles, called *Reckonings*.

Besides this unrivalled wealth of output, the feverish activity of Kraszewski's later years is characterized by another peculiarity, the effect of the catastrophe which overwhelmed the insurrectionary cause. The defeat of 1863–4 smote him to the heart, and his feelings on that tragic national adventure, which he had so eagerly approved, are enshrined in a section of his work marked off from the remainder of his production by the assumed author's name of 'Bolesławita'. His other writings go on under his own name and show the real author settling down into reconciliation with the hard necessities of actual life. It is a case very much like the double literary life of Fiona Macleod and William Sharp in recent times, and the Celtic glamour of Fiona Macleod's poetical tales does not differ more completely from the lucid and matter-of-fact criticism of Sharp than do the passionate irredentist sketches of 'Bolesławita' from the calm and elaborate historical novels of Kraszewski. The fervour of those revolutionary literary products of the insurgent mood communicates a touch of satire to the more reflective work of the true Kraszewski, especially where he deals with his old foe, the decaying and moribund Polish aristocracy, as he does in one of his best novels, pointedly called *Morituri.*

However, problems of contemporary Polish life now recede into the background of Kraszewski's work. With the increasing detachment of permanent exile, and with advancing age, the historical habit grows upon him, and historical novels and treatises occupy an increasingly prominent position among his productions. The ancient capital of Saxony, Dresden, where he spent most of his later age, was full of memories of those eighteenth-century Saxon rulers who were at the same time kings of Poland. Though bad monarchs and dissolute men, they were great lovers and protectors of the arts, and their successor on the Polish

throne, Poland's last king, Stanislas Augustus Poniatowski, was exactly like them in both respects. Accordingly, some of the best specimens of Kraszewski's later art, those of his novels which are most rich in vivid detail, are based on his profound knowledge of the Polish eighteenth century. Its full wealth is displayed in that fascinating medley of historical lore, *Poland at the Time of the Three Partitions*, and in a monograph of the great eighteenth-century wit and most worldly churchman, the poet-bishop Krasicki, one of the best works of its kind. The profusion of characteristic anecdote in the novels, whether relating to the random loves of Augustus the Strong, or to the literary Grub Street of the Warsaw of a later day, or to the eccentricities of a powerful provincial noble like the notorious Prince Charles Radziwiłł, makes that department of the library of Kraszewski's works particularly entertaining and curious. And the best part of his less numerous and much less successful dramatic efforts in comedy also take their themes from this period.

He was not so uniformly fortunate in his most ambitious attempt, for which the German example of Gustav Freytag's cycle of historical novels, called *The Ancestors*, probably served as model. Of the twenty-eight novels in which Kraszewski, drawing from his wide knowledge of the old chronicles, gave a consecutive gallery of pictures from Polish history, only the opening work, *An Old Tale*, can be called a great achievement. As a vision of idyllic prehistoric Slav existence it has hardly a rival, even outside Polish literature, and has justly been translated into other Slavonic tongues. By its outstanding merits it deserves to be likened to that unique experiment in the resuscitation of a remote past which *Ivanhoe* constitutes among the works of Scott. The subsequent novels of Kraszewski's long series show a considerable weakening of creative

power, and their insistence on the less creditable aspects of the old times laid him open to the charge of propagating a pessimistic view of the past, and of writing without the true antiquary's love of his subject. Strangely enough, he succeeded much better in a bold excursion into classical antiquity, and his bulky novel called *Rome in the Time of Nero* held the field as worthily as did Bulwer Lytton's *Last Days of Pompeii* elsewhere, until the glories of Sienkiewicz's *Quo Vadis* superseded them both. Kraszewski, who had explored medieval and modern historical records with such untiring zeal, never lost touch with the classical world. Even in the disaster which befell him in his extreme old age, when the Germans imprisoned him on a charge of espionage in favour of France, he beguiled several weary years in the fortress of Magdeburg not only with further novel-writing, but also with the translation of five comedies of Plautus. He ended as he had begun, in the ceaseless labour of writing, and the last event in current Polish history to draw response from him in the form of a novel was the expulsion from Prussian Poland, by the Government of Bismarck in 1886, of thousands of Polish artisans and labourers.

V

No Polish novelist of Kraszewski's period—or of any period—is comparable to him in the volume of his output or in the breadth of his range. But, both in facility of production and in popularity among his contemporaries, Joseph Korzeniowski followed him close. Like Kraszewski, this writer is a herald of coming realism in the novels written for a still Romantic generation. Although he dies on the threshold of the new age—in the very year of the insurrection of 1863—he has in him, in a way, even more

of the modern element than Kraszewski, because all his novels are taken from contemporary life, and he ventures into the Romantic fields of medieval history once only, and without marked success. In one respect at least he covers a wider field than Kraszewski, in that he attains popularity also as a skilful dramatist, plentifully supplying the repertoire of the Polish theatres of the time. His apprenticeship as a playwright began when French classicism was still holding the field, and continued through the period of the Romantic idolatry of Shakespeare; but those of his plays which have a claim to a permanent position in literature and, some of them, on the Polish stage, are inspired by contemporary life and tendencies.

Similarly in the novels, which predominate in Korzeniowski's later work, he plunges resolutely into the life around him, as he observed it among the country gentry, and the bankers, officials, and artisans of the town.

It is the keenness of this observation, as well as the edge of his wit, unblunted by time, which makes his novels enjoyable reading even now, in spite of their old-fashioned, long-winded and moralizing method of narration, and their occasional artless lapses into a didactic presentation of model characters. Defects of this kind, due to the habits of his profession of schoolmaster, impair his *Wanderings* and *New Wanderings of an Eccentric*. He excels where he keeps closer to the reality of petty human faults and failings, as he does in his admirable comic gallery of snobbish country squires, called *The Neighbourhood*. In a more distinctly moralizing novel called *The Relations*, one of two brothers from a decayed county family becomes an honest tradesman, and another finds salvation in the military profession. Advocating trade and industry as occupations no less worthy of a gentleman than farming, Korzeniowski rose above a prejudice still strong at that

time with people of his class. Similarly, he advanced boldly beyond the views of his age when in his novel, *Thaddaeus the Nameless*, he raised his voice on behalf of children born out of wedlock. Lofty and progressive as such moral principles were, it is a dry and almost commonplace utilitarian soberness which is the chief characteristic of Korzeniowski's manner of envisaging human affairs. Born in a period of extravagant Romantic geniuses, he is himself a sworn foe to the artistic temperament in musicians and painters, whom he ridicules in *The Wanderings* and *The Hunchback*. He smiles at the rant and affectation of provincial actors in *The Widower*, and he even makes good-natured fun of his own profession in *The Emeritus*, where an old retired teacher of Latin is the kindly but comical hero.

vi

If Korzeniowski's attitude is one of calm approval of modern tendencies, we meet with the opposite, and in its extremest form, in the pages of a contemporary who for a time was much more popular: Henry Rzewuski.

Like Vincent Pol in poetry, he is in fiction, above all, the worshipper and loving describer of the olden time, the feudal order of things as it survived in the gentry-governed Poland on the eve of the partitions. He had seen it with his own eyes, being born, in the twilight of its latter days, the son of a great noble who passionately defended to the last the untenable, archaic, and corrupt social and political system of the falling Polish kingdom. The son grew up in an atmosphere of anecdotes and recollections from the life of the old gentry, and by his command of such illustrative stories he fascinated no less a person than Poland's greatest

poet, Mickiewicz himself, whose epic, *Pan Tadeusz*, is described by the author as a 'story from the life of country gentlemen', and is, indeed, full of the influence of Rzewuski. It was from this great epic that Rzewuski, in his turn, borrowed the name of a fictitious hero, *Soplica*, when, in response to the entreaties of his friends, he set down some of his recollections in what purported to be a transcript of the *Diaries* of an obscure eighteenth-century Polish squire. All the past cherished by Rzewuski's class returned to life in these pages, the picturesque costumes, the kindliness and quick temper, the robust joys, valiant fights, and simple faith; the defects of these qualities—licence, recklessness, and obscurantism—were passed over by the author, and forgotten by the public in their delight at the life-like portrayal of the period. The popularity of this work led Rzewuski to further efforts in the same field. His second principal work, an historical novel called *November*, described the conflict, in eighteenth-century Poland, between backward national traditions and advanced French innovations. While even more perfect in art than the first, this second work went too far in its advocacy of lost causes and in its attack on Western ideas of progress, which had already awakened the decaying feudal Poland to the necessity of reform. The author had in the meantime presumed upon his popularity even further by a volume of political *Miscellanies* presented as the work of an imaginary author, *Jarosz Beyła*, in which he had appeared as an out-and-out reactionary, derided all the best efforts of the leading Poles of his generation, and even pleaded for willing submission to, and assimilation with, the Russia of the Tsars. He sinned again when, in the *Diary* of a fictitious *Bartholomew Michałowski*, he presented a political cynic and stolid egoist who, in the time of Poland's first efforts at reform and her desperate struggle

against her aggressors, cares only for his own personal comfort and tranquillity.

Such political and philosophical theories were too much for the feelings of the younger generation: storms of public indignation burst upon the popular writer's head, and it was in fighting his own journalistic battles that in later years he spent most of the energy of his talent. He became the editor of a Warsaw newspaper patronized by the Russian Government, and for a time raised his paper to great brilliancy, only to ruin it by his absurd, ultra-conservative attacks on most of the great achievements of modern civilization, from freedom of thought and scientific discovery to technical invention and political economy. He did not cease to write historical romances, but, seeking their themes in more remote and less familiar periods, he was less successful in presentation than he had been when he drew on living memory and oral tradition. Even the elaborate *November*, although more perfect in literary structure, had not had quite the vivid touch of the anecdotal and easy-going *Diaries of Soplica.*

The extraordinary popularity of these two outstanding works of Rzewuski is best attested by the legion of imitators whose names are coupled with his in the literary record. One only deserves to be singled out to-day as a worthy companion, not a follower, of the brilliant chronicler of old days and customs. It is Ignatius Chodźko, who, in the five series of his *Pictures of Lithuanian Traditions*, set forth a wealth of old-time anecdote such as Rzewuski had given in *Soplica's Diaries.* In contrast to the latter author, Chodźko had begun his career as a free-thinker and a literary *bohémien* among the fervent radical youth of Wilno; and it was only during the later years which he spent in rural quiet that he became entirely absorbed in the private and domestic antiquities of his

beloved Lithuanian countryside. Free from Rzewuski's tendency to special pleading and idealizing, entirely devoted to loving description of detail, he makes actual places and persons, manors and convent schools, family houses, and even their furniture, rise out of the dust before our eyes. His work, part autobiography, part fiction, is perhaps best likened to that of the classic of early nineteenth-century provincial home-life in Russia, Sergius Aksakov, whose delightful *Family Chronicle* is accessible to the English reader in translations.

vii

We have seen the productiveness of Kraszewski rivalled on a smaller scale, and in the field of the contemporary novel only, by Korzeniowski; in that of the historical romance, we have noticed the two isolated early masterpieces of Rzewuski. Greater uniformity of literary standard and wider ambition are characteristic of the long array of volumes by Sigismund Kaczkowski, who was a third and highly successful competitor with Kraszewski and Rzewuski for the favour of Polish readers of historical novels, until Sienkiewicz came to outshine all his predecessors.

Kaczkowski resembles Kraszewski by the breadth of his literary range, extending far beyond fiction into politics, journalism, criticism, and history; also by the amplitude of the schemes embodied in the voluminous series of his historical novels. On the other hand, he resembles Rzewuski in his preference for scenes from a not very distant past, taken largely from actual recollections of old men and women. Appearing last of the three upon the literary scene, he spent the most impressionable years of youth in

the turmoil of the revolutionary propaganda which preceded the events of 1848, and began his career as a red-hot Radical. Diligent historical studies modified this attitude; it gave place to a conservatism more moderate than Rzewuski's reactionary obstinacy, but convinced enough to make stories from the life of the old provincial gentry the most characteristic and intensely personal part of Kaczkowski's work.

Kaczkowski's fame to-day rests almost exclusively on a series of novels and stories presented as the recollections of a gentleman of the *Nieczuja* family. They describe Polish life in the later eighteenth century, already partly under foreign rule after the first partition. The scene is mostly laid in the author's native district, which, under Austrian rule, became central Galicia. The author in general avoids great historical figures and events, and confines himself to the everyday domestic incidents illustrative of manners and opinions. He does not idolize the feudal past, as Rzewuski had done, but, though seeing their faults, he is with his ancestors at heart, and inclined to ascribe the moral decay of the nation rather to foreign innovations than to native defects of character. It was a curious age, in which French influences came into conflict with Polish traditions, and it produced original characters. The unbridled individualism inherent in the national disposition and expressed in the old political constitution, favoured amazing displays of extravagant and lawless character. Accordingly we meet, in the sober everyday atmosphere of Kaczkowski's novels, with figures of strange, romantic eccentricity, such as the half-Italian hero *Murdelio*, or the half-Hungarian *Kitaj*, men of mystery and violence, with a tinge of Byron and of Bulwer in their portraits. The close of the Nieczuja cycle is, however, pathetically and poignantly true, showing the inability of that adventurous class of Polish gentlemen to

adapt itself to conditions of political subjection, and its alternations between moods of religious ecstasy and hopeless military revolt. The same criticism of this class, as unadapted to a modern world, was continued in Kaczkowski's less vivid and more tediously moralizing novels from contemporary life. But he saw little which was comforting or attractive in the rising democracy; and although he vigorously attacked the aristocratic and reactionary doctrines of the conservative faction which centred round Cracow, he became a reactionary himself in his hostility to the materialism of modern science, and in his vain endeavours to reconcile its conclusions with religious dogma. Kaczkowski lived to see, in Sienkiewicz, one who proved his superior in the literary field; his attempt to rival the new-comer's success in a three-volume novel on fifteenth-century Polish history (*The Knights of King John Albert*) resulted in a work full of accurate and curious antiquarian detail, but devoid of the breath of life. Nor did another series of novels from contemporary life, produced in his old age, add anything of permanent value to his achievements. Here, as before, an excessive indulgence in reflection puts the reader's interest to sleep. As the subtleties of modern psychological analysis were unknown to the writers of Kaczkowski's generation, it is only the spirit and zest with which the Nieczuja stories are told that has rescued from oblivion this solitary portion of Kaczkowski's literary output.

viii

When the Austrian monarchy fell to pieces after the Great War, and its political archives were thrown open, it was discovered that Kaczkowski in his later life had served the Austrian Government as a secret agent, supplying information on such Polish opinions and personalities

as were of a nature to arouse suspicion or displeasure in Vienna. To such dishonourable lengths had a spirit of compromise with authority carried a writer not devoid of civic merit in his work.

To another novelist of that generation, whose venerable figure lingered on into the very days of the Great War, compromise in any form was ever unacceptable. SIGISMUND MIŁKOWSKI, better known by his literary name of THEODORE THOMAS JEŻ, had been a Polish legionary in the Hungarian rising of 1849, and a colonel in the Polish insurrectionary army of 1863; he died in 1915, when new Polish legions had taken the field, and Polish colonels of to-day were winning their spurs. His life of exile and wandering was more fantastic and adventurous than his novels could be, and it is as a last survivor of the old Romanticism, both in life and in literature, that he descended to his grave; he died amid a generation which had seen the rise and fall of realism, and the growth of new Romance, first in poetry and afterwards in history.

Spending many years of his Odyssey in various parts of the Balkans, from Belgrade to Constantinople, he became chiefly memorable for being the first, not among Poles only, but among European writers generally (not excluding those belonging to the Balkan races) to found historical romance on the struggles of the Southern Slavs against the Turkish yoke. A whole panorama of South Slav history, from the Bulgarian risings against the Byzantine emperors in the twelfth century to the conflict of Serb and Magyar in the nineteenth, is unrolled in the best-known series of his novels. Besides these, he wrote romances based on Polish history, in which he succeeded only when he dealt with his native soil—the Ukrainian borderlands. But it is in his numerous novels on contemporary Polish themes, all of them marked by a strong moral and social purpose, that

his radical opinions and fiery temperament most vigorously display themselves. A sincere democrat, he repeatedly advocates the enfranchisement and education of the peasant class, though he does not, like other democratic enthusiasts, idealize that class. On the other hand, he does not shrink from downright caricature in his efforts to rouse the dormant country gentry to a sense of social responsibilities, moral principles, and modern problems.

The noble ideals of the author and the vividness of his stories redeemed his old-fashioned style and faulty composition, and secured him a prolonged popularity. His manly personality commanded attention when, in his old age, his inventive power in fiction exhausted, he entertained a new generation with personal reminiscences of old times, particularly of the restless political ferment among mid-nineteenth-century Polish emigrants in London, where he had spent a number of years, at first in dire struggle with poverty, and later in untiring activity as a writer, journalist, and politician.

This strange figure, clad in the varied colours of revolutionary idealism and emigrant adventure, surviving into other days as a link with the past, may fitly mark the close of the Romantic period in the history of the modern Polish novel.

II

FROM REALISM TO NEW ROMANCE

i

For fifty years of the nineteenth century the development of the Polish novel was dominated by the inexhaustible productiveness and versatility of Kraszewski. Similarly, over the last quarter of the century there ruled the less prolific but no less manifold and far more mighty genius of Henry Sienkiewicz.

Like Kraszewski, he lived and wrote right through a complete literary period and on into another, of which he had heralded the tendencies, but which exalted its own gods in his stead. Kraszewski embodied the spirit of Walter Scott, whose influence, diffused over Europe, was waning before Kraszewski died. Sienkiewicz, on the other hand, rose into fame when realism was becoming the keynote of fiction, but he earned his greatest popularity by works which recalled attention to history and romance; his old age was spent amidst new and younger votaries of these idols, who had grown up around him.

