

THE LAST KING OF POLAND

AND HIS CONTEMPORARIES

BY

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Frederick Augustus I
1750–1827



PREFACE

THE present volume aims at presenting a picture of the social, moral and intellectual condition of Polish society at the moment when the Polish State was about to disappear for ever from the map of Europe. The narrative will also, it is hoped, go far to explain how it was that Poland, originally the most chivalrous, high-spirited and promising of Republics, had, by the end of the eighteenth century, become a nuisance to her neighbours, and an obstacle to the development of her own people.

The central figure in this sinister yet engrossing tableau of a decadent nation dancing carelessly towards its doom, is naturally the last King of Poland. There are few more pathetic figures in modern history than Stanislaus Ponia-towski, whose dazzling vices and barren virtues were so typical of the age in which he lived, that "Age of Enlightenment" which prophesied the Millennium, and precipitated the Revolution. In him we find an idealist whose principles were as lofty as his practice was contemptible; a reformer who meant excellently well, yet invariably sacrificed honour to expediency; a statesman by instinct whose political outlook was always clear, whose conclusions were always correct—but alas! his moral flabbiness had forfeited beforehand the confidence of those whom he could have guided and might have saved.

And this Prince Charming, eighteenth-century to the very tips of his fingers, lived in an environment which, judging by outward appearances, might very well have been the later Middle Ages. Anyhow it was more eastern than western. His elegant *bijou* Court was, indeed, a pocket-

edition of Versailles, minus most of the gilding ; but in the Diet, where the business part of his life was spent, Stanislaus had to do with people who, to one of his fastidious tastes, must have seemed semi-barbarians. Here there were far more heads shaven in the Turkish style, than powdered and peruked after the French. The very dress of these old-fashioned squires had an Oriental cut and character. Latin was their official language. Of French they had scarce a smattering. Here, too, were the fabulously wealthy Magnates, the Potoccy, the Radziwills, the Braniccy, each one of them an independent King in his own province, and of far more importance in the State, and out of it, than the titular king whom they openly looked down upon. We shall see in the sequel how these patricians ruined their country to spite their sovereign.

And beneath and behind everything, ever felt though not always seen, is the hand of the Russian Empress, controlling and determining the course of events through a succession of singularly well-chosen satraps, such as the martial Reprin, the courtly Volkonsky, the brutal Saldern, the sarcastic Stackelberg, and—most dangerous of them all—the suave and sentimental Sivers. The work of these finished diplomatists was mostly dirty work, and the best of them heartily disliked it ; nevertheless they did it, as we shall see, well and thoroughly.

Finally, an explanatory bibliographical note. Though certainly no hero, Stanislaus Poniatowski has gone down to history with a much shadier reputation than he really deserves. This is due to the fact that his earliest contemporary chronicler, the Saxon Minister Essen, was opposed to him both personally and dynastically. Subsequent historians, German and Polish alike, have based their estimates of him on Essen's despatches, accepting them absolutely for no other reason, apparently, than because they happen to be original documents. Yet it should by this time be generally recognised that the despatches of diplomatists, as reflecting both the individual and the professional prejudices of their authors, should always be

submitted to the most rigid critical tests. The balance has recently been redressed to some extent, by Kalinka's masterly work, *The Quadrennial Diet*. Here the King is shown in a true light, for the first time, by a writer of unimpeachable veracity and rare critical acumen. Kalinka's favourable opinion of Stanislaus, on the intellectual side, has since been reinforced by *Documents relatifs à l'histoire du deuxième et troisième partage de la Pologne* (Leopol, 1902), and by *Stanislaus Augustus and Prince Joseph Poniatowski in the Light of their Private Correspondence*, Lemberg, 1904 (Polish and French). Both these works, edited by B. Dembinski, are of capital importance. For the social life of the period, Kraszewski's *Poland in the Period of the Three Partitions* (Polish) is still, on the whole, the best authority, despite its frequent inaccuracies as regards purely political events. Another Polish book, Dembicky's *Pulawy*, has also been of considerable service to me. Its one defect is a somewhat exaggerated estimate of the "Czartoryscy." *Les mémoires secrets et inédits de Stanislaus Auguste* (Leipsic, 1862) contains some curious private information from the King's own pen, but certainly does not exhibit Stanislaus in the best light. Here we have the note-book jottings of an ultra sentimental young coxcomb who has still a great deal to learn. On the other hand, the *Correspondence inédite du Roi Stanislas Auguste Poniatowski, et de Madame Geoffrin* (Paris, 1875) does honour to the now maturer King's amiability and self-restraint under most trying circumstances. The lady does not come out nearly as well. Too often she is guilty of petty meannesses and jealousies, sadly disconcerting in the phœnix of the Parisian salons. As to the last years of Stanislaus, and the ambiguous but perhaps inevitable part he played during the Grodno Diet, we must, I suppose, await the publication in full of the despatches of Count Sivvers, still presumably reposing in MS. in the Russian archives, before we can pronounce a final judgment upon the unhappy King's conduct in the midst of appalling difficulties. Meantime we must be content with volume iii. of *Des Grafens Sievers Denkwürdigkeiten*, by C. L. Blum,

which contains copious extracts from the private letters of Sivers to his daughters, as well as from his despatches to the Empress, during his residence at Warsaw and Grodno, as Minister Plenipotentiary of Russia. Of the numerous other works utilised by me, I need only mention the following: Grigorovich's *Chancellor Prince A. A. Bezborodko* (Russian), a poor enough biography from a literary point of view, but invaluable as going to the root of Catherine II.'s private views as regards Poland; Moszczyński's *Records of Polish History during the last years of the reigns of Augustus III. and Stanislaus II.* (Polish), illustrative, in particular, of the social life of those times; volume xii. of the *Works of Catherine II.*, edition Puipin (Russian and French) relating to her early *liaison* with Stanislaus; Kraushar's *Two Historical Sketches of the Times of Stanislaus Augustus* (Polish), furnishing interesting pictures of the Court life of the period; and finally, the last four volumes of Solovev's great *History of Russia* (Russian), and the same author's *Fall of Poland* (Russian), an intimate acquaintance of both of which works is absolutely indispensable to a right understanding of the events set forth in this volume.

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CHAPTER I

THE ROOT OF THE MISCHIEF

Historical retrospect—Geographical remoteness of Poland—the Tatar Invasion—Rise of a middle class—Origin of the Polish Constitution—The *Szlachta* or gentry—Typical instance of its lawlessness—Oppression of the middle classes by the nobles—Limitations of the royal power—Fears of a military dictator—Jealousy and reduction of armaments—Ingratitude of the Poles to the national heroes—Systematic obstruction of every project of reform—Instances of Sigismund III. and Wladislaus IV.—Reform only possible by means of a *coup d'état*—Efforts of John Casimir to save the country by diplomatic and legislative means—Hopeless condition of Poland on his failure—Mischievous influence of Sobieski—Subsequent anarchy and stagnation—The Polish principle of Government assumes that men are angels—Total absence of every sort of coercion—Each citizen a law unto himself—Obedience expunged from the category of public virtues—Excellent laws but no means of enforcing them—Legend of the averted Crucifix and the Devils as symbolising the maladministration of justice

POLAND is the only example in history of a State which deliberately committed political suicide for the sake of absolute individual liberty. In the middle of the sixteenth century Poland bore upon her the full promise of Empire. Her territories stretched from the Baltic to the Euxine, from the heart of Germany to the heart of Moscovy. She was indisputably the greatest Power of central Europe, and the whole world regarded her as the chief representative of the Slavonic races. Less than a century and a half later, the "Republic," once so proud and chivalrous, counted for nothing at all in the councils

of Europe. She might have been isolated in the midst of an ocean, for all the influence she exercised upon her neighbours. Anarchy tempered by insurrection is, approximately, the best description of her internal government. A partition of her dominions had been seriously proposed for generations before it was actually accomplished. The vastness of the spoil, and the weakness of the would-be despoilers were the sole causes of the postponement of a catastrophe which was recognised as inevitable by every continental statesman. For this miserable and peculiar collapse the Poles themselves, or rather perhaps their ruling classes—though it really amounts to the same thing—were mainly responsible. A brief retrospect of Polish history will make this perfectly clear. Nor will it be the least interesting portion of this book. The whole story of Poland's unique act of self-destruction, even when compressed within a necessarily bare epitome, cannot fail to attract the curious, from its very oddity if for no other reason. It may also serve as an introduction to what follows.

It must be admitted at the outset that the Poles were less favourably situated than the Western nations. From the very beginning of their history geographical remoteness placed them beyond the reach of Roman civilisation and feudal discipline, till a comparatively late period. The persistent pressure of the mail-clad German induced them, indeed, at the end of the tenth century, to accept Christianity from the Holy See as a measure of self-protection, but, in 1025, a terrible pagan reaction swept away the poor remnants of Christianity and civilisation along with it. From 1058 to 1138, Poland, under two exceptionally martial monarchs, Boleslaus II. and III., endeavoured, with some success, to carve out an Empire of her own; but, on the death of Boleslaus III., the land, split up into more than a dozen independent principalities ("the partitional period" of Polish historians), lost all political significance for a century and a half to come.

The terrible Tatar invasions (1224-1242) had a curiously

salutary effect upon Poland—it introduced a middle class there for the first time. The only way of filling up the gaps in the population, due to the ravages of Batu and his hordes, was to invite foreign immigrants of a superior kind, chapmen and handicraftsmen capable of building strong cities and defending them afterwards. Such immigrants, naturally, could be obtained only from the civilised West, on their own terms. Immediately dependent upon the Prince, from whom they obtained their privileges, these traders soon became an important factor in the State, balancing, to some extent, the influence of the already dominant military caste, and enriching the land by developing its resources. Casimir III., Poland's first great statesman (1333–1370), who reunited most of the divided Polish lands, and reintroduced his long isolated country into the European family, encouraged and protected the townsmen, and admitted them to the franchise. Under the great Princes of the House of Jagiello (1286–1572) this industrious, enterprising middle class, so indispensable to the national prosperity in an almost purely agricultural community like Poland, was generally protected against the usurpations of the gentry, who would have excluded them altogether from any share in the government of the country.

The origin of the Polish Constitutions is to be sought in the *wiece*, or great council of the Polish Princes in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The privileges conferred upon the magnates, of whom these councils were composed, revolted the less favoured country gentlemen, or *szlachta**, as they were called collectively, who, towards the end of the fourteenth century, combined in defence of their rights in their *Sejmiki*, or local Diets, and speedily made themselves heard. At a somewhat later date, for the convenience of the Government, the various *Sejmiki* sent deputies to a *Sejm*, or general Diet, which represented the whole nation, while the old royal council became a Senate or Upper House. It was during the reign of Casimir IV. (1447–1492) that the gentry, assembled in the local Diets, began to impose their

* Possibly from the German : *Geschlecht*.

will on the country at large. By this time the *szlachta* had added to its original privilege of freedom from any obligation except that of military service, the right of deciding all questions of peace and war, and controlling the *ruszenie pospolite*, or county militia. As, moreover, they had the power of the purse, they could hamper the executive at every step. Their distrust of the Kings was fully equalled by their jealousy of the towns, many of which, notably Cracow and Lemberg, had also obtained from the Crown such privileges as local autonomy and freedom from tolls, in return for loans to needy kings, or important public service, e.g., the warding off of Tatar raids. Most of these cities, as already stated, were of German origin, and additionally protected by the Magdeburg Law. Their political rights, at this period, were considerable. Louis the Great (1370-1382) placed the burgesses of Cracow on a level with the gentry by granting to the town council jurisdiction over all the peasantry in the extra-mural estates of the citizens. Henceforth deputies from all the chief cities were usually summoned to the local Diets on all important occasions, e.g., the ratification of treaties—a right formally conceded to them by the *Sejmik* of Radom, in 1384—and the election of new sovereigns. Thus, on August 27, 1492, the representatives of the cities of Cracow, Thorn, Lemberg, Dantzic, and Posen participated in the election of John Albert. But as the *szlachta*, or gentry, grew in power and pride, they chafed against their political partnership with the wealthy plebeian burgesses, though ready enough to claim their assistance in case of need.

Nevertheless the Jagiellos respected and defended the privileges of the town as far as they could. The following case may be taken as typical.

A nobleman, Piotr Bostowski, had attacked the house of Adam Solcz, a citizen of Cracow, broken open the doors, killed two of Solcz's servants, and done other damage. The consuls thereupon arrested and brought the culprit before the town council. He was duly tried, according to the Magdeburg law, condemned to death, and publicly

executed, confessing the justice of his sentence. Immediately afterwards the Bostowskis cited the consuls and town council before the local Diet for the slaying of their kinsman. The town council refused to admit the jurisdiction of the provincial court, and appealed to the King. Casimir IV. summoned the parties to appear before him at the Castle of Cracow, and, after a careful consideration of the case, decided that the town council had acted in strict conformity with the privileges of the city, as guaranteed by the Magdeburg law, and was worthy rather of praise than of blame.

Unfortunately for the burgesses, Casimir IV.'s third son and immediate successor, John Albert (1492-1501), was both an ambitious and an impecunious Prince, and his poverty had far-reaching political consequences. Dependent on the landed gentry for the subsidies with which to prosecute his wars, he was driven to sacrifice the middle and lower classes to his exacting paymasters. The Diet of 1496 was especially remarkable for a whole series of ordinances levied against the burgesses and the peasants. One of these statutes exempted the exports and imports of the gentry from the payment of all tolls and other impositions; a second deprived the burgesses of the right of holding extra-mural estates, and those who already possessed the right were to surrender it within a given time, under penalty of heavy fines; a third enacted that henceforth prelatures and canonries should be held solely by the descendants, on both sides, of noble families. Other statutes restricted the ancient right of the agricultural labourer to migrate to better wage markets, especially at harvest time, and introduced modifications of land-tenure which just stopped short of the socage system. In one province socage was actually introduced as early as 1477. Thus the Diet of 1496 introduced that abnormal condition of things which was, ultimately, one of the chief causes of the collapse of Poland. It elevated the *szlachta*, or gentry, into a favoured caste apart. The burgesses, forbidden henceforth to hold landed estates, were thereby excluded

from all participation in military service, with the numerous attendant advantages. In a word, the very classes which should be the backbone of every normal State was excluded as much as possible from the public service, and thus tended to become indifferent to the welfare of their country. Nay, more, the commercial prosperity of the burgesses was seriously imperilled by the fiscal exemptions now granted to their competitors, the great landowners. The yeomanry of Poland, too, were being degraded into mere serfs. But it was the State which suffered most. The natural equilibrium between the various grades of society was disturbed by these radical one-sided changes, and many sources of national wealth were permanently obstructed.

To the last the Princes of the House of Jagiello did what they could to defend the liberties of the burgesses against the usurpations of the *szlachta*. Thus when, in 1513, the Diet of Korczyn went so far as to extrude from its session the burgomaster and consuls of Cracow, Sigismund I., who knew the value of the burgesses from experience, promptly reinstated them, and publicly confirmed their privilege of representing the city in the local Diets. In 1533, and again in 1537, fresh efforts were made by the *szlachta* to exclude the deputies of Cracow from the Diets. Finally, in 1539, the King was obliged to issue an edict threatening to prosecute for *lèse-majesté* any gentleman who attempted in future to infringe the rights of the citizens. The Diet of Bromberg, 1520, was very severe on the peasantry, who were now compelled to work one day a week gratis on their masters' land. Hitherto this had been a matter of private arrangement, now it was made a statutory and universal obligation. This novelty proved to be the thin edge of the wedge. As time went on the position of the Polish peasants grew worse and worse, till, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, they had sunk into the condition of serfs, in which miserable state they remained till their emancipation by Kosciuszko in 1793.

But by this time the Polish kings themselves, so far from being able to protect their subjects of the middle and lower

classes, were fighting for their own political existence. The monarchs of the House of Jagiello could always, to some extent, control the vagaries of the nobility, because they were hereditary Grand-Dukes of Lithuania, and possessed enormous estates in their Grand Duchy, which, properly managed, often enabled them to dispense with subsidies. The purely elective kings had no such fulcrum at their disposal. They were bound hard and fast by the *pacta conventa* solemnly imposed upon them at their coronation. The archetype of these electoral *pacta* were the Henrican articles subscribed to by Henry of Valois, in 1573. These "articles" deprived the future king of the privilege of electing his successor; forbade his marrying without the previous consent of the Senate; considerably restricted his authority as commander-in-chief by virtually placing the national forces at the disposal of the Grand-Hetmans, or Captains-General, who were responsible not to the King but to the Diet; and bound him to accept a permanent council of fourteen Senators, elected every two years by the Diet, four of whom, in rotation, were to be in constant attendance upon him. As time went on the *pacta conventa* were made more and more stringent. The *szlachta* had nothing now to fear from the middle and lower classes, but it was quite conceivable that a monarch, who was also a victorious warrior, might object to remain, all his life, a mere puppet on the throne. Yet, in view of her geographical position, a warrior-king was for Poland an almost absolute necessity. The whole of her vast, ill-protected south-eastern frontier, known as the *dzikie poli*, or "wilderness," lay open to the incalculable and interminable raids of the Tatar, the Turk, and the Moscovite, who, with but moderate initial success, could easily penetrate to the very heart of the unwieldy realm. The dilemma, then, as it presented itself to the imagination of the 80,000 or so of selfish and ignorant country gentlemen, who, since 1572, had become the dominant factor, the motive power of the Republic, was this how is the frontier to be defended without augmenting the authority of the Crown? The difficulty was solved by

reducing armaments to a minimum, always a dangerous expedient, but absolutely suicidal in the case of Poland, whose dominions had no natural boundaries and were environed by rapacious and unscrupulous enemies.

The consequences of this new system speedily made themselves felt. The Jagiellos, after two centuries of almost Sisyphean labour, had at last succeeded in welding out of the most unpromising and rebellious materials, a new great power, the Polish Republic. Sixteen years after the death of the last of these great Princes, in 1572, the dissolvent forces of anarchy had already undermined the work of ages. It was of small avail that the first elective King, Stephen Báthory, was a hero and a genius, one of those providential men who are sparingly dispensed to save or enlighten a nation. He did great things for Poland. He humbled Ivan the Terrible to the dust, and made Moscovy harmless for a generation. But he could obtain little or no help from his Polish subjects, who were rather alarmed than gratified by his successes. It was mainly with Magyar soldiers and Magyar money, that he fought the battles of Poland. In the crisis of the struggle with Moscovy, when Báthory had determined upon a winter campaign, the Polish section of the army at once demanded to be led home, and it was only after several young nobles had been well flogged, and a few more had been publicly hanged, that ordinary discipline was restored. Nay more, Báthory's brilliant services to his adopted country, so far from being rewarded with the dutiful gratitude of his new subjects, made him absolutely unpopular with the gentry. Not one word of thanks did the King receive from the Diet for repulsing Moscovy, till his one friend and supporter, the great Chancellor, Jan Zamoyski, put the whole assembly to shame by rising in their midst and delivering an eloquent panegyric, in which he publicly thanked his sovereign, "in the presence of this ungrateful people," for his inestimable services. The Pans, or great lords, chafed and fretted beneath the curb of a strong King, and even rejoiced indecently at the unsatisfactory condition of Báthory's wounds, which

promised to relieve them shortly of that troublesome hero !

<The next elective King, Sigismund III., was a born statesman. At the beginning of 1606, he summoned the Diet for the express purpose of abolishing the crowning absurdity of the existing Constitution, viz., the practice of demanding absolute unanimity in all the decisions of the Diet. If Poland was to continue her political existence the proposed reform, obviously, was urgent and indispensable. The best men in the land were at one with the King on this point. At the previous Diet warning voices had even been raised in the Senate itself against the so-called *liberum veto*. "Whether from malice, obstinacy or stupidity," said Ostrogsky, Castellan of Posen, "all our counsels and consultations come to nought. It is a disgrace to the Commonwealth to have such a Government as ours, which enables any one to bring about the ruin of the State from sheer obstinacy and stupidity. For God's sake, let us not suffer the Republic to perish without making an effort to save it." This effort the King now proceeded to make by abolishing the *liberum veto*. But the royal manifesto had scarce been issued when Nichols Zebrzydowski, one of the highest dignitaries in the realm, and, what is more, a thoroughly honest and well-meaning man, summoned a confederation to protest against an innovation "so obstructive of personal liberty." Amongst the most eloquent champions of individual liberty, at this confederation, was Stanislaus Stadnicki, surnamed "the Devil," who, to quote a contemporary, "had more sins on his conscience than hairs on his head." This nobleman habitually cropped the noses and ears of offensive small squires, and kept his peasants chained to the walls of subterranean dungeons, for months together. On August 6, this confederation converted itself into an "Insurrection," with the avowed object of dethroning the King, simply, we must remember, because he desired to reform a constitution which was paralysing the legislature and the executive alike. Sigismund had now no choice but to take the field

against the insurgents. He routed them first, and after they had solemnly pledged themselves to disturb the Commonwealth no more, he permitted them to renew their homage. All their promises were, however, speedily broken, and, in the course of 1607, the agitation was renewed, and became more widespread than ever. A fresh insurrection was formed at the very time when the Diet was assembling at Warsaw. When, with the approbation of the Senate, Sigismund issued an edict, demanding the instant dispersion of the insurgents, they retaliated by declaring that an insurrection was as much superior to King or Diet combined, as a General Council was superior to the Pope. Then an amazing thing happened. The Diet, instead of energetically supporting the King in his efforts to re-establish the rudiments of law and order, practically enlisted itself on the side of anarchy. Its sympathies were, indeed, rather with the insurgents than with the Government; and its edict: *De non præstanda obædientia* (June 17, 1607) was a surrender to the rebels. This disastrous edict enjoined that, in case of any future malpractices on the part of the King, he was to be warned twice to cease therefrom, by the Primate and Senate, and once more by the succeeding Diet. If he neglected these three warnings, the nation was absolved from its obedience, and free to choose a new sovereign. As, however, even this betrayal of the King failed to satisfy the insurgents, and they still clamoured for Sigismund's abdication, the civil war was resumed, and lasted, with varying success, for the next two years. At last, when every one had grown weary of it, it was terminated by a general amnesty which punished nobody and decided nothing. The helpless King was forced to concur, and henceforth abandoned all his projects of reform. It was in the same reign that the two national heroes, Stanislaus Zolkiewski and Jan Karol Chodkiewicz, were successively sent to certain disaster, dying on the battlefield within six months of each other, because the Diet refused to equip them adequately for the struggle, though the security of the Republic depended upon their exertions.

The moral obviously to be drawn from the rebellion of Zebrzydowski was that constitutional reform in Poland by constitutional means was henceforth impossible. This was clearly recognised by Sigismund's eldest son, who succeeded him in 1632. Wladislaus IV. was the most popular monarch that ever sat on the Polish throne. And he deserved his popularity, for his character was essentially lovable. His election, therefore, was the merest formality; but the unanimity with which all parties united to elect him was due to the meanest of motives. For the Poles calculated that so generous and impulsive a Prince would be content with fresh limitations of the royal power, would be "a sort of 'king-bee' dispensing nought but honey to his subjects"; would first ease all grievances, satisfy all complaints, and then courteously stand aside, and let them rule the kingdom without his help. Accordingly, the *pacta conventa* presented to Wladislaus before his coronation, bound him never to declare an offensive war, or form alliances, however profitable, or hire mercenaries, though there was no regular army to speak of, without the consent of the Estates. Moreover, he was to relieve the *szlachta* from the payment of the land-tax and the hearth-tax, the sole taxes to which they were still liable, "because the said taxes savoured of servitude." And this, too, at a time when the nobles and clergy* between them owned nearly all the land in the kingdom, and there was a deficit in the Treasury of 370,000 gulden! The King agreed to all these usurpations without cavil, and even without comment. Proud of his popularity, and full of confidence in his military genius, of which he had already given the most brilliant proofs, he had his own views as to the best way of benefiting his country. He proposed, first of all, to win over the army, and then, with its assistance, effect a *coup d'état* which should enable him to reform the Constitution on a strong monarchical basis. His chosen instruments were the Cossacks, who formed a large part of the irregular forces

* The clergy owned 160,000 villages out of a total of 215,000, and paid no taxes at all.

of the Republic. The Cossacks liked Wladislaus. He had endeavoured, so far as he was able, to protect them against the tyranny of the nobles who had always oppressed or chicaned these wild children of the Steppe. Indeed, the Polish Pans, or lords, regarded the Cossacks generally as schismatic runaway serfs to whom only the very minimum of tardy justice was to be grudgingly conceded. They did not always remember that these semi-barbarian freebooters were also the sole guardians of the south-eastern frontier of the Republic. Innumerable had been the compacts made between the Diet and the Cossacks regulating the pay and maintenance of the latter, and not one of these compacts had been honestly kept by the Polish Government. When the Cossacks presented their grievances, and protested that they also formed part of the body politic, the Poles replied with a sneer: yes you are parts of the body politic just as hair and nails are part of the human body, and hair and nails need cropping and clipping now and then. Wladislaus IV., on the other hand, had never made any distinction between the Cossacks and the *szlachta*, either in the field or elsewhere, and hitherto they had willingly followed his banner against Turk and Tatar alike. He had but to give the signal and they would certainly rally round him. His opportunity seemed to have come in the spring of 1646, when the Porte declared war against the Venetian Republic. Wladislaus at once concluded a secret alliance with Venice, and summoned the Cossacks to his assistance. Their deputies arrived at Cracow and held midnight conferences with him. In return for a promise of the restitution of their forfeited liberties, the Cossacks promised to put 100,000 men in the field whenever called upon to do so. That Wladislaus meant to increase his prestige by fresh military triumphs, as a first step towards finally reforming the Constitution, there can be no doubt. That the well-laid plan had some chance of success is also highly probable, but the plot was betrayed, the Diet of 1646, convinced that a Turkish war would be "the grave of the national liberties," reduced the royal

guard, the nucleus of the standing army, to 1200 men, and forbade the King to issue any declaration of war whatever without the previous consent of the Republic. Thus the endeavour to reform the Constitution by a *coup d'état* also came to nought.

Wladislaus' half-brother and successor, John Casimir, the ex-Cardinal, shared the views of his predecessor as to the necessity of curbing the nobility, and reforming "the absurd Republic," by strengthening the Executive at the expense of the Legislature. Unfortunately he was not the man to cope with a well-nigh desperate situation. His honesty of purpose was incontestable, his splendid personal valour was a national asset, yet somehow he failed to inspire confidence, and was invariably unlucky. On the other hand, it is no light praise to say of him, that, in the face of appalling difficulties, he was almost the only man who, guided by fixed political principles, endeavoured to do his duty as he understood it, till, in sheer weariness and disgust, he voluntarily abdicated the throne.

But, in truth, Poland had now fallen upon evil days. We have come to the period of open public traitors who deliberately sold their country to foreign Powers, rather than submit to the authority of their lawful ruler. This was after all only a further development of that ultra-individuality which desiderated complete personal independence for every gentleman in the land. The King, simply because he was the King, stood officially higher than any one else, and was, for that very reason, a standing contradiction to the universally accepted dogma of absolute political equality as formulated and interpreted by the dominant *szlachta*. Hence the Diet, composed as it was entirely of gentlemen, nearly always supported every great noble who publicly opposed the King. Was he not one of their own order? Was he not the champion of the Republic? Was he not resisting "despotism"? How, in such circumstances, could the merits of the case be considered at all?

Take, for instance, the treason of the first of these eminent and popular traitors, the Vice-Chancellor, Hieronymus

Radziejowski. It was at the Court of Queen Cecilia, the first consort of Wladislaus IV., that Radziejowski's wit, *savoir-faire*, and agreeable manners had gained him powerful patrons, while his open-handedness and affability made him very popular with the *szlachta*. Though a man of notoriously evil character (he had been convicted of rape, and all but tortured his first wife to death) he was already one of the first dignitaries of the Republic, and his absolute unscrupulousness promised him still greater eminence in a society where corruption and simplicity were so strangely intermingled as in seventeenth-century Poland. But he went too far when he accused his second wife, Euphemia Wisniowiecka, of adultery with the King. She at once quitted his roof for the protection of a royal convent, and instituted divorce proceedings against her slanderous consort. Radziejowski then attempted to kidnap her; but the convent was defended by the royal guards, and, for attacking them, he incurred the penalty of *lèse-majesté*, and was condemned, *in contumaciam*, to lose his life, honour and goods. Never was sentence so richly deserved, yet public opinion, indoctrinated by Radziejowski and his creatures, was almost entirely on the side of the felon. The King, however, did not flinch. He frustrated every attempt at rehabilitation by treating the lesser seal as vacant, and bestowing it on one of his own adherents, whereupon the Diet, which had just met, was "exploded," or abruptly dissolved, by the deputy Sicinski,* at the instigation of his patron, Prince James Radziewill. The *liberum veto*, or the dissolution of a Diet by a single deputy, had frequently been employed before, but this was the first time that the right of a single deputy to "explode" the Diet was recognised as a matter of principle. Henceforth it was open to every discontented magnate to put up a petty squire, or some other hireling, to gag the executive by getting rid, at any time, of an inconvenient Diet. At a later stage, the *Sejmiki*, or provincial Diets, which elected the deputies to the *Sejm*, or General Diet, frequently included in their mandates to their deputies

* He had only to rise and exclaim: "*Nie pozwalam*" ("I protest").

an express injunction to "explode" the Diet in certain contingencies. In the present case the action of Sicinski prevented any further investigation of the Radziejowski affair. As for Radziejowski himself, he hastened to Stockholm, where he prevailed upon Charles X. of Sweden to invade and devastate Poland, assuring him that she would be an easy prey. At this crisis many of Radziejowski's friends either joined the Swedish King against their own King, or proceeded to carve independent principalities out of their bleeding country.

By the autumn of 1655, the Polish State had ceased to exist. The King was an exile. The capital, the coronation city, the central and the western provinces, were in the hands of the Swedes. The Moscovites, unopposed, had quietly appropriated everything not already occupied by the Swedes, the Cossacks had devastated Galicia, blackmailed Lemberg, and ravaged all that remained to be ravaged in the Ukraine. The ruin of Catholic Poland seemed to have been accomplished by the unnatural union of Orthodox Moscovites, Calvinists and Lutherans—directed and encouraged by domestic traitors. Yet Poland's last chance emerged from the very depths of this cataclysm. All Christian societies have within them a germ of regeneration capable of arresting and neutralising the natural processes of political dissolution and disintegration. So long as there are a sufficient number of men of good-will ready, when once convinced of the worthlessness of political pretenders, and the mischievousness of hireling help, to sacrifice everything for their country, ready to seek, in the sanctuary of their own hearts, for that religious inspiration which, in the last resort, is the one remaining hope of a sinking State—no nation need perish. It was religious enthusiasm which saved Moscovy from destruction fifty years earlier; it was religious enthusiasm which was to save Poland now, if only for a time.

The reaction began when, for seventy days, the fortress-monastery of Czenstochowa, the Lourdes of Poland, heroically defended by the Prior, Augustin Kordecki, defied all

the efforts of Swedish skill and courage to capture it. On December 27, 1656, the besiegers were obliged to raise the siege, after suffering very heavily. This success, so extraordinary that it was popularly attributed to Divine intervention, sent a thrill through Poland, and elicited an outburst of religious enthusiasm which spread through all ranks of the population. A holy national war was proclaimed, against which all the efforts of disciplined armies were powerless. The King returned from exile. His first act, at a solemn service in Lemberg Cathedral, was to dedicate himself and Poland to the service of God, and vow publicly to use every effort to re-establish and reform the Republic, and make it a strong and stable State. Two years later, when the country had been swept clear of the despoilers, John Casimir set about performing his vows. The necessary reforms were now to be carried out by diplomatic and legislative methods. The first step was to make the Crown hereditary instead of elective, and thus obviate the anarchy which prevailed, more or less, during every interregnum.

At first the Polish dignitaries themselves, appalled at the sight of the abyss to the edge of which the Swedish war had dragged them, took the matter of constitutional reform seriously in hand. The Diet of 1658 appointed a commission to report upon the expediency of limiting the *liberum veto*, and deciding all matters by a plurality of votes. The Commission reported to the Diet of 1659 that such reforms were indispensable, and the Diet of 1660 was preparing to carry them out, when obstruction suddenly arose, and the further consideration of the matter was postponed indefinitely. At the same time "the succession question," which had also made some progress, was frustrated first by the intrigues, and then by the open rebellion, of the Grand-Marshal of the Crown, Prince George Lubomirsky, from purely personal motives. By dint of the most unscrupulous agitation, Lubomirsky and his partisans easily persuaded the Diet to condemn any alteration of the existing mode of election, and inspired the *szlachta* with such a suspicion of the Court, that it refused to contribute a penny to avert

the threatened economical ruin of the country caused by a war which had reduced the best part of Poland to a wilderness. Not a penny would the 100,000 landed proprietors of Poland, pleading their privileges as noblemen, consent to pay out of their own pockets, but they levied a pole-tax on the poorest sections of the community, the townsmen, artisans, shepherds, millers and farmers, to meet the demands of the unpaid and starving army, which claimed 26,000,000 gulden of arrears. The wretched taxpayers broke down under the strain, and the result was a dangerous military mutiny which took the form of Confederation levying blackmail on the estates of the bishops and clergy throughout the realm, and refusing to disperse until their claims had been satisfied. So far from attempting to mend matters, the Diet of 1662 reaffirmed the right of free election, condemned as traitors all who should dare to elect a future King during the lifetime of the reigning sovereign; levied a fresh poll-tax on the plebeian classes; and actually took measures to rehabilitate the scoundrel Radziejowski.

Henceforth the case of Poland was hopeless. She had deliberately disregarded every warning, rejected every saving expedient. She was to share the fate of sixteenth-century Hungary, and perish in the same way, and for the same reason, because her great men did not care.

It was reserved for the last great soldier of Poland, John Sobieski, to accelerate the ruin of his country; to save it was utterly beyond his power. Sobieski has gone down to history as a national hero. His military exploits were, no doubt, sufficiently numerous and striking to establish his military reputation once for all; but certainly he was a very shoddy sort of hero. Anyhow he stands on a much lower level than the illustrious captains of the two preceding generations, Zamoyski, Zolkiewski, Chodkiewicz, for instance. He could fight as well as the best of them, but he fought for his own hand. He was even patriotic up to a certain point, but his patriotism was inextricably bound up with plotting and self-seeking. In a word, the man was tainted to the core by the lawlessness and egotism of his

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age. Lest this verdict should seem unwarrantable or uncharitable, let us very briefly review the public career of Sobieski before he ascended the throne.

