

1917

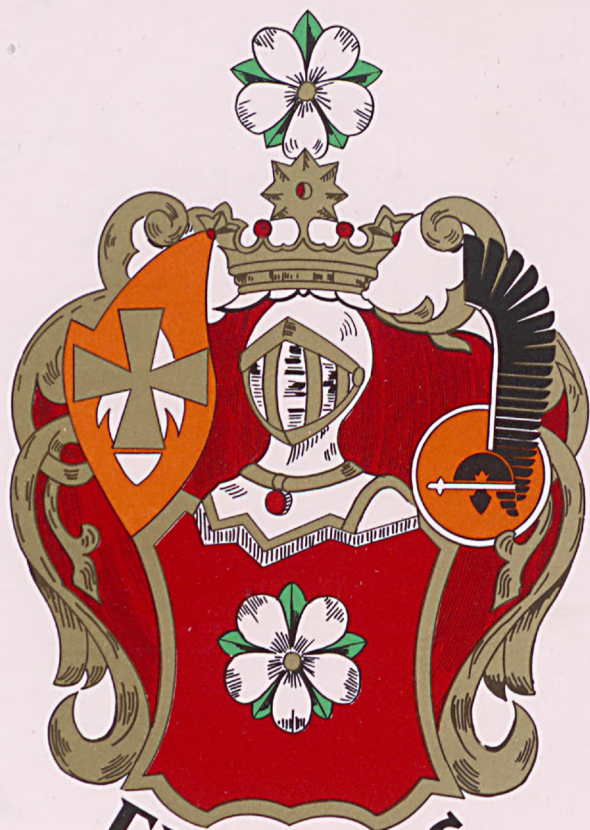
REMARKS ON
POLAND

BY I. J. PADEREWSKI



DELIVERED AT TEACHERS' COLLEGE
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
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LODA and EDWARD C. ROZANSKI



ADDRESS

DELIVERED AT TEACHERS' COLLEGE
OF COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I HAVE been told that some people from Columbia University were willing to afford me the great honor of listening to my talk on Poland. I have been told that some distinguished members of this illustrious institution, devoted to knowledge, to justice, to science, to truth, were inclined to spare a few moments of their valuable time, in order to hear a few remarks concerning the past of my country.

I am not an orator by profession. The means I use for expressing myself belong to another art. But at this time of radical changes, of incredible transformations, when the blue of the sky and the depth of the sea are converted into battlefields, when ancient cathedrals and glorious universities are shelled, bombarded and destroyed like vulgar fortresses, when venerable priests turn into sharpshooters, peaceful shop-keepers into daring aviators, it seems pardonable if, for the sake of helping, in a modest way,

his long oppressed country, a musician becomes a lecturer.

I have to thank you most warmly, most cordially for the honor already afforded, and in anticipation for your lenient patience and kind attention.

The terrible present war with all its cruelty and horror has done, in a sense, some good to my country. It has attracted public attention. Everyone nowadays seems to be familiar with the word Poland, but how many know what this word means?

Notwithstanding the fact that in this war 2,750,000 Polish speaking soldiers have been forced into fratricidal combat, a great many people still insist on calling Poland a small nation. This would be an insult were it not absurd.

The Kingdom of Boleslaw the Great (from 992 to 1025) included Moravia, Slovachia, Pomerania on both sides of the River Oder; it included part of Saxony, the whole of Silesia, reaching almost to Berlin, extending from the Baltic Sea to the Danube.

This was ancient Poland, but what is Poland today?

Poland is a country deprived of political independence, divided between Prussia, Russia and Austria, a country which in 1772 consisted of nearly 300,000 square

miles, almost 100,000 miles more than the whole of the present German Empire. It is a nation with lofty and noble ideals, with ancient and high culture, with admirable literature. It is a nation which, in spite of her dismembered territory, in spite of her mutilated body, remains united in spirit, in language, in aspirations, remains great indeed, ranking together with Italy, as the fifth, after Russia, Germany, Great Britain and France, among the great nations of Europe, because there were, before the outbreak of this war, a compact mass of 35,000,000 people speaking the Polish language.

The name of Poland is derived from the word "Pole" which in all Slavonic languages means a field. The country between the River Oder on the western side and the River Dnieper on the eastern side with the Vistula in the center, is practically a vast field, an immense plain with an elevation toward the south culminating in a long chain of hills and mountains called the Beskids and Giant Mountains, in Silesia, an old Polish province, the Tatra Mountains and Carpathian Mountains, in present Galicia.