Sienkiewicz's journalistic and literary youth was spent in Warsaw, where he wrote under the name of Litwos. The insurrectionary tragedy of 1863 had rudely awakened the survivors of a romantic past to the drab realities of a life of political subjection, of harsh economic struggle, and world-wide social problems. It is this grey light which suffuses the short stories by which Sienkiewicz first attracted

general attention. Pessimism of mood and assurance of artistic touch characterize the striking *Charcoal Sketches*, a tragic picture of helpless darkness and aimless suffering in the old village life. The same may be said of *Johnny the Musician*, which tells with tender pity how a young musical genius is crushed by the social handicap of peasant birth; or, again, of *The Old Servant* and *Annie*, melancholy dirges over the dying romance of the old country house. But even at this period it was evident that the young author had more comforting words to utter. The indomitable vitality of his nation under foreign rule is displayed in *The Diary of a Schoolmaster*: this was intended to describe Russian oppression, but was ultimately presented, with an eye to the Russian censor, as a picture of the Prussian yoke, no less true to life for the change. The same national characteristic appears again in *Bartek the Conqueror*, the Polish peasant who fights heroically for Prussia against France in 1870, only to be presently turned out of house and home by the Prussian Colonizing Commission. It is to be found also in the moving story of *The Lighthouse Keeper*, an old Polish exile in the West Indies, who, absorbed in thoughts of home over the pages of Mickiewicz's great poem, forgets to light his lantern, loses his post, and is driven forth again into the foreign wilderness. It animates, finally, the strange figure of a solitary old Polish settler in a Californian canyon, who reads to himself day by day the sixteenth-century Polish version of the Bible, and talks in biblical Polish to a casual visitor from his country (*At Mariposa*).

ii

This last story, being founded on the writer's personal experience, brings us to the great formative influence which came into the author's life. He had been cured of his early

pessimism and lifted out of his provincial narrowness by a voyage to America, which revealed to him a new and vigorously progressive world. He communicated this inspiration to the ever-widening circles of his readers in his *Letters from America*, one of the best of Polish travel-books. The *Letters from Africa*, written in later life, after an excursion to Egypt and Zanzibar, formed a companion work. But African impressions bore more memorable fruit in a tale of the adventures of a little Polish boy and a little English girl in the African wastes, entitled *In the Desert and in the Forest*. It was a product of Sienkiewicz's later age, and quickly became one of the children's classics of Polish literature.

To return, however, to his earlier years: Professor Kubala, one of modern Poland's most distinguished historians, had narrated the heroic wars waged by Poland in the seventeenth century against her various invaders. Kubala's vivid accounts of that victorious effort gave a further stimulus to Sienkiewicz's new-born national optimism, and it was in a rush of enthusiasm for those glorious achievements that he produced the thirteen volumes of his historical *Trilogy*, as that series of three long novels is usually called by Polish readers. In *Fire and Sword* he depicts the defence of Poland's Ukranian border against the tide of Cossack revolt, in *The Flood* Poland's deliverance from a deluge of Swedish occupation, and in *Mr. Wołodyjowski* the valiant deeds of the men who guarded the frontier against the Turk. These books were breathlessly read by the whole nation: no Polish book was ever so popular at the time of its appearance, hardly even Mickiewicz's great epic, *Pan Tadeusz*. These voluminous stories, surpassed no doubt in literary perfection by some of the author's later works, but unrivalled by any in the zest of story-telling and ardour for the subject, are still, among his

Polish readers, the most popular section of Sienkiewicz's work. They have lost some of their savour for the more critical taste: the romance of incident occasionally reminds us too strongly, in its wild improbability, of the extravagances of the elder Dumas' *Three Musketeers*, and the humours of Zagłoba, the Polish Falstaff, offer too genial a presentation of some of the grossest faults of the old gentry. Altogether, there is too much idealization of the heroic aspects of a Poland already inwardly corrupt, although still triumphant in the field; and the hardening conservatism of Sienkiewicz in his later years made this early partiality all the more noticeable. But there can be no doubt that, at the time when they were produced, these novels gave the nation the comfort which it most needed amid the misery of growing political oppression and in its disruption under three widely different foreign governments. The people, drearily absorbed in their workaday tasks, were awakened by these novels to the sense of being heirs to the glories of a once united and powerful nation, and were filled with confidence in a possible reunion and a great future. A similar service was at the same time rendered to the nation in the field of another art by the huge historical canvases of the painter John Matejko, who displayed on a monumental scale some of the greatest events of Polish history. The torch lighted by Sienkiewicz was taken from his hands by later writers; but the production of the *Trilogy* made him conscious of an achievement not merely of literary value, but of national importance; and this consciousness found expression in his later attitude in a twofold manner. First, he always laid stress thenceforth on the moral and social aspects of literary art, and particularly of fiction; in this spirit he emphatically condemned the 'naturalist' programme of Zola and his school, and expressed his conviction in the

words—admiringly repeated by his American critic, Professor William Lyon Phelps (*Essays on Modern Novelists*, 1910, 'H. Sienkiewicz', p. 128)—that 'the Novel should strengthen life, not undermine it; ennoble, not defile it; for it is good tidings, not evil'. We may, or may not, accept this view; but Sienkiewicz's works certainly achieved this high effect by the highest means of literary art.

Secondly, Sienkiewicz, with the full support of Polish public opinion, frequently appeared in his later years as the spokesman of Poland before the world, more especially when the Anti-Polish policy of Prussia reached its extreme limits in the forcible expropriation of Polish landowners. It may be said with confidence that if he had not died in the midst of the turmoil of the war his countrymen would have entrusted to him perhaps even a higher place in the new Polish State than was held by the great musician Paderewski.

iii

Sienkiewicz's literary activity after the completion of the *Trilogy* continues on the same grand scale and with the same sustained power for many years, and it is marked by several works of even higher literary value. In a field widely distant, he gave next, in a three-volume contemporary novel, *Without Dogma*, written in the form of a diary, a penetrating psychological portrait of an ultra-modern hero, afflicted with what a foreign character in the book describes as 'Slavonic unproductiveness of mind', but what is presented by the author as a Hamlet-like irresolution, typical of an age of crumbling faith and outworn ideals. The Polish novel had not hitherto been much concerned with the modern refinements of psychological analysis: here it reached at once the level of such subtle French masters as Paul Bourget. The analogy with Bourget extends equally to Sienkiewicz's

later work in the domain of the contemporary novel. Just as the French writer, after his phase of scepticism, became the convinced advocate of a return to religion, so Sienkiewicz, in his great later novel from contemporary life, *The Połaniecki Family*, definitely adopted a consistent and thorough-going Conservatism. His mastery is here shown once more in a gallery of life-like types drawn from modern Polish society; but the limited outlook of the commonplace hero, a narrow-minded, business-like Pole of the kind produced after the last insurrection by the stress of economic forces, is emphasized with irritating persistence; the equally irritating passiveness of his devoted wife is idealized overmuch; and at the end the policy of 'back to the land' is advocated too unreservedly for the judgement of the more thoughtful spectator of the industrial and commercial development of society. The author went even further in this direction when he used his waning powers to reveal his want of sympathy with the impatient and misguided outburst of those young Poles who, during the revolutionary ferment in Russia about 1905, thought the moment come for a corresponding rebellion in their own country. The very title of Sienkiewicz's work, *Whirlpools*, is significant of his opinions, but in the eyes of the critic it also indicates with involuntary irony a failing clearness of vision.

We must return once more to the heyday of Sienkiewicz's genius to mention the masterpiece on which his fame outside Poland chiefly rests. *Quo Vadis* is certainly the most successful presentation by a modern writer of the conflict between decaying Roman civilization and the rising moral power of Christianity. The grandeur of the historical vision, its wealth and vivid colour of detail, the creative force which gives life to a crowd of Roman and Christian characters, the fullness of antique culture as embodied in Petronius, have been justly admired by readers of many

nations. Blemishes have become apparent as the work has been more widely read: the central figures of the lovers are somewhat bloodless, the great Christian leaders somewhat abstract in their perfection, the Roman revels and the tortures of the Christians occasionally somewhat too crude in their laboured realism. But it may be said that these are errors such as a Michael Angelo might have fallen into in dealing with so vast a theme; its greatness tends to impair the writer's sense of proportion; under its moral inspiration he over-intensifies in his picture the lights and shadows of reality.

iv

There is one more great work of Sienkiewicz's later years which is dearer to the Poles than anything he wrote after the *Trilogy*. Becoming increasingly absorbed in the fortunes of his nation, he saw, as time went on, the growing hopelessness of the economic struggle which his countrymen were waging in Prussian Poland; fortified by State credits and special legislation, the German settlers on Polish soil had overwhelming odds on their side. Again he turned for comfort to the great deeds of the past. He selected for the subject of his last perfect novel, *The Knights of the Cross*, the triumph of Poles and Lithuanians over the German power in the early fifteenth century. The task was more difficult than in the case of the *Trilogy*, for the age was more remote, and was not illustrated by that profusion of diaries and chronicles of daily life which the seventeenth century had left behind it. The author's power of calling up the past, animating it with a mass of convincing detail, was once more made manifest. Drawing on archaic elements in the living dialects, he re-created with wonderful success the Polish language of the period. In this work, as

in the *Trilogy*, the idealization of the old chivalrous Polish gentry may occasionally be excessive. Poles and Germans, as in *Quo Vadis* Christians and Romans, are painted in too violent contrast. To a greater extent than either in the *Trilogy* or in *Quo Vadis*, the moral strength of virtue, and even the physical strength of body, are at times exalted beyond human measure. But there is some unfailing magic touch of life in all the figures and scenes. If the effect of age is anywhere to be observed, it is in the structure of the story, which is much less skilful and compact than in earlier works; the choice of the trite literary motive of a hero placed between two women is a sign of diminishing power of invention.

These features became more marked in the two historical novels of Sienkiewicz's old age, both of them unfinished. In the first—*On the Field of Glory*—he returned to the familiar seventeenth-century period of the *Trilogy*, and intended to complete that work by celebrating the period's crowning victory—Sobieski's rescue of Vienna; but he broke down on the very threshold of this great enterprise. In another volume planned on a large scale, *The Legions*, he ventured into a field hitherto untrodden by him: the adventures of Polish soldiers fighting under Napoleon on European battle-fields. The Great War took the pen out of Sienkiewicz's hand: he exchanged it for the wallet, and set about collecting relief for his countrymen to whom the war had brought ruin or distress. He died as the self-appointed Great Almoner of Poland; but, looking back on his last venture as a man of letters, we are struck by the fitness with which, on the eve of another Polish struggle for independence, he chose the Napoleonic theme.

During the period of his great novels Sienkiewicz had never ceased to write short stories. Some of them were preparatory sketches for the great works, or chips from the

workshop. Such were the story *From Tartar Captivity*, a study for the *Trilogy*; and the episode from Roman life in Palestine in the time of Christ, called *Let us Follow Him!* and linked up by its theme with *Quo Vadis*.

One of the supreme graces of a great writer, the sunshine of humour, had brightened many a page of Sienkiewicz, both in the *Trilogy* and in *Quo Vadis*, in *The Połaniecki Family* and in *The Knights of the Cross*. It fills with its light a masterpiece among his short stories, *The Third One*, drawn from the life of painters in Warsaw, and glowing with all the comic and romantic glamour of that immortal model, the *Scènes de la Vie de Bohème*, by Henri Murger.

In his later years, Sienkiewicz occasionally made use of the short story to express his ideas on current political problems, most affectingly perhaps in *The Old Bell-Ringer*, where the ardent Polish patriotism of the older generation of Lithuanians is contrasted with the fierce anti-Polish separatism of the younger people.

Like other famous writers, Sienkiewicz made frequent, but vain, attempts to repeat, in the sphere of drama, the success he had attained in the novel. It was not so much these failures as the general weakness of his later novels which brought about a temporary eclipse of his fame. The conservatism of his later years exposed him to attack by the younger generation in the perennial quarrel of youth with age. It became the fashion to slight him, as it became the fashion in England to slight Tennyson and other Victorians. With these, Sienkiewicz is now receding into the secure distance of history, across the dividing gulf of the war. In historical perspective he will undoubtedly for ever stand out as the greatest Polish writer of his age.

V

No other novelist of the period approaches Sienkiewicz in breadth of range or imaginative power. His equal in some of the essential qualities of literary greatness is to be found in the most typically representative writer of the era of realism, BOLESŁAW PRUS (whose real name was ALEXANDER GŁOWACKI). He seldom travels beyond the limits of his own period, as Sienkiewicz did deliberately and with a great national purpose in his historical novels. Prus remains absorbed, with a Dickens-like, democratic understanding and human pity, in the daily tasks and patient achievements, the small joys and lasting sorrows of the oppressed and labouring Poland of his day. This limitation becomes a habit, and makes it impossible for him to vivify an historical theme, in the manner of Sienkiewicz, when, for once, in his elaborate novel *The Pharaoh*, he makes a literary excursion into the dim and distant regions of ancient Egypt. On the other hand, the comparative narrowness of Prus is compensated by a greater depth of social intuition, a wider capacity for sympathy with all the tendencies of his age, and a nobler freedom of thought in his view of modern social problems than are ever met with in Sienkiewicz. A townsman in every fibre of his being, he could yet present with incomparable intensity, in the poignant story called *The Outpost*, the fatalism and tenacity of the peasant clinging to his soil, and struggling for its retention against foreign new-comers. He could penetrate the mortal weakness of the landed aristocracy in his great novel *The Doll*, and of the country gentry in the pathetic story *Little Angela*. He could, in that same greatest work of his, *The Doll*, do rare justice both to the intellectual capacities and to the oriental morality of a modern Jew, and discover a romantic idealism in the seemingly shrivelled soul and dusty existence of an

old shop assistant. His one other great contemporary novel, *The Emancipated Women*, not only unfolded all the driving force and all the weaknesses of the women's movement; it also displayed, in the person of the heroine, the essential and peculiar values of woman's moral nature at its noblest. An old professor's dissertations on the philosophy of natural science contribute fascinating chapters to the same novel; while, in a burlesque, *The Angel's Visit*, an amusing phantasmagoria is even extracted from the physical theory of friction. Prus was able, in contrast to Sienkiewicz, to sympathize in his old age with the young revolutionary hot-heads of 1905, and to speak with tenderness of their errors in his last novel, *The Children*. And outside the sphere of novel-writing, he gave sound and impartial counsel to his nation in the *Weekly Chronicles* which he contributed for many years to a Warsaw illustrated paper.

Unlike Sienkiewicz, Prus is more voluminous as a short-story writer than as a novelist. It is in his numberless short stories that the superior breadth of his social sympathies is best displayed. In these we have a vivid panorama of the Polish society around him, children and students, landowners and city clerks, idealists and cynics, light-hearted girls and shrewish vixens. In this wide realm of fiction the heart of its king is with the humblest of his subjects; he sees to the bottom of their souls, but he reads them with a smile. For Prus possesses, more than Sienkiewicz, an all-pervading spirit of humour, which, in the words of a Shakespearian fool, 'does walk about the orb: like the sun, it shines everywhere.'

Humorists, not uncommon in the earlier ages of Polish literature, are rare among the moderns. One of these, JOHN LAM, a humorist by vocation, made a brilliant start with his novel *Miss Emily*. This ridiculed the bewilderment of

the old imported Austrian bureaucracy when national self-government was granted to Austrian Poland in the 'sixties. But Lam's later works did not reach the level of his early excellence. Another and more recent humorous writer of brilliant wit, Cornel Makuszyński, showed a propensity to sentiment even in his earlier work ; and the tragedy of the war seems to have still further impaired his gift of humour. All the more highly must we value Prus, who, though not a professed humorist, never entirely omits the saving grace of humour from his treatment of even the most serious social themes.

vi

Humour is not usually a conspicuous quality in women writers. And it is not for a sense of humour (for she has hardly any), but for other affinities, that we may single out as akin to Prus one of the increasing group of Polish women novelists of the later nineteenth century.

Eliza Orzeszko resembles Prus both in the breadth of her social sympathies and in the fervour of her liberal convictions, typical of the age. She belongs to a slightly earlier generation of writers than either Prus or Sienkiewicz. She had done her best work when they rose into fame and, for a long time, completely eclipsed her. In the light of history, as we view her now, she cannot, indeed, claim the rank of a George Eliot in Polish letters; but she commands as much respect by her transparent honesty and sincerity as does Charlotte Brontë, though, like her, she may at times occasion a smile by her old-fashioned method of story-telling and copious rhetoric.

She grew up, a country gentleman's daughter, in the Lithuanian East of the old Poland, in the atmosphere of the great social changes which peasant emancipation brought to the quiet country-side. These early impressions

stamped her from the outset an advocate of social progress and liberal reform. As a woman she naturally turned, in some of her earliest novels, to the subject of women's emancipation with a zeal which made them the object of violent attack and enthusiastic defence; one of them, called *Martha*, even awakened echoes in German controversies of the day.

During her later life, spent in the town of Grodno, her attention was attracted to another subject of social importance. The squalid and immovable mass of Jewish proletarians in provincial towns, ever-present to Polish eyes, had hitherto been left unnoticed in literature, except by the somewhat pedantic pen of the eighteenth-century classicist Niemcewicz. Mme Orzeszko's series of vivid stories of Jewish life has since been followed by the humorous and grimly realistic pictures of CLEMENT JUNOSZA. But Mme Orzeszko in these novels has the merit of a pioneer; some of them still retain the embers of a noble fire, more especially, perhaps, the tragic story of *Meyer, Son of Joseph*, an idealist Jewish youth who strives to burst the bonds of prejudice and race hatred, like Uriel Acosta in the well-known German tragedy of Gutzkow.

To Mme Orzeszko, as to others in that age of science, knowledge was the key to the door of deliverance from all social evils. No wonder, then, that after the higher education of women, the liberal education of Jews, and the hygienic education of neglected slum children, it should be on the civic education of peasants that she set her heart. To this cause she devoted her maturest work, in which she returned to country life and fervently exposed the terrible effects of the illiteracy and ignorance of the villagers. Next to the peasants, the *Bene Nati*, 'the Well-born', as she calls them in the title of one of her novels, the minor gentry, living proudly apart from the peasants in their genteel poverty,

though often not far removed from them in enlightenment, are the subject of her warm concern and the constant theme of her later and best work. As she meditates on the uncertain future of the landowning class, her thoughts and her love return to the land itself, and such large-scale works as her novel, *On the Banks of the River Niemen*, give descriptions of the Lithuanian landscape only equalled to-day by those of JOSEPH WEYSSENHOFF, the modern novelist of that region.

In two of her latest novels she turned her eyes to the town once more, to show, in *The Argonauts*, the tragedy of happiness lost in pursuit of gold, and in her last story, *Ad Astra* ('Heavenward'), the revolt of the human heart left unsatisfied by the exclusive pursuit of knowledge. Grappling to the last with the most difficult problems of modern civilization, she never lost confidence in the future of humanity and her people. It may sometimes prove refreshing, amid the despondency of this post-war period, to turn to the strenuous optimism of those hard but hopeful days.

III

NATURALISM AND NATIONALISM

i

THE most typical Polish novelists, even of the later nineteenth century, had, it is true, made occasional excursions into other social spheres than their own. But they had moved with the greatest ease, in their works from contemporay life, among the class from which the majority of them were drawn—the class of country gentlemen. It was some time before the rising social power of the Polish peasantry attained full and worthy representation in the novel.