Sobieski rose to distinction during John Casimir's interminable wars with the rebellious Cossacks. He was one of the first to desert his sovereign in the hour of need, and go over to the Swedes whom he materially assisted. When, however, the position of the Swedes became untenable, he changed sides again, and as his military talents happened to be indispensable, John Casimir made it worth the while of the capable young general to remain loyal in the future. He was rapidly promoted, and, in 1668, made Grand-Hetman of the Crown, in other words, Commander-in-Chief, with the absolute command of the Polish army, for, though the King appointed the Grand-Hetmans, the army was obliged to swear allegiance not to him but to them. Sobieski's next act was to intrigue against, and endeavour to overthrow, the new King of Poland, Michael Wisniowiecki, who had been elected unanimously in 1669, and that, too, at the very moment when a huge Turkish army had already crossed the southern frontiers of the Republic. In any other country but Poland, a commander-in-chief who had deserted his post in the hour of danger, in order to play at treason and promote civil war, would have been promptly and justly executed. But, by this time, the Poles had become morally blind to the turpitudes of their patricians, so when the peccant Grand-Hetman interrupted his treasonable proceedings by a dashing ten days' raid into the Ukraine, he was held to have expiated all his offences by "washing his hands clean in Turkish blood." As King, Sobieski reaped to the full the bitter harvest of treachery and treason, the seeds of which he himself had so recklessly sown beforehand. He soon found himself in the horrible position of a sinner who repents too late. All his efforts to patch up the crumbling structure of the Republic were frustrated by the same methods which he himself had so frequently employed while he was still aiming at the Crown. Ill-luck persistently dogged him during the last seven years of his

life. Nothing that he put his hand to prospered. Rarely has Nemesis pursued its victim so remorselessly. His attempts to convert Poland into a constitutional monarchy, hereditary in his family, certainly the best thing that could have happened, foundered on the determined opposition of the Diet. No sooner did the *szlachta* get wind of his plans than a confederation, headed by the chief dignitaries of the Republic, was formed to prevent any such design ; the parrot-cry of " the Republic is in danger ! " resounded everywhere ; and the application of the *liberum veto* exploded the Diet at the very beginning of the session. His worst enemies were, naturally, the Lithuanians, who could never forgive him for his treachery towards their fellow countryman, King Michael. Thus they prevented the marriage of his son, James, with the wealthy young widow, Ludowika Radziwill, with the result that she married a kinsman of the Elector of Brandenburg, and her immense fortune passed into German hands. The Diet, on this occasion, was inclined to support the King, whereupon it was exploded by one of the hirelings of the House of Sapieha. Anarchical was the state of Lithuania—the eastern and largest half of the Republic—at this period. Casimir Sapieha, Grand-Hetman of Lithuania, preyed upon his neighbours like the worst type of feudal baron. In his private quarrel with the Bishop of Wilna, he devastated the whole diocese, and burnt dozens of churches. Twice, in 1693 and 1695, the King, indignant at these outrages, summoned Sapieha to answer for his misdeeds before the Diet. On both occasions Sapieha's partisans exploded the Diet before it had time to consider the case. Thus the *liberum veto* had now sunk so low, that its chief use was to shelter high-placed felons from the pursuit of justice !

Sobieski died broken-hearted in 1696, and, for the next seventy years, Poland cannot properly be said to have had any history. She became a sort of no-man's land, or hunting-ground, where, as Catherine II. put it, " you could always pick up something worth having for the mere trouble of stooping for it." Her neighbours treated her as politically

non-existent. The eight first campaigns of the Great Northern War were actually fought out within her domains by the Swedes, the Saxons, and the Russians, although she had proclaimed her neutrality, and was technically at peace with all the belligerents. Her provinces were ransacked to supply the wants of half a dozen antagonistic armies which deliberately traversed her territories in search of each other. It occurred to nobody to ask her permission beforehand, still less to offer her compensation afterwards. That hideous hurly-burly—the reign of Augustus II. (1696–1733)—was succeeded by an interval of absolute stagnation—the reign of Augustus III. (1733–1763). During this latter period Poland was free at last from the molestation of foreign enemies. Externally it was a period of peace and quietness, but the quietness was a mortal lethargy, a state of coma preceding death and dissolution. Of Government, in the modern sense of the term, there was no trace. The King, comfortably ensconced at Dresden, very rarely visited his kingdom. The Diet continued to meet, as usual, every two years ; but it was so regularly exploded by the application of the *liberum veto*, that no laws were passed, and no business was done, for a whole generation. The long-sought political utopia of the *szlachta* had, in fact, at last been realised. Poland had become a place where every gentleman had nothing to do but please himself so long as he did not tread on the toes of some other gentleman. All onerous obligations, all vexatious restrictions, had long since been removed. The army had virtually been abolished because the Polish squire refused to pay for it. The diplomatic service had been done away with for the same reason. The political economy of the Republic now rested simply and solely on the personal good-will of the privileged citizens who formed about one-twentieth part of the population. No external compulsion of any sort was to be tolerated for a moment. Good-will as the motive power, conscience as the brake, largess as the stimulus—these were henceforth to be the sole instruments of Government in Poland. The morbid optimism which could devise such a system over-

looked the essential fact that no State can be built up on purely ideal grounds, for the simple reason that men are men and not angels. In every man there are bad qualities to be curbed, as well as good qualities to be encouraged. If bad qualities are not curbed, they have an unfortunate and inevitable tendency to gain the upper hand and extinguish the good qualities, to the detriment of the community. No State, therefore, can exist without a magistracy armed with sufficient authority to control, and, whenever it is necessary, to chastise the perverse and the unruly. Unfortunately in Old Poland, the word "obedience" had been expunged from the category of public virtues. The Polish statute books abounded with excellent laws and ordinances, enjoining in the most eloquent and forcible language the performance of such public duties as the defence of the country in case of need, the maintenance of order in public assemblies, the strict administration of justice, the payment of taxes, and so on. But there was nobody in the land to enforce them. Abuses of every kind flourished luxuriantly, and everybody tacitly agreed to wink at and ignore them. Now and then the Diet would suddenly awake to a sense of its responsibilities, and pass a whole series of new reforming statutes which were to put matters right, but nobody took any notice of them. Everything continued just as it was before, and the statutes were found to be not worth the paper on which they were written. We may go further still and say that the lawlessness of Poland was in an inverse ratio to her legislative productiveness. Thus, from 1347 to 1500, when she was well governed and on the way to become a great Power, a single slender book of statutes sufficed for all her needs, whereas from 1611 to 1714, the period of her debasement, the statutes passed by thirty parliaments filled six enormous volumes. The modicum of direct control nominally in the possession of the chief executive officer of the Crown, the so-called King, was nullified by the absurd regulation, dating from the beginning of the sixteenth century, whereby the King could appoint, but in no case dismiss, the great officers of State. The

consequence was that the various branches of the administration became sinecures for life in the hands of their actual holders, to the exclusive personal advantage of those highly-favoured dignitaries. The King could not call them to account for peculation or maladministration, and whenever the Diet ordered an inquiry to be made it was instantly "exploded" by some hireling of the incriminated dignitaries themselves. So venal was the administration that Augustus III. had publicly to promise that he would not sell the Ministry of Finance to the highest bidder. The militia, since the abolition of the army Poland's one visible means of defence, was under the absolute control of the Grand-Hetmans, or commanders-in-chief, who did what they liked with it, employing it generally to blackmail the provinces they were supposed to defend. The tribunals were a scandal to any civilised State. The *starostas*, or judges, were notorious for their indolence and indifference. Their courts are described as "bear-gardens." "As disorderly as a court of justice" became a favourite proverb in Poland. Everybody recognised its appositeness. In fact, the *starostas* used the *jus gladii* not to maintain public order, but to promote their private interests. The Polish tribunals seemed only to exist in order to demonstrate the superiority of might to right. It was hopeless for persons with small means to sue for justice against the rich or the powerful. The judges were bought beforehand, and the cost of legal procedure was crushing. There were, indeed, even in the worst days of the Republic, really righteous magistrates, like Prince Czartoryski, Malachowski, Krasinski, but the extravagant praises lavished upon them by their contemporaries for merely doing their duty on the bench is eloquent as to the character and conduct of the judicial bench generally. In criminal cases, on the rare occasions when judgments were delivered at all, they were rarely enforced, as there were no means of doing so. In civil cases the parties to the suit were supposed to execute judgment themselves. If they could not, all their trouble and expense, of course, went for nothing. But as a rule

the weaker party had a poor chance of winning.) What the poorer classes, necessarily the greatest sufferers, thought of the tribunals may be gathered from the following vivid legend, most probably worked up by an itinerant Basilean monk from a local tradition. The existing state of things could not have been more happily symbolised.

There was once a poor widow whose little bit of land was her sole possession. But a magnate coveted her tiny estate, and forced her to go to law about it. Her case was as clear as amber, but the magnate bought up all the magistrates, and judgment was declared against the poor widow, contrary to all right and equity. When the judgment was read the unhappy widow cried aloud in the court-house: "If devils had sat in judgment the judgment would have been juster!" This happened at the end of the session, and the magistrates, for sheer shame, feigned not to have heard the widow's cry of distress. Now when the judges had all gone home, and only the clerks of the court remained behind, a number of carriages suddenly drove up to the court-house, and a number of gentlemen got out. They were dressed in fine clothes, but horns could be seen sticking out of their silken hats, and tails peeped from beneath their atlas hose. They were devils, in fact, and they proceeded, strictly observing all the usual legal formalities, to reopen the widow's case, finally pronouncing judgment in her favour. Then it was that the figure of the Saviour which hung in the court-house turned its face away from the judgment-seat, because the very devils had judged more righteously than those grave magistrates, prelates and magnates, whom Christ had redeemed with His precious blood.

Such, then, briefly, was the condition of Poland on the death of Augustus III. (October 5, 1763), the point at which our story properly begins. Before proceeding, however, to narrate the adventures and the experiences of the last King of this nightmare kingdom, we will endeavour to describe, with some detail, the social life of Poland as he found it. First we will see what the Polish patricians were at home in the midst of their dependants and retainers.

CHAPTER II

THE OLD NOBILITY

The 'Courts' of the old nobility—Their domestic economy—The Polish patriarchal system—The retinues of the magnates—Manly virtues of the "Pans"—Their magnificent hospitality—Gross ignorance of the country gentlemen—Wine-bibbing—Anecdotes of heroic toppers—Semi-barbaric types—Prince Karol Radziwill—Strong influence of religion—Pan Potocki of Kaniow—The *szlachta*, or gentry—The burgesses—Miserable condition of the peasantry—Semi-savage state of the country—The roads—The inns—General apathy and ruin.

WHEN Lars von Engeström, the Swedish Ambassador at Warsaw, was staying at Szymaniow, the castle of Prince Sanguszko, the daughter of the host said to him one day, as they were strolling in the gardens: "Our whole Court, except the doctor, is devoted to Sweden." Engeström, who had been entrusted by Gustavus III. with a difficult and delicate mission to the Polish Court, was delighted at such a piece of good news, though he rather wondered why the opinion of "the doctor" should count for so much in a purely political affair. But both his amazement and his satisfaction disappeared when, on further inquiry, it was explained that the Princess was alluding to her father's establishment. "The Polish magnates, it appears, always call their mansions their Courts," wrote the ambassador in his note-book.

The expression was characteristic, but in no way an exaggeration. In old Poland every great nobleman, every palatine, castellan, and *starosta*, was, indeed, an independent potentate in his own province, where he surrounded himself

with all the pomp and circumstance of a princely Court. Very often the Courts of these territorial "dynasts" far outshone the royal Court at Warsaw or Cracow. The palace of the Grand-Hetman Branicki at Bialystok, for instance, was called the Polish Versailles. Equally resplendent, but in far better taste, were the country mansions of the Czartoriscy, at Pulawy and Powonka. The chief feature of another great mansion, Sochazew, was its landscape gardens and arcades, which cost fabulous sums. At Wasklany, the property of Borch, Palatine of Belsk, was the famous moral and emblematical park, crammed full of highly ornate pavilions in the Classical style, in honour of Friendship, Wedlock, Life, Death, and other abstractions. Here, too, was to be seen a chapel with an altar dedicated to Fame, where Borch had proudly planted his own bust between the busts of Sobieski and Copernicus! Yet even the Palatine of Belsk was outdone by one of the royal treasurers, who contrived underground grottoes on his estate at Solec, and exhibited colonies of apes on artificial islands. The majority of the vast old country mansions were, however, built of wood, and were far more ambitious than comfortable. The most distinguished guests were expected to bring with them their beds, bedroom furniture, and table gear, and most of the waiting-men had to sleep where they could on bare boards.

The whole domestic economy of these great houses was also carefully modelled after the pattern of a royal Court. The very titles of a magnate's servants mimicked those of the official hierarchy. His "treasurer" looked after the general expenses of the house. His cupbearer saw to the cost and maintenance of the cellars. His equerry, naturally, took charge of the stables—perhaps the most expensive charge of all. All these officials, it should be added, were noblemen, as well as the chamberlain or major-domo, who stood at the head of the whole establishment, but whose special charge was to supervise and control the numerous gentleman-servitors. These were youths of gentle birth, mostly the magnate's poor kinsmen, or *protégés* who had

been lucky enough to obtain admittance into his house, for from henceforth their future was secured. They ate at the major-domo's table, wore swords, the distinctive mark of a Polish gentleman, and were never required to perform any menial service. Their principal duty consisted in showing the mistress of the house to her carriage or to her seat at church, or in escorting their lord on horseback when he went forth to visit some other magnate. The gentleman-servitors were treated as equals by their patron, who allowed them a small sum of pocket-money every month, with fodder for their horses and other privileges. They were, in fact, something between comrades and salaried officials. Attired in grey serge *kontushes*,* *zupans*, or vests of green atlas, flowered silk girdles with gold tassels, green caps trimmed with chestnut-coloured lambskin, and red boots, a score or so of these handsome, stalwart young fellows were no small addition to the great man's honour and glory. It also flattered his pride to have about him the scions of so many illustrious historical families. Felix Potocki, Palatine of Kiev, one of the wealthiest landowners in Poland, had for his major-domo a member of the ancient but decayed princely house of Czetwertynski, who happened to have the same Christian name as Potocki's mortal foe, Prince Czartoryski—viz., Adam. Whenever any member of the house of Czartoryski came to see Potocki officially, that magnate would always summon his major-domo, solely for the malicious satisfaction of saying to a servant in the presence of the Czartoryskis: "Send Prince Adam hither!"

The consorts of the Polish magnates also had their little Courts, at the head of which stood the Lady Chamberlain, or *Hofmeisterin*, with her attendant retinue of women of the wardrobe, women of the bedchamber, tiring-maids, and so on, all of them of gentle birth. The *Hofmeisterinen* were "virtuous and religious matrons of advanced age, well able to maintain their subordinates in a state of modest obedience." The lady-servitors divided between them the

* A sort of long frock-coat.

care of their mistress's effects, some being responsible for her dresses, others for her gloves and needles, and others, again, for her jewels and knick-knacks. They also dressed and undressed her, and took it by turns to sleep on an ottoman in her ante-chamber, so as to be within call in case she required anything during the night. They formed no part of the general company, but had their proper seats, along with the *Hofmeisterin*, at the major-domo's table. They were supposed, however, to supply, *in propria persona*, any deficiency of dancers at state balls. Yet they had their own waiting-maids.

Besides these lady-servitors, and not to be confounded with them, were the so-called "ladies of honour." These were damsels of high birth but small estate, generally kinsfolk, who were brought up with the daughters of the house, and shared their lessons and amusements. Often, in small families, they were themselves adopted as daughters. But in any case the magnate and his consort treated these young ladies as if they were their own children; educated and dowered them; and settled them for life.

Love of kindred and strong family affections were, indeed, the good points of the old Polish patriarchal system. In every gentleman's house, large or small, genealogies and family trees were religiously preserved, showing every grade of relationship from the earliest times. The youth of both sexes were taught their pedigrees along with their catechisms. The favourite apologue of the domestic mentor in Poland was the ancient story of the Scythian father who, on his death-bed, demonstrated the strength of family ties by making his assembled children break separately five darts which bound together in a bundle they could not break at all. Hence the reverence shown by the Polish youths to their elders. A son, for instance, even when he had arrived at man's estate, would never sit down in the presence of his father and mother without being invited to do so. Moreover, an intimate knowledge of the family ties was necessary for success in life. No one could get a canonry, an abbey, a Maltese cross, or anything else worth

having, unless he could trace his descent from a noble ancestor through at least sixteen generations. A magnate would always acknowledge kinsmanship with a poor gentleman, even if he were a cousin fifty times removed, while a cousin in the fourth degree was regarded as a member of the intimate family circle. Thus whenever a powerful family chose to unite together for political purposes at any of the *Sejmiki*, or local Diets, it was irresistible unless another family equally powerful could be got to oppose it, when the result would be civil war. One of the many reasons why the last King of Poland was looked down upon by the gentry at large lay in the fact that he had very great difficulty in establishing satisfactorily the nobility of his grandfather.

The Polish magnates also maintained whole hosts of *pajuks*, *heydukes*, *huszars*, *murzas*, *cosacks*, and *wallachs*—semi-Oriental waiting-men, lacqueys, and messengers, chosen from among the best looking and the best built of the peasantry, and arrayed in gorgeous uniforms of Turkish or Magyar origin. Prince Karl Radziwill kept at least ten thousand of these retainers, Count Felix Potocki even more. It was, indeed, a point of honour with every great nobleman to maintain as many as possible of these parade servants, as they may be called. The *pajuks* and *murzas* were dressed, like the janissaries, in ample grey hose, flowing mantles, with wide sleeves, embroidered with silver buttons, and lofty *kalpags* like grenadiers' busbies, surmounted by silver aigrettes. From their richly embroidered silk girdles hung Turkish daggers in silver sheaths. The *heydukes*, on the other hand, wore tightly-fitting Hungarian jackets embroidered with lace and silver stars. Their outer garment was a gorgeous fur dolman depending from the shoulder. On their heads they wore little turban-shaped caps covered with silver and galoon. The arms of their masters were embossed on the handles of their swords, in silver sheaths, which they carried by their sides. Still more splendid were the *huszars*. They wore carmine uniforms surmounted by silver cuirasses, and semi-visored

helmets with a ridge of feathers rising behind like a peacock's tail erect. The *huszars* served as a sort of militia, nominally at the service of the Crown, but employed most often, it is to be feared, in local feuds. Their arms, when on active service, were long lances of light wood, with sharp steel points, swords by their sides, daggers in their belts, and pistols in their holsters. In real warfare, however, these magnificent creatures proved to be of very little use. A single Russian regiment could scatter thousands of them.

The love of display also appeared in the trappings of the magnates' chargers, which carried saddles encrusted with gems and were covered by *shabracks* of cloth-of-silver. Thus the great man not only feasted his eyes upon treasures at home, but sat down upon treasures whenever he went abroad. It was all very gorgeous, but also, like gorgeousness generally, very barbarous. But for its fantastic picturesqueness, it might have bordered upon vulgarity. But the Pans of old Poland, especially those who lived far away from the capital—and this most of them did—were indeed semi-barbarous. They belonged rather to the fifteenth than to the eighteenth century. They had all the virtues of a primitive state of society. They were, as a rule, manly, generous, straightforward, outspoken; loyal and affectionate husbands; indulgent fathers, liberal masters. They delighted in field sports and martial exercises. They loved the risk and danger of the chase even more than its excitement, and in the elk, the bear, and the wild boar of their primæval forests they found a quarry which taxed all their skill and courage. Fox-hunting and hare-coursing were looked down upon as somewhat poor sport. Thus when Prince Karol Radziwill, the great Lithuanian magnate, was invited by Augustus III. to come to Warsaw, to follow the hounds with him, he scornfully replied: "Why should I go and hunt rats and mice in Poland, when I can always find wild boars in Lithuania?"

It must be admitted that the hospitality of the Polish magnates was magnificent, and that they spared neither trouble nor expense to make a pageant picturesque and

imposing. Thus in 1787 Prince Radziwill spent millions in entertaining Stanislaus II. for a few days at Nieswicz, his "capital," though the King, well aware of the needs of the country, had begged beforehand for the utmost simplicity. For a mile and a half before the royal *cortège* came to the castle the road on both sides was lined by the Radziwill tenantry, splendidly equipped. At the first stage a beautiful Turkish full-blood charger, a gift from the Prince, awaited the King. There must have been a touch of irony in this present, as the King was notoriously a poor rider, and even at reviews preferred carriage cushions to a seat on horseback. At every milestone thousands of mounted gentry, fantastically attired, met and saluted him, while cannon of the age of Sobieski thundered forth salvos in his honour from the castle walls. Last of all Radziwill himself appeared, riding on a fiery Arab decked out in cloth-of-silver, with a bridle of pure gold studded with rubies.

Unfortunately these fine old fellows had very few mental resources. Their education was rudimentary at best.* If they grew up with a smattering of Latin, that was considered quite enough for any gentleman to know. Very often they had to be coaxed to learn anything at all. The handwriting of the most eminent and distinguished magnates was generally so bad that nobody, not even themselves, could decipher their letters. Whenever, therefore, the great man had to write to a relation or friend with his own hand, he at the same time dictated it to a secretary sitting in an adjoining room. The calligraphic copy of the secretary was then attached, as a sort of key, to the magnate's own hieroglyphics, and both documents were forwarded to their destination. It would have been simpler, no doubt, to have signed the secretary's letter, but it would not have had the same value in the eyes of the recipient. A holograph letter from a magnate was treasured up as an heirloom by the *szlachta*, and had pecuniary value also. The great ladies of Poland, on the other hand, were often far better educated than their lords. Thus it is recorded of the mother of Prince

* I speak exclusively of the old-fashioned country gentlemen.

Karol Radziwill that she not only read books, but wrote them also.

Thus the young squires grew up ignorant and empty-headed. "The amusement of letters" was incapable of diverting such blockheads, and as time hung heavily upon their hands in consequence they were obliged, for want of something better to do, to fall back upon the primitive delights of eating and drinking. Hence it was that so many of the nobility literally ate and drank up their estates, and that banquets were apt to become orgies. "Gluttony and drunkenness," says a contemporary satirist, "are the beginning and the end of all our magnificence. With us he is the most popular who can give us the most to eat and drink." It was no uncommon thing for a magnate to mortgage a whole town* in order to pay for a single banquet. "As for the culinary science," says another satirist, "so much money is spent upon its profession, and it has attained to such a degree of perfection, that if the army or the treasury were only half as well cared for the Republic would have become, by this time, the most powerful and stable State in Europe." Hard drinking in especial was regarded rather as a virtue than a vice. It was considered as one of the distinguishing marks of the good old Polish gentleman. For instance, the Grand-Hetman Branicki once told King Stanislaus II., quite seriously, that he must never expect to be popular unless he got drunk at least twice a week. *In vino veritas* and *Qui fallit in vino fallit in omne* were maxims highly cherished by the Pans both temporal and spiritual. Consequently every sort of business, both public and private, was settled over the wine-cups, while at purely social gatherings nobody was allowed to leave the table unless he had first drunk his proper quota, which was calculated according to the capacity of the toper who could carry the most liquor. The weaker stomachs had therefore to fall back upon such expedients as coloured water and the surreptitious discharge of their beakers into their jack-boots. An ailing or otherwise incapacitated host was,

* Most of the towns were the private property of the magnates.

however, permitted to have by his side a surrogate to drink his toasts for him and prevent the entertainment from flagging. Both in town and country every male visitor on his arrival was welcomed with a stirrup-cup of generous dimensions. If he drained it off at one draught he won general approval, while if he followed this up by drinking a gallon of old Hungarian before dessert his fame was assured. At the house of Sapieha there was a very famous beaker renowned as a work of art, but still more so from the fact that Augustus II. and Peter the Great had successively drained it to the dregs in each other's honour. It was religiously preserved in a magnificent cupboard especially made to house it, and was never brought forth except with the honorific accompaniment of drums and trumpets. Another historic drinking-cup, fashioned by a famous goldsmith, on the occasion of the revival of the Order of the White Eagle by Augustus II., bore the inscription, *Pro lege, fide et grege*. It was subsequently acquired by the Potocki family. Augustus, the physically strong, had often emptied it at a single draught, but as nobody in the succeeding generation was capable of repeating this exploit the cup was henceforth kept only for show. Yet Poland still could boast of heroes far renowned for their bacchanalian prowess. Thus Pan Komarczewski could empty a bucket full of champagne at a draught, without losing his head or his feet. This gentleman and another equally famous drinker, Pan Sosiejkowski, High Chamberlain of Wolhynia, while staying at the mansion of Prince Lubomirsky, drank between them a whole butt of old Hungarian at a sitting. The process was as follows: Drawing out the bung, Komarczewski placed his beaker beneath the bung-hole till it was brim-full, and drank it off while his comrade took his place, beaker in hand; and thus they relieved each other till the butt was empty.

A typical representative of the old Polish Pan of the patriarchal, semi-barbaric sort was Karol Radziwill, Prince Palatine of Wilna. Radziwill was one of the wealthiest landowners of Lithuania, and he held many of the highest

offices in the State. He was also a man of very great natural abilities and magnificent physical powers. Yet from first to last *Panie Kochanku** (he was so called from his invariable habit of addressing every one as "My dear sir!") was, during the fifty-six years of a singularly turbulent life, as useless to his country as if he had lived in another planet. Nevertheless within his own vast domains (which were about half as large as Ireland) he was idolised and omnipotent, and, with this local supremacy, "My dear sir" appeared to be perfectly satisfied. He is thus described by one who knew him intimately:

Prince Radziwill was of lofty stature and of full habit, but, despite increasing corpulence, he could, even in his later years, always swing himself into the saddle, and guide his horse far better than any of us younger men. He had an enormous head, shaved so clean that only a single little tuft of hair was left hanging over the temples. He had a long, pendulous moustache, which he stroked when he was in a good humour, and twisted upwards when he was irritated or excited. He had a complexion as fair as a lady's, but his nose was long and of a bright blue colour. His eyes were large and generally laughing. He was of scrupulous cleanliness, changing all his linen at least twice a day. He generally wore his beloved Wilna uniform, a short pomegranate-coloured *kontusz*, or jacket, with vest and trimmings of an amaranth hue, a silver girdle embroidered with amaranths, a sword in a sheath of costly fur, yellow boots soled with silver, the whole surmounted by a mantle of thick grey cloth lined with fur, and fastened round the neck by a silver Radziwill eagle. His roomy pantaloons were fastened round his body by a sort of apron, so that his *kontusz* might not be dirtied. Stuck at the back of his head, and leaving his ears uncovered in the coldest weather, was a carmine cap trimmed with black lambskin. He wore felt shoes over his boots, but could not endure gloves, though he passed the greater part of the winter hunting in the open air. He had a keen intellect, a quick

* "My dear sir."

comprehension, and was well versed in the national history. He not only knew all the genealogical ramifications of his own family, but those of most other noble Polish families likewise. He treated the poorest gentleman of ancient descent as his equal, kissing him and embracing him and calling him by his Christian name whenever he met him. But he had an aversion to all people of dubious origin, and would admit none of them to his presence. He was well acquainted with the local statutes, and whenever he sat on the bench as presiding magistrate he often spoke extempore, and his speeches always carried conviction. In private conversation he bubbled over with witticisms; loved his joke; and was never offended when paid back in his own coin. He was a good master, and loved his servants like children. Every one of them would gladly have been beaten to death to serve him. Though very passionate, he had a good heart, and was easily appeased, not like his uncle, the Standard-bearer of Lithuania, who kept rebellious servants in chains for years. Whenever a gentleman entered the service of the Prince Palatine of Wilna he could be quite unconcerned as to the fate of his children. His master saw to that. So courteous was he towards ladies that he used to kiss the hand of every one of them he met, not even excepting the wife of a house-steward, so long as she was a gentlewoman.

Being an only son, Radziwill was petted and cockered from his youth upwards. His mother, the Lady Grand-Hetman of Lithuania, would not allow him to be bothered with book-learning, and the consequence was that when he had reached his fifteenth year he could not read a word. Every tutor who tried to make him work was dismissed by his mother the moment her darling boy complained of him. At last it occurred to his father that a youth destined one day to fill the high offices of his ancestors ought perhaps to know a little more than the science of riding horses bare-backed or of shooting a dozen eggs tossed up in the air without missing one. The Grand-Hetman won over his wife to the same opinion, and the lady thereupon announced

that she would give two freehold farms to whomsoever would teach her son reading and writing without using the least compulsion. This pedagogic feat was actually performed by an ingenious squire, Pan Piszczalo, who thereby won the eternal gratitude of the magnate, and got the Vice-High Stewardship of Rzeczyia into the bargain. His plan was as follows. He chalked up all the letters of the alphabet on a large wooden board. The young prince and two other nobles of the same age, who were educated along with him to stimulate their mutual emulation, were then stationed a certain number of paces away from the board with loaded muskets in their hands, and shot at the letters as they were named by the tutor. In this way letters, syllables, words, and at last whole periods were learnt by heart, till the pupils were able to read without quite knowing how they had acquired that accomplishment. The rest was easy enough. The curiosity of the lads had by this time been aroused. They wanted to know more, and had no longer any objection to a regular academic course.

Whenever a great noble attended the *Sejmik*, or local Diet, of which he was generally the marshal, he took half his "Court" along with him. The expedition then became a sort of *fête champêtre*, or picnic. For instance, whenever Prince Karol Radziwill set out for Novogrodek on official business he took with him thirty large waggons full of provisions, and some hundreds of horsemen as an escort. He generally put up at the Bernardine Monastery, whose syndic he was, taking possession of the whole of it, with the exception of a few cells, into which the monks squeezed themselves together as best they could. The Prince appropriated the cell of the Guardian because it was the roomiest. The *szlachta* of the surrounding districts, who accompanied the Prince on foot, slept in the courtyard of the monastery, in which were a score or so of extra large waggons laden with grain, meal, bacon, and *vodka*. A couple of oxen were slaughtered every day in the shambles, at the Prince's charge, and cauldrons full of flesh were seething and steaming all night long. The Prince himself dined twice every

day. First he shared with the small squires in the courtyard their meal—soup and tripe ; then he sat down in the refectory with the magnates and dignitaries who were his guests. When the tables had been removed everybody proceeded to the forecourt of the monastery, where, although they had already well drunk, they fell to their cups again with undiminished vigour. By this time the company had generally become a little mixed. Senators and gentry, magnates and small squires, were all drinking each others' healths like comrades. The Prince, if he perceived any gentleman with a ragged cap on, would snatch it from the owner's head, transfer it to his own, and hand over his rich silken cap in exchange. Instantly, as if by a signal, every one would follow his example. As the Prince got more and more tipsy, he would take off all his garments, one after another, and distribute them among the company, smiling all the time. To one he would throw his girdle, with the words : " Take it, blockhead ! " To another he would throw his *kontusz*, shouting, " Keep it, you swine ! " To a third he would hand his diamond pin, with the words, " Stick to it, you ass ! " His *zupan*, or mantle, would go to a fourth, and so on, till there he stood before them all in his amaranthine-coloured pantaloons, and his bare shirt, over which he always wore a large scapulary. He would then mount a waggon, and sit astride a hogshead of wine, which had been placed there beforehand. The *szlachta* would thereupon drag him slowly through the streets of Novogrodek, while the Prince would draw out the spigot and invite Tom, Dick, and Harry to put their pannikins beneath and drink to their hearts' content, while, with tears in his eyes, he implored them pathetically not to abandon him to his enemies.

It was not always that Radziwill's debauches terminated so peaceably. Once, many years before, while in a state of intoxication, he raided the estate of an old enemy, Pan Kotwicz, and burnt his house over his head. Pan Kotwicz laid the damages at 100,000 gulden, and as young Radziwill was as poor as a church mouse and in mortal fear of

his violent, austere, and somewhat stingy father, who had not scrupled, on a previous occasion, to administer to him fifty lashes for a far smaller offence, despite the fact that he held the high dignity of Sword-bearer of Lithuania, Prince Karol, I say, was at his wits' end what to do. Had his father heard of *this* "excess," he would, most probably, in a paroxysm of rage, have struck his prodigal son dead on the spot. The young man was saved by the devotion of a friend, who sold two of his estates to stop Pan Kotwicz's mouth, and Radziwill *père* never knew anything about the escapade.

Yet these drunken dynasts* were peculiarly susceptible to religious impressions. Prince Radziwill, for instance, observed all the prescriptions of the Church most scrupulously; sang every day, with his lackeys, the Hours of the Immaculate Conception; fasted every Saturday; flogged himself every Good Friday; and suffered terribly in the midnight watches from qualms of conscience. His chaplain, a shrewd and pious old monk, who shared his master's bedroom with a large boar-hound every night, so as to be ready at a moment's notice to exorcise evil spirits, repeatedly took advantage of these moments of compunction. All whom Radziwill had injured, or threatened to injure, during the day—and they were many—used to approach and prime Father Egidius beforehand, and innumerable were the instances in which the worthy chaplain saw to it that wrong was righted and ample reparation made for injury and violence.