In the early days of the ninth century, before the eastern Slavonic country had been conquered by the Normans of Roesland and received from them the name of Russia, the

inhabitants of the country bordered by the river Dnieper and Oder and those living in the Vistula and Warta districts were all known under the name of Polanie, Polans. The most ancient of Russia's historical documents, the Chronicle of Nestor, dating from the beginning of the twelfth century, as well as the first prominent historian of Russia, Karamazin, positively agreed that the ancient Poles and the Polans were the same people, speaking the same language. This assertion, however, has been very energetically contested by some historians and geographers, especially those who obey political motives. Human knowledge is not infallible. Historians and geographers are subject to error. Some political writers at times even resort to deliberate falsehood. But there is something which is trustworthy, absolutely trustworthy, something which speaks at moments more convincingly than certain books, which testifies more irrefutably than certain historical documents: it is the living language of the people. For centuries and centuries, when designating ourselves, according to the provinces and parts of Poland we were belonging to, we have been using the words Wielko-Polanie and Malo-Polanie, which means Great-Polans and Little-Polans. Now if we are Great-Polans and Little-Polans are we not Polans as well?

The inhabitants of the fields were kind, soft-hearted, peace and liberty loving people. In the northwestern parts of their large country while cultivating laboriously their ancestral rather arid soil, they developed, as is always and everywhere the case where man has to fight nature, they developed into thrifty, energetic agriculturists, while in the south they remained somewhat indolent and poor, trusting entirely to the extreme fertility of the native land. Fond of songs and music, of dances, hospitable to excess, they were leading an easy life to which their rich and poetic mythology was adding great charm and beauty. Very soon, however, this kind, soft-hearted, peace and liberty loving people, surrounded by greedy neighbors, exposed to easy invasions, in order to protect their liberty, to protect their homes, their wives and children, were compelled to forge weapons, to learn warfare. They learned it quickly, and they learned it well, and within a short time, out of a number of rustic, pastoral tribes, bound by a common danger, they became a real nation, made up of ploughmen and warriors. For, believe me, there cannot be a real nation without a people who love their soil, without a people who know how to cultivate that soil in peace, and how to protect it in war.

Early in the second half of the tenth century, under Mieszko the First, her first historical ruler, Poland was called upon to take her place among the Christian kingdoms of Europe. But it was given to Mieszko's son Boleslaw the Great to unite all Polish lands, all Polish tribes and to build up a political power of the very highest order. Since then, though preserving intact the people's essential character, never oppressing another nation, always receiving most hospitably every race, affording complete freedom and lawful protection to every creed, truly "with malice to none, with charity for all," Poland had to become a warring nation. A hundred wars have been fought but not one for a conquest. All in self-defense, in defense of liberty, of Christianity, of justice. Our history is filled with noble acts, with glorious deeds, with feats of arms which have been only beneficial to others, to some momentarily weaker nations. The battle of Lignica, in 1241 saved Germany from the Tartar invasion. The battle of Vienna in 1683, under the command of John Sobieski, saved Austria and in fact the whole of Europe from a Turkish invasion. Even after the tragic downfall of their country, though reduced to poverty and weakness, slaves among the Slavs, the Poles inscribed proudly on their flag, "For our liberty and for yours," and true to the traditions of their ancestors,

they offered their matchless bravery to every noble cause; they spent freely, lavishly, their energy and blood wherever the liberty has been menaced, the principles of justice have been endangered. Our revolution of 1794 led by Kosciuszko prevented the coalition of autocrats from accomplishing the defeat of the French Republic. In 1830, after the downfall of Charles X, when Nicholas I, of Russia, ordered the Polish army to invade Belgium and France, that very army, counting only 35,000 men, turned against the Russians and after eleven months of heroic struggle, succeeded in saving France for the second time.

In January, 1832, in a memorable sitting of the French Parliament, the great Lafayette, your own Lafayette, said: "France has won against Russia the war which Poland has lost."

Distinguished writers like Victor Hugo, like Michelet, Sorel, De Noailles, Vandal, Lord Eversley, even Rulliere and von Moltke, when speaking about Poland, called her the champion of western civilization, the initiator of modern liberty.

Poland has been the cradle of all the liberalism in the world. The first meeting of the Polish Parliament took place a few years ago—in 1180, in the city of Lenczyca, now utterly destroyed by our "liberators."