Curiously enough, the glory of producing the most perfect literary work on Polish peasant life was reserved for one who, though himself a villager born, and for a time a farmer, had spent the greater part of his youth as a travelling provincial actor and a minor railway official. This writer, W. S. REYMONT, depicted in two early novels, *The Woman of the Theatre* and *Ferments*, the world of his own early surroundings, the beggarly misery of strolling players, and the shabby gentility of clerks and small tradesmen. In another—*The Dreamer*—he portrayed a poor railway servant such as himself, dreaming of riches and of travel.

He became better known by his next novel, *The Promised Land*. This takes the reader to the Polish Manchester, the rapidly-growing industrial town of Łódź, with the

human ant-heaps of its textile factories, and its curious types of newly enriched Jews, Germans, and Poles, made and marred by their greed of gain, brimming at first with enterprise and energy, lapsing after success into a life of base pleasures, false refinement, or snobbish philanthropy.

With its wealth of masterly detail in figure and episode, this work placed Reymont in the first rank of Polish prose writers. He now turned his mature power to unexpected uses. Looking back from the town he lived in to the country he had come from, he produced in the four volumes of his book, *The Peasants*, a literary encyclopaedia, in story form, of the toils and pleasures, the customs, loves and hates, the personal passions and social conflicts, of the inhabitants of a typical Polish village under the old Russian rule. The work cannot properly be called a novel, although it presents a heroine not less tragic in her way than Hardy's Tess, and a family drama between father and son, who are rivals for her love. More than a novel, it is a panorama of the whole round of peasant life, a brilliant picture of Polish nature through the circle of the year, the four parts being called after the four seasons. The author, unlike the many other Polish writers who have dealt with peasant themes, has no social doctrine to drive home; and a truly epic impartiality is associated with a tragic sense of the elemental forces which dominate the efforts of the tillers of the soil. Nature broods with a 'terrible composure' in the background, as in Thomas Hardy's Wessex stories, which Reymont's book strongly resembles in atmosphere and general effect.

A partiality, both in choice of subject and manner of treatment, contrasting with Reymont's gloomy calm, characterizes those prose writers who recently have followed the Polish poets in their enthusiasm for a particular region of Poland—the Tatra mountains on the south-western border,

and their proud and freedom-loving inhabitants. The grey and joyless aspect of their life of struggle with a stony and barren soil has been presented with a stern realism by a son of that people, W. Orkan, both in his short stories and his longer novel, *The Vale of Roztoki*, as well as in his poems *From this Sad Land*.

ii

Reymont's career as a writer is not so simple in outline as would appear from his greatest works. He ventured once at least, though without marked success, into the field of the historical novel. In a great work in three parts, *The Year 1794*, he presented the last year of independent Poland. Here his realistic method failed; for a bewildering mass of detail obscures the outlines of the historical picture.

In the same spirit of bold literary adventure, he travelled far from his loftier themes in a sensational story of Anarchist plots and of the international underworld of London (*The Vampire*); and he returned to this scene in a recent novel, *Opium Smokers*.

Excursions such as these remind us that new and unfamiliar experiences had in recent times widened the range of vision of Polish writers. Political persecution had, in the 'seventies, driven a young and gifted Polish novelist, Wacław Sieroszewski, to the wastes of steppe and forest in the extreme North-East of Siberia; his twelve years' exile yielded an ethnographical work on the native tribe of the *Yakouts*, as well as a number of pathetic stories of their miserable primitive life, and of that of European exiles among them. In his sympathetic insight into the common human elements of aboriginal and of civilized mentality, Sieroszewski may be compared with the great Russian writer Korolenko, also for a time an exile in that part of Siberia.

But the Polish writer is superior in his presentation of the charm of exotic nature; the mysterious power of life is equally revealed in his descriptions of frozen Northern wastes, and of the rich groves and flowery meadows of the Caucasus, which he shows us in a later novel (*Rish-Tao*). The fascination of wild nature in Poland itself is vividly brought out in a humorous story of two boys who run away from home into the woods (*The Young Idea*). His experience of Siberia and the Yakouts had disclosed to him the elements of ancestral savagery surviving in modern man, and his recent melodrama, *The Bolsheviks*, succeeded on the stage, in spite of many faults, because of its forcible presentation of the interplay of instinct and doctrine, nature and tradition, in the conflict between Poland and Soviet Russia.

The charm of the exotic leads other writers, not into far lands and among strange peoples, but into distant and romantic fields of history. One of Poland's finest living masters of prose, Wacław Berent, after dealing in several novels with the disillusionments and despondency which marked the early years of the century, turned in the midst of war's horrors to the ever-green fields of mediaeval romance. In *Living Stones*, a strange elusive tale, he recalls to life the mediaeval town and country, the convents and the schools, fat burgesses and monks, light-hearted vagrant clerks and travelling comedians, their revels, brawls and mystic exaltation, the enchantment of popular song and story, and the literary magic of Dante in its early freshness.

In more sober guise, the realities of Polish daily life in the Middle Ages, with the exact speech of the period, are being revived once more, after Kraszewski and Sienkiewicz, in the novels of Mme Nitsch ('J. Powalski').

iii

Both Reymont's peasant tales and Orkan's stories of the life of Tatra mountaineers apply to the treatment of peasant themes a new method of novel writing, evolved by an easy transition from the typical realism of the Positivist era. They present that materialistic extreme of treatment and manner which, in most literatures of the European continent, is known as naturalism, that being the name given to it by the French leaders of the movement, Émile Zola and his group. Once immensely popular, these French models of the *roman naturaliste* are now almost forgotten.

Such, also, is likely to be, in course of time, the fate of the distinguished and forceful woman writer who is the most thorough-going representative of this movement in Poland. GABRIELLA ZAPOLSKA was a woman and a writer of a very different stamp from Mme Orzeszko, who had been so popular among the previous generation. Zapolska began her career on the stage, and spent years of irregular and unsettled life in the artistic society of Montmartre. In Poland she enjoyed an extraordinary vogue, both as a novelist and a dramatist, about the turn of the century, and died in old age, amid the new literary fashions which followed the war, neglected like the once-famous Ouida before her.

The craving for strong effect was her motive power, quite as it was Zola's, however much he may have plumed himself on his 'scientific method'. And Zapolska approaches her task with the uncritical sentiment and unreflecting social indignation of a true woman. Her numerous plays and novels all deal with 'problems', which are sometimes

artificially created, often grossly misstated, and hardly ever in any sense solved. She has an actress's instinct for theatrical effect and that of a journalist for sensation; these enable her to play exclusively on our nerves and to produce, with unvarying success, a blind onrush of emotion. Even cultured and critical spectators and readers succumb to it when she makes, in two tragic dramas, the Jewish Ghetto the scene of conflicts between human feeling and rigid tradition; or when she shows a commonplace middle-class household—the proverbial *Dulski Family*—tortured by the stupid tyranny of its mother; when she revels in the vivid adventures of an elopement, or dissects the meanness of seduction in the lower life of towns; when she probes such sores of our social system as venereal disease and prostitution, or lays bare the secret sins of school-girls in some of her most sensational novels. However little moral value or social helpfulness there may be in all this, it captivates the interest by sheer force of talent, and suggests fruitful reflection.

It may finally be mentioned that, with her keen eye for effect, Zapolska found it worth her while to exploit the patriotic sentiments of her audience by melodramas, which never failed to attract audiences and draw tears. One of them deals with the conspiracies of the young idealists of Russian Poland, baffled by the power of the Russian secret police and bureaucracy and culminating in the tragic failure of the revolution of 1905. This play, called *The Other Man*, ran for hundreds of nights when first produced in Warsaw after the Russian evacuation of 1915. Another and even more melodramatic production turns to account the sufferings of Polish exiles in Siberia, which gives it its title; it is often seen on the provincial amateur stage, and retains its fascination for the unsophisticated audience.

iv

'Naturalism' of a higher literary quality is represented by the works of STANISLAS PRZYBYSZEWSKI. Formerly the object of fierce attack by some as a demon of immorality, and avidly studied by others, he is now honoured as a literary veteran, though little read. He won in his time a wide circle of readers in Germany—some of his earlier writings being actually in German—and enjoys an even greater reputation to-day in Russia.

He began his Polish career at Cracow in the late 'nineties as the leader of a group of young literary revolutionaries, whose activities centred round a periodical called *Life*. Under his guidance they defied all accepted standards, intellectual and moral, not only in literature, but also to a great extent in life. They professed to pursue, in personal conduct and in art, the one supreme end of realizing the *Absolute*, the 'naked soul' which is at the bottom of all outward events and efforts, opinions and conventions. The young geniuses of this brilliant group have gone their separate ways in pursuit of that Absolute which they made their watchword: some have reached it in early death and can never tell us what they discovered; others have found room for it within the framework of the established literary and social system, and the days of their revolt are forgotten. The master only of them all, himself grey-haired now, has never ceased to wave the red flag of their youth. With a persistence which could not but become monotonous, he has continued to display, in prose poems, novels, and dramas, his violent artifices of style and his radicalism in the choice of themes. They all harp on one and the same string of human nature—sexual passion—fierce in its elemental power, overriding all social conventions, triumphant over all human plans, savage as hatred, and strong as death.

The author, with a perverse limitation of vision, clings to the conviction that here is the one and full expression of that 'Absolute' of human personality which he has made his artistic aim. His novels, under such typical titles as *The Children of Satan* and *Homo Sapiens*, unsparingly reveal the havoc wrought by this passion in the personal nature of men, and in the social relations of families and communities. And the plays, which he began to write later in his career, turn on the same motives and attain dramatic strength by treating them, if possible, even more ruthlessly than do the novels. There even reigns in them something like a morality of inexorable fate, chaining guilt to guilt, and guilt to punishment, through generations.

In envisaging the relations of the sexes as a fierce unending struggle for mastery, Przybyszewski resembles the friend and associate of his student days at Berlin, that Scandinavian monomaniac of genius, August Strindberg, at once the greatest woman-hater and the most abject slave to woman among writers of European renown. In the eyes of the Polish writer, as of the Scandinavian, woman is ever a vampire, fatally and persistently sucking man's life-blood; she is the *Golden Fleece*, as the title of one of Przybyszewski's plays calls her, for which men madly risk their lives.

Like Strindberg, again, Przybyszewski wearies his reader at last by the repetition of his subjects; he moves, like one possessed, in that one narrow circle. But he moves in it as a master, and his diction and phrase make him one of the great classics of modern Polish prose. He is perhaps most felicitous as a perfect stylist when, for once, in his admirable pages on the music of *Chopin*, he leaves the sphere of his obsession and turns aside to a subject of art criticism and national mentality. An accomplished musician himself, Przybyszewski makes us feel, in this critical rhapsody, more penetratingly perhaps than any specialist in musical theory,

the depth of Polish character and the spirit of the soil, as revealed by the magic touch of Chopin.

Besides his mastery of language, Przybyszewski has one other outstanding merit which gives importance to his figure in its present historical perspective. Into the relativity of a generation astir with shifting social tendencies, problems, and projects, he stepped boldly with his self-centred doctrine of the Absolute. That Absolute which he preached so whole-heartedly and unceasingly was nothing else than the human personality in itself, as its own law-giver and its own reason of being. By adopting, with such conviction, the sublime egotism of Nietzsche's philosophy as the one and only motive power of his art, Przybyszewski rescued by his powerful example all forms of Polish art—literature, painting, music—from becoming absorbed in teaching and propaganda, and losing, in social effort and moral intention, the very character of art. By the solidity and uniformity of his work he effectually reminded the writers and thinkers of Poland that the creative human *Self* is the essence of all Art, and that nothing—neither subject, nor doctrine, nor the perfection of style—matters so much as the force of personality, that vivifying principle, that very soul of every great work of art. The social utilitarianism inherited from the Positivist era would inevitably in the long run have meant death to all living power of beauty in poetry and prose; Przybyszewski's much-maligned revolt on behalf of 'Art for Art's sake' was a return to, and a renascence of, 'the one thing needful', the one thing perennial and essential. The effect of this clarion-call has been that in all the fields of Polish literature in the twentieth century—drama, novel, and lyric poetry—the highest causes, national, social, and moral, have been served with a pervading flame of personal fervour without which most of what was written would have soon become a dead

mass of dusty tracts. As it is, Polish literature, social in its tone and interests, as Art must be in a modern democracy, is pervaded by that spirit of self-expression which alone makes of Art a great human force. And it must not now be forgotten that it was Przybyszewski who, by his passionate rhapsodies, re-awakened the Romantic Princess of Personality, sleeping amid the thorny hedge of Social Purposes. It is in this sense that all who once gathered round Przybyszewski, diverse as may be the ways they may have since gone, carry with them the potent stimulus of the idea which he inculcated. The greatest of them, the painter, dramatist, and national prophet Wyspiański, made the noble and memorable admission: 'Without Przybyszewski, we should all have been nothing.'

V

A selection from among living Polish writers must necessarily be arbitrary and personal. But if any Pole is asked who reigns supreme in the Polish novel of to-day, one name alone can leap to his lips—that of Stephen Żeromski.

Like Sienkiewicz, he began as a social pessimist, and like him, seemed at first more gifted for the short story than the novel. Among longer works, the novel entitled *Labours of Sisyphus* describes the efforts of the Russian school system to quench the sense of nationality in Polish youth, and the ultimate triumph of the vitality of the nation, embodied in a peasant son. There is less comfort in Żeromski's early masterpiece *Homeless People*, where a self-made man, a doctor, resigns personal happiness for the dreary task of carrying enlightenment and relief among the poor. And in shorter stories from Polish life, significantly called *Crows*

and Ravens will hack us to Pieces, an intensity of despair is reached such as the pages of Polish literature had never known before.

Like Sienkiewicz again, Żeromski turned from contemporary life to history; but he did not at first go farther back than to the glorious era of the Napoleonic wars. He produced, in a long novel called *Ashes*, the most life-like record we possess in fiction of the deeds of Polish soldiers on the battle-fields of those stormy years. The author returned to the same period to glorify in a poetic play the gifted Polish officer, Prince Sułkowski, whose brilliant career was cut short in Egypt in 1798 by the hand of an assassin.

The triumphant handling in the Napoleonic novel of a vast mass of historical detail gave assurance to Żeromski: he now turned to the more distant past of the sixteenth century, to the heroic records of Poland's struggle against Moslem invaders. His *Lay of the Leader* celebrates, in poetic prose, the valiant Polish General Żółkiewski, who fell fighting the Turks, and his wise and noble King, Stephen Bathory. If, in this instance, political and moral reflections, veiled in puzzling allegory, mar the outline of a fine work, no such blemish attaches to Żeromski's portrayal of remote Polish antiquity in *Walter the Goodly Wight*, the story of a half-legendary tenth-century hero. There had been no such successful presentment of that misty dawn of Polish history since Kraszewski's *Old Tale*, and the elder writer's simplicity of technique is far outdone by the subtleness of Żeromski's vision and his command of artistic effect.

Like Sienkiewicz again, Żeromski turned his attention once more to contemporary life. In *A Story of Sin* he shed the divine pity of Greek tragedy round the slow moral degradation of a poor girl, the victim of seduction, and round her self-sacrificing death in defence of her first lover.

The later stages of this novel are not free from a popular sensationalism in their scenes of burglary and murder, which were not uncommon in the actual life of Russian Poland after the abortive revolution of 1905. It was probably the immense success of this book which tempted Żeromski to try his skill in dramatic composition; like so many other novelists, he failed and, for once, disgraced himself by a rank melodrama of crime and mystery called *The White Glove.*

He has since been more successful in another drama, called *The Skin of the Beast.* Its subject is the massacre of the landlords by the peasants which took place in 1846 in Austrian Poland, at the instigation of Austria, and which has never been forgotten by the Poles. The hero of the play is a peasant who, under an awakening sense of national solidarity, rescues one of the intended victims. Żeromski, once the gloomiest pessimist of modern Polish literature, sets in this work an example of optimism which is in marked contrast with the prevailing temper of the day. For the intellectual classes in Poland, subjected both to material privations and to the selfish policy of the predominant peasant class, are now in a despondent mood.

The White Glove is the sole instance, in Żeromski's career, of a lapse into melodrama. A strong sentiment of nationality permeates with a peculiar exaltation even his stories of unbridled human passion. For he is a nervously, almost hectically, passionate writer. He moved all Polish readers by his portrayal, in *The Charm of Life,* of an officer of the Russian army who, while garrisoned in Poland, is aroused by the stirring of his Polish blood, and, in order to serve the national cause, ruthlessly breaks the bonds of love which unite him to a Russian girl. Again, in *Whiter than Snow,* a play written since the war, he shows his hero making atonement, by a self-sacrificing death at the hands

of Bolshevik peasants, for a crime committed under the influence of passion.

Since the beginning of his career, an increasingly close sympathy had united Żeromski's literary work with the sentiment of the nation. In 1905, Russian Poland, under the influence of the Russian revolutionary movement of that year, was seething with conspiracies, in which socialist and nationalist ideals were fantastically and sometimes morbidly intermingled. Żeromski displayed the strange, unnatural mentality of the time, in dramatic form, in a work published anonymously and called *The Rose*. It represents an orgy of destruction brought about by a diabolical device, so as to bear to-day the semblance of a prophecy of the death-dealing inventions which the Great War was to call forth, while it reminds the reader, by its Dantesque scenes of the torture of political prisoners, that the methods of the Bolshevist *Che-Ka* were inherited from their Tsarist predecessors. The tinge of socialism, which marked Żeromski's early patriotic creed, is never entirely absent from his work. It may even be observed in the trilogy of novels written during and after the war, called *The Fight against Satan*, and comprising *The Conversion of Judas*, *The Whirlwind*, and *Charity*. In these, against a background ranging from Poland to Paris, and from the Cracow of pre-war times to the Warsaw of to-day, he draws the figure of a noble idealist, who wishes to surrender a huge capitalist enterprise to the workers, but postpones the transfer until the fabric shall be ripe for it, and pays with death for his delay. The hero's no less noble social testament, and its interpretation by smaller-minded men, form the subject of the last part, which has been published in the liberated Poland.

But even before the war, when his earlier connexion with the socialist revolutionaries was still recent, Żeromski struck, on one memorable occasion, a note of solemn and

pathetic appeal to the whole nation. In 1913 all Poland, profoundly moved by the premonition of the approach of a new struggle for freedom, was celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the last Polish insurrection against Russia. Żeromski commemorated the occasion by a story entitled *The Faithful River*, in which he gave expression to the melancholy of these recollections, still vivid in many a Polish family, in tones exquisitely tender and poignantly sad.

