

THE COMMON CAUSE

FORTNIGHTLY OF THE POLISH SECTION OF THE "SWORD OF THE SPIRIT"

EDITORIAL OFFICE: 27 GROSVENOR STREET, LONDON, W.1

Telephone: MAY 2928

Vol. I No. 20

OCTOBER 25, 1942

Price 3d.

JAN REMBIELŃSKI

THE GRAVES MOUNT GUARD

BEFORE THE NEXT ISSUE OF "The Common Cause" reaches its readers, the Church will have celebrated one of the most inspiring feasts of the liturgical year, the Day of All Souls. This day reminds us of death, with its prayers for the dead, but even more of *immortality*, because only the faith in an after-life can give any sense and reason for all these prayers. What would be their meaning if they were not based on the dogma of the communion of saints, or, in other words, on the belief in a lasting community uniting both those alive and dead, who either need our prayers or intercede for us in Heaven.

For this reason All Soul's Day in general, and in wartime in particular, inclines us to look deeper into the problem of the national community. Today, when the pall covers the whole of Poland, when every square in Warsaw has been turned into a cemetery of those who gave their lives in the capital, we can see more clearly than ever the real sense of this community, its nature and portent.

Indeed, a nation in its deepest essence is also some sort of "communion of saints." It is a society linking both the quick and the dead, and this is, perhaps, its most significant characteristic. The determining factor for the existence of a nation is not the factor, often only casual, of being subject to one authority and of living in one country, but the feeling of unity with the same host of ancestors to whose inheritance one is entitled. As in every other society, so in this communion of generations, there is a mutual influence of past and present; the dead, by their heritage, fix our aims and possibilities, they give direction to our sympathies and ideas, and every new generation looks at its past in its own fashion and creates for themselves a new picture of this past.

Today, in the light of our present war experiences, we see more clearly than ever that this fundamental characteristic of every national community is also the most lasting. We saw how the enemy was able to subjugate whole countries in a few days or weeks of blitzkrieg, how he forced legal governments into exile, depriving them of their authority in their own country. However, his brute force proved to be powerless when confronted by the spiritual links of the present generation with its predecessors. This link will never be severed by aliens because it is largely inaccessible to external influences.

This link is not only a fundamental attribute of nationality but also its most effective shield, protecting it against the extermination planned by the invaders. If, after two or three years of persecution we see endurance instead of despair all over suffering Europe, we must look for the reason for this mainly in the feeling that something which has lasted for centuries cannot disappear suddenly, that the glory, the works and the sacrifices of scores of generations cannot vanish into the air, and that it would be unworthy to despair of the future.

Thus we reach the kernel of the matter, inasmuch as we wish to understand anything about the continent of Europe and its future. The long creative and mental history of Europe has resulted in the fact that every European nation, with only a few insignificant exceptions, has too great a heritage of glory to be destroyed or forgotten. Every European nation, great or small, has so many achievements to its credit and so many past generations which form just one family with the living generations, that it is always a great nation which cannot be relegated to a subordinate and secondary role.

This truth is not realized by the totalitarian dictators, who like barbarians are unacquainted with history, who moreover have the naive arrogance of revolutionaries and self-taught men, convinced that history begins with them. But how can men who behave so lightheartedly towards the traditions of their own nation, who maintain only those traditions which agree with their "ideology," and reject everything which, in their opinion, can-

not be contained within the framework of this "ideology," realize the value of the traditions of other nations?

Nor can this truth be understood by conceited planners, who are usually courteously named doctrinaires, though in fact it would be far more correct to call them simply ignorant. This label should be applied to those who think that the world may be arranged at will, that free nations

may be subjected to others or united according to whim, without any regard for the differences in their aims, traditions and culture.

But this heritage of the dead, a heritage which made the nations of Europe what they are now, is the most effective obstacle to all such attempts.

The present generation draws its moral strength from this heritage, which has

enabled it to remain faithful to its past and it will become a factor of stabilization when the world order is rebuilt.