The salutary influence of the clergy was still more observable in the case of Pan Potocki, *starosta* of Kaniow. Potocki was a more difficult subject than Prince Radziwill. He was essentially a hard, stern, even cruel man, whose habitual dissoluteness was untempered by any trace of the joviality of the good-natured and emotional Prince Palatine. He was also far more obstinate and opinionated. Yet he too had a lively tormenting conscience, and would submit to

* A very usual name for the great nobles of Poland and Hungary, as being the heads of dynasties.

almost anything from his clergy, even in his worst moods. Potocki was very ready with his whip on the slightest provocation, and thought nothing of administering a hundred stripes to a troublesome servant. But of fast-days and vigils he was superstitiously observant. On the eve of the feasts in honour of the Blessed Virgin, in particular, he would fast rigorously, and at the same time remit all punishments. It was clear to every one that Fridays and Saturdays were abhorrent to the *starosta*, and that he impatiently awaited Sunday in order to return to his cups. Nevertheless his conduct throughout Saturday was such as to edify even the austere monks whom he always had about him. He told his beads again and again, and, along with his whole Court, sang the Hours of the Immaculate Conception so fervently that, observing, on one occasion, a page-boy yawn during an antiphon, he ordered him to receive a hundred strokes with a birch-rod. Every Sunday all his guests, gentleman-servitors, retainers, and menials, following the example of their lord and master, assembled in church for morning service, and remained on their knees, praying earnestly, till High Mass was over. They dared not do otherwise, being well aware that the Pan Starosta would rate them pretty soundly if they ventured to turn either to the right hand or to the left during Divine service. He himself was in an ecstasy of devotion and contrition the whole time, yet occasionally he would glance around him to observe the behaviour of the others. At High Mass he invariably listened to two sermons, one in Polish from his Dominican, and one in Little Russian from his Basilean, chaplain. Both of them owed their daily bread to their lord's beneficence, yet they never spared the Pan Starosta wholesome truths. The Dominican, it is true, permitted himself only light allusions, but the Basilean went straight for him, without the least circumlocution, denounced the sins of drunkenness and anger, inhuman treatment of dependants, and so on, so that, though he never mentioned the *starosta* by name, he as good as pointed his finger at him before the whole congregation. The Pan Starosta,

however, moved not a muscle of his face, just as if these demonstrations had no reference to him ; but he bowed his head, blinked his eyes, and, turning towards the altar, would smite his chest repeatedly with his clenched fist.

The *szlachta*, or gentry, followed the example of the magnates as far as their means permitted them. They may be roughly divided into two classes, those who were sufficiently well off to live in their own villages among their tenantry, and the multitude of ignorant and necessitous small squires, some 1,300,000 in number, who were the mere hangers-on of the great nobles, living at their Courts, swelling their retinues, and voting as they were told at the local Diets, where they were the loudest champions of that "golden liberty" which found its ultimate expression in the *liberum veto* and general anarchy. There were exceptions, of course, but the great majority of these small squires had not the most elementary ideas of real freedom or true patriotism. They were the descendants of generations of lawless, self-seeking forefathers. Egotism unchecked had become a second nature with them. These were the men who refused, on principle, to give any military or financial assistance to the State in its direst need. These were the men who postponed public affairs to private interests, even during the dismemberment of their country ; who refused to allow their villages to be taxed or their peasants to be recruited when the enemy was already across the border ; who opposed the emancipation of the serfs lest their pockets should suffer by it.

The burgesses, and civic population generally, were of no account at all in eighteenth-century Poland. We have already seen * how the *szlachta* first deprived the towns of their political privileges, and then ruined their trade. The consequence was that what little trade still remained fell into the hands of the Jews, who took greater risks because they had comparatively little to lose. Long before 1763 the Estate of Burgesses had virtually disappeared, and all but a very few of the larger towns were the private property

* Chap. i.

of the magnates. The few native merchants still surviving were to be found in the semi-German cities of Dantzic and Thorn, or in the half-dozen or so royal boroughs which had contrived to save some small fragments of their ancient privileges. But all the old cities were phantoms of their former selves. Cracow, once one of the most populous and prosperous cities in Central Europe, had sunk to the miserable level of a decayed provincial town. Grass grew in the streets of the once flourishing city of Lemberg, for centuries the emporium of the eastern trade. Here and there small traders carried on a petty and ever-shrinking business; but whatever branch of commerce required a little enterprise, a little capital, a little skill, had long since been appropriated by aliens. The descendants of the Polish merchants who in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries had regularly frequented the principal marts of Europe were now little better than petty hucksters. Even the trade of Warsaw was scarcely kept alive by the artificial needs of a luxurious and extravagant Court. It was more of a *bric-à-brac* bazaar than a commercial centre, till, towards the end of the reign of Stanislaus II., the great bankers, the Teppers and the Schulzes, settled in it and completely transformed it. The magistrates and the nobility encouraged the Jews at the expense of the native traders, because they could get more out of them, and the Jews, in their turn, sucked the few remaining burgesses dry. "We are," says one merchant, "like neglected soldiers. Our weapons are still good enough, but they have rusted from long disuse. We have certain honours and privileges still left, but of what use are they to us when our whole Estate is thrust aside and forgotten?"

Still more deplorable was the state of the peasantry.

The degradation of the once flourishing and stalwart yeomanry to the condition of serfs is one of the blackest blots on Polish history. The condition of the peasant in Poland was not, perhaps, intrinsically worse than it was in contemporary Europe generally. But it was the uncertainty of his lot, depending as it did on the moods

and caprices of individual masters, which made it so hard to bear. The Polish peasant had no rights. The law of the land ignored him. The manorial court was the only court open to him, and he could not hope for much justice from a master who denied him the right of personal liberty and grudged him the wherewithal to live. For so many days a month he was obliged to cultivate or reap his lord's land before he could touch his own. These days of forced labour were, naturally, fixed by the landlord, and that, too, in the most unjust and arbitrary manner. Thus the Pan chose all the fine weather for the cultivation of his own land or the harvesting of his own crops, leaving the wet and stormy days to the tenants. The consequence was that the crops of the peasant frequently rotted in the fields before he had had time to gather them in. The masters were supposed to build the huts of the serfs, or supply them with materials for doing so themselves. They were also supposed to provide them with live-stock, and ploughing steers or horses, and allow them wood for fuel from their woods; but as there was no controlling or supervising authority over them, they discharged these moral obligations perfunctorily enough. The huts of the peasants in many provinces are described as sooty, one-roomed hovels, as cramped as dungeons, where in winter-time the cows and calves, sheep and poultry, herded together with the peasant and his usually numerous family. In Lithuania the peasant farmer who had two yokes of oxen, three cows, five calves, twenty sheep, and three swine was considered a wealthy man; but such cases were extremely rare. Most of these small farmers considered themselves lucky if they possessed a horse or a cow and a calf of their own. The peasant paid no rent for his holding; but this was of comparatively little benefit to him, as he was overwhelmed by a multitude of petty burdens. Thus a portion of his corn and hay had to be sent to the granaries and lofts of his lord. He had to supply his master's table with hops, mushrooms, and nuts. In the forest regions one-half of what the peasant caught in his snares and traps had to be sent up to "the

great house." He had also to pay in kind a tithe of his mead, flax, and hemp. The few large farmers who, owing to exceptionally favourable circumstances, still persisted, here and there, had also to maintain at their own expense a driver, a stableman, a dairymaid, and a kitchen-wench, repair their own farm implements, and build proper sheds for keeping them in. If we add to all this that the peasant had frequently to feed casual vagabonds, who would otherwise have burnt his house over his head, that he had to pay the parish priest fees on the occasions of births, weddings, and funerals, to say nothing of church gifts and festal offerings, it must be admitted that the margin of profit must, even in the best cases, have been very small indeed. No wonder, then, that the aspect of the Polish peasant astonished and shocked all who beheld him. "I see," says one observer, "millions of beings, many of whom go about half naked, while others are clad only in short and thin *siermegas*,* all of them pinched, parched, dishevelled, begrimed, with eyes deep-sunken in their heads, with bent backs and narrow chests, working continually. Moody, muddled, and stupid, they feel little and think less—and this insensibility is their only felicity. At first sight their bestial figures remind one rather of brutes than of humankind. *Chlopy* † they are called, a word expressing unutterable contempt. The daily bread of these creatures is coarse groats, and for four months out of the twelve they snatch a bare subsistence from the forest and the heath. Their dwellings are holes in the earth, or hovels raised a little above the surface of the ground. The sun never seems to shine upon these dwellings. It is in such filthy, steaming dens that the peasant, after working all day for his master, lies down in the foul straw of his lair which he shares with his children—and his cattle."

These are the words of a well-informed Pole. The testimony of foreigners travelling in Poland is to the same effect. "I have never seen a smiling Polish peasant," says one of them. "Whenever I have met them they have turned

* Coats of coarse cloth.

† Louts, boors.

their faces away and, with eyes cast down, uttered the usual formula: 'Praised be Jesus Christ!' The more I look at them the more I wonder how they can praise God at all." Another foreigner observes: "The Polish squire is generally of a ruddy countenance and a stalwart figure. His wide-open, prominent eyes show intelligence. He is alert, acute, full of vivacity, which he manifests in all his gestures. The Polish boor, on the other hand, has a savage look, a dark face, tanned nearly black by wind and weather, pinched and withered cheeks and hollow eyes, averting his looks from every passer-by. He slouches rather than walks. His general apathy makes him incapable either of keen joy or deep sorrow. He stands there before you as if petrified. He is indifferent alike to blows and promises."

There may be some exaggeration in these pictures. There are many others of the same sort which I have left unquoted, as they are transparently inspired by the sentimentalism of Rousseau, which profoundly influenced the younger generation in eighteenth-century Poland. They aim, obviously, at bringing tears to the eyes rather than at telling the strict truth. But, when every allowance is made for sentimental colouring and dramatic grouping, it is to be feared that the above accounts of the Polish peasant are substantially correct. There were, of course, considerable local differences. (In the province of Samogitia, for instance, where the peasant still retained the more honourable name of *kmiec*, or yeoman, the agricultural class, generally, was well housed, well fed, well clothed, and, indeed, scarcely distinguishable from the small squires. Many of the more enlightened magnates, too, had already awakened to a sense of their responsibilities to their tenantry. "If," says the contemporary moralist Jezierski, "I had to be born a serf, I should like to be the serf of Prince Augustus Czartoryski, for his peasants regard him, not as a master, but as a father." Prince Augustus's nephew, Prince Adam Czartoryski the elder, and his whole family, were famous for their humanity and beneficence to their dependants. The Princess Adam and her daughter the Princess Mary

built schools for the village children, and taught them from primers and other manuals compiled by themselves. They also built numerous hospitals, chapels, and model cottages on their estates. Prince Adam Czartoryski the elder was also the first to let land on lease and start agricultural savings-banks. The Czartoryscy found many imitators, but these were after all the exceptions.)

The condition of the country at large reflected only too clearly the apathy of the upper and the misery of the lower classes. Poland gave travellers the impression of a land which had relapsed into savagery. Nowhere else in Europe was travelling so difficult. There was no accommodation for wayfarers, and the roads, where they existed at all, were horrible. One traveller describes them as obstacles to rather than means of communication. To all appearance they were in the same condition as when the pagan forefathers of the Poles, a thousand years before, had first settled down among the forests of the Vistula. When primeval rocks and the time-honoured stumps of secular pines and firs did not bar his way, the traveller plunged straightway into leagues of swamp and morass reminiscent of the Deluge. The branches of the trees stretched right across the main thoroughfares, "threatening to gouge your eyes out or tear your head off at every step," whilst the accumulation of fallen trunks across the path often cost the traveller hours of labour with the axe before a path could be hewn through them. To make a *détour* was still more hazardous, for to leave the track was to plunge forthwith into the impenetrable wilderness. The few existing inns were mostly post-houses leased to Jews, principally for the benefit of the landlords, where the peasants drowned their cares for a time in cheap *vodka*. These inns had nothing to offer visitors but black bread, small beer, and a few eggs. They were, in fact, never intended for ordinary travellers. Yet food of all kinds was cheap enough in Poland. The country produced far more than its inhabitants could consume. A fowl could be bought anywhere for twopence, while flesh, milk, cheese, and fruit were to be had for a mere song. As, however, the

villages, often leagues apart, were mere congeries of tumble-down huts, more like cow-houses than dwelling-houses, travellers preferred encamping in the forests. For whatever inconveniences they might have to put up with in Poland, there was at least no fear of highwaymen or foot-pads. Robbery and theft were so rare as to be almost unknown, partly, perhaps, because there was nothing worth stealing, but also because the hospitable traditions of the country still survived, and to some extent supplied the place of law and police. ✓

It seems marvellous at first that crimes of violence were not more frequent in a country which had such a weak Government, or, rather, no Government at all, and where the military caste was everywhere dominant. There was not a gentleman in the land whose apartments did not present the appearance of an arsenal. The very bed of a small squire was often invisible because of the swords, darts, and pistols piled upon or scattered around it. From the look of things it might very well have been argued that brawls and quarrels innumerable must be of everyday occurrence. As a matter of fact the Polish gentry, however they might storm and rage, were as unmarital a body of men as were to be found on the face of the earth. A peace of half a century had destroyed their ancient bellicosity. The enemies of the Republic had little to fear from the Polish gentry till Kosciuszko and Joseph Poniatowski taught them the long-lost art of gaining victories on the battlefield.

Thus to the impartial outside observer Poland presented a most melancholy picture of failure and ruin. And things might have been so different. The country had been most bountifully endowed by nature. Under a moderately strong Government, there was no reason why she should not have been one of the most prosperous States of Europe. It was monstrous that this vast Republic, considerably larger than the whole of the modern German Empire, abounding in corn of all sorts, with vast forests full of precious pelts, with immense pastures covered by fine cattle, with a network of countless rivers which a proper system of

canalisation could so easily, at a relatively trifling expense, have connected with the Baltic and the Euxine—it was monstrous that such a country, intended by nature to be the granary of Europe, should be rotting away in obscurity without ships, without trade, without commerce, without money, obliged to import many of the necessaries of life at the most exorbitant prices. The monopolising of the land by a greedy and ignorant gentry was the chief cause of this deplorable collapse. After destroying the whole country politically, the magnates and the *szlachta* had proceeded to ruin the individual provinces, one by one, financially and economically. Their fixed determination that no other class but themselves should have any privileges had led, gradually but inevitably, to the disappearance of the native merchants and the trade guilds and the enslavement of the peasantry. So long as they could raise from their estates sufficient for their personal comfort, the landowners of Poland seemed indifferent to what became of their country. Nevertheless the best men in the Republic were still to be found in the ranks of the gentry. Stupid, selfish, flighty, obstinate and obstructive as they might be, they had not quite forgotten the ancient and noble virtues of their race. If their heads were muddled, their hearts at least were sound. Religion and morality were still very real things to them. What they wanted was enlightened leadership. And, towards the middle of the eighteenth century, it seemed as if this saving grace would at last be vouchsafed to them. In the following chapter we shall see from whence this enlightenment came, who were its principal exponents, and why, after promising to work wonders, it failed to carry through even the very modest programme of reform which circumstances seemed to favour.

CHAPTER III

"THE FAMILY" AND THE YOUNG STANISLAUS

Rise of the Czartoryski family—The Prince-Chancellor and the Prince-Palatine—Marriage of the latter with Pani Sieniawska—Anecdotes of their domestic felicity—Description of the death of the Prince-Palatine—The women of "the Family"—The Princess Sophia Czartoryska—The Countess Constantia Poniatowska—Prince Adam Casimir Czartoryski—Pulawy—The young Stanislaus Poniatowski—A piece of self-portraiture—Stanislaus made Stolnik of Lithuania—His first visit to the Russian Court—His *liaison* with the Grand Duchess Catherine—His description of her—Peter III.—Poniatowski's second visit to St. Petersburg—He is expelled from Russia by the Empress Elizabeth—Death of Augustus III.—Ascendency of the Czartoryscy in Poland—They invoke the armed assistance of Russia—The rival candidates for the throne—Catherine declares in favour of Stanislaus—False rumours of their forthcoming marriage—The Stolnik of Lithuania is elected King of Poland—

IT must not be imagined that the miserable condition and the desperate prospects of Poland were altogether hidden from the eyes of the Poles themselves. From about the middle of the eighteenth century we begin to notice in Poland the rise of a small but active and increasing minority of earnest and thoughtful men, profoundly afflicted by the political bankruptcy of their country, and eager and zealous to make any sacrifice, to use every available means to re-establish her credit abroad and provide her with a sensible Government at home. The standard of this new movement of reform was raised by the family of Czartoryski—"the Family," as, from its immense influence and political predominance, it was generally called by its contemporaries—who gradually rallied round it the soundest and most promising elements of the nation.

The Czartoryscy were of very ancient lineage. They had held princely rank as early as the fifteenth century, and were akin to the royal House of Jagiello, which had ruled Poland from 1384 to 1572. It was only in the middle of the seventeenth century, however, that they had risen to eminence, in the person of Florian Czartoryski, who became Primate of Poland during the brief and troubled reign of the unfortunate Michael Wisniowiecki. At the beginning of the eighteenth century the fortunes of the family were re-established by two brothers, Prince Michael, Grand Chancellor of Lithuania, better known as the Prince-Chancellor, and Prince Augustus, Palatine of Red-Russia, generally called the Prince-Palatine. These two brothers agreed not only in politics, but in everything else, and walked together, hand in hand, through life, so intimately united that they may almost be regarded as a single personality rather than as two separate individuals. The eminently capable Prince-Chancellor was the statesman of the family, and as such was deferred to unquestionably, while his brother, the Prince-Palatine, was its military celebrity. Prince Augustus had served with distinction in the Turkish wars at the beginning of the eighteenth century, and at the storming of Belgrade had received a golden sword for pre-eminent valour from the hands of the great Eugene. He returned home famous and penniless; but he was to be as lucky in love as he had been in war, for Fortune had reserved for him a prize which was to make him the most envied magnate in Poland. The charming manners and handsome face of the young hero won the susceptible heart of Pani Sieniawska, daughter of the Grand-Hetman of the Crown, widow of the Vice-Hetman, and sole heiress of the vast estates of the ancient families of Sieniawski and Denhof, of each of which she was the last survivor. As, moreover, she was connected with the reigning Houses of Holstein, Brunswick, and Braganza, Pani Sieniawska was not only the wealthiest, but also the most august lady within the territories of the Republic. Nearly every distinguished bachelor and widower in Poland was suing for her hand,

but she rejected them all in favour of the gallant young officer who wore by his side the sword of honour which he had won in the breach of Belgrade. Amongst the aspirants to her hand were several members of the great House of Potocki, which had attained to fabulous wealth by cultivating and colonising millions of acres in the Ukraine. A combination of the resources of the Sieniawccy and the Potoccy would have been absolutely irresistible in Poland ; but the advent of the young Prince Augustus frustrated the ambitious plan. The subsequent enmity between the Czartoryscy and the Potoccy is largely attributable to the bitter disappointment of the latter on the occasion.

This romantic union turned out an unusually happy one. Its unbroken serenity was only eclipsed by death. The following anecdote quaintly but aptly illustrates the perfect harmony which prevailed between the amiable, old-fashioned couple in their latter days, as well as their delicacy in money matters.

Once in every year the stewards and administrators of the Czartoryski estates made a journey to Pulawy, the principal family mansion of the family, bringing with them the rents which they had collected during the year. These rents were paid in gold, and packed in a number of huge barrels. The Prince was a careful economist, and kept the most exact and minute accounts. On the arrival of the stewards the Prince used to receive them sitting on a daïs in one of the state apartments, and carefully checked all the accounts. The barrels full of gold were placed in a circle round the Prince's daïs. When the accounts had been duly examined and passed, the Prince would turn to his major-domo and say: “Take to her Highness the Princess these revenues from her property!” whereupon a procession would be formed, headed by the major-domo holding his silver and ebony wand and surrounded by the gentleman-servitors and pages, while a multitude of heydukes and pajdukes, in their most gorgeous uniforms, would follow behind carrying the barrels of gold. On reaching the apartments of the Princess the major-domo would bow

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low and say : " His Excellency the Prince sends your Excellency the yearly revenues from your Highness's estates." The Princess invariably replied : " Pray convey my thanks to his Excellency the Prince, and take this gold back to my husband ! " This ceremony was repeated every year in exactly the same form.

The Prince-Palatine died on April 4, 1782, in the midst of his family, with the same simple dignity which had marked every action of his blameless life. His son, Prince Adam Czartoryski, has thus described his last moments. He might have entitled it, " How a Christian Gentleman ought to die."

" The Prince-Palatine, to the very day of his death, kept open house and ruled his household. He was not ill before his death, but gradually grew weaker a few days ere the end came ; yet he never took to his bed, nor altered the course of his daily life. On the morning of the day on which he died he awoke early, and found that his sight was failing him ; yet he got up and dressed as usual. He did not sit down to dinner that day ; but, in the evening, hearing his children talking, and recognising their voices, he conversed with them calmly and gaily. When the hour arrived at which all Warsaw had for years been in the habit of making a pilgrimage to the Prince-Palatine, he bade his servants carry him in his chair to his wonted place in the reception room, where he sat down, and, recognising the Nuncio by his voice, excused himself in a cheery tone for his inability to play their usual game of backgammon that evening. . . . Presently he asked why the candles were not lighted ; but on the *kammerdiener* replying that all the lights were burning he understood that his last hour was approaching. So he sent for the doctor, and asked him to feel his pulse, and tell him how long he still had to live. When the doctor was silent, ' Think you I fear death ? ' said the dying man. ' Tell me the truth without delay ! ' During this sad conversation the room was filling with visitors and domestics, down to the very scullions, who stood in the doorway. Every one wanted to bless him who had been their good

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master for so many years. On hearing the verdict of the doctor, and when all who were present fell a-weeping, the Prince commanded that he should be taken to his own apartments, at the same time begging the Nuncio to be present with him in his last moments. The Nuncio began reciting the psalms, and at the words, 'Lord, into Thy Hands I commend my spirit,' the Prince pressed the Nuncio's hand and gave up the ghost—in the eighty-seventh year of his age."

⟨In few great families have the women played such a dominant part as in the family of the Czartoryscy. The Princess Sophia Kazimierzowa Czartoryska, the mother of the Prince-Palatine and the Prince-Chancellor, had perhaps, the best head of them all. No other Polish *grande dame* of her day exercised such a civilising and beneficent influence, an influence due as much to her virtues and graces as to her unquestionable strength of character. It is in her residence, the Blue Palace at Warsaw, that we must seek the source of the new French culture which was so profoundly to affect Poland during the eighteenth century. French modes had first been introduced into Poland during the seventeenth century by two Polish queens of French origin, Marie Ludowika, the consort of John II., and Marie Casimeria, the consort of John III. But their influence had been mainly political and entirely mischievous. The influence of the Princess Czartoryska was purely moral and æsthetic. She herself had been educated at the Court of Versailles in its most majestic and quintessential days, when the great divines were as much read and admired as the great poets, and revolutionary and sceptical ideas were still very far below the horizon. Her father was the exiled Polish politician Andrew Morsztyn, her mother a lady of the House of Gordon. From her earliest youth her grace, intellect, and beauty had attracted a whole army of suitors from among the noblest families in France, but she finally bestowed her hand upon one of her own countrymen, Casimir Czartoryski, Palatine of Wilna, with whom she quitted France never to return.

It is remarkable that the numerous contemporary *mémoires* which have so much to say about the disorders and the scandals of the other great Polish Houses are absolutely silent about the House of the Princess Czartoryska. She shunned publicity and detested ostentation, but her house was the rendezvous of a few choice spirits who endeavoured, not unsuccessfully, to combine French *esprit* with Polish chivalry, and refine without effeminating the sturdy, traditional virtues of old Poland. Her two sons grew up into finished statesmen beneath her very watchful eyes. They were patterns of all the virtues, and to the very last they deferred to the wishes and followed the counsels of their venerable mother, who died in her eighty-sixth year. Her qualities were inherited in a great measure by her daughter Constantia, who married (September 14, 1720) Stanislaus Poniatowski, the friend of Charles XII. and the father of the last Polish King and the last Polish Primate. Constantia Poniatowska was a lady of great spirit. She compelled her husband to identify himself absolutely with the interests of "the Family," and was the infallible arbitress in all domestic discussions. Her brother, the Prince-Chancellor, married an Austrian lady, who bore him nothing but daughters, to his great chagrin, so that the future hopes of "the Family" were at first placed in Prince Adam Casimir Czartoryski, the son of the Prince-Palatine and of the lady of the barrels of gold.

Prince Adam Casimir was born in December 1734, at Dantzic, at the very moment when the Russians were storming its walls. His education, conducted at his father's house, by French tutors, was on classical lines and encyclopædic in range. At the age of twenty-five he knew all the leading languages of modern Europe, besides some Oriental tongues. He devoted himself with equal ardour to the study of history, art, literature, science, political economy, fortification, and tactics. Everything interested him, and he loved to interest others in everything. His mental detachment was extraordinary. It was said of him with justice that he took everything from the encyclo-

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pædists except their philosophy. Almost alone among his contemporaries he was proof alike against the cynicism of Voltaire and the sentiment of Rousseau, though in his placid, reflective way he fully appreciated the merits of both. Towards religion he was somewhat cold, but he maintained, a trifle priggishly perhaps, that "respect for the services of the Church should be one of the first duties of a virtuous citizen."

When this phoenix of politicians quitted his mother's mansion to complete his education by a long foreign tour he captivated all hearts, especially the hearts of the fair sex, by his manifold gifts and graces. While in England, where he was the guest of Lord Mansfield, he devoted much of his time to the study of the British Constitution, and was one of the few foreigners who acquired a fair working knowledge of that abstruse subject. On his return to Poland, in 1760, at the age of seven-and-twenty, he was appointed general of the frontier troops of the Palatinate of Podolia (hence his usual title of "the Prince-General," to distinguish him from his father, "the Prince-Palatine"), and married the beautiful and vivacious Countess Isabella Fleming, daughter of the Vice-Treasurer of Lithuania, of whom we shall have something to say presently.

◀The focus of the influence of the Czartoryscy was Pulawy, their mansion in Volhynia, which became as famous in Polish as Holland House was in English politics, and about much the same period. The house and grounds were originally part of the enormous Sieniawski estate. On the ruins of the ancient wooden house (burnt to the ground by Charles XII., because the Grand-Hetman, its then possessor, refused to abandon the party of Augustus II.) rose a stone building more remarkable for its imposing dimensions than for its architectural excellence. Here lived and ruled three successive generations of the Czartoryscy. By comparison with the ceaseless flux and flow of everything else in Poland, "the Family" seemed to be the only permanent institution in the Republic. Their high level of culture and refinement was even more impressive. Contemporaries assure us with

an air of unmistakable conviction that Pulawy was "a refuge for scholars," "an oasis in a desert full of savages." Many of the most illustrious magnates sent their sons to be educated at Pulawy instead of sending them abroad. Under the Prince-General in particular Pulawy became a training-school of pedagogues, politicians, and reformers. The most promising youths of Poland, quite irrespective of rank and birth, were sought after in the most out-of-the-way places and brought to Pulawy to be educated for the service of their country. The most enlightened foreigners were consulted as to the best curriculum for the students assembled there. Thus Dupont de Nemours, the adviser of Turgot, was summoned from Paris to Pulawy to help the Prince-General to organise his schools, while Lhuilier came thither from Geneva to give instruction in mathematics. There was not one of the numerous native writers on political and social subjects at the end of the eighteenth century who did not owe either their success or their reputation to the generous and intelligent assistance of the Prince-General. At a later day he was also one of the most active members of the Committee of Education which from 1775 to 1782 did so much for Poland.

Yet, despite his many brilliant qualities, Prince Adam Casimir Czartoryski was by no means the most capable and promising member of "the Family." That distinction belongs indisputably to his cousin, Count Stanislaus Poniatowski. It is true that Prince Adam and Count Stanislaus were very much alike in every respect. They had been educated in the same school of ideas, they had inherited the same traditions, they were the pupils and the propagandists of the same philosophy. In personal appearance also they were strikingly similar. Both were equally handsome, charming, and distinguished; both of them were unmistakably the most cultivated men of their generation, and therefore, apparently, its natural leaders. But in one very important particular Stanislaus was infinitely superior to his cousin. He was essentially a man of action, whereas the other was not. Prince Adam was too much of a scholar,

one might almost say too much of a pedant, too finical, too fastidious, to play a leading part in affairs of state. In fact, his political career during the twenty years or so when he held the first place in the land was so unsatisfactory, so disappointing, so full of inexplicable contradictions, that his eulogists have discreetly shut their eyes to it. He frittered away all his time and half his immense fortune in peddling enterprises, forfeited the commanding position won and maintained by his father and uncle, and ended in something very like a total failure. Stanislaus, on the other hand, a born diplomatist, and even something of a statesman, was alert, keen-witted, ambitious; an amused and deeply interested student of human nature; an adventurer if you like, but in the best sense of the word, determined to make his way in the world, and with a very shrewd notion of how to set about it, but also honestly resolved—for by nature he was most kindly—to do as much good and as little harm as possible. His defects—and very serious defects they were—will appear in the sequel, but first we must try and learn more of our hero at first hand, and follow him through the singular and sensational adventures which finally planted him on the thorny and unstable throne of Poland.

Stanislaus Augustus Poniatowski, the fourth son of Stanislaus Poniatowski, Castellan of Cracow, and Constantia Czartoryska, was born on January 17, 1732. “I was brought up,” he tells his friend, Madame Geoffrin, in a curious autobiographical fragment, “I was brought up very strictly by a mother the like of whom you will scarce find anywhere nowadays, while my father only preached to me by his example. In 1748 I began to travel about with a governor. In my twenty-first year I travelled without a governor—and learnt to know you.” This was on the occasion of his visit to Paris in 1753, when his beauty, elegance, and above all his *esprit*, vividly impressed the Court of France, and especially the *grandes dames* who gave the *ton* there. The Duchesse de Broncas pronounced him to be more agreeable and far better informed about every-

thing, including French affairs, than most Frenchmen. Other ladies praised the modesty and simplicity of his conversation, while even in the more austere circles, which criticised his "frivolity" somewhat harshly, it was freely admitted that he was no ordinary man. It was a modish pastime in those days to improvise one's own portrait in public *viva voce*, and such sketches, if happily dashed off, were sure of applause. The Prince de Ligne excelled in this sort of composition, but other *beaux esprits* pressed him hard, and the young Poniatowski also showed himself to be an adept at the game. Some time between 1755 and 1760, when he had no idea what the future had in store for him, he thus described his own appearance and character :

"I should be content with my figure if only I were an inch taller, and my feet were a trifle better shaped, and my nose were not so much hooked, and my mouth a little smaller. With these reservations, I believe that my face is noble and expressive, my figure not without distinction and capable of attracting attention. My shortsightedness often makes me look awkward, but only for an instant. Indeed, I am rather apt to offend by the opposite extreme—too haughty a demeanour. An excellent education enables me to conceal my mental and bodily defects, so that many people may perhaps expect more from me than I can really give. I have wit enough to take part in any conversation, but not enough to converse long and frequently. However, my natural sympathy and amiability often come to my assistance. I have a natural penchant towards art. I have a quick eye for absurdities and personal defects of every description. Sometimes I even have too deep a sense of them. My indolence prevents me from going as far as I should like to go in the arts and sciences. I work either over-much or not at all. I can judge very well of affairs. I can see at once the fault of a plan and the faults of him who proposes it; but I am very much in need of good counsel to carry out any plan of my own. I am very impressionable, but far more affected by sorrow than by joy. I am the first to be depressed even when I have no anticipa-

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tion of impending evil or good. I don't think I was born to please women. I am attracted to them by a general sympathy, but if I love I love too passionately. . . . Friendship is to me a sacred thing. I would go very far to please a friend. Rather than break with him I am ready to do or suffer the uttermost. I am not pious, naturally—far from it; but I venture to affirm that I love God and surrender myself to His Will sincerely. I have also the flattering conviction that He loves to do good to us when we ask Him so to do. I am not vindictive. Though in the first moment of irritation I may long to avenge myself on my enemies, I am never able to carry out my desire. Compassion always comes between.”

This portrait, though on some points unduly disparaging, is in its main features singularly accurate.

A visit to England, most probably in 1754, helped, he tells us, “to stiffen my character.” On his return home, the same year, he obtained, through his father, the dignity of *Stolnik*, or High Steward, of Lithuania, and at once embarked on his political career. In view of the later accusations of cowardice and indolence so frequently brought against Stanislaus, and which, unjustly I think, have clung to his memory ever since, it is worth remarking that his first public action was one which displayed both energy and courage. Some years after his return from France he was present in his official capacity at the Diet, where he perceived Count Brühl, the son of the Saxon Minister, sitting among the deputies. The young Poniatowski at once arose and protested warmly against the presence in a Polish Diet of a person who was not, he affirmed, a Polish nobleman. Brühl, who had, as a matter of fact, obtained his *indigénat*, or patent of nobility, refused to budge, whereupon Poniatowski drew his sword and advanced towards him. Instantly all the other deputies present drew their swords likewise, to resent the insult offered to the House in the person of one of its members. As the partisans of the “Royal Party,” to which Brühl belonged, were far more numerous than the friends of Stanislaus, he was in imminent danger of being

cut to pieces. Fortunately General Mokronowski, a man of great strength and spirit, perceiving the young man's danger, hastened to his side, took him by the hand, and led him through a whole forest of drawn swords to the door of the chamber, at the same time holding his own sword over the head of Poniatowski for his better protection.

At the end of 1755 Stanislaus accompanied the English Ambassador, Charles Hanbury Williams, to St. Petersburg, nominally as his secretary, but really in order to gain a diplomatic footing at the Northern Court, so as to be able to promote the political views of his uncles the Prince-Chancellor and the Prince-Palatine.