Sienkiewicz, who from a leading novelist had become the spokesman of the nation, died during the war. Żeromski has by universal consent taken his place in that high sphere of political literature. At each dramatic phase of the Polish problem in recent years his countrymen have heard from him words of warning or of encouragement. When most of the more thoughtful citizens were shrinking from the risks of war, he exalted it in his *Dream of the Sword*; when the fighting temper of the nation had been fully roused and the growth of a vicious militarism was to be feared, he sang the praises of peaceful industry in his *Dream of Bread*. When Poland had reunited round its central artery, the river Vistula, he gave vivid sketches of the river and its banks in a rhapsody, half poem, half geographical account. And when the state had found again its vital outlet to the sea, he presented in a series of disconnected historical visions—*The Wind from the Sea*—scenes from the age-long struggle between Poles and Germans for the Baltic shore. Recently, he has plainly spoken his mind on *Snobbery*, as it occurs in many walks of the new Polish life of culture, and his booklet is worthy, in its sterling moral soundness, of Thackeray's great model. As a novelist, Żeromski now seems past the zenith of his powers, but the nation hopes, on many occasions yet, to have the benefit of his advice and admonition.

vi

In conclusion, one question remains to be asked which brings us to the very fringe of current history. What effect has the war had on the Polish novel, and what noteworthy developments in that sphere have there been since?

The Great War, during its progress, kept humanity too breathless for thoughtful literary work. There are a very few notable exceptions, such as that prose epic of the war, *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, by the Spaniard Blasco Ibañez; or *Le Feu*, by Henri Barbusse, the story of a French squad in the trenches, a book full of the vivid horror of warfare, and free from artificial sentiment; or, finally, the thoughtful anticipations of post-war reflection in Mr. Wells's *Mr. Britling Sees It Through*. But such great works are few and far between in a waste of ephemeral productions. In the troubled and restless years of the peace, again, economic depression, political uncertainty, and the violent reaction of disillusionment, have combined to produce an atmosphere unfavourable to good and great literature.

In Poland, however, the great upheaval which gave the nation a new birth has acted as a powerful inspiration. Have not her writers seen, enacted before their eyes, the great historical drama for which generations of Poles had anxiously awaited? Among the phases of this drama, two may be singled out as having proved particularly productive of good literary work.

One of these was the Odyssey of thousands of Polish refugees, exiles, and prisoners of war who, driven far into the wastes of Russia and Siberia, became unwilling actors there in the great tragedy of revolution and civil war, and

spent years in wandering and strange adventure before winning their way back to Poland. The romance of these experiences has inspired the recent work of ANDREW STRUG, a distinguished novelist, now in the middle of his career. He is a son of the same Tatra mountain folk who gave Orkan to Polish literature, and have furnished many themes to Polish poetry, novel, and drama. Strug had won his spurs before the war with *The History of a Projectile*, a story of the hazardous life of revolutionary conspirators in Russian Poland in the early years of this century. He has now, in his *Tomb of the Unknown Warrior*, told a characteristic and pathetic story of an Austrian Pole detained as a prisoner of war in Russia. In another post-war book, *A Boy's Diary*, based on authentic facts, he has created a memorial to the heroism of thousands of half-grown boys who fought and fell for Poland, especially during the defence of Lwów (Lemberg) against the Ukrainians.

vii

The second element of the war which has stimulated Polish literature is the Polish military effort in its varied and often tragic phases.

On the eve of the war, in Austrian Poland, enthusiastic Polish youths were training for service under the Polish flag when occasion should arise. The Austrian Government favoured this movement for purposes of its own. When war came, Polish legions formed out of these enthusiasts took the field against Russia under the leadership of Joseph Piłsudski, who was to become the first chief of the re-born Polish state. The tragic history of his legions, disbanded in the later years of the war by Germany and Austria

because of their unflinching loyalty to Polish national ideals, has not yet found a narrator in the realm of fiction. Men of these legions, dispersed over southern Russia in the early days of the Russian revolution, joined those Russian Poles who were then spontaneously leaving the Russian army to form Polish units. Thus was seen, in 1918, the strange and romantic spectacle of soldiers from hostile armies drawing together under the Polish banner. This occurred in various and widely distant parts of Russia: on the Don and on the Volga, in the Ukraine and in the far North, in the West and in the East of immense Siberia. The one aim of these scattered volunteers was to fight their way through Bolshevik chaos home to Poland, and to serve its rising cause. Some of these knights-errant, after perilous adventures, were fortunate enough to reach their country, others perished in the welter of Russian horrors.

One noble youth with a gift for song and story survived the tortures of Bolshevik prisons long enough to take part in the defence of Poland in 1920 against Bolshevik invasion. He shortly afterwards died of consumption, leaving a solitary volume of short stories, which has already become a literary classic. His name is Eugene Małaczewski, and the book is called *The Horse on the Hill.* He came from that Ukrainian borderland of the old Polish state which has given many a great man to Poland. Having served in a Polish force which met with disaster in his native province, he won his way, after a spell of imprisonment in Moscow, into the ranks of Allied troops on the Bay of Murman. His posthumous stories mostly deal with the weird life of Polish soldiers among the snows of the Murman peninsula, in blockhouses under the Midnight Sun and the gleams of the Aurora Borealis. The heroine of his most successful and popular story is a young polar bear, called Barbara (like the late favourite of the Zoo). She

becomes the pet of the Polish soldiers on the Murman, and with them parades the streets of Warsaw after their return, only at last to be killed ingloriously by a peasant for the sake of her fur. Kipling's famous White Seal (Kotik) in the *Second Jungle Book* has found in her a worthy Polish counterpart.

In other stories he narrates poignant, thrilling, and pathetic episodes of Bolshevik persecution of Poles in Russia. One, describing the outrages of the Bolshevik populace against Polish soldiers in the Ukraine, is too steeped in horrors to be bearable by the average reader; yet the horrors—such as the wild cries of men flayed alive—are those of a dreadful reality, witnessed and simply recounted. Another story, of the last night before execution spent by two Polish brothers in a Moscow prison-cell, is full of that exaltation of martyrdom which, after the insurrection of 1831, had produced the greatest masterpieces of Polish poetry. The author, in his final story, which gives its title to the volume, touches on his own last adventures: a young Polish officer, pursuing the retreating Bolsheviks in 1920, finds the country seat of his parents in ruins; his sister has drowned herself to escape violence; an old tottering servant of the house survives to tell the tale, and among the victims of Bolshevik savagery there is The Horse on the Hill—a horse skinned alive and left behind, because lame. It is in this story that the author rises to the sublime Christian conception of love for his tormentors, and thereby reveals the depths of mystic religion which were characteristic of the last days of his brief life. With such a powerful source of inspiration he might, had he lived, have accomplished even greater things; as it is, the book of stories remains the one work by which he will be remembered. There is, besides it, only a slim booklet of exquisite verse, soldierly as well as religious, and a sheaf of translations

from such great modern Russian lyric singers as Alexander Blok. Beloved by the gods, the writer has died young. Beloved by his people, he will live for ever in their admiring memory as a flower blossoming among the ruins of a war-swept country.

The flower does not blossom alone. The same Southern region in which Małaczewski first joined the Polish colours has recently produced another vivid record of reborn Polish chivalry and of the horrors of the Russian revolution. It came from the pen of a woman—Sophia Kossak-Szczucka, in a book of memories called *Conflagration*. A powerful piece of contemporary history, the book is also a pathetic dirge on the work of centuries of Polish peaceful industry and culture in the South-Eastern border-lands, madly destroyed in three short years by peasant fury.

The ruin of the same ancient Polish culture in Poland's eastern provinces by the Bolshevik invasion of 1920, commemorated in one of Małaczewski's saddest stories, becomes, strangely enough, a source of hope and comfort in a book by Isabella Lutosławska-Wolikowska called *The Bolsheviks in a Polish Country House*: hope and comfort rise from destruction, because the authoress is able to relate from her own experience how the stateliness of an ancient Polish home and of an aged lady living in its walls overawed the savage invaders.

The book is another triumphant illustration of a truth which history repeatedly discloses: that the permanent spiritual values of civilization never ultimately go down before brute material force. It is with confidence in this truth that we may look forward to a time when Polish literature, turning away from the tragedy of war to a new life of peace, will seek strength where Mickiewicz found it after the national disaster of 1831. In his epic *Pan Tadeusz*

he deliberately revived, to comfort himself and others, the cherished memories of the idyllic home of childhood. Perhaps, guided by his light, future Polish writers will likewise find their inspiration in the immemorial record of Polish civilization, in the life-force of the old Polish home, the foundation of national character and vitality.

MODERN POLISH
DRAMATIC LITERATURE

I

MODERN POLISH COMEDY

i

Dramatic literature and the theatrical art were still undeveloped in Poland in the seventeenth century, in spite of a few isolated productions of genius, such as the classical tragedy, *The Dismissal of the Greek Envoys*, by the great Renaissance poet Kochanowski. It was only in the eighteenth century that both the drama and the stage acquired in Poland that permanent vitality which they have in the literary and social life of every civilized modern nation. Dramatic composition was stimulated by the example of the tragic, and especially of the comic, masterpieces of the French classics. The theatre was munificently endowed and generously protected by the last king of Poland. A master of satirical comedy arose in the person of Francis Zabłocki, whose wit even to-day has not lost its savour. The secure place which the theatre had won for itself in national life resisted even the shock of the partitions. The Thespian chariot of Poland's most memorable theatrical manager, Wojciech Bogusławski (who was also a popular playwright and skilful adapter of plays), repeatedly crossed the frontiers which divided Poland, and served as a practical protest in the field of art against the dismemberment of the nation.

It was after the partitions, under the abnormal conditions of political subjection, that Polish dramatic literature

was to produce its finest works, just as Polish poetry reached its zenith in calamity and exile.

The first to appear, even before the great poets and before any great tragic dramatist, was a great comic genius. If this is not purely a divine accident, we may perhaps in part account for it by the fact that the way had been specially prepared for high achievements in this branch of literature by the success of Polish comedy in the eighteenth century. Whatever be the reason, Count ALEXANDER FREDRO, who in his youth fought in the Polish army under Napoleon and produced some of his best work in the first thirty years of the nineteenth century, has ever since dominated the Polish comic stage. There has taken place in the new united Poland a revival of his fame exceeding that of any other Polish writer of the past. It has been manifested both in scholarly study of his plays, in his renewed popularity on the stage, and in the influence of his robust humour on living playwrights. And this in spite of the fact that Fredro is the Polish Molière indeed, not in his qualities alone, but also in his limitations. Vainly would we look among his works for the prose of witty drawing-room dialogues, for highly individualized characters or modern social problems: we move throughout to the orderly stroke of rhymed repartee, among general types of human nature, and the conventional situations of the older comedy. Fredro rarely departs from the classic models which still held their ground in the distant days when he began to write. He takes no part in the conflict between the Classical Conservatives and the Romantic Revolutionaries. He does not even study for himself the theory of his literary art; like Shakespeare, he follows the beaten track of the accepted dramatic form as he found it in his early days, and gives full expression to his genius within its limits. He never forsakes it, even many years later,

when it has been deserted by the younger generation of writers. Indeed, he remained always somewhat outside the inner circle of the literary profession; a country squire throughout his life, he was content to be avowedly a dilettante in letters, and never up to date in literary fashions.

What secret of vitality, then, do these old-fashioned comedies contain, that their popularity should never have flagged, and should now be so powerfully renewed? We can only reply that they constitute the most perfect humorous embodiment of Polish national character and national spirit. Descended from a noble stock which had given many gallant soldiers to Poland and produced a witty and observant writer in the sixteenth century, Fredro had inherited the best traditions of his class, including a genial sense of humour. The Napoleonic wars had brought him to Paris, and made him acquainted with the masterpieces of the French stage. Later, he sought relief from the tedious routine of a country gentleman's occupations in assiduous reading both of Molière and the Italian master Goldoni. An early inclination to dramatic composition and a natural gift for easy verse brought these collected experiences into play. After some unsuccessful attempts at Lwów, a comedy produced in Warsaw in 1821 won the favour of the public. This never afterwards deserted him, though he was frequently discouraged in later life by the indifference of theatrical managers and the unfriendliness of critics. It was during his earlier years that his production was most continuous: fourteen years saw twenty plays published without much concern for their production on the stage. Fredro was not one of those playwrights who haunt the green-room, instruct the actors, and study the tricks of the craft and the requirements of the stage. What power of stage effect he possessed was his by instinct. Sensational

allusions to current events and persons of note are foreign to his art, as they were, indeed, precluded by the severe Austrian censorship of the time. Nor did the author's strength reside in his plots, which, like Molière, he took at random from what he chanced to read, and dramatized in a slap-dash, haphazard way, without despising the most time-honoured and outworn devices. Similarly, his characters are often taken with equal light-heartedness and directness straight from his observation of the surrounding world, and infused by his genius with immortal life.

ii

However easy-going Fredro may appear to us in his technical work as a dramatist, and however careless in the choice and handling of his materials, he undoubtedly took his comic art very seriously, and was as deeply and subtly sensitive as most of the great humorists have been in the recesses of their souls. Among Fredro's comedies there is a one-act play which bears direct witness to this aspect of his nature: it is called *The Man-Haters and the Poet*, and exhibits the enthusiasm of youthful idealism pitted against the cynicism of worldly-wise disillusionment. It displays a warmth of sympathy for the poetical idealist which shows Fredro, for once, openly on the side of Romantic exaltation against the narrow wisdom of the Classicist.

Throughout Fredro's career as a comic writer, this serious and idealist element in his nature was never silent; the grave social aspects of the follies of his characters are nearly always emphasized with becoming severity and honest plainness; always tolerantly good-natured, and often youthfully light-hearted, he is never coldly and deliberately immoral.

It is still more significant, and pertinent to that stage of

his career which we have now reached, that he who often in his plays derided conceit and pompousness, was sufficiently conscious of his own literary and moral worth to resent intensely an unkind cut from a critic. It was after such an attack that he withdrew, for the remainder of his life, from all literary publicity, the works which he wrote in this seclusion appearing only after his death.

The circumstances of Fredro's retirement are characteristic of the political and social party strife which at that time prevailed in Poland, under the influence of revolutionary ideas from the West. This atmosphere of faction, due to the strong individualism of the Polish national character, has, indeed, always been a feature of Polish public life. In the new Polish Republic of to-day, it penetrates to the most unlikely, non-political departments of life. It happened to spread in Fredro's time, on the eve of the stormy year of 1848, into the seemingly sheltered sphere of comedy and its criticism. Fredro had, in most of his works, drawn his scenes from the life with which he was himself most familiar—that of the country gentry. A radical hot-head among the Romantic poets, Goszczyński, saw fit to gird at these 'genteel' comedies, in which he detected a number of moral and literary defects. We have Fredro's own declaration that his subsequent silence was not due to this attack; but probably this is only true in the sense in which the 'savage and tartarly' article in the *Quarterly* did not kill John Keats—not, that is, actually and directly. It is certain that when nobody, on the other side, took up the cudgels on behalf of Fredro, the great comic dramatist withdrew in resentment, like Achilles into his tent, and no new work of his was seen for many years in print or on the stage. He continued to write; but what he produced was read by his family and nearest friends alone, then hidden away, only to see the light forty years later, after his death.

His manner as a writer did not much change after the great crisis, except in these respects: he had recourse to prose more frequently than hitherto, having in the past used verse almost exclusively; contemporary political and social developments were more openly alluded to, now that Galicia enjoyed home rule, than had been possible under the reactionary Austrian censorship; finally Fredro, not unlike Shakespeare, became with growing age more and more careless of theatrical effect and of the structure of his plays, and increasingly absorbed in psychological analysis and moral reflection. He also wrote occasional poems and ballads, some serious and even romantic, some humorous and even obscene; he composed his Memoirs in the intentionally disorderly manner of the old humorist Lawrence Sterne, and called them *Topsy-Turvy Talk*, beginning with his campaigns under Napoleon.

But his chief work continued to be done in the sphere of Comedy. Much of it has proved too futile in its matter and workmanship to last, but there remains a considerable series of outstanding works, unequalled in the Polish tongue; and characters and quotations from them are as familiar in Poland as figures and sayings from Dickens are in England.

iii

Fredro's principal productions may be surveyed in three groups: farces, comedies of manner of the traditional sort, and comedies peculiarly representative of Polish life. Of these, the first are his slightest work, the second the most typical of his manner, the third his highest and most permanent achievements.

The farces, which without much care for plot or character-drawing are intended to be frankly amusing, show Fredro's

full possession of that most indispensable quality of a writer of comedy—the *vis comica* or power to make us laugh. His improbabilities and exaggerations carry all irresistibly before them, even if only for the 'two hours' traffic of the stage'. One of the most popular among them, *Ladies and Hussars*, has a subject somewhat like Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost*, the invasion of a stronghold of confirmed bachelors by a group of women, and the capitulation of the diehards. In an early one-act play, *Grumbling and Contradiction*, Fredro succeeds in spinning a series of brilliant scenes out of a very simple situation between a girl and her two guardians, a pair of brothers, who are inveterate grumblers and always quarrelling; they are induced by the girl's lover to give their consent to the marriage, because each is led to believe that by so doing he will spite the other. This little masterpiece is a *tour de force* in the almost infinite variety which it extracts from a quite primitive comic theme, such as might well soon weary an audience, presented, as it is, in exactly the same shape by two characters who are almost continually on the stage.

Fredro's full-dress comedies have, of course, many features in common with the type of comedy which has been established in Europe since Molière, although the Polish character betrays itself at every turn, especially in the impulsive temper of his personages.

One of the best of the comedies, which are more international in type and less distinctly Polish in their peculiarities, is *Husband and Wife*. It has for its subject the well-worn theme of husband, wife, and lover. A touch of originality is added by the appearance of a fourth figure—a scheming little minx of a parlour-maid, to whom both the men in the play make love. There is thus plenty to forget and forgive all round, and all ends in peace and concord. The play consists of conversation between only four persons;

that the author can carry his audience through three acts of this without a dull moment is a testimony to his skill. His delicacy of expression and charming lightness help the play over many an ambiguous and daring situation, and altogether the comedy, his one excursion into frivolity, shows his mastery of witty dialogue at its highest. His other comedies have other excellences, but none approaches this play in the perfection of conversation, wrought in a gossamer-like verse.

Another comedy of human, and not specifically Polish, interest is more solid in its texture. *Mr. Moneyful*, the hero after whom the play is named, is a parvenu of the type whose social ambitions assailed the drawing-rooms and courts of Europe when the speculations and contracts of the Napoleonic wars had made the fortunes of a new class. Mr. Moneyful, without refinement or taste, possesses all that wealth can buy ; he boasts of his riches in season and out of season, and wants to marry his daughter to an aristocrat. In him the author has standardized for Polish literature the type of the *nouveau riche*. With the Europe of to-day as full of men of this class as it was a hundred years ago, when the play was first produced, Fredro's hero has taken a new lease of vigorous life; and a great comic actor, M. Frenkel, impersonates him to perfection.