The first application of a political elective system occurred for the first time in Poland in 1208. It was adopted not only for public offices, but also applied in the ecclesiastical domain. The first complete civil code of Christian Europe was the Statute of Wislica, established in 1347 by the last King of the Piast Dynasty, Kazimir the Great.

In the fifteenth century, under the rulers of the Jagellonian dynasty, Poland was made a self-governing country. Her institutions have been exceedingly liberal and democratic in spirit. In 1430, consequently 249 years before the Habeas Corpus in England and 359 years before the declaration of the Rights of Man in France, Poland introduced her famous law "Neminem captivabimus, nisi jure victim"—"Nobody should be imprisoned unless legally convicted."

Our constitution of 1505, "Nihil novi," must be considered as the first application of a democratic parliamentary system in the entire world. In 1572, after the death of the last Jagellonian, Poland became a republic with a king elected as president for life. In the same year, the very year of St. Bartholomew's night, the Polish Senate declared absolute freedom of religion all over the republic, but long before that date, long before the discovery of this country, Poland used to be what America is now, a safe refuge for

all oppressed people, a shelter for all persecuted religions and nationalities.

A great deal has been said by Poland's enemies about the excesses committed by our nobility. My remarks have been very long already and it is not my intention to discuss this subject at any length. I may, however, be permitted to state that in a controversy between a lamb and a wolf, it is always the lamb which is wrong. In fact, the Polish nobility has not been such a black sheep as our highly esteemed adversaries would paint it to be. With the exception of a few almost feudal families, the Polish nobility was not an aristocratic class but simply a privileged democracy. The Polish nobility was a vast body of men enjoying all civic and political rights, even some privileges, rather medieval privileges won by their ancestors or by themselves on battle-fields or in some other public services. They were all electors, voters. Everybody who distinguished himself in war, in statesmanship, in science, or even in art could become a nobleman, an elector, a voter. How democratically, how broadly this was applied some figures and facts will demonstrate best. In 1847 in France at the time of Louis Philippe, out of a nation of some 28,000,000 to 30,000,000 there were only 150,000 voters;

whereas in 1647, 200 years before, in Poland a nation of 10,500,000 to 11,000,000 was represented by 300,000 voters. In England before the famous Reform Bill of 1832, two per cent only of the population were fully enjoying all political rights, while in 1732, twelve per cent of the Polish population were already in complete possession of these rights.

It may be said to the credit of our nobility that in the middle of the eighteenth century, our Polish landowners started of their own will and initiative the emancipation of peasants from the condition of serfdom. It may be of interest to you to know that among the great illustrious generals who fought for the independence of your country, the only one who had no slaves was a Polish nobleman, Tadeusz Kosciuszko.

I am really afraid I am imposing upon your kindness and attention, but having the great honor of speaking before such an exceptionally distinguished audience, having the rare privilege to address American educators and those who are going to be American educators, I deem it my duty to say a few words about the part played by my country in science and education.

Outside of Nicholas Copernicus, whose solar system the Prussians tried to annex—they are now trying to annex the whole of the sun—outside of Nicholas Copernicus, Poland has produced quite a considerable number of scientists who in their day have enjoyed world-wide fame.

In the thirteenth century a Pole, Ciolek (Vitelius in Latin, the language he used at that time), acquired great celebrity by his philosophical works and quite especially by his "Treaty on Optics" which has been considered by the best authorities the most classical book for over 400 years.

In the fourteenth century another Pole, Thaddeus of Cracow, professor at the University of Paris, wrote his famous "Code of Theology." One of the first translations of the Bible in Polish took place at the beginning of the fifteenth century and is known as the Bible of Saraspatak, a small town of Hungary where it is to be found now. It was, as usual in the war, taken from the Polish people and it is to be found among the Hungarians. The author of that translation is not known. In the fifteenth century the writings pertaining to astronomy and mathematics by Albert Brudzewski, the teacher of Copernicus, were officially adopted by the Italian universities.

John of Stobnica published in the year 1512 one of the first and most perfect geo-

graphical maps of America. The writings of our great philosophers, political and social reformers, John Ostrorog from the fifteenth century and Frycz Modrzewski from the sixteenth century, have been translated into French, Dutch, German, Italian and Spanish.

Another Pole, Strus, professor at the University of Padova, in the sixteenth century was the first, at least one of the very first, to study the pulse of the patients and wrote on that subject a book which for 200 years enjoyed an immense popularity.