At that time the Court of Russia was perhaps the most corrupt Court in Europe after that of Louis XV. The example of the reigning Empress, Elizabeth Petrovna, had been anything but edifying, though, by way of extenuation, it should be added that she had by this time regulated her conduct as much as possible by ennobling, and espousing privately, her faithful old Cossack lover, Razumovsky. Since then she had turned her back upon illicit pleasures and devoted herself exclusively to the serious business of politics, for which she had a strong natural aptitude. But the Empress's niece, the Grand Duchess Catherine, though still only in her twenty-fifth year, had continued and already far exceeded the vicious traditions of her august aunt. Wedded while still but a child to the good-natured, well-meaning, but semi-idiotic nephew of the Empress, the Grand Duke Peter, afterwards Peter III., the clever and high-spirited girl speedily revolted against the unnatural union. There was, however, no violent collision, no open rupture. Dread of the Empress, who was intent on the perpetuation of the dynasty, constrained the young consorts to observe in public a semblance of unity and concord. But by a secret compact they had mutually agreed henceforth to go separate ways. While Peter consoled himself in the society of that ugly but jovial hoyden the Countess Elizabeth Vorontsova, Catherine had already had several lovers, who were introduced to her by the first of the series, her gentle-

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man of the bedchamber, Count Leo Naruishkin, who diverted her by his buffooneries and possessed her entire confidence. Though politely ignored by an indulgent and obsequious Court, the profligacy of the Grand Duchess was already notorious, and even grave Ministers of State like the Grand Chancellor, Count Alexis Petrovich Bestuzhev, made it a factor in their political combinations. At the very time when Poniatowski arrived at St. Petersburg Bestuzhev had selected a new favourite for the Grand Duchess in the person of a young Count Lebrasdov, but the moment Catherine set her eyes upon Poniatowski she declared that she preferred the Pole. She appears to have seen him for the first time at a ball given at Oranienbaum in honour of the Grand Duke's name-day, and was fascinated at once by “the fine expressive eyes” of Stanislaus and “the pensive beauty” of his face. Leo Naruishkin was, as usual, the intermediary, but he encountered unlooked-for obstacles in the shyness and timidity of the young cavalier whom the Grand Duchess would have delighted to honour. Stanislaus himself, in one of his autobiographical fragments, has confided to us, with a frankness which leaves nothing to be desired, the reasons of his extraordinary backwardness on this memorable occasion.

“A strict education had kept me altogether remote from crapulous commerce in my early youth, and a natural predilection for good society had preserved me during my travels. I had been taught to have an extreme aversion for all that sort of thing, and, singular as it may sound, I was still, at two-and-twenty—what very few men can say they are at that age.”

But apprehension had certainly as much to do with it as modesty. In his nursery days he had heard fearful tales of the grim happenings at the Court of the saturnine Empress Anne, and even when Catherine met him half-way by encouraging him kindly at Court functions he saw nothing but pitfalls on every side of him, and had the fear of Siberia constantly before his eyes. Only after months of anxious hesitation did he risk sending a *billet-doux*. He received a

reassuring reply the next day, and the same evening Naruiskin conducted him to the Grand Duchess's quarters, though he was not aware of it till he was actually at the door of her private apartments. When first he saw her she was dressed in a *petite robe* of white satin, with no other ornaments but some light lace and pink ribands. Her dazzling complexion seemed all the whiter in contrast with her raven-black hair. She had large blue, somewhat prominent eyes, with very long black lashes, a Greek nose, "a mouth which seemed to invite kisses," perfect hands and arms, a very slender waist, a singularly agreeable voice, and a perfectly fascinating laugh—"as merry as overflowing fun could make it." Not the least of her charms was her mercurial vivacity. "She could pass in an instant from the most madcap sportiveness to the grave consideration of the most complicated business. In manner she was most caressing, and the weak points of every one she met were as clear to her as noonday." In short, as irresistible a Circe as ever converted men into swine. For the next twelve months the young Stanislaus was over head and ears in love with the dangerous little adventuress.

The earlier assignations were made at the outside staircase of the Grand Duchess's apartments, generally at Oranienbaum, where she resided with the Grand Duke. Poniatowski used to quit his sledge or carriage some hundreds of yards from the *château*, and, passing the sentinel, who had previously been instructed not to hinder or even challenge him, proceeded alone to the private staircase. At other times Catherine, at a given signal, generally the miowing of a cat, would emerge from her apartments in male attire and accompany Stanislaus to his private dwelling. Sometimes, for greater security, they would arrange to meet at the bedside of some sick friend, and there make fresh appointments. They also invented an ingenious code of signals by means of which they could easily communicate with each other at the theatre or opera. "We took a singular delight in these furtive *rencontres*," says Catherine; "not a week passed without our having one, two, or even



Ея Императорское Высочество
Екатерина Государыня Великая Княгиня
ЕКАТЕРИНА АЛЕКСЕЕВНА
Ihre Kaiserliche Hoheit
Die Größ. Fürstin
CATHARINA ALEXEIEWNA.

THE GRAND-DUCHESS CATHERINE, AFTERWARDS CATHERINE II

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three of them.” The secret was well kept ; but a curious accident revealed it. On one occasion, during the temporary absence of the Grand Duke, Catherine was showing a small party of friends, including Poniatowski and a Swedish nobleman, Count Horn, over the private apartments of herself and her consort. In the course of their ramble they disturbed a Bolognese spaniel who was sleeping in the Grand Duchess’s cabinet. The little dog at once began barking furiously at Count Horn, but went almost mad with joy at the sight of the young Poniatowski. This incident did not escape the notice of Horn, who on returning to the *salle* drew Poniatowski aside and said : “ There is no traitor like your little Bolognese spaniel. He was ready to devour me, as you saw, but he fawned upon you. Evidently this is by no means your first visit here. But fear not, my friend ! I can be discreet.”

At last rumours of the intrigue between his consort and her Polish lover reached the ears of the Grand Duke, who took his measures accordingly. A few nights later, while Stanislaus was lurking in the park, he was kidnapped, carried into the *chateau*, and frightened into making a full confession. He fully expected never to emerge alive from the presence of the enraged husband, but Elizabeth Vorontsova, the Grand Duke’s mistress, opportunely came to his assistance, and the tragic prologue had a farcical *dénouement*. The sequel is best told in Stanislaus’ own words. The part he played throughout was ignominious indeed, but he always had wit enough to tell a story against himself in a piquant manner. The narrative also furnishes us with one of the most characteristic and lifelike sketches of that oddity the future Emperor Peter III.

“ When matters had been fully explained the Grand Duke approached me with a roguish air. ‘ What a fool you were ! ’ says he, ‘ not to take me into your confidence before. Then we should have had none of this pother. But now that we are such comrades we want some one else here, don’t we ? ’ With that he hastened into his wife’s chamber and dragged her out of bed, giving her no time to

put on anything but a *robe de Batavie*. In this condition he brought her in to us, and said to her, pointing at me: 'There! I hope you are satisfied with me now?' 'All we want from your Highness,' she at once replied, 'is a note to the Vice-Chancellor Vorontsov strongly urging the Court of Warsaw to send our friend here back to us as accredited Polish Ambassador as soon as possible.' The Grand Duke immediately placed a board across his knee and wrote with his pencil a note to Vorontsov, countersigned by his mistress, the Vice-Chancellor's niece, telling him to see to this at once. This done, we four began playing all sorts of mad pranks, amongst other things squirting at each other with the water of a little fountain in the room, as if we had not a single care in the world. We kept this up till four o'clock in the morning."

This was all very well, but Poniatowski had had a shock and did not feel comfortable. "Tout cela n'était pas bien clair," he says, and he felt that the sooner he turned his back on St. Petersburg the better. Accordingly, at the end of 1756 he quitted Russia, but at the beginning of 1757 was back again as the duly accredited Polish Ambassador. The *liaison* was renewed, but it was now as much a matter of business as of pleasure, Poniatowski making himself very useful as a political spy and newsmonger.

At this period Catherine was rigidly excluded from every participation in politics by the Empress, and kept ignorant of the details of the epoch-making events which were taking place beneath her very eyes. It was the crisis of the Seven Years' War. Elizabeth had determined to reduce the disquieting King of Prussia to the rank of a German princelet, and she suspected Catherine, not without good reason, of strong philo-Prussian proclivities. Poniatowski, therefore, became indispensable to Catherine, for he was now in a position to give her secret and valuable information unattainable from any other source. It was he who first informed her of the Empress's sudden seizure after church at Tsarkoe Selo, an event which neutralised the effect of the Russian victory at Gross-Jägersdorf and led to all sorts

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of political permutations. It was he who warned her against the enmity of the French Ambassador, the Marquis de l'Hôpital. It was he who facilitated her secret correspondence with the Grand Chancellor, Count Bestuzhev. He was also one of the very few people who were privy to the mysterious conspiracy which aimed at placing her on the throne on the death of the Empress. In fine, he took an active if subordinate part in the subterranean war of cabal and intrigue which was waged around the sick-bed of the Empress during the year 1758.* On the unexpected recovery of Elizabeth, Poniatowski was ordered to quit Russia within thirty-six hours. He was not sorry to go. By this time he had grown tired of his mistress, and was by no means unwilling to leave her. But for this inconstancy the *liaison* might have become permanent and had the most far-reaching political consequences. Catherine's real sentiments are expressed in that curious fragment of autobiography entitled "Making a Clean Breast of it," contained in a Russian letter written to her subsequent favourite, Potemkin, eight years later. "He [Poniatowski]," she says, "was loving and beloved from 1755 to 1758, and it [the *liaison*] would have lasted for ever if he himself had not got bored by it. I marked this on the very day of his departure from Tsarkoe Selo, and I was more distressed than I can tell you. I don't think I ever cried so much in my life as I did during that last half-year." But she was quickly cured when, shortly afterwards, the Orlovs appeared upon the scene. This love-idyll—for compared with the enormities of her later years the *liaison* with Poniatowski may well be termed idyllic—left no permanent traces behind it. Catherine, after all, was not naturally sentimental or romantic. As time went on she looked back upon the episode, not with regret, but with indifference. When she met her old lover again, nearly twenty years later, he struck her as unspeakably jejune and insipid. They remained, however, very good friends to the end of their lives, and though, as we shall see, her unscrupulous ambition exposed

* Full details will be found in my "Daughter of Peter the Great."

him to many bitter chagrins and humiliations, in which no regard whatever was paid to his feelings, yet, on the other hand, her liberality enabled him to multiply indefinitely his extravagant pleasures and gratify his expensive tastes.

Stanislaus could not be congratulated on the results of his first diplomatic mission. He returned to Poland discredited and somewhat ridiculous. His uncles the Prince-Chancellor and the Prince-Palatine were much displeased with him. Instead of gaining a firm footing at the Russian Court, he had been expelled from it with ignominy. His disreputable intrigue with the little Grand Duchess was also very offensive to these stately and correct old gentlemen. Even politically it was worse than useless, for Catherine herself at that particular time was not only in disgrace, but in danger of being sent back to her humble and uncomfortable German home by the justly irate Empress. This *contretemps* did not, however, interfere in any way with the far-reaching plans of the Czartoryscy. The aim of all their endeavours during the last twenty years had been the reform of the Polish Constitution, which they rightly regarded as the indispensable preliminary to any permanent improvement in the condition of the country. To educate, and thereby transform, public opinion was, no doubt, the first step towards the realisation of this noble ambition. An atmosphere had to be created in which the new, saving ideas could live. A race of politicians, full of courage and free from prejudice, had to be trained to be the champions of the new era. But, in the circumstances, the time of preparation could not last for ever; the time for action could not be indefinitely postponed. They had matured their plans. They had prepared their programme. They only awaited their opportunity. That opportunity seemed to have come when Augustus III., to whom they had long been opposed, and whom, latterly, they had even attempted to dethrone, expired, somewhat suddenly, on October 5, 1763.

It cannot be denied that the position of the Czartoryscy in Poland during the autumn of 1763 was a very strong

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one. All the neighbouring Powers were amicably disposed towards them. The Prince-Chancellor had many influential connections at the Austrian Court. Frederick the Great was under considerable obligations to both the brothers, for they had kept Poland neutral during the Seven Years' War, and exploded the anti-Prussian Diet of Grodno, from which the Saxon and Russian Courts had expected so much. Nor was the Court of St. Petersburg unfavourable to them. Their nephew's former mistress was now autocrat of all Russia, and disposed to listen to old Kayserling, the Russian Minister at Warsaw, whom the Czartoryscy regarded as a friend of long standing. Their carefully elaborated scheme of reform was the best that had yet been devised, because it did not aim at accomplishing too much at first, and, so far as possible, avoided offending the susceptibilities of those great Powers who had so long made the domestic affairs of Poland their own peculiar business. Briefly, they proposed to curb the anarchic Diet and strengthen the Executive, as represented by the King and the Senate; and while ostensibly retaining the elective monarchy and the *liberum veto*, they proposed, dexterously, to introduce various checks and restrictions which, they hoped, would neutralise the first of these vicious principles, and reduce the second to an empty demonstration. First they attempted to reform the Republic from within; but when their opponents exploded every Diet favourable to them, and nullified all their Confederations by counter-Confederations, they recognised that their project was impossible without the aid of some foreign Power. Their eyes instinctively turned to Russia. Despite the secular rivalry of the two nations, the Poles had always been more in sympathy with the sister Slavonic State than with their German neighbours. Moreover, immediately after the death of Augustus III. Frederick the Great had privately intimated to the Czartoryscy that a Piast, or native Pole, would be the candidate most acceptable to himself and the Russian Empress, whereupon the Prince-Chancellor, in February 1764, communicated with Catherine direct

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and begged her to support him with a Russian army corps.

The Czartoryscy have been very severely blamed for thus legalising the armed intervention of Russia in Poland's domestic affairs. Treason is the least offensive epithet that has been applied to their conduct on this occasion. Yet, plausible as the accusation seems at first sight, it is quite unwarrantable. The Czartoryscy were not traitors; they were patriots. Their sole object in bringing in the Russians was to quell effectually the predominant anarchic elements in Poland, which stood in the way of every attempt at reform. It was, no doubt, a desperate remedy; but desperate evils can only be cured by desperate remedies, and all the ordinary means of saving the Republic had been exhausted and had failed. The fault of the Czartoryscy was not the bringing in of the Russians, but the imagining that Russia would ever consent to help them to re-establish a strong, independent Poland. They erred from pure simplicity and inexperience. Politics was the one science they had never acquired, yet in the circumstances some political knowledge was the one thing needful, and their ignorance was to be their undoing. For the moment, however, they were the masters of the situation. At the Convocation Diet,* held in May 1764, under the protection of Russian troops (some hundreds of whom were quartered in the capital itself), they silenced all their opponents, who, perceiving that further resistance was useless, ultimately fled the country and left them in possession of the field. In June they formed a Confederation to enable them to pass their measures by a majority,† and Prince Adam Czartoryski was unanimously elected the Marshal, or President, of this Confederation. The first act of the Confederation was to thank the Empress for her intervention and acknowledge her imperial title, which the Republic hitherto had steadily refused to concede to Peter the Great and his successors.

* *I.e.*, the Diet summoned to convoke the Election Diet.

† Decision by a majority was the essential difference between a Confederation and a Diet.

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Simultaneously the Russian troops defeated and scattered the opponents of “the Family” in the provinces. But now a difficulty arose. Who was to mount the vacant throne? Should it be Prince Adam Czartoryski or Count Stanislaus Poniatowski? Kayserling, the Russian Ambassador at Warsaw, reported dead against Stanislaus. “The election of Poniatowski,” he wrote to Catherine, “would cause a general disturbance here, because he is so little known in the country, has no party to back him, possesses very little property, and therefore has not money enough to purchase votes.” On the other hand, he declared that the election of Prince Adam would be an easy matter. As Marshal of the Confederation he had for the moment plenipotentiary power, whilst most of the younger men and all the women in Poland were decidedly in his favour. So strong, indeed, were Kayserling’s recommendations in favour of the Prince-General that Catherine, though she seems already to have given a half-promise of the crown to her lover, began to waver. But it was only for a moment. On mature reflection she returned to her former conviction that Poniatowski was the best candidate, inasmuch as his comparative poverty and insignificance would make him entirely dependent upon her, whereas the Prince-General, with the whole concentrated interest of the Czartoryscy behind him, might be by no means so pliable an instrument. Accordingly, the new Russian Ambassador to Warsaw, the energetic Major-General Prince Nicholas Repnin, was instructed to declare that Stanislaus Poniatowski, Stolnik of Lithuania, was the only possible Russian candidate, and all parties were to be bribed or coerced into supporting him. To add dignity to the new pretendant, the Russian Order of St. Andrew and the Prussian Order of the Black Eagle were sent to him on the same day.

In Poland itself the candidature of Stanislaus came as a complete surprise. So second-rate a dignitary was scarce considered eligible at all. Every one fancied that either Prince Augustus or his son Prince Adam would be elected. The Czartoryscy thought so themselves. The first public

notification of the high honour awaiting Poniatowski was a dramatic incident which took place on the occasion of a banquet given by Prince Augustus Czartoryski to the magnates, prelates, and deputies who had come up to town to attend the Diet. The Prussian Minister, Benoit, arrived when all the other guests were already at table. On entering the banqueting-hall he leisurely surveyed the guests till he caught sight of the Stolnik of Lithuania, when he at once proceeded to the place where Stanislaus sat. After making him a low obeisance, the ambassador solemnly invested him with the Order of the Black Eagle in the name of the King of Prussia, at the same time congratulating Prince Augustus on the honour thus rendered to his nephew. This was a plain hint that the candidature of Stanislaus would be supported officially by Prussia. The effect produced by this demonstration was the more impressive as nobody else in Poland possessed the coveted distinction of the Black Eagle.

Stanislaus himself had already been manipulated privately by the Russian Minister Kayserling. In the middle of 1764, when the obstacles in the way of his election seemed insurmountable, Kayserling sent for him. "I want your opinion about an idea of mine," began the ambassador. "How would you like your uncle the Prince-Palatine to be placed on the throne instead of yourself? Tell me frankly if you think it would be to the advantage of Poland or not. I shall expect an answer in three days." "A thousand thoughts occurred to me during those three days," says Stanislaus, who tells his own story, "and I examined the whole question from all possible points of view. My dominant reflection was that if I became a King the Empress sooner or later might marry me, but that otherwise she would be unlikely to do so. . . . Moreover, the despotic and implacable character of my uncle made me fear that his reign would be a hard one. I therefore came to the conclusion that it would be better for my country if I ascended the throne instead of my uncle."

As a matter of fact Stanislaus' uncle never had a chance

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of becoming a King. At a Cabinet Council held at St. Petersburg in November 1763 Catherine had already decided that "no old man on the verge of the grave" (an obvious allusion to the Prince-Palatine and his brother the Prince-Chancellor, both of whom were verging on seventy) "should be allowed to stand as a candidate for the Polish throne." The idea of marrying her ex-lover was by this time most repugnant to Catherine, now that she was enamoured of the more virile Gregory Orlov. Yet the opinion that she meant to give her hand to Stanislaus after she had crowned him King was so widespread that the mere rumour of it seriously disturbed the Porte and provoked the suspicion of an anti-Turkish league between Poland and Russia. Not till the Russian ambassador Obryezkov had solemnly assured the Reis Effendi that "it were a blasphemy against the sacred person of the Empress" even to imagine that she could ever marry Stanislaus Poniatowski did the Porte recover from its alarm. Kayserling was instructed to put the sentimental Stanislaus right on this important point in the politest manner possible. Accordingly he informed the young man that "such a union would cause too much jealousy, and put all Europe in combustion." It was therefore not to be thought of.

Stanislaus goes on to tell us that his uncle the Prince-Palatine never forgave him for thus intervening between him and the throne. A hint, however, from the new Russian Ambassador, Prince Repnin, to the effect that the Empress would support the Stolnik of Lithuania with all her forces and all her treasures compelled the Czartoryscy to give way, and they had the good sense to give way gracefully and unreservedly. Stanislaus' first cousin, and only serious competitor, Prince Adam, was the first to propose his candidature at the General Confederation held in June; and when Stanislaus himself had given his uncles a solemn assurance that he would support their plan of reform and abide by their counsel in all things his election was assured. After all, was he not as much a member of "the Family" as Prince Adam? The progress of events

was now greatly accelerated. On July 27 Repnin officially informed the Primate, the Ministers, and the Senate of Poland that the Stolnik of Lithuania was the candidate recommended to the Polish nation by her Imperial Majesty. The Prussian Envoy followed suit the same day.)

Nevertheless, at the very last moment the Empress once more began to hesitate. Only a few weeks before the day fixed for the election of Stanislaus the fear lest his election might seriously embarrass her affairs, and even bring about a war with the Turks, so impressed her that, contrary to the advice of her political mentor and first Minister, Count Nikita Panin, who controlled the Russian Foreign Office during the first half of her reign, she instructed Kayserling to stay his hand and not promote the election of Stanislaus too openly. Then Panin took a very bold step. "I know not what the Empress's instructions to you are," he wrote privately to Kayserling, "but, after all that we have done up to now, the honour of our Sovereign and the Empire is too much engaged in this affair for us to think of drawing back. Do, therefore, all you can to advance matters. I will take the risk." Kayserling had the courage to follow Panin's advice. He disobeyed the Empress and supported Poniatowski with all his might. The Election Diet met on the 16th, and terminated on August 26, and the Stolnik of Lithuania was unanimously elected King of Poland. The election was so tranquil that a number of ladies were present on the field of election amidst the squadrons of the nobility without a single accident happening to any one but a certain Pan Trojanowski, who received a kick from a horse. Many of the ladies even mingled their voices with the acclamations of the electors from the various palatinates when the Primate, in an open chariot, went the round of the assembly to receive from the hands of the marshals of the different provinces the suffrages of their respective deputies. Twenty-five thousand electors thus recorded their votes, and there was not one dissentient among them. But this singular unanimity was not unconnected with the well-known fact that eight thousand Russian regulars, ready for



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NIKITA IVANOVICH PANIN, THE POLITICAL MENTOR OF
CATHERINE II



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action, were only three miles distant from the field of election.

“Mamma, your son is elected King!” wrote Stanislaus to his old friend, Madame Geoffrin, immediately after the event. Her reply was an outburst of ecstatic joy. “I see Poland rising from the dust! I see her in dazzling splendour, like the Kingdom of a new Messiah!” Catherine was equally delighted, but her first congratulations were not to the young King, but to the greatly-daring old Minister who had best served her interests by traversing her instructions. “I congratulate you on the King you have given me,” she wrote to Panin; “this affair greatly increases my confidence in you, demonstrating as it does the perfection of all your combinations.” To Stanislaus she sent a coronation gift of 100,000 ducats, besides paying the very considerable expenses of his election. A basket of truffles was all that the needy monarch could afford to send her in return. He was already sensible of the extreme difficulties of his new position, and it is in a somewhat depressed tone that he now responds to the admonitions of his elderly Egeria at Paris. “I know right well what I *ought* to do, but the whole situation is terrible. Patience, caution, courage! And again patience, courage, caution!—There you have my motto!”

And indeed he had need of all these qualities in the evil days that were now close upon him.

CHAPTER IV

THE KING AND THE SATRAP

Good intentions of the new King—Panin's "Northern Accord"—Frederick the Great opposed to any amelioration in the condition of Poland—His brutality in the matter of the Marienwerda tolls—Difficult position of Catherine—The question of the Polish Dissenters arises—The Russian Ambassador at Warsaw, Prince Nicholas Repnin—The Poles refuse to consider the question of the Dissidents—Visit of Madame Geoffrin to King Stanislaus—The charm and the weaknesses of Stanislaus—Catherine forces on the solution of the Dissident question—Its transparent fictitiousness—The Confederation of Radom—Stanislaus bows to the will of the Empress in all things—Elevation of the infamous Podoski to the Primacy—Rally of the Catholics against Russia—The nuncio Durini and Soltyk, Bishop of Cracow—Religious enthusiasm of the Diet of 1767—Repnin overawes the Diet—Review of the conduct of Stanislaus—His unique opportunity of saving his country founders on his timid subservience to Russia—Inherent flabbiness of his character

STANISLAUS II. ascended the throne with the honest determination to do his best for his country. The first step was to endeavour to reform the Polish Constitution on the lines suggested by his uncles, as he had solemnly engaged to do on the eve of his election. The essence of this reform was the substitution of the principle of decision by majority in the proceedings of the Diet instead of absolute unanimity, the immediate effect of which would have been the disappearance of that cardinal vice of the Polish Constitution, the *liberum veto*, whereby any single deputy could "explode" the Diet, and *ipso facto* annul all its previous resolutions, even if they had been voted unanimously. Such an important step could not be taken, however, without the consent of the Empress. Stanislaus,

therefore, undertook to persuade her of the necessity of such a reform even in her own interests. On November 15, 1764, he addressed her as follows: "You want Poland to be free; so do I. I would therefore save it from the boundless disorder which prevails there. A large number of patriots would prefer absolute monarchy to the present shameful abuses of mere caprice if a more orderly species of liberty be unattainable. I would save these people from despair, and the only means of doing so is Parliamentary reform."

This appeal was so reasonable as to be beyond all cavil. If the Polish State were to continue to exist at all, it was indeed necessary that so powerful a solvent as the *liberum veto* should be eliminated altogether, and as speedily as possible, from the Polish Constitution. Stanislaus was justified in supposing that Catherine, as a statesman and as a philosopher—and she prided herself on being both—could not fail to see the matter in the same light. It were preposterous of her to bestow upon him the useless present of a kingdom which he had no means of governing. Moreover, at this very time the dominant Russian Minister, Count Panin, was very benevolently disposed towards Poland. It was the ambition of this statesman to establish a "Northern Accord," consisting of a combination of Russia, Prussia, Great Britain, Saxony, Sweden, and Poland, to counterpoise the influence of the Bourbon-Hapsburg alliance, and preserve as much as possible the peace of Northern and Central Europe. In this "Northern Accord" Poland was to supply the place of Austria, Russia's former ally, especially in case of Oriental complications, for by this time the Polish question had become part of the Eastern question. Inasmuch as Panin regarded Poland as an indispensable factor in his "Accord," it was naturally his desire to make her as serviceable, and consequently as strong, as the interests of Russia would permit. For the same reason he was opposed to any diminution of her territory and inclined to favour some moderate measure of reform in her Constitution. Had Panin's policy succeeded, Poland might, perhaps, have become the retainer, the armour-bearer, of

Russia ; but her territorial integrity would have been respected, her anarchical tendencies repressed, and her ancient military efficiency restored. A union with Russia was therefore, in the circumstances, the best fate which Poland could now expect. Anyhow, it would have strengthened her present position and held out some hope for a brighter future.

But Panin's policy never had a fair chance, because the King of Prussia was opposed to it. Frederick the Great detested the theory of the "Northern Accord," as tending to involve him in useless and expensive alliances. The policy of Prussia had always been a policy of self-preservation and aggrandisement, consistently carried out to the last consequences. To this policy every other consideration had always been ruthlessly sacrificed. It was a narrow and selfish policy, no doubt ; but its very simplicity made it easy of execution, and it had the best of all justifications from a purely political point of view—invariable success. No wonder, then, that the relatively benignant policy of Panin excited the utter disgust of the Philosopher of Sans Souci. What had sentiment to do with politics ? he argued. They were mutually exclusive terms. He had no sympathy whatever with Panin's romantic ambition to become the Regenerator of Poland. He objected, most emphatically, to loving his neighbour as himself. It was not business. And cynical as his principles might be, they were at least perfectly consistent with his conduct. He took his stand on the fourth secret article of his treaty with the Russian Empress, ratified March 31, 1764, five months before the election of Stanislaus, whereby the contracting parties engaged to permit no alteration in the actual Constitution of Poland. On the first rumours of the impending abolition of the *liberum veto* Frederick warned Catherine (October 31, 1764) of the inexpediency—nay, the peril—of any such reform. "Your Majesty," he wrote, "would live to repent any alteration of the *liberum veto*. Such a change would make the Polish State dangerous to its neighbours, whereas by guaranteeing all the old laws you can intervene whenever

you please." It was in vain that Panin protested against this frank brutality. "It would be too cruel," he remarked to Catherine, "to prevent Poland from emerging from her barbarism." But Catherine, who was just as practical as Frederick, had been much impressed by the arguments of the King of Prussia. From henceforth she set her face steadily against every notion of a radical reform in Poland.

Thus even in theory Russia, at this period, was the best friend and Prussia the worst enemy of Poland, while in practice the methods of the Court of Berlin were so brutal as frequently to provoke the remonstrances of the Court of St. Petersburg. Take, for instance, the affair of the Marienwerda tolls. <A few months after the accession of Stanislaus II.; Frederick built a new custom-house and fort on the Prussian side of the Vistula at Marienwerda to compel Polish vessels on their way to Dantzic to pay an extra 10 per cent. toll on their cargoes.> When the Polish ships, to avoid the exaction, hugged the Polish shore, they were towed by force over to the Prussian side, where the toll was levied despite repeated protests against its illegality. By these means the Polish shippers were mulcted of 900,000 roubles (an amount equal to the whole annual revenue of Brandenburg), and Dantzic was threatened with utter ruin. Stanislaus protested energetically against this unheard-of piece of blackmailing. He declared he would rather forfeit his crown than pay the Marienwerda tolls. "I have the right to expect that the Empress, after placing me on the throne, will at least uphold my dignity," he said to Prince Repnin, the Russian Ambassador at Warsaw. Repnin quite agreed with him. "I must confess," he wrote to Panin, "that the action of the King of Prussia in this matter is cruel, offensive, and insupportable." The Polish Minister at Berlin thereupon demanded an explanation from the Prussian Government, but as he only received an evasive and unsatisfactory reply, Stanislaus, by the advice of his uncle the Prince-Chancellor, addressed the King of Prussia direct. So sharp and vehement was the tone of this letter that Catherine, anxious to avoid any unpleasant-

ness with Prussia, was rather alarmed by it, especially as it was really unanswerable. Both Panin and Repnin advised the Prussians to remit the tolls, and Catherine went so far as to give Frederick similar advice. Ultimately the whole affair was referred to an extraordinary Polish Diet and allowed to drop. It had, however, one important political result. From henceforth Stanislaus lost all confidence in the King of Prussia, and rightly regarded him as the most dangerous adversary of Poland.

Catherine befriended Stanislaus on this occasion; but she would not, or, rather, could not, help him to put his house in order by reforming the Polish Constitution, at once and thoroughly, because she was already committed to a policy which was bound to have, at least in the first instance, the contrary effect.

At the beginning of her reign Catherine's position in Russia was somewhat insecure. To begin with, she was a foreigner, and distrusted as such by a nation that had always hated foreigners. In the second place she had only won the imperial crown by extraordinary and very questionable methods. One thing only might correct her defective title and excuse her dubious origin—popularity. Popularity was essential to the stability of her throne, and the best way of gaining popularity, instantly and completely, was to identify herself with what the Russian nation prized above all things—the Orthodox religion. The easiest and most effective way of doing this was to come forward prominently as the champion of the Orthodox population of Poland—the so-called *Dissidents*, or Dissenters. Catherine might be sure of the suffrages of the Russian nation if she could place the Polish Dissenters on a footing of absolute equality with the Catholic majority in Poland. To the accomplishment of this purpose all Constitutional questions in Poland were therefore to be postponed. It was hoped at St. Petersburg that a party devoted to Russia might be formed out of these enfranchised Dissenters. Such a party once formed, there would, it was argued, be less risk, from a Russian point of view, in reforming, moderately, the Polish

Constitution, if reformed it must be. Panin was instructed, therefore, to carry out the details of this plan, and its execution was entrusted to the new Russian Ambassador at Warsaw, Prince Repnin.

Nicholas Vasilevich Repnin was one of the best specimens of the brilliant soldier-diplomatists for which the reign of Catherine II. is so remarkable. He had become a general during the Seven Years' War, when still but eight-and-twenty, and subsequently, as Minister-Plenipotentiary at the Court of Berlin, had won the reputation of a safe and sound diplomatist. At the beginning of 1764, when not quite thirty, he was transferred to Warsaw. Repnin had lived for a great part of his life in Germany, and was reputed one of the best educated Russians of his day. His worst fault was a brusque haughtiness; but he had a generous heart, and his honour was unimpeachable. Military glory seems to have been his secret ambition, yet Fate had decided that he should do some very dirty diplomatic work in Poland. Repugnant to him as his orders very often were, he executed them with loyal thoroughness, but also with an outspoken candour which often gave great offence in the highest quarters at St. Petersburg. A man of his sterling character could not help despising such of the Poles as took his money and ran his errands; but, as a pupil of Panin's, he wished the Polish nation well, and he would have helped it if he could.

King Stanislaus was full of consternation when Repnin informed him that there could be no talk of reforms until the Polish Dissenters had been placed on a footing of equality with the Catholics. He declared straight out that the thing was impossible. And he was right. Catherine had underestimated the force and fervour of Polish Catholicism. She was about to embark on one of the most serious blunders of her reign. Repnin at first pooh-poohed the King's objections. He insisted that the matter should be brought before the Diet forthwith. The result justified the apprehensions of the King. The instant the question was introduced all the deputies sprang to their feet as one man

and vehemently demanded the name of the traitor who dared to reopen a matter which had been settled once for all by so many previous Diets. The King and the Primate were speechless with terror, and the same evening Repnin reported that it was impossible to fulfil her Majesty's commands without using violence. Panin thereupon advised Repnin to prepare for "armed negotiations," and directed that the Russian troops should remain in Poland. Stanislaus was deeply distressed. "I want to do some good, and cannot do it," he wrote to Madame Geoffrin. Again and again he remonstrated, through his Minister at St. Petersburg, against the folly and danger of the attempt to place the Dissenters on the same footing as the Catholics. "If the Empress still has the slightest feeling of benevolence towards me," he wrote, "now is the time for her to show it. To perish is nothing, but to perish by the hand of one's own familiar friend is terrible. If this be persisted in, I can see nothing but a St. Bartholomew's Eve for the Dissenters and a harvest of Ravailacs* for myself." "The Empress," he exclaims, in a final outburst of despair, "would make of my royal mantle a robe of Nessus. I shall have to choose between renouncing her friendship or being an enemy of my country."

But Catherine was inexorable. "I cannot conceive," she wrote to Repnin, "how the King can fancy himself a traitor to his country by simply supporting the demands of equity. If the King continues to regard matters in this light, I can only say that I am disappointed with him."

But Repnin himself was now growing uneasy, and very dubious of success. He told Panin privately that the difficulties of this Dissenting business made the hairs of his head rise up in terror. It would be impossible, he said, to carry out his instructions at all except by force of arms. A last attempt to frighten the Czartoryscy, who were, as we have seen, the protagonists of Parliamentary reform and had bitterly reproached Catherine for disappointing their expectations, failed utterly. The Prince-Chancellor

* Ravailac assassinated Henry IV. of France.

declared that the Dissidents were entitled to absolute toleration, and they had that already. To give them full equality with the Catholics was as absurd as it was impossible. "Then your estates shall be occupied by Russian troops," thundered the Ambassador. "We are prepared to suffer all the horrors of devastation," rejoined the Prince-Chancellor with dignity, "but we cannot comply with the demands of Russia in this particular."