Another venerable type, the miser, is presented by Fredro in a comedy which also belongs to his recognized masterpieces, *The Life Interest*. The usurer, Patch, who is its central figure, has become as classic a character on the Polish stage as Molière's *Avare* on the French.

To these two types from Fredro's comedies—the upstart and the usurer—we may add a third, who completes the group of his best individual characters. It is that of *Mr. Joviality*, who gives its title to another popular comedy. This hero—a part also excellently acted by Frenkel—is one

of those indomitably talkative and genial old gentlemen who abounded in the easy-going, convivial Poland of former times, and are not uncommon in London clubs to-day, and, in fact, in all times and climes. He is as ready with proverbs as Cervantes' Sancho Panza or Dickens's Sam Weller, and he is equally full of stories which he insists on perpetually repeating to unwilling hearers.

As the hero of this comedy is such an inexhaustible talker, it is only natural that it should have given currency to more sayings than almost any other work by Fredro. But one of his plays has surpassed it in that special form of success, *The Mania for Things Foreign*. It is the ridiculous character in this comedy of a fanatical admirer of all foreign things, and particularly of everything English, which has perhaps contributed most liberally to Poland's treasury of familiar quotations; the joke consisting generally in applying foreign terminology to things which are common to all countries and found at home as elsewhere (as in the exclamation: 'Let 's go for a drive, for an English mile or so!').

iv

The Mania for Things Foreign follows the tradition of the best eighteenth-century Polish satire and comedy in ridiculing a weakness which the Poles share with some of their Slavonic brethren, and particularly with the Russians: the uncritical admiration and imitation of foreign fashions, views, and institutions. This comedy, accordingly, has brought us by its national subject-matter to the third and highest sphere of Fredro's art. It takes its place among those theatrical masterpieces which have a distinctly Polish colouring, and while following Fredro's general practice of introducing comic characters of a universal and traditional type, yet invest them with peculiarities of conduct, habit,

and speech only to be met with on Polish soil. It is among these, the most distinctly national comedies of Fredro, the comedies of Polish manners, that we find his greatest contributions to the classics of Polish literature, his two supreme works, *The Revenge* and *Girlish Vows*.

The Revenge turns on a quarrel between two elderly country neighbours in some undefined period of the past—probably the eighteenth century—over the boundary of their estates. The author holds up to ridicule the obstinate mania for litigation, common among the old Polish gentry; but he does justice to their qualities of piety, hospitality, and chivalrous honour. In one of the most amusing characters of the comedy the features of the braggart soldier of the classic type are significantly united with those of an apish imitator of foreign fashions. By its half-critical, half-admiring attitude towards the national tradition, this masterpiece of Polish comedy reminds us of its predecessor *The Old Polish Way* ('Sarmatyzm'), by the greatest of Poland's comic writers in the eighteenth century, Francis Zabłocki.

Fredro's other recognized masterpiece, placed higher by some of his admirers than *The Revenge*, is *Girlish Vows*, or *The Magnetism of the Heart*. The theme of *Love's Labour's Lost* is reversed here: the vows of two girls to remain inexorable are overcome by the device of one of the two lovers, light-hearted, but good-natured and thoroughly lovable. Of the two heroines, the one who shows the more initiative and resolution reminds us of Shakespeare's Beatrice by her roguish wit and ready repartee; and like Beatrice she succumbs at last. Simple and unsophisticated in its plot, the play is less distinctly national in colouring than *The Revenge*, but the essential traits of the characters are typically Polish—especially their impulsiveness and generosity of heart. The glowing lyrics of the lovers'

speeches stand as high in the range of Fredro's work as the poetry of Shakespeare in *Twelfth Night*, that sunniest production of his comic Muse.

V

Among the later comedies, written by Fredro after a pause of thirteen years, and never printed in his lifetime, one in particular deserves to be singled out for its popularity. *A Great Man for Little Affairs* is again the caricature of a type not uncommon in all ages and societies: the busybody who thinks himself the centre and mainspring of the affairs of every one about him, while in fact he is a negligible quantity in their eyes, and events take their course uninfluenced by his deep designs. Fredro was here glancing, with the ripe judgement of old age, at the self-importance of Austro-Polish politicians in self-governing Galicia. Political satire on a larger scale, exposing all the typical faults of Polish public life, was attempted by the author in this later period in a work which is unique among his comedies, in that it takes the form of an allegorical dramatic fable and the characters are all animals, as in Edmond Rostand's once-famous *Chantecler*. *The Watch Dog*, as it is called, is perhaps more wise and morally sound in its speeches than entertaining in its plot; the verse has all the quality of the poet's highest art, but the difficulty of producing such a play has made it much less known than his other works.

Of the remaining sixteen comedies of the later period many are, in their peculiar excellence, quite equal to some of the earlier plays. *Mr. Benet*, a farce written in admirable, ringing verse, shows undiminished spirit. In another one-act farce, *The Two Scars*, the author, by a *tour de force* recalling his previous one-act masterpiece, *Grumbling and*

Contradiction, makes capital comedy out of the world-old theme of mistaken identity due to close resemblance. A third one-act play, *The Candle's Out,* has had a marked and unvarying success on the stage, which is seldom attained by the later and generally less vivid work of even popular dramatists. The scene of a fourth one-act farce, *On the Cracow-Vienna Line,* more modern in character than the majority of Fredro's plays, is laid in a railway waiting-room; and the subject—the reconciliation of a divorced couple—shows both the conservatism of old age and the kindliness peculiar to the author at every stage of his long life.

Among the longer comedies of this period, *Worthy of Pity* portrays an egoist who deceives and exploits his fellow men by playing the part of a persecuted victim. The character, subtly drawn, is considerably more complex in its structure than the standard types of the older comedy, and it shows even the art of Fredro tending, in its later phase, towards the modern form of comedy, which deals in individual characters rather than general types.

Fredro did not attain in old age the rounded and complete perfection displayed by his greatest works. But the individual qualities of his genius shine in each with unabated brilliancy, and we can scarcely speak of a twilight of his talent. He may, no doubt, like all the older comic poets, seem wanting in subtlety to a public intellectually more refined. But the zest and flow of his scenes, their abundant merriment, the soundness of his judgement on the fundamental aspects of human nature, finally his sterling Polish diction and golden verse, will appeal to his countrymen as long as Plautus and Molière are accounted masters by the world at large. The hold which he retains on his country has recently been proved afresh. Fredro was made the subject, during the war, of a profound and scholarly essay by one of Poland's foremost literary historians (Professor I.

Chrzanowski), and one of the first literary critics of our generation, Adam Grzymała-Siedlecki, has shown his appreciation of Fredro in a penetrating volume of studies, which places the national perfection of his humour in the fullest light. What is more, the critic himself has followed in the steps of Fredro, in the vigorous style and genial fun of his comedy, *The Lady Lodger*, which has shed gaiety on the painful problem of the housing shortage and other economic miseries of post-war life in Poland.

vi

Polish comedy has produced, since Fredro, no writer of equal greatness, and has turned to him for inspiration in the dreariness of recent days. But this does not mean that all the lesser writers of comedy of Fredro's own time and later generations were under his spell, or that there have been no new departures from the old-fashioned manner of his comedy. Even in his lifetime his popularity was shared by Joseph Korzeniowski, a widely-read novelist of manners, and an equally successful writer of modern social comedy. Comedy was only one of the many domains of drama in which he attained public favour. His theatrical masterpiece, in fact, still frequently performed on the amateur stage, is dramatized folk-lore; it is called *The Carpathian Mountaineers*, and is full of the picturesque mode of life and dress and the passionate temperament of those hardy mountain dwellers. Among his comedies from the more conventional town life around him, two stand out in the general estimation. One of these, *The Jews*, is directed against the decay of the old Polish aristocracy, and represents a Jewish usurer as the moral superior of the degenerate men of this class. In another and more interesting comedy called *Married Woman and Widow*, a girl

plays the part of an intriguing married woman in order to induce her shy lover to declare himself. This was, in those days, a boldly original theme for a play; and the comedy is, indeed, in its way epoch-making, as marking the transition from the classic comedy of standardized types to the modern comedy of individual characters. This momentous change, which came over all European comedy, has dominated further development, and in this sense Korzeniowski is more of a herald of its essential tendencies than Fredro.

But his fame is incomparably less. In another comedy, written in verse, and entitled *Fortune or Name*, he shows a girl preferring a poor artist to rich and noble suitors—a worthy moral, but not a strikingly effective subject for comedy. In a play much admired and frequently imitated, *Moustache or Wig*, he works once more that mine of fun exploited by the older Polish comedy—the conflict of the eighteenth century between Polish tradition and new French fashions. But all these once popular plays, like most of the author's novels, are now consigned to the dust of oblivion, and chiefly for the reason that he compares with Fredro as Ben Jonson does with Shakespeare: like Ben, he achieved success through patient toil, struggling with difficulties and obstacles, and his works bear all too distinctly the marks of labour and lack the spontaneity of creative genius. Similarly, his honest morality seems dry and over-practical, nay, sometimes repugnantly opportunist, as compared with the easy-going and light-hearted, but essentially sound and unerring, moral sense of Fredro.

vii

Of other writers of comedy, some of them highly popular in their day, few have kept their hold on the stage, and still fewer occupy a place of importance in literary records.

European comedy, meanwhile, was drifting far from the standard set by Molière towards the comedy of social problem popularized by Augier and Sardou, and, above all, by Dumas *fils*, who in turn gave such a powerful stimulus to the social drama of Ibsen. It is a significant little irony that even within the Fredro family the current of tradition changed, and Fredro's own son, who wrote comedies which had some vogue in their day, followed the newer models. Other writers of comedy of that generation were either too full of social and moral zeal to be enjoyable to-day (like NARZYMSKI), or produced work too slight and farcical to attain a more than transitory favour (like LUBOWSKI). One of them, JOSEPH BLIZIŃSKI, rises to something like the height of Fredro's good-natured humour and masterly diction; like him, he moves in his plays chiefly among country gentlemen; but this narrowness of sympathy is more unpleasantly marked than in Fredro, and the new social problems which, in accordance with the fashion of the time, he thinks it necessary to introduce, do not harmonize with the old-world, thorough-going optimism of his temperament.

Another playwright, great enough to be mentioned here, MICHAEL BAŁUCKI, brilliantly gifted for satirical observation, made it his life's task to ridicule all forms of obscurantism and want of public spirit displayed in the new self-governing Austrian Poland of his day. He may justly be remembered as the Aristophanes of Galicia; his comedies from Galician municipal life have in them stores of fun general enough in application, and human enough in idea, to retain even now some savour; and his relentless exposure of petty personal ambitions in the provincial politics of his day retains its moral value for the larger scene of the new Polish state to-day. But much of his work is professedly mere farce rather than high comedy, reckless and hasty

in its composition and slangy in its style; these characteristics would seem to doom it to oblivion in the near future, when the separate existence and local affairs of Austrian Galicia will have been completely forgotten among the greater problems of the new, united Poland.

It is significant that many Polish writers of comedy about the end of the last century, after making a promising beginning on the comic stage, turned to the more ambitious field of drama (where they mostly failed lamentably). This was partly due to the fascination of the gloomy Scandinavian masters, Ibsen, Björnson, Strindberg, and Sven Lange; and partly to a subconscious sense of the approach of momentous and dramatic events in the national life. The great historical moment, which was indeed coming, found its dramatic herald in Wyspiański; but Polish comedy has not found another Fredro. And after the war, with new material for satire abundantly present in the strange world around us, Polish comedy is turning towards old Fredro again for guidance and inspiration. We must therefore expect some time to elapse before the advent of a new and original genius who can rival the sway which Fredro has so far indisputably exercised over the comic stage of Poland.

II

MODERN POLISH DRAMA

i

Modern Polish comedy rose, in the work of Fredro, to a height never attained before and not equalled since. The excellences of his work are of a kind that renders them independent of passing literary theories and fashions. They are the virtues of comedy at its best, both as a dramatic entertainment and as a distinct type of literary production.

No such absolute perfection can be said to have been reached by Polish serious drama in the works of any of its masters. Efforts in this domain have been more numerous and more varied, ambitions higher and more intense than in the field of comedy. But most of the efforts are too closely connected with the literary tendencies of a particular group and period to produce anything of lasting value, and high ambitions rarely go together with exceptional creative gifts. The long array of nineteenth-century dramatists shows some figures respectable enough as writers, but devoid of dramatic power, some popular enough in their day on the stage, but ephemeral in their literary quality. And one feature is present almost throughout—a strange unfamiliarity with the elements of stage-craft. This is partly to be ascribed to the abnormal political condition of Poland, which made constant contact with the theatre impossible for many writers, but partly also to the national tradition of an agricultural country, whose educated class

were country gentlemen living in scattered manors and rarely gathering in towns. The absence of a highly developed town civilization, such as France has had ever since the late Middle Ages and Poland lost before their close, accounts, perhaps more completely than any other circumstance, for the fundamental weakness of Polish drama.

Finally, one more factor must be considered. The moments of high dramatic emotion in nineteenth-century Polish life, such as may inspire a playwright, have in general been associated with the dramatic fate and history of the nation itself; and events in which a community as a whole is the agent or the sufferer hardly lend themselves to effective treatment in dramatic form. Their magnitude makes them rather fit for epic poetry or for prose, the strength of the collective feeling accompanying them induces lyrical eloquence rather than dramatic restraint. Hence it happens that much of the best dramatic work of Poland in the nineteenth century, strongly national as it necessarily is, shows epic rather than dramatic structure, and is all of it highly lyrical in expression. The Polish drama of a hundred years culminates in two poets—Słowacki at the beginning and Wyspiański at the end of the era—and it is a disputed point of criticism whether both are not lofty singers rather than great dramatists. At any rate, the irresistible appeal which their works make, even on the stage, is the musical and imaginative appeal of splendid verse, addressed to emotions wherein the individual soul is absorbed and effaced, rather than the personal and human interest of pity and terror. And where that is stirred by spectacles of personal conflicts, trials, and sufferings, the thought of the great background of national history again and again diverts the poet from the portrayal of his individual figures, and the voices of the weavers are drowned in the roar of the great loom of Time.

ii

The above description certainly applies to most of the mature work of JULIUS SŁOWACKI, and gives the clue both to his grandeur as a poetic prophet and to his deficiencies as a theatrical writer. It was, indeed, a purely personal drama, though in political guise, which he had in his mind's eye when he wrote a tragedy on *Queen Mary Stuart*; but the childish characterization and primitive dramatic technique of this beautiful, inspired, and promising, but very youthful attempt absolve us from dwelling on it. Again, when in his later years, he turned to another foreign theme and wrote a tragedy on the Shelleyan subject of *Beatrix Cenci*, he had fallen too much under the spell of the highly-coloured and rhetorical style of Victor Hugo. Under that author's influence he strives to pile up horrors and to rack the nerves too much for high and pure artistic effect. Of the works produced in the heyday of Słowacki's dramatic genius, between his early inexperience and later exaggeration, there is one only which can be said to attain anything like unmixed dramatic perfection, and which does so largely in consequence of the utter dissociation of a personal and domestic theme from the broader aspects of national history. This is the tragedy of *Mazeppa*, recognized by the verdict of generations of the Polish public as supreme in dramatic excellence among the productions of Słowacki, quite as *Macbeth* stands in this particular respect supreme among those of Shakespeare. *Mazeppa* is a tragedy of the causeless but unappeasable jealousy of a young wife's old husband, and of the unhappy love of stepmother and stepson. Although the scene is laid in the Polish seventeenth century and a king is an important character in the story, *Mazeppa* is as free from emphasis on political events as *Othello* from association with the wars

and policy of the Venetian republic; in this and other points it resembles *Othello* by its severe artistic economy, directed wholly and exclusively to dramatic effect. There is the same paucity of characters, and these are placed in the same strong relief; the real innocence of the chief actors and victims is as complete, and human characters, seemingly sane and free, are compelled to their actions by the fascination of the same relentless fate. There is in both an overpowering pathos in the ruin of noble creatures trapped by circumstance; and the figure of the king in *Mazeppa*, though less villainous than that of Iago, exhibits the same mixture of normal human motives with the inexplicable promptings of evil.