The "Logic" by Smiglecki, professor at the University of Vilno, published in 1611, was adopted as a school book in a great many European countries and enjoyed particular popularity in England.

Sarbiewski, a great Latin poet of Poland, who lived in the seventeenth century (he died in 1640), is still being studied and held in high esteem by the Latinists of Oxford University.

Still another Pole, Jablonski, published in 1750 his famous work "Pantheon Egyptiorum," thus preceding by fourteen years the birth of Champolion, the French archeologist to whom the credit is given for being the founder of the science of Egyptology.

I quoted only a few names, in order to

shorten my address, omitting a great many others of equal importance, not mentioning our inventors, our discoverers, our artists, our musicians, not mentioning even the poets, some of whom, as you know, belong to the greatest the world has ever produced.

The cause of Poland's downfall cannot be found in the state of anarchy in which the country was submerged during the time of their ruler's election. There has been in history a great deal more of anarchy in other countries and still these countries are very much alive. There is a tendency toward anarchy in every more or less democratic country without imperiling national existence. The effects may sometimes appear simple but the causes are always complex. Limited in their power by the excessively liberal constitution, the Polish executives, the kings, might have been lacking authority; the country, the granary of Europe, the defender of the faith, might have been exhausted as a political power; the nation, deprived of a permanent regular army, might have appeared a tempting and easy prey to our good neighbors; but the principal reason for Poland's partition was obviously that liberal, progressive and democratic spirit which made the country so very early not only one of the most civilized nations, but the most liberal state of Europe.

The University of Vienna was founded in 1365; that of Berlin in 1809; that of Petrograd in 1810, while the four Universities of Poland (I mention only four, omitting those which had a rather ephemeral existence) dated as follows:

Cracow	1364
Vilno	1578
Zamosc	1595
Lemberg	1661

No wonder that with such centers of culture, with a ministry for public education, the first, chronologically speaking, of the entire civilized world, with the most humane judicial reform introduced twenty years before the great French revolution, with a republican form of government, Poland was looked upon by the surrounding autocratic monarchies as a continuous and ever-growing danger for their feudal, reactionary institutions, and her fate was sealed. "It would be criminal," says an eminent French writer, "to reproach Poland with her anarchy. She has simply been the first victim of European democracy."

Poland needs help, she needs it now even more than ever before. But it is not for that purpose I took the liberty to appear before you and to address you at this time.

Men may starve but a nation will not die, because nations are immortal.

However immeasurably reduced, Poland will live. She will live forever. She will live as long as our globe has to live, but if she is not granted what she needs most of all, her life will be crippled, horrible and unbearable as it has been ever since 1772. Poland has been hungry for thirty-three months, but she has been thirsty for 144 years, and nothing but freedom can satisfy her burning thirst. Freedom of all the Poles, not of only one portion of them.

Several months ago, in one of the crucial moments of my country's history, a great and noble man raised his mighty voice and said a few words in Poland's favor. A few words only but they shook the whole world, stirred up all the Poles wherever living, because they came from your country, because they were spoken by your President.

I will not attempt to describe to you the unbounded gratitude of the entire Polish nation, but I can solemnly assure you that there is not one true Pole who would not gladly offer the last drop of his blood in defense of the Stars and Stripes—that glorious and beautiful flag of yours, that very emblem of "liberty, equality and justice."

The aspect of the Polish problem is much brighter now, but the final solution is still

far away. In this immense enlightened democracy, no man, however great, noble and mighty, can fully realize his plans, his aspirations, without the loyal support of public opinion, without the harmonious co-operation of at least those who are the most powerful, the most decided factor in every civilized life. And they are those who know, who do, who teach.

You are here in one of the greatest powerhouses of the United States. You are concentrating here the heat of thousands of young American hearts, you are generating here the light for hundreds of thousands of American minds. You are laying and establishing the solid, sound foundations for public opinions. You are sanctioning ideas, consecrating facts. Give us some of that precious heat, give us some of that priceless light, warm up the indifferent, enlighten the ignorant ones, help us to break these humiliating chains binding up an ancient and highly civilized nation, a nation which has been for centuries and which can be again one of the vital organs of humanity. Take your share in this work. Help those who have already started the gigantic enterprise and then the ancient Polish republic, which has been murdered by three autocracies, will rise again, revived again by the generosity of American Democracy.



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