Disappointed in their hopes of Russia, the Czartoryscy now attempted to carry their Constitutional reforms through the Diet with the aid of the King and their own partisans. When the Russian and Prussian Ministers protested, the Prince-Chancellor declared he would rather see Poland subdued by force of arms than subjected to such dictation. Then Replin worked upon the fears of the deputies, and persuaded them that a Royalist plot was afloat and that the Republic was in danger. Stanislaus at the same time began to waver, and the Ambassador so worked upon his hopes and fears that he deserted his uncles and allowed the motion for abolishing the *liberum veto* to fall through without making a single effort to save it. But when, the same evening, Replin waited upon him to thank him for his gracious co-operation, shame and mortification overcame the unhappy King; he could not utter a word in reply, but burst into tears. The Diet rose on November 19, 1766. It had, at the bidding of the Empress's satrap, rejected every motion of reform; but, stimulated by the fiery eloquence of Soltyk, Bishop of Cracow, it absolutely refused even to consider the question of the Dissenters, despite the joint petition of the Russian, Prussian, and British Ministers at Warsaw in their favour.

Amidst the troubles and the terrors of this unlucky year Stanislaus found some slight distraction in the visit of his old friend Madame Geoffrin. She had been the first person whom he had informed of his election, and at the same time he had invited her to visit him in his capital at the earliest opportunity. Madame Geoffrin, for all her philosophy, was not unaffected by the homage of a King. She responded

to the invitation of Stanislaus with dithyrambic effusion. "My dear son, my dear King, my dear Stanislaus Augustus," she cried, "imagine, if you can, the transports of my joy on the receipt of your divine letter. I fancied that you were our Henry IV. and I was Sully. I shed tears of tenderness on hearing of the details of your election, and I feel worthy of that sweet and precious name of Mamma! Why should I not come and admire you like a second Queen of Sheba attracted by the wisdom of a second Solomon? . . . Oh, my dear son! Oh, my adorable King! With what transports of joy shall I not look upon the admiration of Europe!" It was no small undertaking for an old lady of sixty-four, of sedentary habits and luxurious domesticities (she had never hitherto been outside the walls of Paris), to undertake a journey of many weeks to the wilds of Poland. But the temptations presented by her royal host proved irresistible. "You will be lodged in the palace where I dwell, and on the same floor," wrote the King; "we shall only be separated by a couple of rooms. You shall dine and sup by yourself whenever you wish it, or with me whenever I am not engaged in public functions. *You* shall only see whom you like in your own apartments, and to see *you* shall be accounted an exceptional favour. You shall be entirely dispensed from all public receptions. As soon as I know whether you are coming by Vienna, Dresden, or Berlin I shall send to meet you one of my suite who can talk French, German, and Polish. He shall take charge of you and conduct you to Warsaw. You shall see nothing but the best company, I promise you; but I have reserved a few moments for myself (moments which sometimes will last for hours) when we will tell each other what we think about all men and all things."

Despite Mamma's protests, Stanislaus ordered for her from Paris furniture which she warned him would cost a King's ransom. How he paid for it is another question. Possibly the 20,000 ducats which he was obliged to borrow the same year from Repnin went some way towards it. Everything which could be done beforehand to make his

distinguished guest feel thoroughly at home was done. Indeed, the provident ingenuity of Stanislaus on this occasion raised hospitality to the rank of a fine art, and recalled the traditions of the Caliphs. On her arrival at Warsaw, Madame Geoffrin found that the rooms provided for her at the Palace were exactly like those she had quitted at Paris—the same size, the same kind of carpets, the same furniture, down even to the very book which she had been reading the evening before her departure, in the same binding, and placed exactly as she had left it, with a marker in the very place where she had left off reading.

The visit was planned originally for the year 1765. It was postponed for a twelvemonth because the lady was suddenly overcome by a fit of pique which scattered all her philosophy to the winds. The cause of this storm in a teacup was the bare suspicion that an architect, Louis by name, whom she herself had introduced to the King, had supplanted her in his confidence. In her first access of rage the spiteful old lady discharged all her accumulated venom at the poor architect and treated the King with glacial coldness. Stanislaus is no longer "my son" or "my adorable infant," but "Sire" and "your Majesty." A very kind and forbearing explanation from Stanislaus soon put matters right, however, and the apologies of the mollified lady were copious enough; but such a very unpleasant and unexpected exhibition of bad temper from the oracle of the Paris *salons* did not augur well for the impending visit. And, in fact, it proved as miserable a failure as Voltaire's visit to the great Frederick. The lady expected far too much. She was over-quick to find fault and impute evil motives. She was also intolerably exacting and peevish. She found that the Polish ladies were by no means disposed to yield to her that unquestioning deference which she claimed as a right at Paris, and once, when she presumed to be insolent at an aristocratic reception, she was severely snubbed by the venerable Princess Czartoryska* who objected to the airs of "cette bonne bourgeoisie." These

* The lady of the barrels of gold mentioned in chap. ii.

little *contretemps* vexed Madame Geoffrin exceedingly. Subsequently she reproached Stanislaus for not being as good as his word. This was ungrateful, to say the least of it, and the King had the spirit to reprove her, delicately but decidedly, for her injustice and exaggeration. Their friendship revived, however, as the geographical distance between them increased, and to the very last Madame Geoffrin remained the *confidante* of the trials, the amours, and the aspirations of the King of Poland. On September 13, 1766, she quitted Warsaw, to the great relief of the Court, in a coach especially made for her. It was so small that one could scarce sit upright in it, and it was provided with an ingenious arrangement for keeping out the dust which excited the hilarity of the profane. Evidently the good Poles regarded the great lady rather as an oddity than as a celebrity.

As a host and a friend Stanislaus always appeared at his best. He was a finished gentleman in no mere conventional sense of that much-abused word. He loved to see and make people happy because he really had a kind heart. His charming manners were the natural expression of a genuine benevolence. If anything, he was *too* suave, *too* yielding. The amiable complaisance which made him so perfect, socially, pointed to an inherent instability, a moral flabbiness. He thought too much of persons and too little of things, especially of the things that mattered. It is doubtful whether he ever had any fixed principles. Anyhow, he always found it very difficult to make a firm stand, and almost impossible to say no. And the worst of it was, that his acute and resourceful intelligence was always ready with a justification of his most questionable actions. He was, to use a phrase of Edward Fitzgerald's, applied to some one else, one of those exceedingly clever people who can always produce a thousand excellent reasons for going to the devil. Very characteristic of the man is the excuse which frequently appears in his correspondence with Madame Geoffrin: "My position is so terrible that I am obliged to sacrifice honour to duty!" As if true honour could ever clash

with true duty. As a matter of fact, it was both honour and duty which Stanislaus habitually sacrificed to expediency.

◀ In the earlier years of his reign Stanislaus's obvious duty was to stand by his uncles the Czartoryscy. They were the only persons in Poland strong enough and brave enough to make a good fight for the minimum of reform for lack of which the Republic was perishing. Their superior authority, ability, and patriotism were reluctantly acknowledged by the Russian Ministers themselves. All the best people in the land were with them. If there was any hope at all for Poland, it was founded on their aspirations and efforts. Catherine herself was half afraid of them, or she would never have hated them so bitterly or crushed them so remorselessly. Had the King been true to the solemn promises which he had made to them on the eve of his coronation, had he supported them with his whole heart, their position, already respectable, would have been almost impregnable. Doubtless Russia might have triumphed in the end, for the big battalions were all on her side ; but the triumph would have been much more difficult and altogether inglorious. Moreover, the false moves made by the Empress and Panin during the years 1767 and 1768 gave opening after opening to skilful and alert antagonists. The affair of the Dissenters in particular was a blunder from beginning to end. It was undertaken hastily and ignorantly. No pains were taken beforehand to arrive at a just view of the circumstances, and when, at last, the real facts came to light it was discovered at St. Petersburg (with what disgust it may be imagined) that there was really no case at all for the Dissenters. The whole thing was a transparent fiction, an artificial grievance. "For some time past," wrote Repnin to Panin in the course of 1767, "I have been trying to find among the Dissenters some one or other who is even moderately educated, but up to the present time I have been unable to discover any one. All these people are tillers of the soil and without a shred of education. The Orthodox gentry of Poland must be sought for in the Russian

monasteries." "Nay," he adds in another place, "the Dissenters have actually petitioned against being forced to accept high office. They have not a single representative capable of holding it." And these were the very people whom the Empress proposed to thrust among the Polish senators and the Polish prelates! It should also be borne in mind that there was no suggestion of religious persecution. From time immemorial the Polish Dissenters had enjoyed absolute religious liberty.

Nevertheless Catherine had committed herself so unreservedly and ostentatiously to the policy of placing the Polish Dissenters on an equality with the Polish Catholics that she could not now draw back without serious loss of dignity. Repnin was accordingly instructed to proceed with his work, and unlimited funds and thousands of Russian soldiers were placed at his disposal. With these means of persuasion it was an easy matter to form artificial Dissenting Confederations who voted as they were paid to vote. Simultaneously Repnin's agents scoured the country to stimulate all the enemies of "the Family" to rise against them *en masse*. The ambassador's most trusty emissary was Gabriel Podoski, a Polish priest of infamous character and antecedents, who had been in the pay of Russia for years and was actually Repnin's private secretary. Laden with roubles and ukases, Podoski went the round of the Polish provinces, and speedily induced the Opolinscy, the Potoccy, the Mniszscy, and all the other antagonists of the Czartoryscy to protest formally against their reforms as "innovations injurious to the Republic." At the same time all those noblemen whom "the Family," with the assistance of Russian troops, had expelled from the country in 1763, were invited to return, and assured of her Imperial Majesty's high protection. Back they all trooped, headed by that drunken swashbuckler Prince Karol Radziwill, who set the example of slavish obsequiousness by requesting that a Russian officer might be attached to his suite permanently, in order to communicate to him the Empress's wishes. This rabble, composed of the most reactionary and

anarchical elements in the Republic, proceeded to form a general Confederation at Radom, with Radziwill as its marshal. Its first act was to issue a manifesto petitioning the Empress to guarantee the perpetuity of the existing Constitution. In plain English, it proposed to give the *coup de grâce* to every project of reform.

Without money and without troops as he was, Stanislaus could not prevent this insurrection of evildoers, but he had at least frequent opportunities of embarrassing, and even circumventing, the enemies of his country, if only he had had the moral courage to make use of these opportunities. Unfortunately for Poland, this was just where he failed. At the very outset, "Atticus" and "Cicero," as he nicknamed his uncles, reminded him that though the Empress might form any number of Dissenting Confederations, they remained illegal until the King of Poland consented to receive them in public audience and allow them to kiss his hand. Stanislaus assured his uncles that nothing should induce him to receive the Dissidents, yet Repnin had only to threaten him with the loss of the Empress's favour and he instantly gave way. He received the Dissenters. He allowed them to kiss his hand.

Again, Stanislaus, refortified by his uncles, protested at first against the Empress's proposed perpetual guarantee of the vicious old Constitution. But Repnin had only to threaten once more and Stanislaus surrendered unconditionally. "Very well," he said, with an air of resignation, "I will look on, most reluctantly, of course, but at least patiently and quietly." "Do so," replied the Ambassador, "and then you may be quite sure of the uttermost benevolence of the Empress."

A still more promising opportunity of successful resistance presented itself when, for the furtherance of Russia's plans, it was proposed to make the infamous Podoski Primate of Poland. The man's character was so bad and he was so generally detested that the bare proposition seemed ridiculous and impossible. At Rome, too, such a candidature was most unwelcome, as Podoski's orthodoxy was at least as

problematical as his morality. The Nuncio in Poland was prepared to go all lengths in order to exclude Podoski. At a private interview he solemnly assured Stanislaus that the Pope would never consent to the consecration of Podoski. The King, greatly embarrassed, consulted Repnin. "What am I to do?" he asked. "His Holiness declines to send the Bull of Confirmation." "Convoke the Senate and confirm Podoski's election yourself," promptly replied the Ambassador. "Impossible," replied the King. "I warn you that if the Pope adopts a firm tone all the Catholics will obey him. . . . You may introduce Podoski into the Senate with fixed bayonets, but torrents of blood will flow, and Poland and I will have to pay the piper." Repnin shrugged his shoulders. "The thing must be done, whatever happens," said he. Then the King gave way, and appointed the criminous clerk—Primate.

Repnin himself was amazed at the completeness of the King's surrender. The appointment of Podoski was by far the greatest triumph he had yet achieved. "I must say," he wrote to Panin, "that Podoski's appointment is the most impressive proof of Russia's omnipotence in Poland. It demonstrates that those of the Polacks who are ready to oblige Russia may hope to rise to the highest dignities in the State even when their conduct has been most offensive to their King and their country. Why, without the assistance of Russia, Podoski had not the slightest chance of becoming even the least of the Polish bishops." There can be no doubt whatever that Stanislaus ought to have abdicated rather than stoop to such an act of infamy.

But the last and greatest opportunity of Stanislaus during these dismal years came when the Polish Diet met at Warsaw at the end of September 1767. This Diet, which had been expressly selected, under severe pressure, to equalise the position of the Dissenters, proved rebellious from the first. The country had been thoroughly aroused by the transparently hypocritical professions of Russia, and a wave of religious enthusiasm arose which swept everything before it. "The Faith is in danger!" was the rallying cry

of the Patriots and the Catholics (in the present instance the term was synonymous), and it was only the actual presence of Russian troops which saved the hirelings of Repnin and Podoski from being cut to pieces at the polls. The new Papal Nuncio, Durini, a man who united apostolic fervour with no ordinary diplomatic ability, placed himself at the head of the movement. He brought with him an Encyclical from Pope Clement XIII, which denounced any surrender to the Dissenters. A copy of this Encyclical was sent by Durini to Catherine. "What a lot of fairy-tales the Pope has to tell us!" she sneered as she turned over its pages. But these "fairy-tales," as they were called in Russia, were regarded as divine oracles in Poland. Durini found a resolute coadjutor in Kajetan Soltyk, Bishop of Cracow, who kept fifteen secretaries busy day and night copying and issuing fiery exhortations to the faithful, which were distributed in every part of the country. The threats and sophisms of Repnin were alike powerless against such a champion as Soltyk. When Repnin haughtily bade the Bishop bridle his tongue for his own sake, Soltyk retorted that he would never keep silent while the interests of religion were at stake. When, resorting to argument, Repnin reminded him that the Poles themselves had invited the intervention of the Empress, Soltyk replied: "True, but as an ally. We are not and never have been Russian. We are a free people, and the Empress herself has guaranteed our liberties." This was unanswerable. Repnin could now only suggest to Panin that as Soltyk was a man whom it was impossible to frighten he must be forcibly removed.)

In the beginning of September the Russian army advanced to within three miles of Warsaw. The 3rd Grenadier Regiment was quartered in the city itself. The dauntless Soltyk thereupon threatened the Russians with a repetition of the Sicilian Vespers. In every church the priests and monks preached uncompromising resistance to Russia, and whenever the Polish ladies happened to meet a Dissenter in public they ostentatiously drew aside their skirts as if to avoid contagion. After all their efforts

the Russians could only muster fifty deputies in a Diet of some hundreds.

On the eve of the opening of Parliament (October 4, 1767) the deputies assembled in the Radziwill Palace, where the Nuncio, in a stirring speech, urged them to defend the Catholic Faith to the last drop of their blood. He also forbade any negotiations with the Russian Ambassador. The excitement was extraordinary. Many of those present proposed to settle the question by the drastic expedient of massacring all the Dissenting deputies. Others loudly demanded the withdrawal of the Russian troops. The Diet, they cried, could not deliberate freely while surrounded by Russian guns and Russian bayonets. By this time even the intrepid Repnin was growing anxious. "If I did not know how cowardly these people are I should think something serious was going to happen," he wrote to Panin. "As for the poor King, they have brought him to such a pass that I fear he will be cut to pieces. I shall have to employ the most violent expedients to carry this matter through." These "violent expedients" included the arrest and imprisonment of the deputies Kassakowski and Czacki, who could not be repressed by any other means.

But even these measures seemed to have no effect, and when the Diet assembled the trembling minority appealed to the Russian Ambassador for protection. Repnin instantly hastened to the assistance of his party. He arrived while the uproar was at its height, and forced his way into the crowded House at the risk of his life. "Cease this uproar!" he shouted; "or if you *will* have a row, I'll make a row too, and my row shall be louder than your row." When order had been somewhat restored, the Ambassador expressed his surprise at seeing the representatives of the nation in such an undignified state of excitement and so forgetful of the proofs of the goodwill of her Imperial Majesty. Was it not she who had enabled them to confederate for the defence of their liberties? Here he was interrupted by shouts of "We have come together for the defence of the Catholic religion!" "Well, who

prevents you?" retorted Repnin. "Zeal for the Faith is commendable, but true religion demands fairness to one's neighbours." Cries of "Release Kossakowski! Release Kossakowski!" then assailed him from every part of the House. "You'll get nothing from me by shouting," replied Repnin coolly. "Ask gently and politely, and I may, perhaps, do what you require." Then Prince Radziwill approached, *chapeau bas*, and courteously repeated the wishes of the House. Repnin thereupon ordered the kidnapped deputy to be released.

<The session of October 12 was still stormier. On the motion of Soltyk, the House formally demanded of the Ambassador by whose authority he was committing so many acts of unjustifiable violence. Upon this Repnin resolved to have done with the Bishop once for all. The same evening Soltyk and some other equally irrepressible deputies were seized and sent off to Russia in covered waggons. The resistance of the House thereupon slackened sensibly. Terror had had its effect, and the Diet expressed its willingness to negotiate with the Ambassador. A committee was formed to consider the question of the Dissenters in all its bearings, and, by the end of February 1768, the long-pending matter was finally adjusted in accordance with the wishes of the Empress. The Diet was then dissolved.>

The will of a single strong man, determined at all hazards and by any means to do his duty as he understood it, had prevailed against an assembly of nearly four hundred mutinous Polish gentlemen who did not know their own minds. The last independent Diet of old Poland had quailed before the frown of the Russian satrap. But Repnin had not prevailed by force alone. His despatches tell us that he also owed much, very much, to the steady, if secret, assistance of the King. Again and again he insists on the value of the services rendered by Stanislaus. Again and again he insinuates that some recompense is due for such services—some compliance, for instance, with the King's wishes in the matter of Constitutional reform, some

small concession on the part of Russia in return for so much compliance on his. Evidently the influence of Stanislaus had been of some weight. But now suppose that the whole weight of that influence had been thrown into the scales against Russia instead of in her favour. Suppose that Stanislaus, as the official leader and representative of the Polish nation, had chosen to oppose Repnin instead of supporting him—what would have happened then? One thing is certain. Repnin could not have treated the King of Poland like he treated deputies and bishops. He could not have got rid of him by kidnapping or transportation. He would not have dared to do so. The consequences of such a step would have been incalculable. Most probably if Stanislaus had stood firm for reform, well aware as he was that the best part of the nation was with him (Repnin admits as much), the Empress would have been compelled to submit to a compromise which might have benefited her without materially injuring Poland. The establishment of Russia's hegemony over Poland would have been quite compatible with the abolition of the *liberum veto*. Repnin himself would have preferred this solution of the difficulty. "If," wrote he to Panin, "you would make Poland ever so little stable, ever so little useful to you, you must re-establish internal order. . . . All the people here who are worth anything desire that domestic affairs at any rate should be determined by a majority of votes. . . . How glorious it would be to make a whole nation happy and enable it to emerge from its anarchy and ruin! I believe in the possibility of uniting politics with philanthropy. I flatter myself that I should be able to fulfil the wishes of the Empress and at the same time make the Polish nation happy." Catherine refused a compromise because the vacillation and weakness of the King had already surrendered into her hands everything she claimed. But suppose he had not so surrendered. Suppose he had stood upon his rights. Suppose he had fought as courageously for his country's liberties as Repnin had fought for his sovereign's glory. In that case things would have been very different.

The King, to begin with, would have had a basis for negotiation. He would have had something to offer in exchange for concessions from Russia. He could not easily have been ignored or thrust aside.)

Or take the worst possible contingency. Suppose that Catherine had insisted upon absolute surrender, and emphasised her demand by invading Poland. Even then Stanislaus would have had a last weapon in reserve. He could have abdicated, and at the same time have explained the reasons of his abdication in a manifesto addressed to the Western Powers. We can well imagine how telling his skilful and eloquent pen could have made it. In such a case Catherine would have been placed in an extremely awkward position politically, while her reputation as an enlightened and magnanimous ruler, on which she especially prided herself, would have been severely shaken. Stanislaus would have changed places with her in the good opinion of Europe. All the friends of liberty and equity would have been on *his* side.

But Catherine knew her man too well to have the least apprehension of any such heroic demonstration. When, on the eve of his election, she had described Stanislaus to Frederick the Great as "the individual best suited to our purposes," she had summed him up exactly. Stanislaus was not of the stuff of which heroes are made. He was too much of a *philosophe* for that. He had not faith enough in any one or anything to make sublime ventures. Enthusiasm, whether religious or patriotic, was disagreeable to him. He called it fanaticism, and had as little to do with it as possible. Prudence and common sense were his pet virtues. But prudence is sometimes only another name for cowardice, while common sense, which generally looks after the main chance only, dislikes risks of any kind. So it was with Stanislaus II. So long as he could save something from the wreckage of his country he was quite content. Nay, he really believed that his conduct, on the whole, was highly creditable to him. His incurable optimism led him to fancy that, somehow, everything would come right in

the end, with a little patience. Listen to what he says to Madame Geoffrin about the events of the years 1767 and 1768: "The day after to-morrow [October 4, 1767] the Diet will commence; and what a Diet! All the others will be nothing in comparison. To keep my head cool I repeat fifty times a day this motto of Fontenelle: 'Never be in a hurry to rejoice or complain!' If you were religious I would say to you: 'Pray for me!' Oh! it is a terrible Diet!"—"It is very vexing to have to live always with a fire-hose in your hands and be walking over hot embers with it. But with patience and courage one gets used to everything. . . . The Empress makes me feel that if she took away her protecting arm I should cease to exist. . . . Meanwhile the Confederates are ravaging my estates and dispersing the few troops I have left. But I always conclude by saying: 'Patience and courage!'"

Patience Stanislaus had in abundance and to spare; but it is difficult for even the most friendly eye to discern any trace of courage in his conduct during this melancholy period.

CHAPTER V

DECADENCE AND DEMORALISATION

The dissipations of Stanislaus—Proposed Austrian match frustrated by Catherine—"Les petites" and "les bons diables"—Influence in Poland of the women—The old-fashioned *grandes dames*—Beginning of their political ascendancy—The younger ladies of "the Family"—The Princess Isabella Czartoryska—The Princess Elizabeth Lubomirska—"The Sphinx"—Pani Kossakowska and Pani Ozarowska—Frequency of divorce—Influence of the Age of Reason—Typical worldly bishops—Krasicki, Bishop of Ermeland—Krasicki and Frederick the Great—Soltyk, Bishop of Cracow—The Prince-Primate, Michael Poniatowski—Carelessness and indifference of the Polish prelates—General scramble for the property of the Jesuits in Poland—Depredations of the Bishops of Wilna and Posen—The Confederation of Bar—Outbreak of the Russo-Turkish War—A partition of Poland proposed by Frederick the Great—His reasons for it—Long hesitation of Russia—Territorial losses of Poland by the first partition—Frivolity and indifference of the Poles—Negligence and ignorance of the Polish Government—Suppression of the patriots—Gigantic peculations of the hirelings of Russia—Rapacity of Poninsky—Wholesale jobbery—Poland's one benefit from the first partition is the new constitution

BY nature, then, Stanislaus II. was the least heroic of men, and the luxurious atmosphere which he breathed, habitually and by preference, was not conducive to the cultivation of the robuster virtues. From the moment of his elevation to the throne all the errant and acquisitive Beauties of Poland were as irresistibly attracted to this brilliant Prince Charming as moths are attracted by the light of a candle set upon a lofty pedestal. In this instance, however, it was not the moths, but the candle, which suffered the most.

The Court of Stanislaus in his earlier days was a sort of miniature of the Versailles of Louis XV. Gallicised

coquettes in silk and atlas shamelessly pursued the handsome and amiable young King, and plunged him into a whirlpool of excitement and dissipation. It was a delightful existence, but, unfortunately, it was also extremely expensive, and Stanislaus at this time was almost entirely dependent on the generosity of his wealthy but austere uncles, the Prince-Chancellor and the Prince-Palatine. These exemplary old gentlemen naturally objected to throwing their riches into the bottomless sieve of a prodigal nephew's dissipation. They took measures, therefore, to protect both his virtue and their own pockets by endeavouring to contract a sensible marriage for him. The Prince-Chancellor corresponded on the subject with his influential connections at Vienna, and it was arranged at a family council that the King should solicit the hand of the Archduchess Christina from the Austrian Court. Such a union, it was argued with some reason, would benefit Stanislaus both personally and politically. It would compel him to live a more decent and dignified life, and at the same time interest the Austrian Court in his favour, especially if he should become the father of a possible heir to the throne. The plan was kept very secret, for fear of alarming the susceptibilities of Russia, but Catherine soon began to suspect that something of the kind was afoot, and Prince Golitsuin, the Russian Ambassador at Vienna, was instructed to get to the bottom of it. Golitsuin discovered that the prime mover in the affair was the Spanish Ambassador, an impenetrably taciturn man when sober, but confidingly garrulous when in his cups. Golitsuin took his measures accordingly. He invited the Ambassador and the Ambassador's mistress to dinner, plied his Excellency well with liquor, and then, with the assistance of the mistress, who had been bribed beforehand, contrived, in the course of the evening, to extract the secret from him. Catherine was furious at what she considered an ungrateful attempt on the part of Stanislaus to break away from her. The Austrian match was promptly quashed; but Stanislaus, piqued by this high-handed interference, refused to marry a Polish lady,

of the great House of Potocki proposed to him as an alternative by the Empress. He preferred his liberty, he said, and remained unmarried.

After this the private life of Stanislaus became still more disorderly. Pretty Parisian actresses now began to jostle Polish princesses at the merry, *recherché* suppers given by "the young Telemachus" * in his private apartments to *les petites* and *les bons diables*, as he humorously calls the *bon vivants* of both sexes whom he loved to entertain, and whom he could entertain so exquisitely. When his uncles remonstrated with him on the impropriety of his conduct he only shrugged his shoulders. When the Prince-Palatine, who was naturally economical, lectured his nephew on his extravagance and threatened to cut off the supplies, Stanislaus snapped his fingers at him. Henceforth "Telemachus" carefully avoided "Cicero" and "Atticus," as he called his uncles, and kept them ignorant not only of his private amusements, but of his political plans also, which still further incensed them. It was now that he began to run up debts with devil-may-care nonchalance, till his liabilities amounted to some millions of gulden.† The pocket-money with which the Empress supplied him, very irregularly, enabled him to meet the more pressing of his current expenses, but when very "hard up" he was glad to borrow a few extra thousands from his personal friend Prince Repnin, who was much about the same age, and sincerely sympathised with him in his troubles. In extenuation of the King's extravagance it should be borne in mind that he had no fixed civil list at this time, and often suffered acutely from the hereditary niggardliness of subjects who had never been known to maintain their sovereigns adequately or even decently. His dissoluteness may no doubt be excused by the indulgent on the score of youth, and certainly in this respect he was no worse than his cousins, male and female, with whom he was extremely intimate. This leads us to another question, the influence

* His nickname for himself in the Geoffrin correspondence.

† A Polish gulden = about 15. 3d.

exercised by the Polish women during the reign of Stanislaus II.

In old Poland the women, generally speaking, had remained quite outside the anarchical political arena. In their own homes they were paramount, but they very rarely emerged beyond the domestic threshold. It was thought unbecoming, unwomanly, for "the flaxen polls" to meddle with public life. The idea of petticoat government was hateful to the virile instincts of the *Szlachta*, or gentry. The cynical apothegm "*Cherchez la femme*" was inapplicable to Polish society in those early days. The history of the country may, perhaps, in consequence, be comparatively poor in romantic and dramatic details; but, on the other hand, the national life was certainly happier and healthier. The attempts of the Italian queens of the later Jagiellos and the French queens of the later Vasas "to plot and intrigue"—in other words, to promote the diplomacy of their consorts—was widely resented as something impudent and monstrous. The Court was never a great power in Poland. The pride and envy of the magnates would not permit it to exist as it existed elsewhere. It was only in the course of the eighteenth century that a spacious political career presented itself to the Polish women. It is remarkable, too, that they only began to assert themselves in the domain of politics when the incompetence of the men became more and more patent. In the family circle they had always had the first word and the last, and thus when Polish politics ceased to be national and became a mere family affair the women, naturally, took the lead.

It must frankly be admitted that the earlier types of these female politicians were remarkable for a superior energy and sagacity which put the men to shame. The best of these types were the Princess Czartoryska and her daughter, the Countess Constantia Poniatowska, already * mentioned. But it was an unnatural state of things after all. A society in which the women are virile and the men are effeminate is already far advanced in decadence. Subjectivity, the

* Chap. iii.



THE PRINCESS ISABELLA CZARTORYSKA



predominance of the purely personal point of view, is characteristic of feminine politicians all the world over, and the consequences are narrowness and bitterness. It cannot well be otherwise when the political outlook is circumscribed by family interests and obscured by family prejudices.

The ladies of the two earlier generations of the Czartoryscy were very exceptional women. They were endowed with the true political temperament, their aims were invariably high and pure, and they did great things in consequence. But their very success was mischievous ultimately, because it established a tradition in favour of the regimen of women within "the Family," a tradition which their daughters and granddaughters attempted to continue, with the most disastrous results. These younger ladies were bound to play a part in the great world. They had inherited, in ample measure, many of the seductive qualities so long hereditary in the united families of Czartoryski and Poniatowski—beauty, grace, charm, and spirit. They exercised quite as much political influence as their mothers and grandmothers had exercised before them. But it was an influence wholly mischievous because no longer directed by wisdom, honour, and conscience and recklessly wasted on personal aims and unworthy objects. But let us examine a few of these *grandes dames* a little more closely.

Very few of the contemporaries of Stanislaus II. held such a commanding position in Polish society as the Countess Isabella Fleming, consort of the King's first cousin, Prince Adam Casimir Czartoryski. She was married while quite a child to a pedant, twelve years her senior, whose recondite pastimes she could not share and who treated her as a mere plaything. They spent their honeymoon at Paris, and on their way thither, much to her husband's amusement, she dressed up as a boy. At Frankfort-on-Maine she was mistaken for Christian VII. of Denmark, who was expected to arrive at the place about the same time. There was some excuse for the blunder as the Czartoryscy travelled with more than regal pomp and the young King of Denmark was of a notoriously effeminate exterior. The burgomaster

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and town-council went so far as to pay a visit of ceremony upon "His Majesty" at the hotel of the Czartoryscy, and were only convinced of their mistake by the appearance on the balcony of the supposed King in a ball-dress. The Princess Isabella was a true child of the eighteenth century. She aimed at being the Queen of Polish society and her country mansion at Powanzka well deserved the name of the Polish Trianon. Here, in her magnificent gardens—horticulture was the one science which she had mastered—she entertained hundreds of guests disguised as shepherds and shepherdesses, gods and goddesses, herself the gayest and most enchanting of the company. Just before her marriage a severe attack of small-pox had severely pitted her face and robbed her of her wonderful hair. No one then imagined that she would become one of the most beautiful women in Poland. She was a reckless, impetuous hoyden in those days, caring for nothing but pleasure and excitement, and indiscreet to the verge of folly. But she had a good heart and there is not a word of truth in the infamous calumnies which insinuated that she was the mistress, simultaneously, of her cousin King Stanislaus and his friend, Prince Repnin.* In her later years, as we shall see, she plunged into politics on the ultra-patriotic side; but she had no talent that way, and, always with the best intentions, did much harm. But she was neither a *philosophe* nor a blue-stocking, and frankly expressed her utter repugnance for art and literature, a confession which required some courage in those days.

Over her husband she possessed not the slightest influence. He was, all his life long, the political tool of his clever, masterful sister, the Princess Lubomirska, a woman of a very different type.

The Princess-Marshal Elizabeth Lubomirska was the daughter of the Princess Sophia Czartoryska (the lady of the barrels of gold†) and inherited no small share of her

* The same scandalmongers, with as little show of reason, attribute the paternity of her illustrious son, Prince Adam George Czartoryski, to the Russian ambassador.

† Chap. ii.

mother's enormous fortune. "Aspasia," as the King jocosely called her, aspired to be the political oracle of "The Family." She had great force of character and considerable ability, but her extreme vindictiveness always got the better of her judgment. Thus instead of keeping "The Family" united and consequently formidable, as heretofore, she eventually broke it up altogether by alienating both her husband and her brother from her cousin, the King, whom she detested. As, however, the King had a far sounder judgment and a far clearer intellect than any of his relations, except his own brother, the Primate, the consequences of the Princess Elizabeth's determined opposition to everything he did or meant to do were most disastrous to herself, her family and her country.

Anyhow, the virtue of the Princess Lubomirska was invulnerable even to the poisoned darts of scandal. As much cannot, unhappily, be said for another equally great lady who frequently appears in the King's private correspondence under the sobriquet of "The Sphinx." This was the Princess Sapiezhna, consort of Prince Sapieha, Palatine of Mscislawl. In her earlier years the Princess was one of the King's many mistresses (her husband previously went abroad by special arrangement) and by far the most expensive of them all. Always gambling heavily, constantly in debt, never with a penny to spare though thousands passed through her hands, she was so extravagant that the King had, at last, to get rid of her, to save himself from being ruined outright. She revenged herself by becoming his political opponent. Unfathomably crafty (hence, perhaps, her nickname) and diabolically malignant, she employed her hirelings and creatures at the Diet to obstruct the royal measures on every occasion till Stanislaus began to think it would have been less costly to have retained "The Sphinx" as his friend. It was in consequence of this lady's unscrupulous victimising of French peeresses at play, that Stanislaus, at the earnest solicitation of the French Government, issued a rescript forbidding French visitors to Poland to lend any money to Polish ladies.

Still more dangerous, if possible, in different ways, were two other leaders of Polish society, Pani Kossakowska, wife of the Castellan of Kamieniec, and Pani Ozarowska, widow of the Castellan of Woynic. The former was generally dreaded for her mordant witticisms and amusing but scandalous letters, which stuck at nothing and spared nobody. The latter richly provided for a whole army of poor relations by bestowing her favours on five successive Russian ambassadors.