In his later years, the poet repeated the theme of an old husband's jealousy in another powerful play, *Horsztyński*, where its pathos is heightened by the old man's blindness. But by this time his interest had become so absorbed by the great events of national history, that in this second treatment the personal drama is intertwined with an affair of State—the high treason of one of Poland's great nobles at the time of the partitions. The blending of a private theme with public history is perhaps more successful in this than in any other drama by Słowacki. Altogether, the play is one of his grandest conceptions, and it is much to be regretted that it remained unfinished. It is in prose, and therefore more natural in its dramatic realism, but by no means devoid of both loftiness of idea and tender poetic charm. Its only blemish lies in some rhetorical conceits and melodramatic effects after the manner of Victor Hugo.

iii

Next in popularity on the stage to *Mazeppa* there stand two poetic plays by Słowacki, which do not share its austerity of dramatic outline and economy of speech, but,

on the contrary, abound in lyric ornament, variety of episode, complication of dramatic action, intricacy of characters, and wealth of imaginative detail. They are the two which were completed of a series of six, planned to illustrate the legendary history of earliest Poland. The conception was suggested by Shakespeare's plays from ancient British history and fable—*King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Cymbeline*; and the two tragedies of Słowacki, named after their heroines, are almost overloaded with Shakespearian detail, which sometimes, however magnificently poetic its Polish garb, calls forth a smile of recognition from the lover of Shakespeare. The first play, *Balladina*, the tragedy of a criminal and ambitious Queen, is essentially a Polish *Macbeth*; the second, *Lilla Veneda*, the tragedy of the devoted daughter of an unhappy deposed old king, may be called a Polish *King Lear*. But besides fundamental resemblances to these two great Shakespearian models, both dramas are full of echoes from the fantastic world of the *Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*. There is in one of them a fairy queen, like Shakespeare's Titania, haunting the shores of a romantic lake, attended by twin elfin spirits like Puck or Ariel, and falling in love with a 'hempen homespun', a coarse and ordinary mortal, like the Shakespearian Bottom. The tragedy of *Balladina*, with its heroine modelled both on Lady Macbeth and on Regan and Goneril, is dominated by personal passions and has little political background; it is therefore nearer in dramatic force to *Mazeppa*, and the part of its heroine is as much a goal for the ambition of the tragic actresses of Poland as that of Lady Macbeth herself. The second play, *Lilla Veneda*, with a heroine who is a worthy sister of Shakespeare's Cordelia, is less of a personal drama: it is full of the catastrophe of a nation conquered by invaders; the old unfortunate king is at the same time a harper, like the

nebulous figures of the old Celtic kings in Ossianic poems, and the fate of the falling nation is bound up mystically with the harp played by the king. With this national theme and its poetic symbolism, lyrical emotion intrudes irresistibly into the dramatic structure, and the poet's melodies attain their greatest power in the declamations of the chorus. These explain the allegory and convey to the audience that the wonder-working harp is the life-giving poetry itself of enslaved Poland, the poetry of Słowacki and his two great brethren Mickiewicz and Krasiński.

iv

If Słowacki was under the spell of Shakespeare in his earlier poetic plays, he came, in his later work, under the no less potent spell of another great magician of the drama—the Spaniard Calderon. It was the growing religious mysticism which marked the later days of all the great Polish Romantic poets that brought Słowacki under the influence of this greatest worshipper of Spain's grand Catholic tradition and led him to rival the chivalrous exaltation and torrential flow of the Spaniard's four-stressed verse. The Polish poet translated, or rather paraphrased with noble inspiration, one of Calderon's masterpieces, the tragedy of *The Constant Prince*, who returns to die in Moorish captivity, as Regulus returned to Carthage, because he had pledged his word to do so. Henceforth, the diction of Słowacki's plays framed itself in the rushing, unceasing flow of Calderon's trochaics, and mystic raptures and miraculous events were freely interspersed among authentic facts in dramas taken from eighteenth-century Polish history. The armed rising against Russia which preceded the first partition—the heroic partisan warfare of the 'Confederates of Bar'—became the poet's favourite subject

both for drama and epic; these men had defended the Roman Catholicism of their country against invaders of another faith, and the poet, a democratic Radical himself, found their simple piety one of the chief attractions of their exploits. Here was indeed a theme to call forth all his new-found spiritual enthusiasm, and two of his verse plays are aglow with it. One has for its hero *Father Mark*, the great preacher of the Polish Confederate Army: his sermons are rendered in magnificent cascades of verse, and miracles attest the spiritual strength of his cause. In a second, *The Silver Dream of Salomea*, it is the heroine, an exalted visionary and seer, who becomes the vessel, or rather the lyre, of the poet's own mystic ecstasy. The drama centres round the terrible massacre of Polish gentry by Ukrainian peasants shortly before the first partition, and, as is not infrequent with Słowacki's plays, it is steeped in the horrors of its theme; but the stream of his trochaic cadences carries even physical horrors into a realm of beauty, and the noble figure of the Ukrainian Cossack, Sava, who faithfully stands by the old Polish civilization of his country, fascinates by its sublime idealism.

For a third time Słowacki drew from this favourite sphere a play, *The Golden Skull*, which has unfortunately survived only in fragments. It charms us by the central figure of a Polish knight, without fear and without reproach, by Christmas scenes from a devout old Polish home, and by a delightfully naïve Christmas carol in old-fashioned, half-Latin rhymes. Here again, in all likelihood, as in *Lilla Veneda* among the plays from pre-historic Poland, it is the poet's ever-throbbing lyrical vein which would have predominated, had the play been finished, rather than that of dramatic movement.

The excellences of a fourth play from the same sphere—happily complete—are again emphatically of a lyrical order.

The *New Deianeira*, or *The Incorrigible Ones*, has held many a Polish audience spellbound, as Edmond Rostand's poetic play *Les Romanesques* has more recently enchanted Western hearers. And the charm is of a similar nature: it is breathed by two most poetical, though slightly ironic characters—Count Phantasus and Lady Idalia—who weave the gossamer of their imagination round melancholy dreams and delicate tendernesses. To see them impersonated by an actor and an actress endowed with the subtle spirit of poetry is to fall in love for ever with these two embodiments of Romantic sentiment.

V

Poetic acting also brings out the theatrical possibilities of an earlier verse drama by Słowacki, mention of which has been deferred to the last because its literary character places it outside the roll of his other masterpieces. This is *Cordian*, announced as the first of a cycle of three plays, and written by Słowacki in jealous emulation of *The Feast of the Ancestors*, the mystical and patriotic poem of the greater Mickiewicz. Słowacki shows his superior capacity for true drama by choosing for the central theme of his play, not as Mickiewicz did, a symbolic popular ceremony, but a very real political conspiracy of 1829. The work is, however, less a dramatic structure than the story, in the form of a string of changing scenes, of the hero's psychological evolution. It carries us with this Byronic youth first abroad, to Italy and London and the summit of Mont Blanc; it then shows him, awakened to a sense of his life's mission, organizing a conspiracy against the Tsar, who is to be crowned King of Poland in Warsaw; and finally shrinking from crime and breaking down on the very threshold of the deed. We are left in uncertainty whether this Polish Hamlet dies or is reprieved; and what we have

are isolated scenes, many of them masterly in the sword-play of pointed dialogue, in the fire of powerful speeches, and in the rendering of the impulses and confusion of blindly-moving crowds.

Here once more, as in so many other dramatic works of Słowacki, poetic excellence and powerful effect are focused in jewels of lyrical expression, such as the short and passionate song of a nameless conspirator whose allusive promptings stir the crowd on coronation day. Similar gems add lustre to many of the dramatic fragments which in profusion strew the field of his poetic work, and are too numerous and disjointed to be recorded systematically by any but a devoted bibliographer. Some of these unfinished or lost dramas, like two of the finished masterpieces, were drawn from early Polish legend; one had the Scottish hero *William Wallace* for its subject; another, the two ancient kings of Sparta, *Agis and Agesilaos*. In most of them, even in one taken from Polish legend (*Krakus*), the influence of Shakespeare has been traced: the king of dramatists never ceased to exercise his fascination over the Prince of the Polish Stage, although this fascination became latent in the period of Słowacki's mystic fervour.

vi

We have beheld in Słowacki something akin to the meteoric figure of Shakespeare's great predecessor Christopher Marlowe: a dramatic poet of Titanic passion and force, but having in him a source of lyrical melody which pours its stream of music through nearly all his dramatic fabric. We have also seen how the power of national feeling, which throughout his career preys on his very being like a fever, struggles victoriously for the mastery with the born dramatist's interest in individual character and personal story.

There is the same lyrical inspiration, the same predominance of national themes, in the dramas of STANILAS WYSPIAŃSKI, the poet in whom, on the eve of the Great War, a new generation of Poles found a second Słowacki. His paintings, which are no less justly famous than his poetry, reveal a genius for dramatic construction and a dramatist's grip of essentials. Dramatic indeed are the figures wrought by this modern Michael Angelo in the stained-glass windows of some churches at Cracow: old Polish kings and heroes sleeping in majesty or resting from deeds of valour, medieval saints in the fervour of mystic love or the cold splendour of austerity, Poland herself in the purple pride of her storied past.

He found in the theatre a permanent sphere for his energies of word and verse because, unlike most Polish writers, he became associated by ties of lifelong intimacy with the Cracow stage, then in a period of noble effort and high achievement. This connexion led him to devote the treasures of his poetic genius to the composition of verse plays, and these he staged himself, putting all a painter's creative power into the scenes he planned, constructed, and disposed.

vii

If a Pole is asked which is the greatest of Wyspiański's great poetic dramas, there can be only one answer. It is *The Wedding*, which was acted at Cracow Theatre for the first time on March 16, 1901, and held its audience in spell-bound silence a long while after its conclusion. Since then it has ranked in Polish opinion with the great dramatic poem which expresses the soul of early nineteenth-century Poland—Mickiewicz's *The Feast of the Ancestors*—and it will retain that place in Polish literary history, whatever changes may come in poetical and dramatic fashions.

The fabric of this strange play, like that of Mickiewicz's *Ancestors*, is one half of it reality—the actual reality of the poet's immediate personal surroundings and acquaintances—and one half phantasy—ghosts and spectres of Poland's historic past. And there is another resemblance to Mickiewicz's *Ancestors*: there, a peasant custom is the symbolic subject; here, not only is a peasant home the scene, and a wedding ceremony the occasion, but the characters emerge, always two at a time, from among the dancers in an adjoining room, in imitation of ancient popular pageantry; for in the old Christmas interludes, satirical types of various classes of society appeared by two and two at the manger of the infant Christ, and amused the public by their dialogues.

Of the personages of Wyspiański's drama many are the life-like portraits of persons who still survive. One of them, alive to-day and very popular in Poland, a painter friend of the author's, had startled people of his class by marrying a peasant girl and settling in a country cottage in her native village near Cracow. The example had tempted another man of the same group, a poet, to do the like, and it is at this second unconventional wedding that the strange things set forth in the play are supposed to happen. Writers, journalists, artists, and town ladies meet and talk with peasant men and women. This turns their minds to thoughts of the national unity of Poland in the past and its degradation in the present, of the great tasks of the future, in which only through democracy and union can the nation hope to live and regain its freedom. The dreariness and despondency of Poland's subject and divided existence are contrasted with its noble aims and solid strength in the past, and visions of this earlier glory take the form of ghosts who appear to individual guests and mock their littleness. A jester of the Renaissance pours his scorn on the journalist of to-day, an armed knight of

the fifteenth century brings out the weakness of a puny modern poet. Finally, out of all this ferment of reflection the idea emerges that the new spirit of unity created by this wedding between townspeople and peasants should be set to work in a joint armed rising to set Poland free. This thought is ushered in by another ghost—the Ukrainian singer and harper of the eighteenth century, the half-legendary Wernyhora, who foretold both the fall and the resurrection of Poland. The host of the house—the painter who has lived for long among the peasants—is to take the lead, the villagers of the neighbourhood are to be called together and to arm themselves with scythes, as their forefathers did when, over a hundred years before, they gathered from the same villages round the last defender of free Poland, Kościuszko. They present themselves, full of simple resolution and unguided strength. But the appointed leader fails of his purpose in dreamy Hamlet-like irresolution, and the peasant boy sent out by him loses the golden horn whose blast was to be the signal for the great enterprise. The assembled people sink into a sleepy indifference, and move in drowsy wedding dance to the sound of a straw fiddle played by a man of straw—the winter covering of a rose-bush, here made a living figure, and serving as a symbol of the dullness and futility of the ordinary day by day existence.

No literary work, in fact no appeal in any form in modern Poland, and no event in national life since the insurrection of 1863, has shaken the consciousness of the nation so strongly as did Wyspiański's *Wedding*. The gloomy pessimism of its ending was a powerful and prophetic reminder that a coming crisis—Poland's opportunity for another struggle to free herself—would find the nation lacking the union needed for effective action: the educated class wanting in decision to direct and act; the peasants, the backbone of

the nation, blind and leaderless, though powerful and willing.

viii

There would have been nothing beyond unnerving despair in the message of *The Wedding* if it had stood alone. But it did not. In another play called *Deliverance* the poet spoke in ringing tones of the one goal to be firmly kept in view, and to be pursued with an unflinching sense of reality. For the first time in modern Polish poetry he emphasized the vital necessity of a real new Polish State, and the inadequacy of a shadowy abstraction of national existence without political independence, and of the futile part of a martyr among nations. This play did more than any political manifesto to crystallize the aims of Poland's youth as the fateful hour drew near of the world conflict. Like *The Wedding*, but in a different manner, the play is connected with Mickiewicz's fantastic drama, *The Ancestors*: it was inspired by a production of Mickiewicz's play which Wyspiański himself had staged at Cracow; the distinguished Polish actor who had played the hero is himself the hero of the new play; and the actual stage of the Cracow theatre is the scene of the first act. All the greater must appear the boldness of the new poet who, linking up his drama with Mickiewicz's great work, deliberately turns against Mickiewicz himself; the hero faces the personified statue of Mickiewicz, like Don Juan the statue of the Commodore, but not to yield to its power. His rebellious shout: 'Away, Poetry! Thou art a Tyrant!' is the cry of a new, active spirit, victorious over the passiveness of the Poles, who had been induced by their great Romantic poetry to acquiesce in the pathos and beauty of political martyrdom. Other portions of the play, with their stirring and hopeful call to action, are as pitiless in their dissection of national faults

as this daring criticism of Poland's romantic poetry. The hero, conversing with a chorus of maskers, relentlessly reveals the affectations and the lack of character, the class selfishness and the personal egoism, the shallowness and uncritical imitation which rendered ineffectual so much of Polish public life, defects some of which characterize the Polish body-politic of to-day.

Wyspiański, steeped in history from his boyhood among the medieval churches and Renaissance palaces of the old town of Cracow, steeped in history again when he visited the great cathedrals and ancient castles of northern France, had the strongest sense of the service which national tradition renders to the vitality of the people. At the end of the play just described, its hero leads his followers down to the tombs of Poland's kings under the cathedral on the Castle Hill of Cracow—like Goethe's Faust descending, at mystic bidding, to seek The Mothers, the primeval elements of things. The cathedral and the old royal castle of Cracow, of which the restoration was begun in Wyspiański's life-time, often occupied his imagination as embodiments of the thousand years of Poland's national life. He contributed a grandiose design of his own to the manifold plans for the restoration of the castle. In another play, overbrimming with imaginative symbolism, he associated, in historical meaning and dignity, the Polish castle with the *Acropolis* of Athens, and brought to life the statues on its tombs and the very figures on its tapestries. In a dramatic fragment recovered from his posthumous papers and called *The Ruin*, he imagines himself as a solitary dweller among the crumbling walls of the still unrestored castle, drawing life and youthful vigour from contact with its great memories.

ix

In a wider sense, Wyspiański descended more than once into the caverns of the past for the buried treasure of national life-force. The heroine of a play called *The Legend* is an early princess of Poland named Wanda, who, according to tradition, drowned herself to escape a German marriage, and whom Polish poets for more than a hundred years have never ceased to celebrate. In another play, *Boleslas the Bold*, the hero is a historical eleventh-century king, who killed an overbearing Bishop, as Henry II killed Thomas à Becket. The wild and reckless personality of the king, in the foreground throughout, embodies the vitality of the nation. But this, with a grand tragic impartiality, is contrasted with the spiritual force and majesty of tradition, personified in the Bishop, and in a scene full of moral grandeur the Bishop's silver coffin weirdly stalks upon the stage, like the stone figure in *Don Juan*, to overwhelm the guilty king by its appearance. In another poem on the same historical episode, *The Church on the Rock*, the centre of dramatic interest is shifted: the Bishop is the principal figure, and the scene his residence. One more work—not a drama—has for its hero a Polish monarch of the fourteenth century: *King Casimir the Great.* The body of this great Prince of Peace had been discovered in royal state in his forgotten tomb shortly before the time of Wyspiański; and he both painted the majestic form in crown and royal robes, in one of his most impressive canvases, and, in a poem full of sublime teaching and admonition, made the dead king speak at his own funeral.

But it was to a more recent past, and in particular to the tragedy of Poland's national insurrection of 1831, that Wyspiański's dramatic Muse turned with even more passionate eagerness. The splendour of its bravery and

sacrifice, the hopelessness of its romantic temerity, and the beauty of its vision of an actual Polish Army in the field with Polish emblem and Polish war-song, repeatedly possessed his poetic imagination. In a play in prose, called after the great Polish historian *Lelewel*, who was a member of the insurrectionary government, he showed with magnificent dramatic power the interaction of the ambitions and conflicting policies which unceasingly disturbed the counsels of the leaders and did much to wreck the cause. In a one-act dramatic poem, the then new song from the French of Delavigne, *La Varsovienne*, extremely popular ever since in Poland, inspires the poet to glorify the reckless devotion of the young fighters who, with this song on their lips, went to a certain death in the unequal combat. That in this self-immolation lay the promise and foundation of the nation's further life, was the poet's grim but confident belief, and this watchword of 'Life and Victory through Death and Defeat of the Nation's Best' is sounded still more emphatically in the greatest of the three plays based on the insurrection. In a series of titanic scenes called *The November Night* the poet brings vividly before our eyes the memorable happenings of the evening of the outbreak in Warsaw of the insurrection. When the young conspirators are gathered in the shadows of a park to begin their wild and fateful work, we witness the striking contrast of a visionary pageant: a scene from Greek mythology, the parting of Koré, or Persephone, from her mother Demeter before her willing descent into the dark underworld to the side of her husband, the Ruler of the Shades. It symbolizes the same dominant idea, which is here most clearly expressed in the poignant words:

'All that is to live, must die!'

The same thought, at the height of its inspiration, crowns

the dramatic homage which, in a sequence of lofty scenes called *The Legion,* Wyspiański renders to the great poet Mickiewicz, whose influence on later generations he had so resolutely opposed in a former play. It immortalizes the poet's noble attempt to form, in 1848, an armed body of Polish volunteers on Italian soil, who were to fight for the liberation of Italy from Austria, then the oppressor both of Italians and Poles. In the last fantastic scene, Mickiewicz appears, like Christ, tossed by the storm in a boat with his disciples, and exults in their approaching shipwreck as the condition of new and lasting life.

When Wyspiański thus stressed repeatedly the importance of heroic death for the future life of the nation, he seems to have felt prophetically the approach of a stormy era of heroism and self-sacrifice through which alone his nation could secure a new and happier existence. His countrymen, gifted with a lesser vision, puzzled over his mystic meanings: they see them now writ large in mighty events, and in this light Wyspiański's figure stands out as one of Poland's greatest men.

X

He did not live to see the blood-red dawn of the new age. He died young, thirty-nine years of age, like his Irish contemporary and analogue, J. M. Synge. But much more great work even than has so far been told was pressed into this brief, meteoric career. Most of it is instinct with the life-blood of national interests. Thus when, in a dramatic fragment called *Weimar,* an earlier and a purely literary moment in the life of Mickiewicz is selected for treatment, viz. his visit of homage to Goethe on the German poet's eightieth birthday, even here the contrast between the Polish and the German spirit is present to the

poet's mind, and the figure of Mephistopheles is borrowed from *Faust* to become an interpreter of German mentality and German political philosophy.

In another dramatic fragment a great scene from Polish religious history is commemorated—the solemn *Dedication* of the Polish nation to Mary the Virgin by the seventeenth-century king John Casimir, after the deliverance of the country from Swedish invasion. Wyspiański, brought up in a medieval town full of marvellous old churches, profoundly understood the traditional piety of the old Poland, and his verse-paraphrase of the grand old Latin hymn, *Veni, Creator Spiritus*, is one of the finest among his few but great lyrics.