On All Souls' Day, when I recollect our cemeteries—the Powązki in Warsaw, Lyczakow in Lwow, Rossa in Wilno—amidst their trees, glittering with thousands of lamps and candles on a dark November night, it always seems to me that I am seeing the fires of a great army

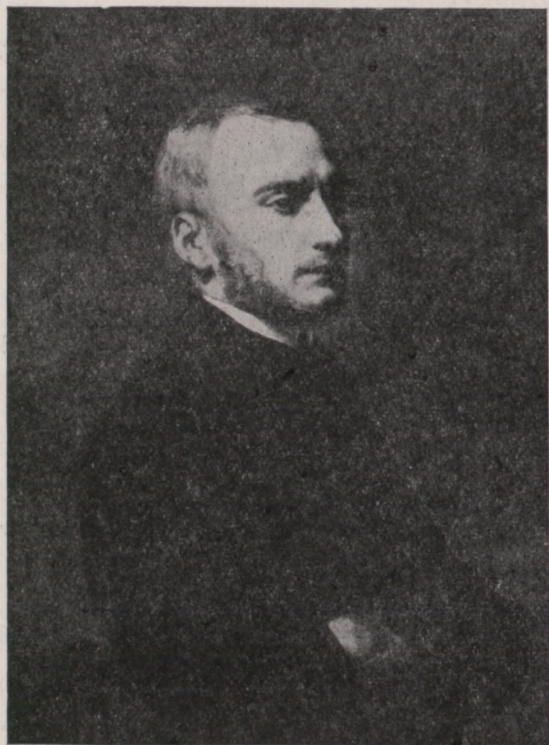
bivouacking in a wood on the eve of a decisive battle. Today they are blacked out, in accordance with the rules of the present war, and they seem to be an even more dangerous ambush for the enemy. And again, in daylight the ever-growing numbers of crosses in these cemeteries are like signals warning everyone that no attempted "Order" can hold its own if it violates the peace of those buried there.

G. K. CHESTERTON

POLAND'S TRAGEDY

(From the Preface to the English translation of the "Undivine Comedy")

One of the *chef-d'oeuvres* of the famous Polish poet, Zygmunt Krasiński (1812-1859), is his drama "The Undivine Comedy" (1835). Its main subject is the vision of a future universal revolution; the decaying aristocratic world is personified by Count Henry (The Man), and the victorious revolution by its leader, Pancras. Both heroes, however, sin through lack of Christian spirit. Count Henryk, though claiming to defend the ideals of Christianity, ends by committing suicide because, actually, "he loved nothing, he worshipped nothing but himself and his own thoughts." Pancras dies blinded by the vision of Christ, in Whom, faithful to his materialistic philosophy, he refused to believe. This drama should be considered as prophetic, especially considering its date. It was translated into many languages and has been played on many stages throughout Europe for over a hundred years. It was translated into English by Mrs. Harriet E. Kennedy and Mrs. Zofia Uminska (1924), and G. K. Chesterton wrote the preface to this English edition, from which the excerpt which follows is taken. We also include two scenes from the "Undivine Comedy" from the above translation on the following page. Krasiński's other *chef-d'oeuvre* "Irydion" (a drama of the times of Heligabalus) was also translated into English by Miss Florence Noyes (1927).



Zygmunt Krasiński from a portrait by Ary Scheffer.

On the back page:

(1) Zygmunt Krasiński as a lad.

(2) The Mansion at Opinogóra (Central Poland) where Zygmunt Krasiński was born.

THE UNDIVINE COMEDY MAY BE said to have appeared in the most tragic period of the tragedy of Poland. What that ordeal was like is still very little understood in England; and its shadow on these pages may still perplex the reader. Indeed most English people will probably live to accept the Polish triumph without having ever realized the Polish tragedy. For, indeed, it was a tragedy to which western nations could conceive no parallel, since nationality arose out of mediaeval Christendom. There is no other case of a separate, self-respecting nationality not robbed but murdered, or rather cut up alive. Apply it to any other concrete case and it will seem fantastic; the fancy will seem as comic as the fact was tragic. We have to imagine that some conference at Lausanne or Stockholm had comfortably arranged that East Anglia, Essex, Sussex and Kent should be given to France, along with London and parts of the Midlands, that everything north of the Trent should go to Germany and that all the remaining land, covering Wales and the West Country, should very properly and naturally become part of the United States. Nobody knows what an Englishman would say if there were not an inch of England to walk on. But we may be

pretty sure what his enemies and oppressors would say; they would say exactly what the enemies and oppressors of Poland said, and they would have quite as much justification for saying it. They would say that England had been weakened by a great deal of feudal liberty and even anarchy; which is quite true. They would say that England had become too much of an aristocratic state, which is quite true. They would say that the ambition of such aristocrats weakens the nucleus of national monarchy; which also is quite true. The Polish aristocrat who wrote this play draws darkly enough the shadows of Polish aristocracy. But there is hardly a word ever said against Polish aristocracy that could not have been said against English aristocracy. There is scarcely a word about Polish liberty and laxity that could not have been said against English liberty and laxity. The reason that no such horrible and inconceivable fate befel this island was not merely that it had a considerable strength and security as an island. It was also that it happened to be surrounded by civilized nations while Poland was surrounded and is still surrounded by savages. Neither Louis of France nor Philip of Spain nor any President in America would have dreamed of dealing with a Christian nation exactly

after the fashion of the monkey tricks of Frederick of Prussia, and the mad Czars, working in a sort of innocence of infamy, only faintly modified by the real remorse that mingled with the hypocrisy of Austria.