It must not be supposed, however, that all the Polish women were quite so abandoned as Pani Ozarowska. Certainly the court-ladies were not remarkable for extreme austerity of manners, but they were light rather than corrupt. The most disquieting feature of the Stanislavan age, from a moral point of view, was the ease and frequency of divorce. Even the daughters of the virtuous Prince-Chancellor were divorced so often that they were said to have gone the round of the Polish peerage. Gustavus Maurice Armfelt, the friend and favourite of Gustavus III., was one day in a select *salon* at Warsaw where out of twenty-five noble married ladies present no fewer than fourteen were living apart from their husbands. Armfelt's own liaison with the Countess D——, a married woman, is characteristic of the time and place. The first *billet-doux* containing the words, "Je ne serai qu'à toi," was thrust into his hands at church, the lady subsequently explaining that she regarded a promise made "in the Temple of the Lord" as the more binding. Let us add that the first assignation was made in the chapel of a monastery, the walls of which Armfelt had to scale at midnight. On the other hand, it should never be forgotten that in so decentralised a Government as Poland the influence of the Court was relatively limited and confined almost entirely to the capital. In the country the ladies were very much what they had ever been, quiet, modest, strenuous house-wives, ignorant of the new ideas and of the strange practices thence ensuing.

For it was the spirit of the age which had affected the upper circles of Polish society so deleteriously. The Age

of Reason had included Religion and Morality amongst the obsolete prejudices which must be got rid of because they barred the path of Progress. The intellectual leaders of the day were terribly afraid of being thought religious—it was so out of date. This moral invertebrateness was most painfully evident where it might have been least expected in so Catholic a country as Poland—among the Prelates. I am not speaking now of mere robbers and scoundrels like the Primate Podoski, or Młodziejowski, Bishop of Posen, or Massalski, Bishop of Wilna, whom every honest man, whatever his creed, could not but regard with loathing. I am speaking now of prelates of the better sort, men of good repute and sterling qualities, like Krasicki, Bishop of Ermeland Soltyk, Bishop of Cracow, and Turski, Bishop of Luczk.

Ignaty Krasicki, Bishop of Ermeland, was the first eminent Polish writer of modern times. A great wit, a great humourist, a great satirist, even a great moralist, he was everything that is great except a great bishop. He borrowed largely from the best French models of the lighter sort without ever losing his own originality. He was the oracle and the delight of contemporary literary circles. A whole generation was trained up to repeat, daily, his national anthem, "Swienta milosc kochanej ojczyzny,"* instead of its prayers. As an author of *vers de société* he has rarely been equalled. Perfect taste was the hall-mark of his refined and exquisite talent. As a satirist he delighted all men and offended none. His usual weapon, a delicate irony, was never known to wound, irritate, or even disquiet. And yet, though always gentle, he never flattered. Like Goethe, with whom he has often been compared, Krasicki kept absolutely aloof from politics. Nothing in the world ever seemed to put him out so long as he could enjoy, at his ease and in moderation, the society of quiet, appreciative people of culture and breeding. He was just as gay, just as self-contained, just as suavely dignified when his country was bleeding to death before his very eyes as when, twenty-five years earlier, he was preaching platitudes to an amused

* Oh, sacred love of our dear Fatherland.

and indifferent court. In his youth he was a personal friend of Voltaire, Diderot and d'Alembert. In his old age he was the associate and literary counsellor of Frederick the Great. Numerous are the recorded *bon-mots* with which he enlivened the round table of the Princess-Marshal Lubomirska at Willanova, where he was always an honoured guest. Krasicki's most characteristic witticism, however, is, perhaps, the repartee with which he mildly rebuked the levity of Frederick under whose jurisdiction his sadly reduced and mutilated diocese passed after the First Partition. "Well, well, Bishop," cried the philosopher of Sans Souci after a more than usual *risqué* sally, "anyhow, when I die, you must contrive to smuggle me into Heaven under your cloak." "Alas! Your Majesty," replied Krasicki, "you have clipped my cloak so short that to conceal anything contraband beneath it would be impossible."

Kajtan Soltyk, Bishop of Cracow, was a man of quite a different stamp, but every whit as unapostolic. The son of the Castellan of Lubelsk and connected with many of the noblest houses of Poland, he had a brilliant academic career at Rome, attached himself, during the reign of Augustus III., to the dominant faction at the Saxon Court and in 1759 was appointed Bishop of Cracow, the wealthiest See in Poland. Loving luxury and splendour, he lived more like a temporal Prince than like a pastor of Christ's flock. His equipages were superb, his gardens and conservatories swallowed up tens of thousands. He had his own *troupe* of actors, too, and the gem of his palace was a sumptuous theatre. He was also something of a musician, and frequently played the clarinet in his own orchestra. A true patriot and an ardent politician, he became, as we have seen, the most daring and determined adversary of Russia. His vehement martial eloquence constrained the *Szlachta* to follow him blindly, generally to their own hurt and harm, for Soltyk was far too passionate and headstrong to be a safe guide. Nor was his patriotism, genuine enough so far as it went, of the right kind. An aristocrat from top to toe, it was the liberties and privileges of his order for which he

mainly fought. In his later years he displayed a sudden enthusiasm for building and restoring churches and made so free with the revenues of the Diocese of Cracow for this purpose that the Chapter brought a restraining action against him, in the course of which he was found to be hopelessly insane.

↳The best of the Stanislavan Bishops was the King's brother, Michael Poniatowski, Podoski's successor in the Primacy. Prince Michael was the only Polish Bishop of whom the Papal Legate Garampi could report favourably. The highest tribute to his character is, perhaps, the awe in which his contemporaries held him. The soft and luxurious Polish Court complained that the Primate Poniatowski was an austere man, hard, stern and unyielding. There were others who blamed him for what they called his eccentricities, *e.g.*, making vaccination (which he recommended) the subject of one of his pastorals, and directing his clergy not to marry any peasants till they had learnt their catechism thoroughly. But though far more feared than loved, he was universally respected. His authority in ecclesiastical affairs, always great, was, at last, paramount, and his rigid discipline did much to strengthen and purify the church. Though considered niggardly, he spent large sums of money in training young priests, whom he sent abroad to learn the principles of diocesan administration under the strictest of the foreign bishops. His candidates invariably justified his choice of them, for he possessed, in an unusual degree, his brother's gift of discernment, and, like him, was altogether free from aristocratic prejudice. As Primate he worthily maintained his official position as the First Dignitary in the Realm. Indeed, once, on St. Michael's Day, he made his solemn entry into Lowicz with such pomp and splendour that the King complained that Prince Michael was depriving him of all his credit. Yet, to the honour of them both, the brothers remained inseparable friends and allies. In political affairs, indeed, Prince Michael was by far the ablest and most courageous counsellor of Stanislaus II. Had his advice always been followed, Poland might have been saved from

destruction even at the eleventh hour. He was equally influential at the Courts of St. Petersburg and Vienna, and Catherine II. corresponded with him, on purely political matters, even more frequently than with the King. Michael's statesmanlike instinct firmly grasped the essential and indisputable fact that, after the First Partition, the only hope for Poland was an intimate alliance with Russia, and from this standpoint he never swerved for an instant.)

It was not, however, till the latter part of the reign of Stanislaus II. that the influence of Prince Michael Poniatowski became paramount. A decennium earlier, the condition of the Polish church, during the Primacy of Podoski, is thus alluded to in the reply of Pope Clement XIV. to the letters of the Nuncio Garampi: "Your ciphered despatch informs us that the state of religion and of the church in this unfortunate country is deplorable. What especially disturbs us is not so much the plans of the foreign ministers* as the carelessness and indifference of the Catholics and especially of the Bishops. We exhort the more patriotic of the Bishops not to come forward prominently for the sake of personal grievances however real and important, but to recollect that they are Catholics first and Poles afterwards." On October 16, 1773, Clement, by the Brief "Dominus ac Redemptor Noster," dissolved the Jesuit Order. In Poland the Jesuits possessed a hundred and thirty houses and had accumulated great wealth. Upon this treasure the Primate Podoski and his Bishops fell, to use the words of a contemporary "like wolves upon their prey." Modziejowski, Bishop of Posen, in league with the Vice-Treasurer, Adam Powinski, seized 380,000 guldens' worth of silver in Poland and 170,000 guldens' worth in Lithuania, besides plate valued at one million and a half, all formerly the property of the Order. Massalski, Bishop of Wilna, took 600,000 guldens' worth more. The final distribution of thirty-two and a half millions worth of property of all kinds, the estimated total value of the Jesuits' possessions in Poland, was in the hands of ten people, one half of whom were ecclesiastics, who hastened

* For the partition of Poland.

to dispose of it as quickly as possible in case inquiries might be made. Innumerable monstrances, chalices, pyxes and other consecrated vessels were sent direct to the Mint to be coined. No wonder that the Nuncio was scandalised. He reported that the Vice-Treasurer and the Bishop of Wilna had collected between them and hidden in their houses hundreds of precious vestments, encrusted with gold and precious stones, under the pretext of taking care of them. Much of the altar plate from the churches was melted and re-cast into stirrups, spurs and other equine trappings. The Pope was also informed of the shameful appropriation of funds which were to have been set apart for education and the endowment of poor parishes. "The Bishops," wrote Garampi, "are by far the worst offenders, especially the Bishops of Wilna and Posen." The latter prelate, by the way, had worn threadbare the seats of the velvet arm-chairs in the Warsaw gambling saloons, but had not set foot in his diocese for years. He thought nothing of losing half a million livres at a sitting.

And this wholesale spoliation was contemporaneous with a catastrophe which should have shamed and sobered every Pole who still had any stake in his country or any feeling for her. On September 18, 1773, by the First Partition treaty, the Republic was forced, at the point of the bayonet, to sacrifice nearly one-third of her territory and more than one-third of her population. How this unique event came about must now be briefly described. It is a curious and suggestive story.

At the beginning of 1768 it was reasonable to suppose at St. Petersburg that the vexatious Polish question had, at last, been disposed of. Repnin had been very handsomely rewarded; the Polish Diet had been dissolved after doing everything which Russia required of it; the Russian troops had quitted Warsaw and were about to quit the kingdom altogether; when, early in March, tidings reached Warsaw of disturbances in the remote palatinate of Podolia on the Turkish frontier. The history of this obscure rising, which was to bring about one of the most momentous changes of modern times, was as follows.

On February 29, 1768, two score or so of country gentlemen, some hundreds of peasants, and a few priests and monks, assembled at the little fort of Bar under the banner of the Blessed Virgin, formed a Confederation to protest against the anti-Catholic resolutions of the lately dissolved Diet. Without any influence, or organisation, the Confederation of Bar appeared, at first sight, insignificant enough. It owed its real importance to the fact that it was a genuine popular rising inspired by a patriotism and a devotion utterly unknown to the official classes of Poland.

Its consequences were momentous and far-reaching. The original Confederates were, indeed, easily scattered by the Russian troops; but, stamped out in one place, the conflagration quickly burst forth again in half a dozen other places, and, at last, the whole Republic was, as Repnin put it "ablaze with the fire of Bar." At the end of 1768, a band of Cossacks, in pursuit of the Confederates, crossed the border and destroyed the Turkish town of Galta, whereupon the Grand-Vizier, already seriously alarmed by the recent events in Poland, delivered an ultimatum to the Russian Ambassador Obryezkov, threatening war unless the Empress instantly cancelled the guarantee treaty with Poland and withdrew her troops from the territories of the Republic. On refusing to comply with these demands, Obryezkov was thrown into the Seven Towers and a Turkish army of 20,000 men was despatched to the Danube.

Catherine was seriously embarrassed. Unable to prevent the inconvenient and unexpected outbreak of the First Turkish War which absorbed, for the time, all her forces, she was forced to make some concession to Poland. On March 31, 1769, Repnin was superseded by Prince Michael Volkonsky, whose instructions were to be passive, conciliatory and pacific. The supersession of Repnin was a mistake. The exchange of ambassadors necessarily implied a change of system and therefore raised false hopes in Poland. Fortunately for Russia, the extreme weakness of the Republic minimised the consequences of this blunder. Stanislaus was so poor that he was glad to borrow 10,000

ducats from Volkonsky soon after his arrival, while the Grand-Hetman, Rzewuski, accepted 3000 more in order to put the lilliputian Polish army on a war-footing. Nevertheless, it soon became quite clear that neither the King nor the Czartoryscy were inclined, if circumstances improved, to submit to Russian dictation as heretofore. When Volkonsky asked Stanislaus whether he imagined he could keep his throne without the assistance of the Empress, the King simply shrugged his shoulders. The Senate, too, at the suggestion of the Czartoryscy, after despatching an embassy to St. Petersburg complaining that the treaty of 1768 had been extorted by the violence of Repnin, endeavoured, by diplomatic means, to secure the good offices of Great Britain at Stambul, and assured the Porte, by a special envoy, that the Republic would remain neutral during the war.

It was only now, when Poland seemed about to break with Russia, and Russia herself was immeshed in the Turkish imbroglio, that the partition project, which had long been in the air, suddenly became a cardinal political factor.

As early as the end of 1768 the Courts of Vienna, Versailles and Copenhagen had become aware that the King of Prussia was about to "compensate" himself, at the expense of Poland, for the subsidies he was bound, by treaty, to pay to Russia on the outbreak of the Turkish War. The first Partition scheme, of which Frederick was the real author, was sent to Count Solmes, the Prussian Ambassador to St. Petersburg, at the beginning of 1769. Panin, however, was not particularly pleased with it. The territory of Russia, he said, was already so vast that he doubted whether it would be any advantage to her to increase it. As a matter of fact, he preferred to keep Poland completely Russianised but intact and semi-dependent. Frederick was profoundly irritated. He wanted an accretion of territory sufficient to counterpoise any possible acquisitions of Russia from Turkey, and, above all, he wanted it without the risks of war. The Frederick of 1769 was a very different man from the Frederick of 1741 or 1756. The terrible experiences of the Seven Years' War had converted the

brilliant and unscrupulous adventurer into a cautious, almost timorous statesman, whose invincible machophobia coloured the whole policy of his later years. Of Russia he was especially afraid, while Poland, then, what Turkey is now, the sickman of Europe, seemed expressly at hand to adjust all differences and reconcile all ambitions. The only question was: which of the Powers should benefit by the partition and how? The Court of Vienna considered it disadvantageous for Austria to transgress her natural north-eastern boundaries, the Carpathians, by annexing the Polish lands beyond; but was quite willing to allow Frederick a free hand in that direction if only he, first of all, restituted Silesia. Choiseul, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, in order to anticipate what Panin called "the sordid designs of the King of Prussia," suggested that Austria should take the first step and appropriate as much of Polish territory as she wanted—and Choiseul was, ostensibly, the friend of Poland. Even the Porte, which had actually taken up arms in defence of the Republic, proposed (1770) that Austria and Turkey should partition Poland between them to circumvent Russia and Prussia.

Joseph II.'s fear and jealousy of Frederick the Great, and the ambition of the aged Austrian Chancellor, Prince Kaunitz, to go down to history as a famous acquirer of territory, were the causes of Austria's final adhesion to the partition project. Her new understanding with Prussia on the subject was cemented at the conference between Frederick, Joseph, and Kaunitz, at Neustadt in Bohemia, at the beginning of September 1770. Immediately afterwards, Austria formally annexed the Zips Counties, a district in North Hungary which had been mortgaged to Poland in 1412 and never redeemed. The occupation of Zips was followed by the mission of Prince Henry of Prussia to St. Petersburg to accelerate the adhesion of Russia to the partition project. Catherine, however, resented being hurried into a compact for which she had no great relish; but, at the end of December, she showed Prince Henry that she had penetrated the designs of his brother by hinting,



THE PARTITION OF POLAND

ON THE RIGHT FREDERICK II AND JOSEPH II, ON THE LEFT STANISLAUS II AND CATHERINE II

facetiously, that as Austria had already seized Polish territory, Prussia might just as well follow suit. It is highly probable that the project of the First Partition was settled with Prince Henry; but it is evident that Catherine and Panin would have spared Poland as much as possible. On the other hand, though Frederick was quite capable of seizing Polish territory as unceremoniously as he had seized Silesia, he was not insensible to the outcry which such an act of political brigandage might call forth. It was necessary that the spoil should be shared with the two Empires. Common action would be the safest course in the present and the best guarantee for the future. But the Russian Government had still some scruples of honour and held back. In February 1771, Panin, in reply to an impatient reminder from Potsdam, informed the Prussian Minister, Solmes, that the Empress had so often and so solemnly guaranteed the territorial integrity of the Republic that the open violation of that principle must produce, everywhere, the most unpleasant effect. He added that Frederick's suggestion that Russia should compensate herself in Poland for losses sustained elsewhere was regarded at St. Petersburg as "brutal and offensive." It was not till the end of May that Catherine, yielding to fresh pressure, instructed Panin to carry out the details of the partition.

Poland, meanwhile, was the only country in Europe where there was still no suspicion of the impending partition. Stanislaus and the Czartoryscy naïvely imagined that the Republic was far too essential a part of the continental system to be dealt with thus summarily. Even when military cordons began to be formed along the Netze by Prussia and on the Galician frontier by Austria; even when the suave and courtly Volkonsky was superseded by the brutal Saldern and the sarcastic Stackelberg, they failed to discern a fresh change of system at the Russian Court, and obstinately shut their eyes to facts. On September 7, 1771, Stackelberg presented the partition project to the Polish Ministers. In their utter helplessness, they could only fall back on passive resistance and procrastination.

At the end of October the Russian Ambassador put fresh pressure on the King. Stanislaus, characteristically, fell a posing and haranguing. He cited all the classical examples of fortitude in adversity that he could call to mind. He vowed that he would imitate those examples. Stackelberg impatiently interrupted him. "Would your Majesty graciously be pleased," he sneered, "to leave Plutarch and antiquity alone and deign to give your undivided attention to the history of modern Poland and of Count Stanislaus Poniatowski." He then warned the King that his political existence depended upon two things, the summoning of a Diet to Grodno to consider the propositions of the Powers, and abstention from all intrigue * in the future. Two days later, Stanislaus made a last desperate effort to save his country by sending a secret embassy to Versailles. All that the Polish envoys brought back with them were polite condolences. There was nothing for it but to submit to the inevitable.

After innumerable notes and declarations had been exchanged between the three Powers, the definitive treaty of partition was signed at St. Petersburg on August 5, 1772. On September 18, 1773, the miserable shadow of a Diet which assembled at Grodno beneath the protection of Russian bayonets, was forced to confirm it. By the First Partition Poland lost 214,000 square kilometres out of a total of 751,000; nearly five millions of her population; and an annual revenue, in round numbers, of 290,000 Polish guildens. ✓

Abroad, the partition of Poland was, at first, regarded not merely with indifference but with something like positive relief. The subsequent condemnation of it by the Western Powers was of much later date and due not to moral indignation but to political apprehension of fresh aggrandisements on the part of Catherine and Panin. In 1773 there was no such feeling. The partition was looked upon then as an equilibrating event making for the peace of Europe. Useless and helpless, Poland was regarded, generally, as a

* *I.e.*; diplomatic efforts to obtain extraneous assistance.



THE DEPUTY TADCUŠZ REJTAN PROTESTING AGAINST THE PARTITION TREATY IN THE POLISH DIET
FROM THE PICTURE BY MATEJKO



DECADENCE AND DEMORALISATION 111

sort of lightning-conductor diverting the storm from Sweden and Turkey, the maintenance of whose independence and integrity was of much more consequence to the balance of power on the Continent.

Incredible as it may sound, the persons least affected by this terrible mutilation were those who might naturally have been supposed to suffer most from it—the Poles themselves. At no other period of their history were the Poles so unconcerned and nonchalant as during the evil and miserable period of the First Partition. At the very time when the territories of the Republic were being torn to pieces, the capital abandoned itself to the most reckless and delirious gaiety. Every week there were half a dozen public assemblies with dancing and concerts, while at the farao tables in the side rooms hundreds of gamblers lost small fortunes every night. While the negotiations preliminary to the signing of the partition-treaty were actually proceeding, every one was trying to get as much enjoyment out of life as possible. Every pretext was seized upon for promoting fresh festivities. The most popular and most frequented entertainments were those given by the ministers and generals of the partitioning Powers. On the name-day of the Grand Duke Paul, General Bibikov, who commanded the Russian troops in and about Warsaw, gave a grand dinner-party, followed by a ball, at his camp at Praga, which was attended by the *élite* of Polish society. Scores of pretty women of the highest rank, many of whom had the most cogent of all personal reasons for regarding Bibikov as the most amiable and generous of men, danced all night with the young Russian officers. "What I am about to say now," exclaims a contemporary, "may seem well-nigh incredible, but nevertheless, it is perfectly true that people here, generally, know more about the different farao banks, or the latest brands of Hungarian wine, or the courtesans of Warsaw, than about what is actually taking place on the Prussian frontier." "There is no government in the world," he continues, "like the Polish Government. Nobody knows what is going on. Nobody has any

information. Nobody gives any instructions. Only by the merest accident have the proceedings of the Prussians on the northern frontier come to light." So great, indeed, was the negligence and ignorance of the Polish Government that the King of Prussia tried to take advantage of it by annexing fresh districts to which even the treaty of partition gave him no title. He was promptly brought to book by Panin and compelled to disgorge the uncovenanted spoil; but so far as the Poles themselves were concerned he might have seized, with perfect impunity, anything he took a fancy to.

But what could be expected of a Government which was composed, almost entirely, of the hirelings of Russia, scoundrels and swindlers like the Vice-Treasurer, Adam Poninski, Andrzej Młodziejowski, Bishop of Posen, Augustus Sulkowski, palatine of Kalisz and his brother Antoni, palatine of Gnesen? For by this time the few honest men had been either removed or silenced. The Grand-Chancellor of Poland, Andrzej Zamoyski, had resigned the great seal rather than sign the partition treaty. His colleague, Michael Czartoryski, Grand Chancellor of Lithuania, had been less scrupulous—and was allowed to retain his high office. The Grand-Hetman, Waclaw Rzewuski, had, at least, the courage to protest. "Had I been here earlier," he said to Stackelberg, "there would not have been so many concessions." "I doubt whether the presence of your Excellency would have made much difference," replied Stackelberg, "but if you had been obstinate you would only have qualified yourself for obtaining an excellent practical acquaintance with the geography of Kamschatka." On the very rare occasions when the members of the Permanent Committee of the Diet resisted the Prussian claims, the Prussian minister Benoit, threatened to order General Lentulus "to knock off half a dozen heads or so in order to bring the rest to reason." The King who, although powerless for good, took the partition greatly to heart, was rebuked for the "extravagance" of his grief. "Of course you may lament in moderation," observed

Stackelberg indulgently, "the Empress has no objection to that."

The Poles who did the work of the ambassadors of the partitioning powers were treated, as they deserved to be treated, "like dogs or dirt." But this troubled them not at all, as they were allowed, by way of compensation, to fill their pockets out of the public funds at the same time. The rapacity of these jackals almost passes belief. Their great opportunity came when the question of rewarding the partisans of Russia arose. The ninety-four members of the Polish Delegation plundered the Republic *ad libitum*. They actually made a solemn compact to divide, fairly and equally among themselves, everything they could lay their hands upon. Yet when the actual division began, feeling ran so high that a couple of Bishops reviled each other as rogues and knaves in the presence of the Russian Ambassador. The Vice-Treasurer Poninski was insatiable. Not content with securing for himself the lucrative tobacco monopoly, he bargained with the King for a "gratification" of 800,000 guldens and, in conjunction with Sulkowski, appropriated the exclusive leasing of all the public dancing-saloons, concert-halls and coffee-houses in the capital. He also paid the Russian Ambassador 20,000 ducats for a "constitution" prohibiting the Jews from trading in the capital, and, immediately afterwards, sold to the Jews a "licence" for erecting booths beneath the arches of the city gates at a figure which richly compensated him for his previous outlay. Besides these "privileges" he got "emoluments" to the amount of 400,000 guldens as well as a life pension of 100,000 more. Stackelberg ironically congratulated him and his colleagues on becoming "men of such importance." Not content with these enormous profits Poninski sold the dignity of Marshal of the Permanent Committee to his friend Augustus Sulkowski for an enormous sum. He also forced through the Committee a bill for building a bridge across the river at Warsaw for the express purpose of levying tolls on all vehicles crossing it, of which he was to have the monopoly for ten years. Bishop

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Młodziejowski was bribed by the Prussian Minister to consent to the imposition of the iniquitous tolls which practically ruined the trade of Dantzic. Measures were "galloped through" the Diet so breathlessly that, very often, the reporters and secretaries had no time to examine their contents, or even recite their titles. Many measures were introduced surreptitiously in direct contravention of the rules of procedure.

(One thing, however, Poland did gain by the First Partition. The new Constitution, drawn up at St. Petersburg, to meet the new requirements of the Republic, and confirmed by the Diet of 1775 was, sentiment apart, far superior to anything of the kind which the Poles themselves had ever been able to devise. The crown continued, indeed, to be elective and the *liberum veto* was also retained; yet everywhere we trace the ingenious hand of Panin endeavouring to make of Poland as serviceable an ally as the circumstances would permit. The Executive was entrusted to a Permanent Committee of thirty-six members (eighteen Senators and eighteen Deputies) elected biennially by ballot, and subdivided into the Departments of War, Justice, Foreign Affairs, Police, and Finance, on the model of the old Swedish Constitution overthrown by Gustavus III. in 1772. The King was to preside over the Council, summon the Diet with the consent of the Council, and select all Senators, Ministers and Bishops from a list of three candidates submitted to him by the Council. For the first time in Polish history the King was provided with a really adequate Civil List, and the Chief officers of State with decent though not extravagant salaries. The annual budget was fixed at between thirty and thirty-five millions of Polish guildens. The regular army was to consist of 30,000 men of all arms, a force, by the way, considerably larger* than used to be when Poland was in the plenitude of her power.

* The old *ruszenie pospolite*, or militia, was practically useless for serious warfare.

CHAPTER VI

LE ROI S'AMUSE

Miseries of King Stanislaus—The Russian Ambassador, Count Stackelberg—Abduction of the King—Improved financial position of Stanislaus—His liberality and extravagance—Amiability and brilliant qualities—Contemporary impressions of him—His residences—The Saxon Palace—Lazienki—The King's mistresses—Lulli—Grabowska—"Todi"—His morganatic marriage—The sorrows of an unpaid librarian—The *fêtes champêtres*—The Countess Oginska at Alexandrovna—Morbid social phenomena—"Crank" and eccentrics—Charlatans and adventurers—Cagliostro—Blackmailers—The King's better qualities—His natural prudence and common sense

NO one suffered so continuously and so acutely during the period of the First Partition as the unfortunate King. A more sensitive man would have died of pain and shame before the ordeal was half over. A prouder man would have vacated, betimes, a position incompatible with self-respect. Stanislaus stuck to his post, first because he hoped to profit, ultimately, from the situation, and, in the second place, because he really believed that he could best serve his country by remaining where he was. Events certainly justified his expectations in both respects. He emerged from the wretched business richer and more powerful for good than he had ever been before, but he had to pay for these advantages by pocketing meekly all sorts of affronts.

First of all he had to put up with the contemptuous insolence of the new Russian Ambassador, Stackelberg.

Otto Magnus von Stackelberg came from Courland, a province which has supplied Russia with many of her most gifted diplomatists. He had served a long diplomatic apprenticeship in Spain and at various continental courts,

and was one of the most accomplished of Catherine's servants. He prided himself especially on his powers of repartee and, though naturally good-natured, lived, above all things, to seek whetstones for his wit on those about him. His mordant tongue spared nobody from the King downwards. Personally, Stackelberg was a small fat man who strutted about, on state occasions, with his broad breast literally ablaze with stars and orders. During the greater part of his long residence in Poland (1773-1789) all the world bowed down before the dumpy little Satrap and listened to his lightest word with bated breath. When he entered a crowded saloon every one made way for him obsequiously, and, bowing and smiling, right and left, he would make his way to an arm-chair especially reserved for him at the end of the crowded room, inviting two of the most handsome ladies present to sit down one on each side of him. On reception-days he used to drive to the Palace in a carriage and six. During the sessions of the Permanent Committee which governed Poland from 1775 to 1788, the President of the Committee, day by day, regularly reported the proceedings to Stackelberg between the hours of five and six in the evening. This time suited Stackelberg best because it was the interval between his two whist parties, one of which he had immediately after dinner and the other just before supper. One day Stackelberg procured the Polish blue ribbon for one of his creatures, Baron Unrich, whom he quizzed about it, unmercifully, the whole evening, till at last even the shameless Unrich was obliged to blush. "You see I can make him red when I like," said Stackelberg, turning to his partner, Count Potocki. "Yes, and *blue*, too, your Excellency," replied Potocki. The Ambassador's whist-table was always surrounded by a large circle of courtiers and sycophants whose faces beamed with pleasure whenever he addressed them. The greatest ladies in Poland would never receive any newly-arrived foreign envoy without first consulting the Ambassador. Stackelberg did not even spare King Stanislaus, whom he sometimes treated with outrageous insolence. Thus at a *levée* he would

deliberately make his way up to the King's chair, without any ceremony, and plant himself before the fire with his legs wide apart, and his hands beneath his coat-tails. Once the King paid him a visit while he was dealing out the cards for a game of farao. On perceiving him, Stackelberg did not even take the trouble to rise from his chair. He simply nodded and pointed to another chair with the words: "Pray be seated, your Majesty!" and went on playing. This rudeness seems, however, to have been calculated in order to depress the King and prevent him from being rebellious till the First Partition had been accomplished. After that event, the Ambassador became much more courteous and even amicable towards Stanislaus. During the latter part of his mission, Stackelberg, under instructions from Panin, even worked cordially with the King to put down faction and make the new Polish Constitution fairly workable.

But even the rebuffs of Stackelberg were gentle caresses compared with the unheard of insolence of Stanislaus' own subjects. The patriotic party, as represented by the Confederates of Bar, publicly declared that the assassination of the King would be a meritorious action. In May 1770, they went the length of proclaiming his deposition. But, by this time, the Confederates themselves were at the last gasp. The mere fact that their proclamation of deposition was issued at the Turkish port of Varna was as much a revelation of their impotence as of their indignation. Before collapsing, however, they made a desperate attempt to better their fortunes by kidnapping the King and holding him as a hostage.

On the evening of November 3, 1771, between nine and ten, Stanislaus was driving home from a dinner-party at the house of his uncle, the Prince Chancellor at Warsaw accompanied by a small escort of mounted heydukes. Suddenly, ten men sprang out upon him from an ambush. A single volley scattered all the heydukes but one, who flung himself between the King and his assailants and was instantly shot dead, besprinkling his master with his blood. At the same time a bullet grazed the top of the King's head,

and he was dragged from his carriage, thrust upon a hack, and hurried off at full speed. Fortunately for Stanislaus his captors lost their way in the darkness, and, while wandering about the forest of Bielny, were attacked by a Cossack patrol. During the *mêlée*, Stanislaus tried the effect of his eloquence upon the confederate who had him in charge and begged the fellow to help him to escape. "I have sworn to my chief, General Pulaski, to bring you to Czechstochowa, and I cannot break my oath," replied the man. "But," objected Stanislaus, "did not you, seven years ago, also swear an oath of allegiance to me?" "By Heaven! your Majesty, I had clean forgotten all about it," replied the simple gentleman. The next moment he was at the King's feet imploring pardon. Stanislaus promised to forgive him if he conducted him to the mill at Mariemont close at hand, from whence the King communicated with General Coccei, the Colonel of the Royal Guards at Warsaw. At five o'clock next morning Coccei brought the King back to town dishevelled, bedraggled and bloody, but otherwise none the worse for his singular adventure. The whole city turned out to meet him with flaming torches, and great was the rejoicing when the King assured them that he was unhurt. Many wept for pity to see him in such a plight—without hat, pelisse or boots, and his legs half naked. The first thought of Stanislaus on arriving at the Palace was for the family of the brave heyduke who had sacrificed his life to save his master, and till they arrived he refused to be attended to himself. He also ordered all the doors to be thrown wide open so that every one might see that he was safe. By this time all the bells were ringing, and soon grateful *Te Deums* were being sung everywhere in crowded churches. It is quite true that the Confederates had no intention of killing the King, as they might very easily have done half a dozen times over while he was in their hands. But Stanislaus, not unnaturally, could never be persuaded to the contrary. He sent a brief but vivid account of the mishap to his horrified "maman," which concludes thus: "And now, more than ever, I keep on repeating the words:

Patience and Courage ! If it has pleased God to save me by something very like a miracle, doubtless it is because He would make use of me for something in this vale of tears."