But in some of his very best poetic dramas he steps out of the circle of national creeds and ideals, and appeals to universal human emotions. Two such tragedies—*The Curse* and *The Judges*—are concerned with the lot of the peasant, the most important element in national life, as the poet always realized. One play shows the Polish peasant in his relation to the village priest—a great force in his existence—the other in his relation to that equally important force (mostly a pernicious one), the Jewish shopkeeper and publican. Both works turn on the conception of an illicit love doomed to calamity, because it braves convention. The heroine of one tragedy is the mistress of the parish priest, that of the other is bound in love to the young son of an old Jew. In both plays disastrous entanglements and violent deaths are engendered by the ignorance and superstition which, in the Polish village, surround these human passions, and both plays call forth our pity for the victim by outbursts of poetical pathos comparable with the noblest work of the Greek tragedians. These two short plays would, if translated, be capable of producing the most intense tragic effect on the stage of

any nation, however remote its interest in the affairs and conditions of Poland.

xi

There is one more group of Wyspiański's works to be mentioned, perhaps the highest in artistic perfection of word and verse. We have seen, in his plays *Acropolis* and *The November Night*, the classical imagery of Greek history and mythology twined, like evergreen ivy, round Polish national subjects. Greek imagery is present almost everywhere in Wyspiański's work, because his own imagination was full of it. He was a worshipper of Homer and illustrated the first book of the *Iliad* by drawings full of noble daring; he also dramatized the subject in a fashion all his own, in a poetic play called *Achilleis*. And he began and ended his dramatic career with other verse plays purely Greek in subject and in style. His early tragedies *Protesilaos and Laodamia* and *Meleager*, and his last play *The Return of Ulysses*, are distinguished—particularly the first two—by a beauty of expression and a melody of stately verse which make them comparable to the faultless majesty of Greek marbles. Technically, in the manner of their dialogues, the flowing rhetoric of their speeches, and the use of choruses, they are modelled on the greatest works of the Greek tragic drama. The last play of this Greek group, *The Return of Ulysses*, is the poet's own farewell to life. It has to-day something peculiarly affecting because, under its Greek garb, we behold a vision of what might have been Wyspiański's own attitude towards the reborn Poland. Ulysses, in his play, having, after long wanderings, found again the home he had longed for during many weary years, does not stay to ply the tasks of peace in his recovered realm. Nor does he, like the Ulysses of Tennyson's great poem, seek again the restless-

ness of voyages of discovery. In a manner more tragic, and more consonant with the Polish poet's personal disposition, he flies from the oppression of daily reality into the arms of death—to the bottom of the sea, where there gleams for him the vision of an ideal kingdom and an ideal crown of nobler labours. The new and real Poland of to-day, in the grey day-break of a disappointed and ruined Europe, lacks the rainbow colours in which the longing of generations had clothed it. We may well imagine that the great poet, if he had lived to see this new Polish State, would have been fain, like his own Ulysses, to depart from such reality into the ideal world of shadows. As it is, we may find a Providential fitness in the fact that, having heralded a new era and led the nation towards it by his poetry, he should have died, like Moses, on the threshold of the Promised Land.

Wyspiański's literary culture, as manifested in his use of Greek imagery and Greek dramatic form, extended beyond the ever-living world of classical antiquity. He wrote a thoughtful book on Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, which indeed contributes little to actual Shakespearian criticism, but is unique as a poet's vision of some aspects of the subject which a great genius might have worked out, and which transcend the bounds of the Shakespearian conception. Wyspiański also emulated the laurels of Count Morstin, an inspired translator of the seventeenth century, in producing a new and noble version of Corneille's youthful masterpiece, the tragedy of the *Cid*.

xii

The true greatness of Wyspiański, both as a poet and a national prophet, has only been fully realized by his countrymen since the war. Just as Polish comedy is now

turning back for guidance and example to its old master Fredro, so the Polish poetic drama of recent times has remained under the spell of Wyspiański. One of the most gifted of the younger poets, HUBERT ROSTWOROWSKI, undoubtedly imitates him in his quaint allegorical play *The Terrible Children*, a sociological dramatic fantasy inspired by reflections on the Russian Bolshevik convulsion.

In the case of drama, as in that of comedy, this deepened appreciation and irresistible imitation of a dead master would seem to indicate that some time will elapse before new forms of literary creation evolve out of the profoundly altered conditions of national life.

MODERN POLISH
LYRICAL POETRY

I

THE REAWAKENING OF PERSONALITY

i

When natural science, in the later nineteenth century, advanced from victory to victory, and began to dominate all spheres of human thought, it seemed at first that it would overthrow, on its triumphant way, all the idols of human tradition. Religion of the accepted sort was to make room for new gods, and poetry appeared also to be threatened. There was no use for it in a world of mechanical necessities, of 'struggle for life' and 'survival of the fittest'. Humanity seemed on the verge of another Age of Reason like the eighteenth century, although a reaction from the ideals of that century had only recently produced, throughout the literatures of Europe, an intense, if transitory, blaze of Romantic genius.

The Age of Reason came indeed, but it was no less transitory. It found its metaphysical seer and religious prophet in the Frenchman Auguste Comte, whose Positive Philosophy, and even the fantastic ritual of his Positivist Church, became the creed of an agnostic generation in many countries of Europe. Things unapproved by experience were deemed unworthy of interest, and poetry addressed itself to what occupied the minds of the generation : it rhymed the scientific treatise or versified the social pamphlet. Such subject-matter and its treatment gained an even more exclusive ascendancy in Poland than else-

where, because the increased political oppression and the national disillusionment which followed the disastrous insurrection of 1863 did much to sever Polish poetry from that patriotic source from which, in the great Romantic period, it had almost wholly drawn its inspiration.

How the Romantics were put to silence by the breath of the new age is perhaps best exemplified by one who lived from one era into the other, only to leave his early promise lamentably unfulfilled—CORNELIUS UJEJSKI. When still but a boy, he had framed reminiscences from his school Classics into one of the most spirited narrative poems in Polish literature—*The Battle of Marathon.* Later on, the fratricidal massacre of Galician landlords by peasants in 1846 had struck a spark of genius from his soul—*The Choral Song,* known to every Pole as the 'national anthem of Poland in mourning'. Sung thousands of times during the century of captivity, its solemn tones have never failed to comfort, because, although it begins, like the *Dies Irae,* on a note of despair, it ends in a triumphant assertion of Faith and Hope: 'God was and is!' Ujejski's genius as a lyrist, here at its height, was no less brilliantly manifested in a cycle of *Biblical Melodies,* not unlike Byron's *Hebrew Melodies* in intensity of vision, and superior to them in rhythmical music. In the *Laments of Jeremiah* the sorrows of his country unite with the inspiration of the Old Testament to produce strains of deepest pathos.

Yet in later years it was only rarely that the poet moved his countrymen as deeply as in these great early works. An attempt to spin into a poem a charmingly simple old Polish legend, *The Plough and the Sword,* was left unfinished. His efforts to direct his Muse to the new social problems, as in a short poem on a starving peasant child (*In Search of Service*), show him profoundly affecting indeed, but stammering and inarticulate. And so he ended

his days respected as a patriotic orator and a writer of occasional Odes, but not as a full-voiced national poet.

It seemed as if the gloom of political oppression, the dry exactitude of science, and the new social problems, had cast a blight on poetry. When a really great poet appears in the barren stretches of the Positivist decades, it is a thinker in verse like ASNYK, whose poems are full of intellectual abstractions and philosophical meditations, or a warm-hearted social propagandist like KONOPNICKA, whose sympathies are held fast within one narrow circle—the hard lot of the peasant and the slum-dweller.

But in the very works of that greatest poetess of Poland there are signs of the coming change. The special danger which threatened poetry in the new Age of Reason was that, in its absorption in the philosophy of natural science and the collective problems of society, it would lose sight of its chief element of strength—the appreciation and expression of the individual *human personality*. It was this personal factor for which the central place among poetic values had been won by Romanticism, ousting the classical rule of discipline and authority. Was that vivifying personal touch entirely to be lost again, to make way for objective thought and social ideals?

That could not be, if poetry was to live. Before the agnostic generation is off the stage, we perceive signs, everywhere in Europe, of another revolt of the eternal Romantic instinct against the new tyranny of enlightenment. In Poland it is the great woman poet herself who, in her maturest work, raises the standard of rebellion. The very tenderness of insight and strength of feeling in Konopnicka's social sympathies, the deep humanity of them, mark them off from the theories, in verse or prose, of doctrinaire fanatics. Entering whole-heartedly into the life of the peasant, she exults in the beauties of nature

with an enthusiasm which is worlds away from the rhymed scientific speculation that Konopnicka had found fashionable in literature when she began her career. Educated in sympathy with agnostic ideals, she is confirmed, by her experience of social wrongs, in the conviction that we do not live in a world governed by Christ; but she interprets the human soul's desire for a truly Christian order, and its unceasing quest for a personal religion.

After Konopnicka's deep humanity, there came from another side a mighty awakening of the spirit of personality in Poetry. Stanislas Przybyszewski is far more conscious and resolute on this point, and becomes, in fact, fanatical in his advocacy of 'Art for Art's sake', 'The Absolute', and 'The Naked Soul'. He is one-sided not in principle only but in practice as well. In his work, of which much is lyric poetry in rhythmical prose, he clings with the obstinacy of an obsession to the theme of sex, wherein lies, in his view, the only full manifestation of the individual.

We meet with the free play of the same power of personality in wider and more varied fields in the work of a number of gifted poets who arise simultaneously in Poland towards the end of the nineteenth century, many of whom begin their career in contact with Przybyszewski and under his spell, though they attain in time a broader vision.

ii

The greatest of these new poets in the domain of the lyric, by common consent to-day, is John Kasprowicz. He exemplifies, in his own personal life, the transition from social doctrine and scientific philosophy to human sympathy and personal religion. He began life as a peasant's son and as a student in German Universities; national propaganda and educational efforts in Upper Silesian villages

brought him to a Prussian prison. The greatest Polish poet of his day, he wasted energy and years in the slavery of journalism before his lifelong activities as an inspired translator of foreign classics were rewarded, at a ripe age, by the chair of comparative literature which he still holds in the University of Lwów. He started early on the quest for the expression of personality and for the mystic secret of God in the Universe; but even in his later verse he comes back repeatedly to the grey poverty of country cottages and the simplicity of Polish rural nature, in which his childhood had been spent. At present he has withdrawn almost entirely into the realm of translation, and is crowning the large edifice of his versions from Greek, German and English poets by a complete Polish Shakespeare from his own hand. His career as a creative poet seems closed, and we can now to some extent judge and analyse the mingled strains of his rich and abundant song.

His earliest lyrics are instinct with the realism of the scientific era and the moralizing tendency of its constructive social programmes. Even in this earlier period, when he is to some extent the herald of the widespread ideas of his generation, a strong fresh breath of powerful personality and heroic inspiration blows through his pages. With courageous resolution he faces the hard realities of life; nature's changing aspects do not call forth from him melancholy reflections, as they so often do from others, but fill him with a joyful readiness to take his share in the universal, and not meaningless, pageant of life.

'I know', he exclaims, 'that behind the misty veil of appearances a great granite statue stands hidden, blue-eyed and crowned with gold, as the morning sun is crowned with the redness of dawn, when it comes to scatter the slumber of worlds and the stillness of tombs. I know that there reigns, in the heart of things, the flame of life with its

watchword: eternity of substance in endless change of form. I know, that what perishes does not perish in vain; that the rays which have flickered out to-day will give light and warmth to darkness to-morrow—the light and warmth of youthful power; that the flowerless tombs of to-day will be temples of resurrection to-morrow and clothed in the splendour of joy; that doubt must be banished, because from the corn which falls, a new blade will grow.'

It seemed as if he were drifting as far from poetry into the rhymed didactic journalism of social reform as any Positivist, when he made such declarations in his verse as this:

'Our poetry is the echo of nations' sufferings, the desire for light and bread, for freedom to our hands. Our poetry, without visions and miracles, is to-day a call to action and courage, and to-morrow—to-morrow it will re-echo the shout of victory.'

He seemed on his way to become the very voice in poetry of the unsophisticated strength of that peasant class from which he himself had come. He is tender over the 'grey cottages, the poor peasant cottages', and enthusiastic over 'the unquenchable force of the people, the salvation under the peasant cloak'. He even glorifies the 'red flag' of social revolt, and makes a dramatic hero of the leader of a peasant rising in the seventeenth century, in Poland's Southern mountains (*Kostka Napierski*).

And suiting the form to the substance, he is deliberately rugged and unrefined; even his descriptions of nature have more force than charm, more high colouring than harmony.

iii

But even when thus plunging into what to him was the essence of life, the poet found in it harassing doubt and mystery and entanglement. Rendering peasant life with

his utmost realism, he wove, in a forceful but almost repulsive play, *The End of the World*, a dramatic tale of passion and weakness, misery and greed, of which only deaths and suicides could unravel the tangled skein.

It was among these tragic puzzles of human destiny that Kasprowicz finally found his true self, and as the deepest chord of self—restless religious questioning. Religion was, to this peasant soul, the groundwork and the ultimate expression of thought, and he had been less than himself when, in his early poems, he had repeated the fashionable free-thinking rhetoric of the town. Now he strikes bedrock in a poem called *Christ*—a string of scenes in Dantesque *terze rime* from the life and passion of the Saviour, with one strain of despair running through it, evoked by the contrast between Christ's teaching and historical Christianity, between the pathos of His sacrifice and the sufferings of the millions unrelieved by it. It is the voice of Lucifer who, looking ahead into the future of humanity, accompanies the life of Christ with the oft-repeated reminder of the unbroken vitality of Evil in the world. Christ dies on the Cross with a sigh of doubt and desolation on his lips (as He does in the Gospel story), and an agony of blasphemy is reached in the exclamation: 'For Evil is eternal—God created Evil!'

Henceforward the conflict between the cultured and heroic human soul and the elemental power of passion, matter, evil, becomes the underlying theme of Kasprowicz's poetry. It is an obsession and an anguish, audible in his lines like an unbroken wail. The passion for the most part appears in the form of cruel and indomitable sensual love, the personal drama clothes itself in the garb of religious meditation. Hence the frequency of religious subjects and of titles from sacred story or from church song: *Salome* and *The Banquet of Herodius*, *Jude* and

Mary of Egypt, The Hymn of St. Francis of Assisi and *My Even-Song, Dies Irae* and *Salve Regina.* The significance of all this religious symbolism in relation to the poet's fundamental attitude is perhaps even better revealed by the more direct titles of two of his later song-books, *Anima Lachrymans* ('The Weeping Soul') and *My Soul descends into Darkness.* His soul indeed now descended, out of the tumult of his early social interests, into the darkness of solitary brooding on deepest mysteries. He forswears his allegiance to the crowd:

> Thou wert my idol once, O Multitude!
> Thou cam'st, O human reptile, unto me,
> With marks of yoke upon thy bended neck,
> And my soul cursed thy tyrants. It is thou,
> Foe of the spirit, who hast trodden down
> With leaden foot, the flowers sown by God,
> Which grew within the garden of my soul!

His whole spiritual frame was perforce convulsed in this turning from the social problems of the hour to the eternal enigmas of the relation of God to Man. The vivid realism with which Kasprowicz had exulted in the activity of creative life, intensifies the torment of pessimism when the hard mind of the peasant's son reaches its inexorable conclusions. He rushes into wild homage to death, he passionately desires dissolution in the immovable calm of the Universe. And these are not the fine gestures and theatrical attitudes of a literary decadent. Images of sensuous desire and of ruthless extinction melt together in a poem called *Amore desperato*, in the cycle entitled *Love.* And among the majestic rocks of the Tatra Mountains, sung by so many Polish poets, the soul, in an ecstasy of self-immolation, soars into unison with the eternal tragedy of birth and death, of joy and pain:

Oh, blow and roar, and carry my wild soul,
Thou mountain wind!
And what to thee, to me,
If streams of life-blood mark all paths of life?
There is no happiness, where'er life grows—
Let the world perish—it was made for that!

Maturity and high vision had come through the ordeal of suffering and despair: 'Into the aching book of thy heart write these words for ever: as ore finds its purifying might in fire, so man finds it in pain.' Here is the measure of his wisdom, attained by contemplation of the impassive majesty of nature among the Alps and Tatra Mountains, of the mysterious depths of personality, and of the pulsing life of the native soil. And the wisdom is a bitter wisdom: freed from the progressive doctrines of his youth, undeluded, in his essential peasanthood, by the outward ornaments of culture, the poet is face to face with the whole terrible mass of guilt, of ill, of disaster, of elemental helplessness, in the life of humanity. Having summed up, in one cry, its confession and its lament, he, with the fatalist acquiescence of the peasant nature, sings his own hymn of death. There is no note in modern Polish poetry which more resembles the tragic pessimism of Thomas Hardy than the note with which Kasprowicz's maturest poetry resounds. And like that of Hardy, his soul finds all the peace it can attain, in reunion with the Mother Earth, which cradles and buries his peasant race. Songs of rural nature mark with quieter harmonies the end of his stormy career: his muse returns to the village from which it came.

iv

Kasprowicz's work as a translator is rich and manifold: Aeschylus, Shakespeare, and Shelley stand first among his

inspired renderings, and the *Specimens of English Poets*, of which he is about to bring out a new and enlarged edition, range down the ages from Chaucer, Spenser, and Sidney, not only to Burns and Wordsworth, but to Blake and Swinburne, Browning and Yeats—names little known before in Poland.

But Kasprowicz's original poetry, since it had found its bearings, was not free from the reproach of occasional monotony and limitation. Laments over the eternal strife of Good and Evil, sometimes more shrill than powerful, and always inconclusive in their despair, weary the reader by their repetition.

The case is different with the second poet of the period, Casimir Tetmayer, whose reputation, now well established in his advancing age, admits of historical treatment. His range is wider and his variety more interesting, but his power of feeling and of vision less; there is more subtle artistry, more imaginative and melodious charm, but less elemental creative force. Much more frequently than Kasprowicz he has entered the field of drama, both in verse and prose; and unlike Kasprowicz altogether, he has written a number of short stories and longer novels, including even one of three volumes on Napoleon's Russian campaign. Of all this, it is now safe to predict that, apart from a short story or two, only his tales from the life and legend of the Tatra mountaineers—full of the fresh breath of the mountain side, of the hardiness of the people, and the racy vigour of their dialect—will survive as Classics not regional merely, but national.

As a lyrical poet he is, in much of his earlier work, too much in love, Narcissus-like, with his own image; he alternates, with a voluptuous self-consciousness, between a philosophic despondency less sincere than the despair of Kasprowicz, and a sensuality too frank and unrestrained

to be artistically enjoyable when the literary fashion for it has passed.