The unnatural strain in the Polish tragedy is the first thing to be realized in the interpretation of this strange and rather stern drama. The writer is not directly concerned with the national indignation. He is in a sense seeking distraction from it, as men always desperately seek distraction from the memory of defeats. He is in a sense even doubtful about it, as he was I believe in his personal and political attitude; for in such cases it is always doubtful

whether the next step is to be hopeless resistance or compromise or the support of more moderate elements among the enemy. But the subconscious pressure of the abnormal national condition is felt everywhere; in the bitter invocations of the artistic ideal as something that can deceive and destroy mankind; in the suggestion of the historic past as something rather heraldic and antiquated and inevitably passing away; in the imagination of the haughty hero who breaks because he will not bend, and goes to death believing that he is going to damnation; and even in the vision of the victorious Christ at the end, who is still the Man of Sorrows even when He comes in the clouds of glory.

A. Z.

A POLISH MOTIF

ON THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

THE APOLLO THEATRE IS NOW SHOWING a good war play, "Flare Path" is the realistic story of one day in the lives of a group of people whose fate directly depends on the war. The action takes place in the lounge of a small hotel by an airfield. This hotel is inhabited by airmen. The audience feel like guests who have entered a pub at night and rub elbows with strange fragments of life.

The author of the play, Terence Rattigan, is an airman himself, and his play is "no literature," but rather a reporter's story and the clear echo of real life. We become better acquainted with three airmen staying in this hotel. One of them is a mechanic: a simple, kind and witty man; he is visited by his wife, who is very worried that she might be late at her laundry the next morning. The other one is a young boy, full of schoolboy admiration for a male film star who, by accident, is also there. The third one is a Pole. He speaks English in clumsy phrases from basic English, he smiles charmingly to cover the fact that he understands not one word of what the others are saying, and he is as gauche as a bear. As he can't say much, he only says what is most important; that he loves Poland, that it is a magnificent country, and that his own pleasure is in beating Germans.

The wives of two airmen stay permanently in this hotel. One of them is an actress; she suddenly meets again the man film star from whom she rebounded to marry the schoolboy airman in three days. The other one is a barmaid, the strongest personality on the stage (and her part was, perhaps, the best played). She is called Countess, because she is the wife of a Pole, who, of course, is a Count. So we have a Count, a film star, and everything is set for a love adventure. Still the play is simple. It shows a grey war life, a life of duty, the prosaic background of the enthusiasm and gallantry of the airmen.

The airmen are suddenly called to take off, and the audience lives with the three waiting wives through a night full of anxiety and dread. Two of the airmen return. The schoolboy husband of the actress pays the price of his tremendous effort; in a state of appalling exhaustion he discloses the stirring drama of the weight of the responsibility of a grown-up man resting upon a mere boy. The third of the airmen, the Pole, does not return. The letter he left behind to be opened if he did not return is read on the stage. It is laboriously translated from French and listened to by an audience holding its breath. The letter speaks in simple words of the tragedy of Poland and of the nobility of the Poles.

However, the play has a happy end, especially happy and dear to us Poles. The Polish airman returns. There is terrific enthusiasm on the stage; the nice clumsy boy who is popular with everyone, describes mainly with his hands how he fell into the water, how he rowed, and how a "pheasant" (which he obviously confused with peasant) showed him his way on the shore. In the general excitement the only civilian, the film star, completely deprived of his charms by a night of real drama, leaves the hotel by the back door. The curtain falls on a scene of happy cheers for the Pole, who is raised up and sat on a chair and sings with the rest of the company the realistic war song: "We do not want to join the Air Force..."

Terence Rattigan made the acquaintance of Poles in airmen's messes and in bomber crews. He has a good look at their behaviour and movements. He gave us a life-like character. But above all he has given a genuine expression to the friendship of the English people for Poles, and for this we are deeply indebted to him. Until now the Polish Motif on the English stage was often inspired by propaganda hostile to us. Now the Poles have a chance of making themselves better known, and particularly our airmen.