His optimism was invincible. At the very time when Russian, Austrian and Prussian troops occupied two-thirds of the territories of the Republic and an enormous contribution was levied upon the capital, which was paid to prevent the city from being treated like a place taken by assault, he could still be hopeful, almost cheerful in fact. All that haranguing and exhorting could do to put off the evil day as long as possible and obtain "less pernicious terms" was done by the indefatigable and eloquent Stanislaus. He won as many as thirty senators and fifty deputies over to his opinions, and his motion in favour of an appeal to the Western Powers was only defeated by five votes. Then fresh pressure was applied. Sixty Prussian dragoons were quartered in the houses of his brother and uncle, and eleven Russian hussars made themselves comfortable in the very bedroom of Turcki, Bishop of Plock, one of the most courageous of the Polish prelates, where they smoked their pipes, sprawled over the furniture, and demanded not only as much as they could eat but *recherché* wines and liqueurs into the bargain. Yet even now, when he was entirely at the mercy of the three Powers and so hard-pressed as almost to be dying of hunger, he could still write to Madame Geoffrin: "nevertheless, it is necessary to keep up some appearance of tranquillity and sustain, with some sort of dignity, the worst conceivable of *roles* . . . and try and secrete some grains of liberty which may sprout up again at a more favourable season." And all this time he was crippled by a rheumatism which flew from limb to limb and by "ces maudits maux des nerfs" of which he so often complains. There was certainly some excuse for the wretched condition of the distracted monarch's nerves. In the period between the signing of the First Partition treaty and the formation of the new government the fortunes of Stanislaus were certainly at their lowest ebb. The government, during these few weeks, was entirely in the

hands of Podosky, Poninsky, the Sulkowscy, and the other Russian hirelings and parasites who treated the King with undisguised contempt. So bad was their conduct that Stackelberg seemed relatively friendly. Very frequently, the Russian Satrap had to intervene to prevent these harpies from ruining everything, for Panin had secretly instructed him to spare the King and get as endurable terms as possible for Poland. The Sulkowscy, in particular, set no bounds to their insolence. On one occasion they had the face to say to the King in public: "It is all very well for your Majesty to keep a stiff upper-lip for you are safe upon the throne. Your Majesty runs no risk of injury to honour, wealth, or children because you have none of these things already." On September 27, 1773, one of them harangued the King and accused him of ruining the country. The manner of this diatribe was even more offensive than its matter. The speaker went so far as to mimic the words, gestures and even the favourite expressions of Stanislaus, till the unfortunate monarch fainted on the throne and had to be blooded. If he had been a revengeful man he could, a few months later, have turned the tables on his persecutors. The Empress had no intention of dethroning him as his enemies had, at first, imagined, and when the new form of Constitution had been definitely settled, it was patent that the King would have very much more influence than he had ever had before, and that his patronage would be considerable. This instantly produced a reaction in his favour. All the native place-hunters and fortune seekers suddenly posed as converted royalists. Those who had proclaimed themselves his irreconcilable enemies on the assumption that the Russian ambassador was against him, now approached him hat in hand, apologised for their former rudeness, and assured him, with tears in their eyes, that they had always had a warm place in their hearts for him. Like the sensible man he was, he took these assurances for exactly what they were worth and proceeded to make the most of a situation which was becoming more and more favourable to himself personally.

From 1774 onwards, when the First Partition had regulated the affairs of Poland for some time to come, Stanislaus, for the first time in his life, found himself in the delightful position of being able to maintain a court where his brilliant social qualities could shine forth in their full lustre. The revenues of the five most lucrative of the one hundred and twenty-five starosties, or reserved crown-lands, had been assigned to him for his maintenance, and they seem to have yielded him, approximately, 1,200,000 thalers a year. His debts, amounting to four millions of Polish gulden * had also been paid, and he received an additional million for his table, wardrobe, equipages, &c. But no amount of money could ever satisfy the extravagance of Stanislaus Augustus. His whole life long he was a gilded pauper. By 1786 his income had increased to no less than 6,143,000 gulden, or one-third of the total revenue of the Republic, yet his debts, despite the fact that between 1764 and 1786 they had twice been discharged by the State, now amounted to ten millions. It was ever thus with Stanislaus. In proportion as his income increased, his liabilities, instead of diminishing, multiplied till they overwhelmed him altogether. Towards the end of his reign he borrowed largely from abroad. In 1790 he owed the Dutch banker, Hope, five millions of gulden, the Warsaw banker, Tepper, † four and a half millions more, while his innumerable private debts, including 700,000 for unpaid salaries, totted up to the respectable figure of an additional two millions.

In fairness to Stanislaus, however, it should be added, that by no means the whole of these enormous sums was wasted on himself and his pleasures. One of his most expensive qualities was his extreme goodness of heart. He could never say no to the miserable even when he suspected them to be impostors—as they very often were. Poor men of letters were his especial care. No fewer than three authors of merit, whom he discovered and protected, became members of his own household. As a Mecænas he made

* The Polish gulden was equivalent to 1s. 3d.

† Tepper went bankrupt in consequence.

very few mistakes, for he had considerable critical acumen and his literary taste was excellent. His family, too, was a constant and severe burden upon him. For years he was the visible providence of his impecunious brothers and sisters, nephews and nieces. In these cases, moreover, his natural generosity was certainly stimulated by the deep-lying sentiment of family solidarity which, as already indicated,* was, perhaps, the most characteristic feature of Polish society. The King was also very generous to his servants. Thus he paid the debts of his Italian secretary Ghigiotti, amounting to 10,000 ducats; did the same for his chamberlain Wickede; and made one of his doctors, when on the verge of bankruptcy, a present of 8000 gulden. Yet he allowed his wretched librarian Reverdil to live on credit for years and was so unpunctual in paying the wages of his lacqueys and footmen that their arrears at last amounted to thousands, a large proportion of which, it is to be feared, was never paid at all. In a word, an appeal to his compassion never failed to move him, but he could never be made to recognise that the prompt payment of just debts was as much a matter of honour and conscience as the discharge of gambling obligations, or the bestowing of a promised *douceur* on a pretty woman.

It should also be remembered that the political expenditure of Stanislaus was considerable. Every Diet cost him thousands of gulden, for not only had he to purchase his party beforehand, he had also to keep it in a good humour by liberal largesses incessantly renewed. Nor did he ever refuse to respond to the large demands repeatedly made upon him for particular public undertakings. We frequently hear of him giving half a million gulden at a time towards the extension of education or the increase of the army. On one notable occasion he even pawned the whole of his fine collection of jewels, including the diamond crosses of the Black Eagle and of St. Andrew, respectively conferred upon him by Frederick the Great and Catherine II., and paid the money into the national exchequer.

* Chap ii.

Yet, after making every allowance for private charity and public spirit, it must frankly be confessed that by far the largest part of the King's immense income was swallowed up by the expenses of his court. From the nature of the case this was almost inevitable. Stanislaus had very pronounced sociable instincts. His personal qualities, too, were of the most brilliant and attractive descriptions. He loved the society of the most amusing people of both sexes, and the most amusing people are also, generally, the most expensive. Stanislaus was always the heart and soul of every assembly which he frequented. All foreigners were delighted with him, and even his own countrymen, however they might affect to despise him, were never quite insensible to his glamour. His voice always fascinated the most mutinous. "It was so expressive and yet so gentle," says one contemporary, "that its harmonious tones penetrated every heart." "As his former opponents," says another, "we were, naturally, all very much prejudiced against him; but at the sight of his stately form, his truly regal majesty, all our prepossessions thawed away like April snow before the sun. I could not feast my eyes upon him sufficiently, there was something so enchanting in the features of his handsome face." Even those memoir-writers who are most inclined to belittle him frankly recognise his social superiority. "If any one," says the hostile Moszczyński,* "wanted to discover for the court of a great monarch a most charming cavalier to keep a *salon* in a good humour, or to act, with distinction, as a master of the ceremonies, it would be impossible to find any one more suitable for the post than Stanislaus Augustus." And he sums him up as a sort of superior *petit-maitre* "who loved scholars and, especially, witty and merry versifiers because they incensed him freely."

This, however, is the record of that bitterest of all enemies, a whilom friend. The more impartial view of the man in

* *Pamiętnik*. The author, once the King's Chamberlain, had, when he wrote his memoirs, gone over to the opposite camp and was a personal friend of Stanislaus' deadliest enemy, Felix Potocki.

the street is best represented by the memoirs of Kitowicz. In this work, Stanislaus is aptly described as the best possible King for quiet times. His affability, accessibility, patience and good sense are highly praised. He also gets full credit for wit, eloquence, love of learning, enthusiasm for reform, extreme moderation in eating and drinking (he rarely took wine), attention to business, and encouragement of public sports. But he is also, and greatly, blamed for his instability, irresolution, wastefulness, frivolity, and for thinking more of his crown than of honour and duty. Kitowicz is especially severe upon him for looseness of life and hypocrisy as regards religion. "A Catholic by profession but a libertine at heart," is the final verdict. But this Aristarchus is plainly too much of a precisian on this head, for he includes in his somewhat elaborate list of the King's peccadilloes, "a great dislike of sermons"—surely a very venial fault.

Of the numerous foreign descriptions of Stanislaus, the best, on the whole, is that of the Swedish Minister Lars von Engeström. It is particularly interesting as a picture of Stanislaus when he was beginning to grow old.

"The King of Poland has the most beautiful head I ever saw, but an expression of extreme sadness somewhat diminished the beauty of his face. He did not look happy and his hair was already beginning to grow grey. He was broad-shouldered, with a deep chest, and tall with relatively short legs. He had had a splendid constitution, but trouble and his mode of life had undermined it. At this time he was often ailing, and fears were even entertained of his life. . . . He possessed all the brilliant qualities necessary to sustain his exalted position with dignity. . . . He could speak Polish, Latin, German, Italian, French and English perfectly. His conversation always excited the admiration of foreigners, and he was thoroughly *au fait* with all the literary and artistic novelties of the day. As a master of the ceremonies he would have done infinite honour to the most brilliant of Courts. He had correspondents everywhere whom he paid most handsomely, and was, certainly, one of



STANISLAUS II. KING OF POLAND



the best informed of Princes as to the course of European affairs."

Such a man was naturally at his best when playing the part of host at the "Saxon Palace" at Warsaw or at his favourite chateau, Lazienki. On both of these residences he spent millions for he had very ambitious views on the subject of architecture and took care that the interiors of his houses should not be unworthy of their external magnificence. The "Saxon Palace" in the Cracow suburb, had one of the finest sites in Europe. The courtyard, to which there was access from three different streets, was large enough to accommodate an army-corps. During the summer evenings, the grounds, in the style of the Palais Royal, but much larger, were a favourite promenade for the youth and beauty of Warsaw. The great feature of this Palace, when the King had thoroughly restored it, was the marble colonnaded bedroom, between the columns of which hung portraits of kings and heroes, and historical pictures by Canaletti and Bacciarelli, illustrating the past glories of Poland. It also contained a magnificent new audience chamber, the walls of which were covered with the portraits of contemporary sovereigns. In the background glittered a gorgeous throne. The library on the other hand, was of almost classical severity. Its sole ornament was a life-size bust of Voltaire, on the pedestal of which the King had had the following lines engraved :

" Depuis que j'ai écrit
On lit, on vit ;
Et l'on tolère davantage."

But the King's favourite home, "the work of his own hands and the better half of his heart" was Lazienki, purchased from the Lubomirscy in 1774, which he was never tired of altering, enlarging and embellishing. So dearly did he love the place that in 1792 he is said to have betrayed his country rather than run the risk of losing it. Hither in the summer months he would flit with a gay company of poets, wits and fair ladies, who attired as shepherdesses or goddesses promenaded with him in its far-extending bowers,

boated with him on its lakes and canals, and entertained him at *fêtes champêtres* amidst its bosques and gardens. Here, too, were an elegant theatre, at which the latest French pieces were acted, and an opera-house. But what the King liked best of all was to train whole bands of peasant girls and their swains to sing the popular songs and dance the national dances before him in their characteristic native costumes in the open air. The King's sumptuous little Thursday dinners were also much sought after by the *élite* of Polish society. The more splendid entertainments given by Prince Adam Casimir Czartoryski at the Blue Palace, or by the Princess-Marshal Lubomirska at Willanova were, in comparison, very second-rate affairs. They lacked the grace, the finish, the amiability with which Stanislaus alone had the gift of investing everything he took in hand.

The manners of this butterfly court were exquisite, but of high morality there was not the least pretence. Any affectation of austerity would have seemed supremely ridiculous to this Prince Charming and the ladies whom he delighted to honour. It is impossible to observe a chronological sequence in the innumerable amours of Stanislaus Augustus. The most stable of his liaisons were those with Madame de Lulli and Pani Grabowska. The former was a French *émigrée* Marquise of great charm and beauty. At the age of eighteen she accompanied her aunt to Warsaw and soon acquired such an absolute dominion over the King that she interfered in affairs of State and became a source of emolument and promotion to which many had recourse. She lived in the Cracow suburb, and her equipages and her diamonds were the admiration of the Polish capital. Every penny of the millions, which she banked securely abroad, came out of the King's pocket. Pani Grabowska, subsequently the King's morganatic wife, was an amiable blonde "with heavenly eyes," and a skin of a whiteness rare even in Poland. She was the only sweetheart of Stanislaus who was sincerely attached to him. She asked nothing from him either for herself or for her friends. She never intrigued or plotted against him. She shared with him both

his good and ill fortune and was always ready with salutary and disinterested advice. The King's intercourse with her began during her husband's lifetime. He would have married her privately there and then, but his chaplain refused to perform the ceremony till the lady had become a widow. They were finally wedded, late at night, in the royal chapel, Grabowska's brother and the Primate of Poland being the sole witnesses. After his marriage with Grabowska the King led a much more regular life ; renounced all "*les autres petites*," and gave himself up almost entirely to affairs of State. Of his still earlier relations with the Princess Sapiezhna, already mentioned, Elizabeth Rozhanka, and the actress "Todi," who enchanted him with her beautiful voice, it is unnecessary to speak. The usual *rendezvous* was the studio of the artist Bacciarelli where a great court-lady, Pani Malczewska, used to go through her celebrated "mythological poses," *au naturel*.

Perhaps the most vivid and certainly the most amusing description of Stanislaus *en déshabillé* is from the pen of his librarian and lector, the Swiss Reverdil, who saw him from day to day, and was expected, *ex-officio* apparently, to marry the King's cast-off mistresses whenever called upon to do so.

Reverdil, very highly recommended, arrived at Warsaw on November 23, 1766. "*Enfin je vous tiens !*" cried the King, enthusiastically, at their first interview, whereupon the learned Swiss reflected, complacently, that the Duke of Ferrara had greeted Michael Angelo in the same way. The King instantly led Reverdil into his cabinet and examined him so rigorously in the English language that the librarian, though he seems to have passed creditably through the ordeal, began to wonder whether he would do for the post after all. Stanislaus, however, not only expressed his satisfaction but allowed the young man four ducats a month out of his own pocket for finishing lessons. This was a good beginning, but Reverdil soon discovered that the King's moods were very variable. He was apt to become cross and irritable without the slightest warning, and "though

very polite to every one, especially to his doctor, Herr Boeckler, and his painter, Bacciarelli, he was often very cranky to me." Twelve months after his arrival, the complaisant lector was induced to marry Mariana Constantia L—, one of the King's discarded beauties, who was packed off to Switzerland immediately afterwards because Reverdil could not afford to keep her. Eight years later Reverdil undertook to wed a second ex-mistress of Stanislaus, Dalilka Ciecierzynika. He had the less difficulty in obtaining a divorce from consort No. 1 inasmuch as he had never set eyes upon her since their espousals. "What could I do?" explains the poor lector apologetically. "I had no prospects for the future, and the fresh obligations I now took upon me seemed to guarantee a source of income." The courting took place among the bosques and alleys of the Saxon Park, but Dalilka gave great offence to the officers of the Guard there by continuing to sport the royal colours, blue and white, as if she were still under the King's protection. A Polish General complained to Stanislaus about this irregularity, and Stanislaus warned Reverdil to be more careful in future about the lady's decorations. Not very long afterwards, the disillusioned Reverdil discovered, to his deep chagrin, that his fresh matrimonial venture was not even a financial success. "My second marriage, which was entirely an act of politeness on my part," he observes pathetically, "instead of proving profitable to me, as I had anticipated, was nothing but a source of contrarieties. I had insisted on the following preliminary conditions: an improvement in my official position, a double number of candles for the library, and twenty ducats a month extra for a horse and carriage. But when I mentioned them the King grew very impatient and threatened me with the loss of his favour if I did not wed the lady without more ado."

After the marriage Reverdil was constantly in debt, so much so, indeed, that he could get no credit and was often in want of the bare necessities of life simply because his modest salary was never paid regularly. The King occasionally made him handsome presents, such, for instance,

as a fine cabinet containing a collection of all the medallions struck to commemorate the chief events of his reign : " but," cries the unfortunate lector, " what was the good of such a pretty trinket to me?—it was money that I wanted." The Library for which he was responsible was also a constant source of annoyance. He lived in constant fear of being asked for books which he knew beforehand he would never be able to find. There was nothing wrong with the Library itself. It was, indeed, a fine, spacious room well-furnished with handsome bookcases with glass frames. But the bookcases were neither deep enough nor high enough for the folios and quartos they were supposed to accommodate, while the keys either did not fit the key-holes or had been hopelessly mislaid, so that all the books were heaped indiscriminately on the floor in such quantities that it was difficult to move about the room because of them. Then, too, the King and his friends had the slovenly habit of borrowing odd volumes at odd times and never returning them, so that the unfortunate librarian was at his wits' end what to do. To add to his troubles, the newly-appointed Education Committee suddenly demanded a catalogue of the royal library under the threat of dismissing the librarian, while the King at the same time required " a full report of its present condition." The librarian protested that he had neither a table to write upon nor sufficient candles to see by, and, at last, losing all patience, declared he would rather resign if he could not get an increase of salary. At this outspokenness the King also fired up. " Never speak to me again in that tone or you will lose my favour," cried he. " My wife is ill, she vomits spasmodically and is in torments," protested Reverdil ; " and I am also involved in a costly process with the creditors of her first husband. A pretty marriage I have been inveigled into in the hope of being protected!" " You had better not talk so much about your marriages or people will only laugh at you," retorted the King shamelessly. " All you say is right enough," he continued, " but at present I am not in a position to give you any more salary." " A pretty sort

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of equity, indeed," comments the lector in his note-book, "when he gives the money, part of which should come to me, to the wives of two other men whose families are already well provided for!"

On October 8, 1783, Reverdil had a hard fight with the King on the perennial question of more candles. Reverdil represented that the library was very large, and in the winter months very dark, and that he and three assistants had all to work in it together; but the utmost that the King would concede were *two* extra lights. Previously to this there is the following significant entry in poor Reverdil's diary: "Signor Pasiello, the composer, and Signora 'Todi,' the singer, came to the Palace to-day and got from this poor King, from whom I dare not ask a much needed increase of salary, no fewer than 4000 ducats for singing three songs! or the exact equivalent of what I have been begging and praying for during the last twenty years!" Finally, Reverdil quitted the service of the King for that of a wealthy American "from whom, at any rate, I do get an allowance which I can live upon." And with that he disappears into the comfortable obscurity of private life.

But though his poor lectors often remained unpaid, the King could generally find money enough for *fêtes champêtres* and other *divertissements*. Such entertainments were common to most of the Courts of Europe in the eighteenth century, but in Poland they were tinged by a peculiar semi-oriental colouring suggestive of barbarism. The King's penchant for these entertainments was so well known that the magnates of both sexes who hoped for favours from him in return vied with each other in amusing him in this way. Thus, in 1782, Stanislaus was, for several days, magnificently entertained by Pani Oginska, the consort of the Grand-Hetman of the Crown, a lady remarkable for her elegance and taste, at her *château*, Alexandrowna. Whenever the King took his walks abroad here, nymphs and goddesses would suddenly appear before him among the islands on the river, which flowed through the estate, and recite verses in his honour. On his return to the *château*, "a company of

Chinese merchants on Arabian mules" stopped his carriage and offered him pine-apples and "other products of the Orient." He rested at mid-day in a "Turkish chapel" close beside which was a Mosque where a Mufti saluted him in the Turkish tongue. After lunch, he was conducted to "the grotto of Diana," where the village maidens, headed by the local magistrates, welcomed him with rustic melodies and regaled him with "real Neapolitan ices." Close by stood a little mill, near an artificial cascade, and while the King stood there admiring the scene and conversing with his hostess, a beautiful state-barge came round the bend of the river laden with wine and confections. Another day, after dinner, the whole company took a short promenade which led them into a Venetian fair where, besides the inevitable Turks and Venetians, people of every nation and language were selling their particular wares under the arched colonnades of forty beautiful bazaars. Four yoke of oxen then drew the King in a gala boat to a theatre built expressly for him on an artificial island in an artificial lake. In the evening Pani Oginska received her guests in a barn surrounded by haycocks, while "real peasants" sang their artless ditties in an adjoining hut. On closer investigation, all the surrounding bosques and spinnies were found to be full of shepherds and shepherdesses in picturesque costumes. Finally the King was conducted to a shed where Italian chapmen presented him with a rhinoceros, a leopard, and living marionettes. Here, too, were savage Bashkirs and their women-kind, and gypsies who foretold the future to the King by means of wax and Turkish beans. The entertainment ended with an exciting race between a one-legged Italian buffoon and a tortoise.

These extravagant and fantastic amusements, so characteristic of the times were, after all, morbid and disquieting phenomena. An insupportable *ennui*, especially observable in those who had been abroad, drove the restless and ignorant upper classes of Poland to kill time and waste money in a febrile pursuit of sensational excitement. At no other period of Polish history were so many bizarre and eccentric figures

observable as during the reign of Stanislaus Augustus. There was, for instance, Nicholas Potocki,* Starost of Kaniow, whose mad exploits were proverbial and who spent the greater part of his life in scouring the country, with his Cossacks and Heydukes, in search of adventures, always escaping unhurt from the most hazardous escapades. *His* speciality was Jew-baiting, in which he attained to great proficiency. Prince Karol Radziwill* was another eccentric of the same kidney whose whole existence was a reckless indulgence in the maddest of pranks, yet he was of a most chivalrous disposition and possessed abilities of a high order. But even Radziwill was excelled by Prince Marius Lubomirsky, who ruined himself outright simply because he always would have his little joke cost what it might. This Catholic magnate—whose family had contributed so many prelates to the Roman church in Poland—died a Jew. Another original was the ex-Vice Treasurer, Prince Casimir Poniatowski, famous for his subterranean grottos, his colonies of apes, and his sumptuous harems, who was a mountebank to the very last day of his frivolous old age. He had a worthy compeer in the learned Prince Jablinowski who maintained regal etiquette at his “Court” at Nowogrodek. This nobleman dabbled in necromancy and “compelled the very devils to obey him.” Pan Godzki, on the other hand, was a mediæval knight of the Don Quixote order. His beautiful and witty sister, who married the Prince of Nassau-Siegen, was equally bizarre. When her splendid palace caught fire she would not permit the flames to be put out but watched “the sublime and unusual spectacle” through a telescope from the top of a neighbouring hill till nought remained but a heap of smouldering ruins. Even the Grand-Hetman Branicki, one of the highest dignitaries in the realm, could give points to many professional buffoons in his earlier years. His life was eccentrically disreputable, and in one of his drunken frolics he was shot through the stomach by the adventurer Casanova who would infallibly have been cut to pieces by Branicki’s

* See chap. ii.

retainers had not that magnanimous nobleman facilitated the escape of his adversary by putting the pursuers on at false scent. In those days Warsaw abounded with charlatans and adventurers of all sorts, attracted thither by the hope of profiting by Polish curiosity and credulity. Most of them found the Republic to be a veritable El Dorado. Their numbers were largely increased, especially just before and during the French Revolution, by hundreds of *émigrés* who were received in the Polish capital, at their own valuation, with open arms. The more respectable of these visitors came in search of heiresses. Thus the Prince de Nassau secured the hand of Pani Godzka; while the Prince de Ligne, aiming higher still, took unto himself the Princess Massalska and became a naturalised Polish nobleman, to the extreme indignation of the high-aristocratic families. The lesser fry were content to open farao tables, by means of which they amassed small fortunes in an incredibly short time. There were other still more dubious adventurers whose practices are best left unrecorded. No *chevalier d'industrie* of any importance failed to visit the Polish capital between 1764 and 1788. Casanova has already been mentioned. Cagliostro made his appearance there in May 1780 on his return from an extraordinarily lucrative expedition to Russia, notwithstanding the fact that Catherine II. had denounced him as an impostor and declared that her hands itched to flog him. At Warsaw he first presented himself to the ex-Vice Treasurer, Prince Casimir Poniatowski as a thaumaturgical Egyptian Freemason, and was received into the best circles along with his pretty and witty young wife, as accomplished a rogue as himself. Between them they managed to transfer 10,500 ducats from the pockets of the Polish gentry into their own, and then the Grand Copt and his neophyte deemed it expedient to decamp at midnight with their cabalistic cabinets, their transmutation furnaces, and all the rest of the *hocus-pocus*.

Of the numerous adventuresses who swarmed into Poland about this time the most dangerous was a certain Anna Maria de Nevi, calling herself Maria Theresa, Baroness

Lautenburg, who was supposed to have married Major Dogrumow, a Polish nobleman. This lady had, for years, been behind the scenes in the very highest circles. The *chronique scandaleuse* of the Polish aristocracy was an open book to her, and she resolved to utilise her unique and recondite knowledge by practising blackmail liberally and systematically. She began by approaching, mysteriously, the King's chamberlain, Herr Ryks, and the War Minister, General Komarzewski. She informed them that she had discovered a plot against the King's life, and had the brazenness to insinuate that Prince Adam Casimir Czartoryski, the King's cousin, and his family, were implicated in the plot. But she had her pains for nothing. Both Ryks and Komarzewski, well aware of the extreme levity of the lady's character, pooh-poohed the whole affair. Even when, subsequently, she offered to produce letters in support of her allegations from one William Taylor, a dependent of the Czartoryscy, they refused to take her seriously. Taylor, by the way, was a needy adventurer who had appeared in Poland a few years before, pretending to be the bearer of credentials from Lord Suffolk which he had got, he said, to enable him to collect a sum of money due to his firm in England from some Polish traders. As however, both "the firm" and "the Polish traders" were pure inventions, it is more than probable that Taylor had forged his own credentials. Be that as it may, Taylor and Dogrumowa seem to have been old acquaintances. They were certainly accomplices in the curious conspiracy they now proceeded to set on foot. Baffled in her efforts to coax money out of the King, Dogrumowa, actuated as much by a desire to avenge herself on Ryks and Komarzewski as to enrich herself at their expense, now went over to the opposite camp, and informed the Princess-Marshal Lubomirska that a plot had been formed to poison that lady's brother, Prince Adam Casimir Czartoryski, a plot to which many of the King's servants, and very probably the King himself, were privy. This time the adventuress was more successful. Both from Prince Czartoryski, and his sister she met with

instantaneous and complete credence. The Prince was, by nature, the most credulous of men, while the Princess Lubomirska hated the King so frantically that she was always ready to believe the very worst of him. Yet even she had still sufficient common sense left to ask Madame Dogrumowa for some proofs of her horrible accusation. The lady proposed that Taylor, and Count Stanislaus Potocki, a notorious enemy of the King, should hide themselves in one of the rooms of her house. She would then, she said, invite Ryks and Komarzewski to visit her, and the nature of the ensuing conversation would, at once, reveal beyond all doubt, the existence of the plot. Prince Czartoryski—a man of honour—revolted, at first, against lending himself to such vile eavesdropping. He offered the woman, whose character he knew to be shady, 200 ducats if she would confess that the whole affair was a mystification. But Dogrumowa, who wanted much more than a paltry 200 ducats, persisted in her accusation, and the Princess Lubomirska insisted that her brother should see the thing out. Accordingly, on January 16, 1785, Dogrumowa enticed Ryks and Komarzewski to her house on the pretext that she had received fresh and startling evidence of the conspiracy against the King, first taking the precaution to conceal Taylor and Potocki behind the folding doors. Then she alluded so dexterously to the plot of poisoning the King that the hidden listeners, who could hear but indistinctly, imagined she was referring to the plot of poisoning Prince Czartoryski, with the details of which Ryks and Komarzewski appeared to be surprisingly familiar. At a given signal Taylor rushed out upon the unsuspecting Ryks. Potocki followed him just in time to receive into his arms the fainting form of Dogrumowa who pretended to be overpowered by her emotions. That evening the opera "King Theodore" was being performed at the Warsaw Opera House. In the middle of the piece a whisper ran through the stalls that an attempt had been made to poison Prince Czartoryski and that one of the royal chamberlains and the King's favourite general were under arrest. The consternation

was general. On quitting the Opera House the people either flocked to the Palace or assembled at the mansion of the Countess Oginska where they remained all night discussing the terrible affair. Early next morning *Te Deums* were sung in many of the churches for the miraculous escape of the Prince, and "the Family" sent couriers with the latest information to all the Courts of Europe who were interested in their welfare. The Prince was ill-advised enough to bring an action against Ryks for attempt to poison, whereupon Ryks brought a counter-action against the Prince for defamation of character, while Ryks and Komarzewski brought a joint similar action against Dogrumowa and Taylor. A process as ridiculous as it was scandalous now began. The whole Republic was divided into two factions, one of which sympathised with the King, the other with Prince Czartoryski. A most rigid and impartial investigation brought to light the true character of the infamous Dogrumowa and her disreputable connection with Taylor. It was proved to demonstration that the poison-plot, from beginning to end, was a pure fabrication of the female defendant. After being branded at the pillory, she was condemned to a lifelong imprisonment, while the documents containing her false charges were burnt by the common hangman. The Czartoryscy were overwhelmed with shame and confusion. The Princess Lubomirska, but for whose vindictiveness the affair would have died a natural death, migrated to Paris for a time to escape ridicule, while Prince Adam, whom every one but his own clique blamed for his almost criminal gullibility, hid his head for a time among the books and bowers of his charming country mansion; Pulawy.

The Dogrumowa affair, insignificant in itself, had deplorable political consequences. It increased the personal tension already existing between the King and the Czartoryscy, exacerbated their public antagonism, and was indirectly responsible for the fierce opposition which they offered to his serious and salutary projects of reform during the next few years. In a word, it divided the best forces of

the nation at the very time when their absolute union and concord were more than ever necessary.

Nevertheless the King possessed in his own sagacity and in the support of the Russian Ambassador two powerful resources which enabled him to triumph over all the machinations of his enemies. Hitherto we have seen him play but a miserable part in the tragi-comic history of his unfortunate country. Hitherto we have only seen him as an elegant trifler, a careless saunterer through life, a timid mendicant of Fortune's favours. But there was another and better side of his character. For all his apparent apathy and *laissez-faire*, Stanislaus II. was an uncommonly shrewd observer, who learnt much from adversity and reflected deeply upon its lessons. He was, moreover, by nature eminently practical, in this respect standing far above his contemporaries, the best of whom were, too often, mere doctrinaires. Without any heroic qualities, he was worse than useless in a period of crisis and catastrophe. But his prudence and foresight were invaluable in periods of transition and reconstruction. Give him but favourable circumstances and a free hand, and he could always find a safe way out of the most complicated political situation. His ultimate failure was due quite as much to untoward events as to his own inherent defects of character. Add to this that up to the period of the First Partition he had had no opportunity of displaying his real ability as a statesman and an administrator. But the period which elapsed between the First Partition and the assembling of the Quadrennial Diet was much more propitious. Let us briefly follow the career of the King during those fifteen years of sustained effort and reviving hope.

CHAPTER VII
RECUPERATION AND RECONSTRUCTION
1773-1787

Miserable position of Poland after the First Partition—Decline of agriculture and its causes—Ruinous effect of the Prussian tolls—Stanislaus as an industrial reformer—Introduction of manufactories into Poland by Tyzenhaus and others—The commercial revival brings the gentry and the traders together—The Black Sea Company—Improvement of the means of communication—The first Polish Post-Houses—New canals—The school of Cadets—The University of Cracow—Its obsolete and absurd curriculum—Appointment of the Education Commission—Hugo Kollontaj, his early career and character—Educational reforms—The new Generation—The Potoccy come to the front—Early care and character of Felix Potocki—His three marriages—Ksawery Branicki and Severin Rzewuski—Their intrigues against the King—Struggle between Stanislaus and the obstructive opposition—Diet of 1776—Its projects of reform—And obstructive parsimony—Frustration of all reform by Branicki—Factionous and outrageous opposition to the King—Unfairness of Polish historians towards Stanislaus II.—His extraordinary difficulties—Justification of his administrative abilities—He alone makes government possible—Changes in the political situation consequent upon the death of Frederick the Great and the Austro-Russian alliance

POLAND emerged from the frightful catastrophe of the First Partition with her territories diminished by one-third, and her Government entirely at the mercy of the Russian Guarantee Treaty. She emerged depreciated in the opinion of Europe, humiliated in her own eyes, and, apparently, without the slightest possibility of reforming a Constitution which she naturally abominated because it was imposed upon her from outside. Yet, despite the most pessimistic anticipations, she was about to enter upon a period of fifteen years of gradual but steady national pro-

gress, as if to prove that the vitality of an inherently healthy political organism can always triumph over the most inveterate diseases. To the honour of the better class of Poles, be it said, no sooner had the first bitter impressions of grief and pain somewhat diminished in violence than they began seriously to consider the condition of the Republic and, instead of abandoning themselves to senseless fury, diligently sought after the best means of raising up the country both economically and socially.

Poland was then, almost exclusively, an agricultural country. Her chief concern was to find customers for her raw products. The very spaciousness and fertility of her territories, however, were partially responsible for the relatively low development of her agricultural and forestal industries. The Polish squire, finding himself in the possession of vast tracts of land which it cost him practically nothing to cultivate, and upon which he paid no tax or impost whatever, was the most careless and slovenly of landlords. He never thought of making improvements which would, certainly, have increased production, but would, at the same time, have demanded a considerable preliminary outlay and, in any case, presupposed more knowledge and science than he had ever taken the trouble to acquire. Farming, therefore, in the days of Stanislaus II., was pretty much the same as it had been in the days of the Jagiellos, three centuries earlier. It was taken for granted that hungry foreigners would always be found to buy Polish corn, and that when the land was exhausted in one place, rich crops might easily be raised in another. The First Partition considerably modified the advantageous position of the Polish gentry. Production and exportation began to diminish. During the years 1764-1772 the value of the corn conveyed to Dantzic for export had amounted to 18,200,000 Polish gulden, it fell in the years immediately following to 9,290,000 Polish gulden. This was the result not merely of the loss of whole provinces but of causes which, hitherto, had never operated. The Prussian acquisition of territory, for instance, embracing as it did

practically the whole of the Lower Vistula, impeded to the uttermost the transport of raw materials from Poland to Dantzic. Frederick II. imposed prohibitive tolls on the Vistula and Wartha, and tried to injure the trade of Poland in every possible way. Then, too, the loss of the salt mines of Wielicza and Bochnia, which formed part of Austria's share of the spoil, caused a serious rise in the price of salt and a corresponding deficit in the receipts of the Polish Treasury which had to be made up by some other means not immediately discernible.