Out of this sphere of ideas the poet was led by the disappointment which follows sensuous joys, and it was about the turn of the century that a marked change came over his poetry. It gained in depth, and he became the most perfect modern Polish singer of man's longing for the spiritual happiness and ideal beauty which are never realized on earth. The poet's own evolution is expressed in one of his finest lyrics, *The Mad Faun*, where that mythological pursuer of nymphs becomes the symbol of a sad and insatiable desire for the ideal. It is in this phase that his fervid temperament best serves him to produce images of beauty: more like an Italian in his passionate nature than almost any modern Polish singer, he revels in the glories of Italian landscape and painting, of Greek sculpture and myth. His poems on the scenery of the Tatra Mountains (at the foot of which he was born) are instinct with all the pulsating life of the elements—of chasing wind and flying cloud and floating mist, of lightning and thunder and rain, of quaking bush and nodding pine, of dreaming lake and ancient rock, of tinkling well and leaping stream. Of the countless modern Polish poems on those mountains, none show a greater intimacy with the living secrets of a seemingly dead and changeless nature than those of Tetmayer.

Full of this intensity of personal experience in the sphere of sensual enjoyment and of ideal longing, he is necessarily a less eloquent interpreter of the social concerns and tendencies of his age, though he often re-echoes them with sympathy and respect, and even devotes to them an entire volume, called *Watchwords*. At his best, he is the tuneful exponent of a mood in which forgetfulness is sought in dreams of beauty, because the conditions of surrounding

life and the character of the passing generation are such as to afford no scope for great deeds and heroic effort. Like Lord Byron, whose poetry and personality no doubt fascinated him greatly, Tetmayer sought relief from the dullness of a life without great aims in the field of imagination; it is there that, like Byron, he lives his real life and gains fullest self-expression; and he resembles Byron, too, in the 'negligent ease of a man of quality'—to use Scott's just description of Byron's manner—with which he pours the unpurified material of intimate personal experiences straight into the mould of verse.

II

FORM, THOUGHT, AND STRENGTH

i

If the 'negligent ease' of impulsive and reckless self-expression is proper to Tetmayer's poetic personality, it is the ease of happy facility and all-too spontaneous eloquence which distinguishes the person and writing of his contemporary, Lucian Rydel. He is a poet as intimately associated with the intellectual life of the town of Cracow in the early twentieth century as the great dramatist Wyspiański himself. Known to many as a lecturer on literature at a girls' college, and to more as an indefatigable talker in coffee-houses and drawing-rooms, he died during the war as manager of the Cracow Theatre. The theatre had been the goal of his ambitions many a time as a writer. A verse play full of lyrical beauties, called *The Magic Circle*, had a great success in its time, and still holds the stage by the opportunities which its rhetoric offers to actors. It is a half-fantastic drama of ambition and love, of crime and fate, in which the fortunes of nobles and peasants in an old-time Polish setting are intertwined with legend, and the Devil himself appears on the stage. Rydel's friends used to say in jest that it was 'founded on the best authorities,' and indeed, the varied mass of its folk-lore material, its skilfully woven dramatic elements, and the manifold melody of its declamations, are all echoes not difficult to trace to

Polish and foreign literary models, chiefly to the work of that master of Polish dramatic and lyric fantasy, Julius Słowacki, but largely also to the German fairy play of Gerhard Hauptmann, *The Sunken Bell*.

Of Rydel's other dramatic efforts, one at least has secured a permanent place as the standard Christmas pantomime of the Polish stage: it is called *The Polish Bethlehem*, and exhibits a procession of figures representative of Poland's distant and more recent past, doing traditional homage to the Virgin and the infant Christ. It delights ever-new swarms of children by its array of living pictures and the easy flow of its charmingly simple and easily remembered rhymes. It appeals no less to an older audience by the equal simplicity of its sterling national and religious feeling.

Other of Rydel's plays, largely imitative of forgotten literary fashions, or honestly advocating outworn social and national ideals, or fatiguing by their mass of inert historic detail, have vanished, or are vanishing, into oblivion: none of them has enough of power or passion to retain its grip on theatrical audiences.

Power, possessed by Kasprowicz, and passion, expressed by Tetmayer, are not among the qualities of their elegant and somewhat garrulous contemporary; nor is originality a marked feature of his work. But it is undoubtedly distinguished by unlaboured and rounded perfection. He is more of a typical literary artist than the other two: if they remind us of the sombre glow and sultriness of Baudelaire's *Fleurs du Mal*, his work rather resembles the alabaster flawlessness and finish of the Parnassian School of French poets. Or we may do justice to his scholarly imagination and happy facility of diction and of verse by likening him to Ovid, who said of himself:

Ipse suos versus numeros veniebat ad aptos . . .
Quidquid temptabam dicere, versus erat.

Imitative in most things, he even imitated his painter friend, Tetmayer's elder brother, in his marriage to a peasant girl: the event became the occasion for that masterpiece of Polish poetic drama, Wyspiański's play *The Wedding*. But while Wyspiański thrills us with a powerful vision of the moral strength of the peasantry and its social importance in the national organism, Rydel's personal contact with the peasant world does little more than add an adornment to his work, and from a series of poems dedicated to his wife there linger in the reader's memory only some outward features of peasant life: the gaudy colours of the Cracow peasants' costume, the joyousness of their holidays and pastimes, and a faint perfume of gardens, woods, and fields. In a ballad on a profoundly pathetic theme—the unhappy love of a rustic servant-girl for a noble master (*The Story of Katie and the Prince*)—there is a melodious profusion of exquisite musical tenderness, but nothing like the heart-stirring, tragic brevity with which, for instance, the grand old English ballad, *Child Waters*, deals with a similar subject.

The literary culture and imitative nature of this mellifluous and eloquent poet were perhaps really at their best in the paraphrase or translation of the great masterpieces of others. His version of Homer's *Iliad*—unfortunately unfinished—is among the best in Polish: it is the only one equal in merit to the apparently final Polish version of the *Odyssey*, produced by an earlier Cracow poet, Lucian Siemieński. In a prose story from old Greek life—centring round the Olympian Games—*Pherenike and Peisidoros*—Rydel produced a little encyclopaedia of the civilization and daily existence of ancient Greece which would be as popular a schoolboy classic as Barthélemy's *Voyage d'Anacharsis* or Bulwer Lytton's *Last Days of Pompeii*, if secondary education in Poland as elsewhere were not drifting ever farther from the Classics.

ii

Rydel also distinguished himself as a translator of the Moderns by an admirable version of Molière's *Les Femmes Savantes*. But in that field he was surpassed both in quantity of output and excellence of rendering by another Cracow poet, who may well be called the 'Translator-General of the Age' in Poland, as Philemon Holland was in Elizabethan England. To Dr. Thaddaeus Żeleński, known to his readers under the name of Boy, Polish literature and the Polish stage are indebted for that priceless possession, a complete version of Molière's Comedies, of which it is difficult to imagine that it will ever be surpassed or superseded. But to Boy's fervent zeal and stupendous accuracy, fortunately coupled with a happy ease of style, Polish literature owes more than the Molière: in an imposing and constantly expanding array of volumes, justly called *The Library of Boy*, this wonderfully productive genius is giving to Poland, in worthy Polish shape, all the great French writers in verse and prose, from Villon and Rabelais, to Descartes, Pascal, Montesquieu, Diderot, Voltaire, Beaumarchais, and Rousseau. The Library includes those early masters of the modern novel and short story, Balzac, Stendhal, and Mérimée, as well as the romantic classics Bernardin de St. Pierre and Chateaubriand, and even such older and half-forgotten, but gifted and spirited story-tellers as Queen Margot of Navarre and Rétif de la Bretonne, Choderlos de la Clos and Crébillon. It could well seem that such a task would absorb all the energies even of a great literary talent. But Boy has another outstanding merit as an original writer. He is one of the very few great humorists of modern Poland. His abundant short satirical poems in varied tuneful metres are permeated by as brilliant and ever-surprising a wit as are his dramatic criticisms,

now collected in several volumes under the heading of *Flirtations with the Dramatic Muse, and other Amourettes.* Having entered the province of humour by vocation, and seeing the scarcity of great humorous works in the dreary period of Poland's political subjection, the author, with a happy instinct, went back to the ever-flowing sources of robust humour to be found in early Polish writers, and his study of them has enriched his vocabulary and the spirit of his poetry with a profusion of healthy, if often very drastic elements of comic power. His occasional lapses into frank cynicism remind us of the author's medical profession; but the all-pervading sadness of the world's greatest humorists is present in his amusing pages, more especially in his poems on love and on the effects of increasing age, and makes them food for reflective thought. It is by such features as this that his topical verse about petty incidents in the intellectual life of Cracow rises above provincialism and holds a permanent place in national literature. The author's own migration from that Polish Oxford, Cracow, to the restored metropolis, Warsaw, is symbolic of his accession to a place among the few modern Polish humorists who will go down to posterity.

iii

The mighty events of the World War did not essentially affect the firmly established attitude of Żeleński towards social life and human nature. They also failed to strike sparks of real fire from a cultured eclectic like Rydel, who died towards the end of the war. They would probably have drawn deep poetical thought from George Żuławski, a fellow-singer who also died before the fullness of his time, in the first months of war. The philosopher and

metaphysician among Polish poets of recent times, he would perhaps have found the impressive tones with which to speak of this profound convulsion of the world.

Early in his career he wrote an essay on Spinoza, which is excellent in its solid brevity. And among later works his fantastic romance *On the Silver Globe*, a story of an imaginary commonwealth in the moon, displays deeper thought, if a more melancholy despondency, in its allegorical treatment of social questions, than the many modern Utopias which other countries have produced, from the boys' books of Jules Verne to the latter-day Socialist satires and paradises of Mr. H. G. Wells.

Żuławski's tendency towards abstract and reflective thought leads him to apply his all-too eloquent verse rather to dialectics and metaphysical theorizing than to the spontaneous manifestation of his spiritual experience. Like Tetmayer and others, he was inspired at first by the social ideals of his age: but this was to him from the outset somewhat of an irksome obligation; he passed, by a gradual emancipation, into sheer individualism, and even soared into the abstraction of purely spiritual existence, independent of material fetters. It is significant that while others sing of the birth of Venus from the waves of the sea, he devotes one of his greater poems to the *Birth of Psyche*, the personified and liberated soul. And in another, *Eros and Psyche*, a poetic drama now recognized to be his highest achievement and permanently successful on the stage, he presents, in a sequence of historical love-scenes, the perpetual aspiration of the human soul towards ideals. In spite of this unity of idea the poem is essentially undramatic in its constant repetition of the same situation in varied historical surroundings: the very conception of such a flight on the wings of philosophical generalization through wide spaces of history has in it necessarily a rather epic

element, such as we find in Victor Hugo's *La Légende des Siècles*, which may have distantly suggested the scheme.

The Pantheism which Żuławski had studied in the system of Spinoza pervades his poetry. It makes him, in some of his best poems, paraphrase majestic visions of the greatness of God from the Old Testament and from the parables of the Talmud, it makes him invoke the sacred shores of the Ganges as 'the native country of his soul'. And it gives its character to his poetry as poetry. All his emotions are intellectual; all the forces which his poetic imagination can see in the world, eternal and spiritual. The strength and weakness of his poetry are best expressed in his own saying: 'Thought is all in this world, and thought alone creates.' Even when he deviates into almost contemporary history, as in his play *The Dictator*, based on the Polish insurrection of 1863, it is the philosophical contrast between great causes and little men that absorbs his interest. The glow of life fades under the breath of thought; such philosophic poetry must indeed remain 'caviare to the general', but in its kind and place it retains high and lasting rank.

iv

If the most thoughtful of Poland's modern poets did not survive the war to show us what his reflections on it would have been, we are more fortunate in the case of another distinguished lyric singer who lived in the town of Lwów, and whom the Russian occupation drove, among the crowd of prisoners, into years of exile. He has come back from Russia and told us his impressions. This poet is Leopold Staff.

Even before the war he had differed from his contemporaries by the absence of that pessimism which is so

marked a feature of Kasprowicz throughout, and of Tetmayer at times. *Dreams of Power* is the significant title of one of Staff's earliest collections of lyrics. Woman, where she appears in the songs of his youth, is not the origin and embodiment of insatiable and ruinous passion, as with Kasprowicz or Tetmayer. In a cycle of lyrics she is glorified as *The Mother*—a proof of rare maturity at a time of life when love and delight in beauty usually eclipse, to the eyes of men and poets, the graver aspects of womanhood.

What at that time linked Staff to his young literary companions, different as was the texture of his poetry, was his cult of form. He early showed a mastery of many difficult metres: he boldly ventures on a particularly arduous one—the *terza rima* of Dante—and succeeds in it in an ambitious epic poem called *Master Twardowski*. The legendary figure of Twardowski the magician and his pact with the Devil are the Polish analogue to the German Faust. Under Staff's hands the personage becomes a hero of humanitarian endeavour, something like Browning's *Paracelsus*, and like him persecuted for his pains. When he is presently flattered as the possessor of the elixir of life, he rises to the proud and tragic heroism of taking his secret with him into death. The poem does not perhaps quite justify its sub-title *Five Songs of Action*, but it nobly glorifies a Stoic strength of soul.

Staff, like most successful poets, repeatedly attempted poetic drama. But his plays, one of which has for its heroine Tennyson's *Lady Godiva*, are too rich in lyrical inspiration and too symbolic in their imagery to be effective on the stage.

To the poet's wide range of variety in poetical forms, even in his youth, there corresponded from the first a similarly wide range of human sympathies—wider than in

the case of strongly individualist and personal poets, like Tetmayer, or purely literary artists like Rydel. The very width of his sympathy with many moods of nature, many conditions of man, many states of his soul—made this poetic personality strangely indefinable for critics. Stoicism, though the term implies somewhat too much austerity, might perhaps have rightly been attributed to him; there was, with him, no desperate or feverish pursuit of happiness, but a heroic determination to 'live dangerously', and face such ordeals of storm and stress as might await him.

They came at last on a great scale. Exiled into the Ukrainian town of Kharkov, the poet was plunged into an ocean of his fellow-countrymen's sufferings, while there loomed in the future the task of building up a Polish State out of a chaos of ruin. Under this ordeal Staff's poetry did not flinch: becoming patriotic, it still resounds with the same note of manful resolution. Love of his land, intensely realized in the home-sickness of the Russian years, fills his verse with even greater sweetness, makes it perhaps more pure, and certainly more richly imaginative in its descriptions of nature, more melodious in its lyrical accents, than it had been before. Another poet of the same group, THADDAEUS MICIŃSKI, had also had his heroic impulses, but these were obscured by mystical and allegorical diction. It is perhaps a symbolic dispensation of ironic fate that he perished in the welter of the Russian civil war, while Staff has emerged to carry the comforting strength of his poetical message into the life of the new Poland.

V

It was not by the unconscious symbolism of fate but by the intentional symbolism of national homage that in the new Polish State the new office of 'Minister of the Fine Arts' was entrusted, at the very outset, to the poet

Zeno Przesmycki, known under the name of Miriam. He was recognized publicly by this appointment as one of the creators of modern Polish literary culture. It was he who in the late 'eighties, at the height of the Russian oppression under Alexander III, had established in Warsaw, in a periodical called *Life*, a centre for Polish literary effort and literary study. At a later period, he and another poet and critic of similar type, Anthony Lange, had widened the Polish literary horizon, both by numerous essays on the literary schools and personalities of contemporary Western Europe, and by exquisite translations of foreign poetical masterpieces from the past and the present. It was the same Miriam, finally, who had created, in the ten volumes of *The Chimaera*, another of his periodicals, a rich garner of such inspired versions from foreign poems, a storehouse of liberal education for all young novices in poetry.

It is to him, then, that the new Poland is to-day indebted for a poetry enriched by the heritage of the best in the literary past of all the world. It is rich not in that heritage only, but also in the prolific vitality of its output. 'Of making many books there is no end'; of few domains of literature does the old half-sarcastic saying hold so true as of lyrical poetry among the Slavonic nations, whose proper and peculiar vein of self-expression it appears to be. Even amidst the ruin and starvation of Soviet Russia, the largest share of the scanty harvest of books which it is possible to publish there belongs to the field of the lyric. A witty critic once said before the war that there were in Poland, on an average, 'ten thousand lyrical poets living'. Reunion has stimulated literary production by the enlargement of the Polish book-market. European fashions of to-day and yesterday find their echoes in abounding verse. The 'futurism' of the last days before the war, so loudly pro-

claimed by Marinetti in Italy and by his followers in other lands, has clamorous Polish disciples now. It is even more remarkable that, in spite of the traditional unpopularity in Poland of everything Russian, the sensational lyrics of Russian poets of the revolutionary movement are being busily translated and eagerly imitated by Poland's young singers; while a less ephemeral Russian master, the recently deceased Alexander Blok, has found more judicious admirers. Battles are being fiercely fought in a number of Polish periodicals between strongly contrasted schools of poetry and art; of these periodicals, *Scamander* is perhaps the highest in its standard of artistic form.

Which of the names famous in the glare and tumult of to-day will soon have vanished into oblivion, only the Gods can say. Names that, before the war, even figured in scholarly treatises on modern literature—such as that of Andrew Niemojewski, passionate progressive journalist in verse and prose—are being forgotten now. On the other hand, some who were scarcely known at the height of their work are now strangely rising into posthumous fame, for instance W. Rolicz Lieder, a subtle virtuoso in verse and a gifted translator of Oriental poetry, and Bronisława Zawistowska, a great poetess who was cut off in the flower of youth and left behind her little more than a handful of magnificent sonnets.

Of those now in the prime of their promising vigour, again only the Gods can say which will fall short of their promise, and which will follow up their early achievement by riper and more splendid work. Attention at the moment is mainly attracted by Julian Tuwim, most gifted among Poland's lyrical youth, and seemingly on his way to shake off childish mannerisms in the maturity of true poetic genius.

The war stirred to higher flights the sincere but

previously somewhat pedestrian Muse of EDWARD SŁOŃSKI; he has told, with the sterling ring of deep personal experience, the tragedy of Poles fighting each other in the ranks of hostile armies, and the passionate enthusiasm of the nation for liberty and reunion.

Again, a gifted young poetess with a genius for classical Polish diction, CASIMIRA IŁŁAKOWICZ, who had begun her work before the war with an exquisite slender volume called *Icarian Flights*, has borne the heat of the day, but has escaped the doom of Icarus. She has brightened her own and others' drab and disillusioned after-war existence by several volumes of the same pure and noble verse, one of which, a delightful sheaf of *Children's Rhymes*, will no doubt carry comfort to many a Polish home in these days of disenchantment and depression.

These and other facts are hopeful signs indeed. They give assurance that Polish poetry, like the Phoenix, has risen deathless out of the very fires of war, and in the midst of the desolation called peace is spreading strong wings for its flight into a future of new glories.

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