Economical reform was extremely difficult in Poland because the usual factors of wealth and prosperity scarce existed there at all. The gentry, as we have seen, had ruined the burgesses, and everything really worthy of the name of commerce had consequently collapsed. So long as the squires retained the absolute control of the corn-market they could manage without middlemen. But when Prussia gained the control of the Polish rivers, and imposed ruinous tolls on Polish products, the absence of a trading class in Poland began to be felt most acutely, for all direct communication with the West was now cut off, and there were no great mercantile houses in Poland to correspond with the foreign merchants. It was no reviving sense of justice, it is to be feared, but the unendurable extortions of the King of Prussia which finally compelled the Poles to take some thought for the national industries.

In everything relating to the material prosperity of his country, Stanislaus II. always took the initiative. It was his ambition to be accounted a prominent propagandist of the new ideas of enlightenment, a compeer of Catherine II., Joseph II., and Gustavus III.—a philosopher on the throne. Immediately after his accession, he began by founding a new Mint, an institution very much wanted in Poland. Two years later he started a cannon foundry and encouraged others to follow his example. Zalucki and Soltyk, successive bishops of Cracow, and Jan Malachowski, for instance, built iron-works on their estates, and, for many years, the village of Konskie, in the possession of the latter, became the

centre of the Polish iron industry. Another eminently successful enterprise was the scythe manufactory at Sobienica, near Warsaw, which exported goods to the value of 2,225,000 Polish gulden per annum. By far the most energetic and enterprising economist of those days was Antoni Tyzenhaus, the Treasurer of Lithuania. The King was the first to recognise his superior ability and gave him his entire confidence. In a marvellously short time Tyzenhaus had set in motion no fewer than twenty-three manufactories which gave employment to 3000 workmen. He also founded schools where book-keeping and mensuration were taught, an institution for the training of midwives, a veterinary-medico-surgical school, and a botanical garden which, by 1778, possessed 1500 exotic plants. All these manufactories, schools and institutes, situated, for the most part, in the environments of Grodno, bore upon them, however, the marks of haste and dilettanteism. Tyzenhaus, being without any special or technical knowledge, imported crowds of specialists from abroad to help him in his undertakings. But they sold their services at a very high rate, and frequently abused his confidence; while it was very difficult to create a native class of workmen and artisans because of the hampering effects of the grinding soccage tenure which kept the peasants in a state of brutalising servitude. Moreover, the peasant taken from the plough worked very unwillingly in the factories, for he knew that no amount of labour there could purchase his freedom and that the greater part of his earnings would go, inevitably, to his master.

The haste with which Tyzenhaus went to work, the extraordinary variety of his undertakings, and, especially, the lack of business capacity and proper supervision (the characteristic and inveterate defects of old Poland) were the principal causes of his ultimate failure, though his ruin was precipitated by the fierce antagonism of the Polish magnates. Nevertheless, like all pioneers, he opened up new and unexpected fields of enterprise and, so far, his influence was salutary. Thus after his disappearance,

many salt works were opened at Brezsc and Ciechocinek, iron foundries were started at Suchedniow and Samsonow, and coal-mines were sunk and manufactories of faience established at several places in the palatinate of Cracow. About the same time, the peasant, Peter Pajonk, discovered a new method of making steel. In a word, throughout the Polish domains there were unmistakable symptoms of a healthy and encouraging revival of the commercial spirit.

The long-neglected and deeply depressed estate of burgesses naturally benefited by this new state of things. The gentry, when they began to discover that they could not do without the co-operation of a commercial and financial class, were forced, however unwillingly, to combine with the bankers and burgesses, take their advice in business matters, and purchase the help of their capital. Thus, on the Committee of the Company of Wool Merchants, founded about this time, we see men of the middle classes like Tepe Dekert and Raffalowicz, sitting by the side of the Zamoiscy, the Poniatowscy, and the Potoccy, and taking upon their shoulders by far the heaviest part of the burden. Nay, Antoni Protazi Potocki, one of the wealthiest of the Polish magnates, did not disdain to take lessons in book-keeping from the trader Krugel, subsequently entering into partnership with some English merchants in the suburbs of Cracow and founding a banking house on a large scale.

Exceptional as these cases may have been, they demonstrated, at any rate, that from within the nation itself, despite strong aristocratic prejudices, fresh sources of energy, making for the combination and unification of all classes, were springing forth in every direction. <Very characteristic of this liberal movement were the ordinances promulgated in the year 1774 to the effect that men of noble birth, however ancient and illustrious their origin, were free to engage in trade without forfeiting their nobility, and the adoption by the Executive Committee of the Diet of a general impost which *ipso facto* traversed one of the most exclusive privileges of the gentry—the privilege of exemption from taxation.

The efforts of private individuals to revive and develop

trade and industry were warmly encouraged by the King. It was also mainly due to him that the administration spared neither trouble nor expense in this respect. After the Peace of Kuchuk-Kainardji, July 21, 1774, when the trade of the Black Sea was thrown open to Russia and a new emporium arose in the recently founded town of Kherson, a lively export of the raw products of Poland began in that direction from the southern provinces of the Republic. In 1782 the Black Sea Company was formed under the presidency of Antoni Potocki, and the Polish Government contributed every year considerable sums for the maintenance of the Euxine trade. In 1783 a Polish consulate was actually established at Kherson.

The development of trade depended, in a great measure, on the state of the roads and other means of communication. Throughout the eighteenth century they were in a deplorable condition all over Europe, and what their condition was in Poland in especial has already been described.* At his very first Diet, Stanislaus called the attention of the deputies to this disgraceful state of things. At this period the roads, dams and bridges were all in the hands of private individuals, and to interest these persons in the proper maintenance of the thoroughfares they were now authorised to levy light toll on all wares and wayfarers in order to keep the roads and bridges in a proper state of repair. Henceforth a great improvement is noticeable in the condition of the means of communication in Poland. The Government further encouraged the landowners to do their duty in this respect by establishing, for the first time, an excellent posting system in Poland. This was especially appreciated by foreigners, who considered the Polish posting-stations as superior to the general run of such establishments to be found elsewhere on the Continent. Travellers now preferred to go to the East through Poland instead of by the older route *viâ* Berlin, Königsberg and Klojpeda.

In those days, when there were no railways, water communication, as being the cheapest and the easiest, was in

* Chap. ii.

most general use. This applied especially to Poland which was so rich in waterways. In proportion, however, as the Prussian Government obstructed the navigation of the Vistula, the Poles attempted to find fresh markets for their wares by connecting their river systems with the Black Sea. The Grand Hetman of Lithuania, Michael Oginski, took the lead in this patriotic enterprise. At a cost of twelve million Polish gulden he dug out a canal six miles long connecting the rivers Szczara and Jasiolda. In 1784 vessels of thirty-five tons burden passed through the Oginski canal on their way from Kherson to Königsberg. Another work of the same sort was the Royal Canal, which aimed at connecting the Black Sea with the Baltic and was completed in the course of three years (1781-1783). Simultaneously the Government devoted large sums towards the dredging of the rivers Niemen, Wartha, Liwec and Bobr; removed mills, weirs and other obstructions to navigation; and did much to regulate the flow of the Vistula and to keep the Vistulan ports in a good condition.

Simultaneously with these economical measures, there is also to be noticed a vigorous progressive movement in the direction of education which, in a relatively short time, produced an abundant harvest.

Educational reform had first been taken in hand in the former generation by the famous pedagogue the Piarist, Stanislaus Konarski, who was protected and assisted by the elder Czartoryscy. So successful were the efforts of Konarski, that he found many disciples especially after the suppression of the Jesuit Order. Among them none was more liberal and enthusiastic than King Stanislaus. On his coronation day he founded the School of Cadets in the Casimir Palace at Warsaw and assigned for its maintenance out of his Civil List, 200,000 Polish gulden, to which the Polish Treasury added 400,000 more. This institution, though never a military school in the strict sense of the word, always preserved a martial character. Here the youth of noble Polish families (it was exclusively aristocratic) were trained up to be good citizens and taught the mathematical

and physical sciences, military surveying, geography, history and everything else necessary to qualify a young man for entering the public service. On first establishing the School of Cadets, the King had entrusted it to the care of his cousin Prince Adam Casimir Czartoryski, one of whose numerous hobbies was education. With the best intentions in the world the Prince, nevertheless, made a sad muddle of it. So proud was he of the handsome, well-to-do, high-spirited lads whom he got together there that, so long as they practised good manners and avoided "fanaticism" (by which term he meant every sort of religious zeal), he practically let them do what they liked. Beyond drawing up for the Cadets a sort of patriotic catechism, which they were supposed to learn by heart and recite every day instead of their prayers, he never attempted to enforce any discipline. On the contrary, in order to revive the martial ardour of the Polish *jeunesse dorée* he encouraged them to fight duels on the slightest provocation, looking on delightedly through the bars of their barracks whilst the young bloods recklessly slashed and banged away at each other with sword and pistol. Even when these little affairs of honour ended fatally, the Prince always took care to hush up the matter and shield the culprit. No wonder that the Cadets idolised Prince Adam, and would gladly have laid down their lives for him. But the King naturally preferred that they should be taught rather to lay down their lives for their country, and as the discipline of the school left very much to be desired, the Cadets exhibiting a decided disinclination to listen to the instructions or obey the directions of the foreign brigadiers and vice-brigadiers set over them, Stanislaus superseded Prince Adam by General Komarzewski, who had already done so much to reform the army. Komarzewski speedily did away with the abuses of the School and made it a model institution. In the long run the School of Cadets rendered valuable service to Poland by turning out some of the best soldiers that ever fought the battles of the Republic. Here Kosciuszko first learnt the art of war. Here, too, were

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trained the heroes who sustained the Liberator in the titanic struggle of 1794 and subsequently helped the great Napoleon to win his victories all the world over.

Stimulated by the example of the King, Prince Karol Radziwill founded a school of artillery at Nieswiez, the Vice-Treasurer Potocki a School of Cadets at Niemerow, and Tyzenhaus a similar institution at Grodno, but none of these private enterprises had a very long life.

At this time the national schools were in the most deplorable condition. Konarski's reforms had compelled the Jesuits to introduce some changes into their curriculum. They, too, had their *collegia nobilium* in which they taught the grammar of the French language and a little geography and physics; but their methods were hopelessly obsolete. As at the end of the sixteenth century so now also themes like the following were propounded in the Jesuit schools: "Was the world created in spring or autumn?" "Who was Melchisedek?" "Was the manna in the wilderness equally pleasant to the good and the evil Israelites?" In a still worse condition was that decrepit Alma Mater the Jagiellonic University, or Academy of Cracow. Obstinate-ly defending herself against every scientific novelty, she clung desperately to her antediluvian system, silently ignoring all modern developments from the Cartesian philosophy downwards; rejecting Greek as dangerous to orthodoxy; never teaching history at all; and treating even the Copernican theory as mischievous though Copernicus himself had been her most eminent son and her greatest glory when she still counted for something in the world of learning. The very considerable funds of the University were dissipated partly by maladministration, partly in consequence of the enormous fees (amounting to one million Polish gulden) paid for the canonisation of Cantius, famous for his pious pilgrimages, who had held the chair of Theology there from 1413 to 1417. The efforts of the enlightened bishops of Cracow, Zaluski and Soltyk to reform the University were of no avail. When Zaluski proposed to place the famous mathematician and natural philosopher Christian

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Wolff at Cracow at his own cost, the academicians unani-
mously and successfully opposed the project. When the
bishop sent Professor Swientkowski to Halle to complete
his education in mathematics they expelled him from his
chair at Cracow. When Bishop Soltyk, at considerable
trouble and expense, undertook a visitation of the Academy,
so well-combined an opposition was offered that the attempt
had to be abandoned. Incapable of any sort of progress, the
academicians of Cracow, nevertheless, clung to their inordinate
privileges with obstructive tenacity; put all the machinery
of the law in motion to prevent any one from teaching
anything better than themselves, and diligently endeavoured
to extinguish every kind of enlightenment which interfered
with their monopoly of education or showed up its weak
points.

Such was the condition of the public schools of Poland
at the time of the formation of the Education Commission
in 1774. The Commission had before it a gigantic task of
reform; but, on the other hand, thanks to the suppression
of the Jesuits and the appropriation of their property by
the State, it possessed ample material resources for the
purpose. It was hampered, indeed, at the outset by the
intrigues and peculations of its first presidents, the greedy
and corrupt Poninski and his worthy coadjutor Massalski,
Bishop of Wilna, who dissipated a considerable portion of
the property of the Jesuits, or diverted it to the scandalous
uses of themselves and their kinsfolk. In 1776, however,
the Diet intervened and transferred the control of the
distribution-fund from Massalski to the administrative
committee of the Education Commission itself, with the
happiest results. All sorts of abuses and malversations
instantly came to light. Jozef Wybicki, sent to Wilna to
visit the Lithuanian schools, discovered the most gigantic
frauds. He reported, amongst other things, that Massalski
had appropriated 300,000 gulden from the school-funds,
that Poninski had seized, under the rubric of "free gifts," a
number of houses and estates that had belonged to the
Jesuits and sold them to the Jews. The spoliation had,

moreover, been managed so skilfully that the embezzled property could not be recovered by legal process.

After establishing order and method in the administration of the funds at its disposal, the Commission set about its proper work of educational reform, beginning with the compilation and distribution of new school-books. With this object there was formed, on the motion of Ignacy Potocki (who now comes prominently forward as a reformer and of whom I shall have something to say presently) an Elementary Society whose principal duties were the editing and issuing of new school-books; the establishment of national schools where they were most wanted; and the reformation and supervision of the Academy of Cracow.

↳The first appointed visitor of the Academy was that very remarkable man the Rev. Hugo Kollontaj, whose true character it is so difficult to arrive at. Born in 1751, the son of a poor Sandomerian squire, he completed his education at Rome (where by skilful intrigue he obtained a canonry vacant at Cracow) along with the Florentine Scipio Piatolli, subsequently the most influential of the King's secretaries, by whom the young Kollontaj was first introduced to Stanislaus. From the very first Kollontaj flung himself into the forefront of the reform movement. He was already an ardent disciple of the Encyclopedists, and the most audacious propagandist of their ideas in Poland. At a later day he became a notorious Jacobin; but at present he was mainly intent upon making his way in the world. As an advocate of the rights of the middle and lower classes he was, naturally, most popular; but in the upper classes and among the bishops he had many enemies, and when, somewhat later, the King took the extreme step of making the clever adventurer Vice-Chancellor, even so easy-going a prelate as Krasicki protested that the election of such a man was dangerous alike to Religion and the State. Kollontaj possessed extraordinary ability and almost superhuman energy; but it cannot be said that he was either high-principled or conscientious. He certainly took orders, without any inner vocation, for the sole purpose of getting

on as quickly as possible. This first false step affected his whole future career and gave it a sinister twist and a crooked direction. Crafty, subtle, pushing, Kollontaj had a rare gift of insinuating himself into the favour of powerful or influential persons ; but the moment he felt the ground sure beneath him he had no scruples about turning his back on his former benefactors. Naturally revengeful, moreover, he never forgave those who attempted to bar his way. For pure intellect he was, perhaps, head and shoulders above his contemporaries. It was he who drew up the plan (a remarkably lucid and able one) for the reform of education in Poland ; and as visitor of the Cracow Academy the young canon (he was only twenty-eight) acquitted himself so well of his extremely difficult task as to call forth universal admiration. On the other hand, his adversaries blamed him for his extreme haste and complained that he had pulled the old machine to pieces before he had invented anything suitable to take its place. At the same time Kollontaj got into trouble in consequence of some very shady traffic in benefices for which he was condemned *in contumaciam* by his own bishop and severely reprimanded by the Papal Nuncio. He consoled himself with the reflection that he had emerged from his troubles fairly well-off. This worldly *abbé* would never undertake the cure of souls. He preferred to make a rapid and well-deserved reputation as a political pamphleteer and secured, simultaneously, the lucrative and stable position of Referendary of Lithuania. We shall meet this slippery semi-cleric again as a leading politician during the Great Diet, here we need only emphasise his distinguished services in the cause of education.

It was mainly owing to the efforts of Kollontaj that the curriculum of the Cracow Academy was entirely recast, and that, from 1780 onwards, the chairs of the University were occupied by such capable teachers as Jan Sniadecki, the brothers Shaster, and Scheidt. Next came the turn of the University of Wilna. A medical faculty was established there under the direction of professors from Tyzenhaus's School of Medicine at Grodno ; a Botanical Garden and a

Clinical Institution were also founded at Wilna ; and the Jesuit astronomer Andrew Strzecki was sent to England and France to purchase astronomical instruments for the Observatory—in short, everything was done which could be done at once, to place both Universities on the higher level of the requirements of contemporary science. For the education of teachers two Seminaries were established, one at Cracow and the other at Wilna. These teachers were educated entirely at the expense of the State, binding themselves in return to teach in public institutions for six years consecutively. All the new schools were to be affiliated with the Universities, visited periodically, and reported upon to the Education Commission. I may add, in conclusion, that the ordinances and regulations of the Education Commission were so apt and to the point, as well from a pedagogic as from a patriotic point of view, that even to-day, despite our enormous advances in experience and educational methods generally, the school administration of Poland, as formulated by the Educational Commission at the end of the eighteenth century, might well serve as a model system now. Its immediate results were certainly extraordinary. Thus, in 1783, there were in Poland thirty-eight high schools with 9816 pupils, and in one district of the Province of Great Poland alone forty-three elementary schools with 1368 pupils and teachers to a population of 40,000. The efforts of the Government as regards education were seconded by the zeal of individuals. Thus the Potoccy founded schools of the Basilian order at Human and Buczacz Elizabeth Puzyna contributed 6000 ducats towards the building of the new Observatory at Wilna ; while Joseph Zalucki, Bishop of Kiev, in the year 1775, placed his magnificent library at the disposition of the Government. >

While the King and the best men in the country were thus waging a *combat à outrance* against the ignorance and prejudice of ages, while a whole host of publicists and essayists were doing their utmost to guide the rising generation into new and better paths, the daily life of society continued, apparently, on much the same lines as before. Poland was

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still suffering from the effects of the First Partition. Economical stagnation still depressed her. The burden of supporting the army of occupation was almost more than she could bear. The best and noblest patriots were often a prey to callousness or despair. Discontent with present conditions was discernible in every section of society. Hence there arose (it is difficult to say exactly how or when) a restlessness, an impatience, an opposition to things as they actually were, comprehending within it elements often diametrically opposed to each other, yet all of them bent, more or less, on the destruction of the order of things imposed upon the country by force from without, and especially of the new Government as represented by the Executive or Permanent Committee guaranteed by Russia. <The times became more and more critical as the old conservative party-chiefs disappeared one after the other, and younger men with all the enthusiasm but also with all the recklessness of youth forced their way to the front. In 1775 died the eldest of the Czartoryscy, the Prince-Chancellor Michael, for more than thirty years a restraining and at the same time a regenerating influence. "The Family" was henceforth represented by the frivolous and pedantic Prince Adam Casimir Czartoryski, or rather by his masterful and vindictive sister, the Princess-Marshal Lubomirska. The old Grand-Hetman Jan Clemens Branicki, an unruly but really patriotic magnate, was also no more. Prince Radziwill ("My dear Sir") now mostly resided abroad. The scandalous old Primate, Gabriel Podoski, ended his days in 1777 at Marseilles>

It is now that the great family of Potocki, so long kept in the background by the elder Czartoryscy, comes prominently forward. Its principal representative was Count Felix Potocki, the eldest son of François de Sales Potocki, the richest magnate in Poland, commonly called "the Knight of Russia,"* who at one time aimed at the Polish crown itself. Felix inherited from his father his immense estates

* *I. e.*, the Palatinate of Red Russia, most of which was his private property.

in the Ukraine, his overweening haughtiness, and the ambition to play a leading part in Poland. Yet his parts were mediocre and his education had been very indifferent. So proud were the parents of Felix that they would not allow their son to be sent to the Piarist College at Warsaw, the school *par excellence* of the Polish nobility, where many of his own cousins were being educated, but had him brought up at home in a way of their own. His Governor was a Bernardine monk, his tutor a Piarist, but he learnt the little he knew from a French *Kammerdiener* who won the complete confidence of the young nobleman. In the circumstances there could have been no serious education at all. The two tutors killed time by playing cards all day, while Felix and his *Kammerdiener* sported in an adjoining chamber. The parents paid very little attention to their child. Occasionally they gave the lad "a special audience," after the fashion of the great French houses of the day, and from these audiences the young Felix usually emerged either well scolded or well flogged. On arriving at man's estate he made the acquaintance, at his parents' house, of a pretty cousin, Gertrude Komorowska, lost his heart to her and married her privately. The intermediaries were the *Kammerdiener* and the Bernardine tutor. But the marriage could not be concealed for ever, and there was a terrible explosion when it came to light. Both the monks were dismissed, the youthful husband was well birched, and the poor young wife, from sheer grief and shame, flung herself into a pond and was drowned.

After this catastrophe Felix was sent abroad. Here also, though he saw a great deal, he learnt but little. In the diary which he kept during his travels the only recorded items are the post-houses at which he changed horses and the dinners he ate while he waited for them. On his return he was married to one of the great heiresses of Poland, Panna Mniszekowna, with the most disastrous results. He divorced her as soon as he was able to do so, with an allowance of £40,000 a year, and married instead a beautiful Greek slave, of whom we only know that her christian name



SOPHIA THE GREEK, THIRD CONSORT OF COUNT FELIX POTOCKI

was Sophia, and that she had been brought from Stambul by the French consul Boscamp, who sold her to the commandant of the Polish fortress of Kamieniec. Here she became a great favourite with the Russian officers who frequented the place, till the young Palatine of Red Russia came along that way, fell in love with her, and made her his third consort.

The fact that the whole life of Felix Potocki was a series of light adventures and serious scandals by no means impaired his popularity with the gentry. His political influence was enormous. Inheriting vast estates which embraced three millions of acres in the Ukraine, and maintaining a magnificent establishment at his "capital," Tulczyn, he might almost have been called the King of the Ukraine. Despite his want of education, therefore, he filled some of the highest and most responsible offices in the Republic. (Felix Potocki has gone down to history branded with the dark stigma of treason. He certainly was, as we shall see in the sequel, directly responsible for the Second Partition which was the beginning of the end of unhappy Poland. But he was a traitor by accident not by design. His head was far more to blame than his heart. This bigoted, haughty, self-willed arch-aristocrat, even when he was bringing in the Russians to destroy the Republic, actually deluded himself into the belief that he was defending it. His extreme individualism made him the protagonist by conviction of all that was most absurd and mischievous in the impossible old Polish Constitution. He has been well described as the *liberum veto* personified. We may go further still and say that he was ready to sacrifice everything to save his country, but only on condition that he was to save it in his own way. Only when the mischief was done did he realise, with horror, that instead of saving his country he had ruined it irretrievably.)

Closely associated with Felix Potocki in all his plans, and, ultimately, the shameless accomplices of his patricide, stand two other Polish magnates, Ksawery Branicki and Severin Rzewuski. As to the former it is only charitable

to suppose that he was mad rather than bad. Anyhow, only eighteenth-century Poland could have produced such a fantastic specimen of decadent humanity. Branicki was a man of indisputable valour and insatiable ambition, passionate, fitfully energetic but always unreliable, without the least self-control, despising every one and everything, uniting the expensive vices of a Court with the useless virtues of the Polish pseudo-democracy. (He first made the acquaintance of Stanislaus at St. Petersburg and won his friendship by facilitating his amours with the Grand-Duchess Catherine. On becoming King, Stanislaus rewarded the ex-pander by bestowing upon him the revenues of the starosty of Bialocerkiewsk, amounting to 516,000 Polish gulden per annum, and appointing him Grand-Hetman of the Crown, or Commander-in-Chief of Poland. Thus Branicki, while still in his prime, became the chief dignitary of the Republic with a fortune more than adequate to sustain his exalted position. Yet, even now, his extravagant ambition was not satisfied. Offended by the limitations of the authority of the Grand-Hetmanship by the Permanent Committee, he sought protection at St. Petersburg where he married Gospodina Engelhardtovna, the niece of the omnipotent Potemkin. Henceforth Branicki was far more of a Moscovite than a Pole and openly boasted of his allegiance to the Russian Empress. His subservience to his uncle-in-law was of the most servile description. Potemkin when angry or drunk, and he was nearly always in one or the other of these conditions, would frequently shake his fist in the Grand-Hetman's face, and Branicki, instead of resenting the insult, used to treat it as a joke. Yet he was the slave of an absurd *point d'honneur* for which he was always ready to lay down his life at a moment's notice. On one occasion, for an imaginary insult, he compelled the disreputable adventurer Casanova to fight him under the threat of otherwise blowing out his brains. Casanova promptly shot him in the stomach, whereupon Branicki flung a purse of gold in his face and advised him to run for his life to escape the vengeance of his (Branicki's) servants. The religious views of the Grand-

Hetman, so far as he can be said to have had any religion at all, were certainly peculiar. Though a nominal Catholic he used always to maintain that a belief in immortality was ruinous to a soldier because it made him live in constant fear of Hell, whereas a really good soldier ought to be afraid of nothing. His own men and the gentry in general were rather fond of him for he always affected a bluff joviality and was hail-fellow-well-met with every one of them. His popularity, however, only made him the more dangerous.)

Severin Rzewuski, the Grand-Marshal, also owed all he had and all he was to the generosity of the King whom he subsequently so basely betrayed. He was, perhaps, the most capable of the three confederates, but had not a tittle of their popularity as he not only openly professed himself a partisan of Russia but was notorious for his stinginess and meanness.

This mischievous and factious triumvirate was a perpetual thorn in the side of the King. Very soon after the First Partition they began to intrigue openly against Stanislaus on the pretext that he was aiming at absolutism, and told him to his face that they would make it impossible for him to reign much longer. They caballed persistently against him at St. Petersburg where they relied, principally, upon Potemkin; and at home they persuaded the King's cousin Prince Adam Casimir Czartoryski to throw in his lot with them. At last things went so far that Stackelberg, the Russian Ambassador at Warsaw, had actually to proceed to the Russian capital himself to circumvent the designs of the triumvirate which, certainly, were as injurious to Poland as they were to the King. At the elections to the first post-partitional Diet, in 1776, Branicki and Co. fiercely opposed the royal party at the polls. The King desired the maintenance of the Permanent Committee which, for the first time in three centuries, had given Poland something like a reasonable and effective executive. Branicki, on the other hand, would have freed his Grand-Hetmanship from the dominant control of the Committee in order to obtain an independent and commanding position which would

have made his authority equal if not superior to that of the King. (In the circumstances the Permanent Committee was indispensable to Poland. It could not indeed secure the autonomy of the country, but it made for order and relatively good government, and, thanks mainly to the prudent and skilful statesmanship of Stanislaus, had already introduced many salutary economical and administrative reforms. To all true patriots and lovers of progress it opened out a wide field of useful activity and seriously contributed to heal the gaping wounds which the First Partition had inflicted upon Poland. So, at any rate, did the deepest and soundest thinkers in Poland understand the situation; and when the King, anxious to save the Diet from being exploded, formed a Confederation, in conjunction with Stackelberg, and offered the dignity of Marshal, or President, to Andrew Mokronowski, Palatine of Masovia, one of the most honest and high-spirited dignitaries in Poland, that distinguished man did not hesitate for a moment to accept this responsible office and supported the King with all the authority of his influence and popularity.)

Despite all the efforts of the opposition, despite the unscrupulous agitation which they fomented in the local diets, the Royal Party succeeded in forming the Confederation,* though not without having recourse to the most violent expedients. It was justified in doing so because it meant to carry out a wise and useful programme whereas the Opposition cannot be said to have had any programme at all. Obstruction and retrogression were their only motives.

(From the first the Confederated Diet showed that it meant business. It brushed aside the sophisms and the mock-pathetic appeals of Branicki and his associates, and permanently transferred the control of the army from the Grand-Hetman to the War Office. At the same time, the right of nominating officers of every grade in the army was restored to the Crown. The Diet next appointed a Com-

* A Confederation could not be "exploded" like an ordinary Diet, by the vote of a single deputy, because all its measures had to be decided by a majority.

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mission to expedite the course of judicial procedure. Finally it directed the ex-Chancellor Andrew Zamoyski to prepare a draft project for the much-needed codification of the laws. But at this point the energy of the chamber suddenly collapsed. When the question of supply came before the Diet, when the Budget report showed a considerable deficit, and when, in consequence thereof, the Government asked for a large increase of subsidies to put the army on a war-footing—then the inveterate repugnance of the gentry to part with a single penny of their money for administrative purposes once more asserted itself. In this respect there was nothing to choose between the Government party and the Opposition. Both of them adopted the same watch-word: no increase of taxation, and the same persons who, not so very long before, carried away by Republican ardour, had drawn their swords in defence of outraged liberty, now proceeded, with a light heart, to pare away the military budget and cut down the national defences to starvation-point. Incredible as it may sound, the Polish Diet, on this occasion, was far more indifferent to the vital interests of Poland than the partitioning Powers had been. Catherine II. had “most graciously guaranteed” that the standing army of Poland should not be less than 30,000 men; the Poles themselves, despite the serious warnings and earnest protests of the King, now reduced it to 18,000. >

The abolition of judicial torture was the last legislative act of this Diet. The subsequent elections to the vacancies in the Permanent Committee fell out according to the wishes of Stanislaus.

The position of the King was now considerably strengthened, yet his victory was neither complete nor permanent. The Opposition, disappointed in its hopes, now changed its tactics. Instead of attacking Stanislaus direct, it began to wage a furious warfare against the Permanent Committee, neglecting, at the same time, no opportunity of vexing the King. Knowing as we do the aims and the characters of the men who posed at Warsaw as the enemies of the Moscovite tyranny, and cringed abjectly at St. Petersburg before

the Satrap Potemkin, who advertised themselves as the champions of the nation and subsequently betrayed it to Russia, we can only say of them that, consciously or unconsciously, they were traitors and incendiaries. The superior tactics of the King and his advisers held them somewhat in check, but it was no fault of theirs if they did not make legislation absolutely impossible. At the Diet of 1780 they succeeded in ruining the economical reformer Tyzenhaus and destroying most of his industrial undertakings. Still worse, they defeated, once for all, the project for the codification of the laws laid before the House by Zamoyski which represented the ripe fruits of the thought and labour of that great jurist and his chief assistant, the reformer, Joseph Wybicki, during the last four years. The gentry, still immersed in mediæval traditions, and spurred on continually by the zealots of "Liberty," refused obstinately to admit the authority of a code which ran directly counter to their privileges and their prejudices by proposing to give equal rights to the Burgesses and ameliorate the hard lot of the peasantry. So furious were they against the whole project that they would not even permit the Bill to come on for discussion in the Diet. "We reject every proposal for the codification of the laws, nor will we consent to have it revived at any future Diet," they cried. The proceedings of the Opposition on this occasion were obviously an act of revenge directed quite as much against the King as against Zamoyski. Stanislaus did his utmost to carry through the codification project. Almost alone he had the courage to defend it, in full Diet, in speeches so lucid and cogent that they would have convinced any one but fools or foes. He went out of his way to encourage its authors and promoters. He especially invited Zamoyski and Wybicki to his Thursday dinners. He accepted with enthusiasm a modification of the original project, making some concessions to invincible prejudice, and even publicly advocated this amended version. But all would not do, the House refused to entertain it on any terms. (During the Diet of 1782 the Opposition became still more outrageous. At one session the

drunken Branicki staggered to his feet and threatened the King to his face that within six months he would drive him from the throne. At the Diet of 1786, Branicki, becoming more and more venomous as he realised his powerlessness, had to be suppressed by the personal intervention of the Russian Ambassador, Count Stackelberg. For fifteen years this war against the King and the Permanent Committee continued, a war without aim or purpose which humiliated the crown without in the least benefiting the Republic. Such men as Felix Potocki had not the remotest idea of patriotism, though the catchwords "Liberty" and "Fatherland" were constantly in their mouths. True patriotism implies self-sacrifice. These pseudo-patriots, a mere handful of ultra-conservatives, would have sacrificed the majority of their fellow countrymen to their inordinate pride and egoism.)

The person who really deserves our sympathy, and even our respect, during those fifteen years of political hurly-burly and barrenness, is the King. (Polish historians, with very few exceptions, are never weary of reminding us of the weakness, the irresolution, the moral decadence of Stanislaus II. Whenever they allude to him, his moral cowardice, his political incompetence, are generally taken for granted. Even when, in common fairness, they are obliged to give him some praise it is of the faintest description. But, after all, this unbalanced censoriousness is but one of the many aspects of that curious disposition to hold their kings primarily responsible for the calamities of their country which has ever been characteristic of the Poles. On their weak kings they are especially severe, ignoring the fact that these very princes were deliberately elected by the nation at large, and that therefore the nation is partially responsible for their doings. Their last King, Stanislaus II., has been treated worst of all. Not only has he been held responsible for the faults of others; but his very efforts to reform the nation have invariably been misrepresented, while the extraordinary difficulties of his situation have never been adequately taken into account. No other Polish King ever

had such a difficult position as Stanislaus II. Not only were his enemies irreconcilable and unscrupulous, but he could place little or no reliance in times of crises, on his numerous partisans. Of most of these it may fairly be said that their moral value was *nil*. Another difficulty—do what he would, he never could gain the confidence of the nation. Although his ideas were, generally, sound, his intentions excellent, and his views most benevolent, he was always exceedingly unpopular. The nation distrusted him not so much because he was a bad or a weak king, but because he *was* a king. Every single step he took was the signal for an unloosing of the most foolish and frantic opposition. It was sufficient for him to propose anything original for every one to be instantly up in arms against it. How, it may well be asked, could any constructive statesman build upon such shaking ground with such rotten materials? Yet, in spite of everything, Stanislaus did much to reorganise and consolidate the State, because his premises were sound and his conclusions were practical. From the first he endeavoured to minimise the mischief of the centrifugalism in which Polish individualism delighted by forming a party devoted to the Crown. Hence the maintenance of a Court more splendid and imposing than Poland had known for generations which was to be the focus of this new political system. For the same reason he would have diminished the authority of the Magnates, whose factious feuds had torn Poland to pieces for centuries, by making them of less account in the State, by employing the lesser gentry almost exclusively. He never had sufficient time to accomplish his projects, he lacked the stability of character necessary to carry them out, yet the projects themselves were good and therefore deserved to succeed. We have already seen what he did for commerce, industry and education, of his invaluable services as an army reformer we shall say something in another chapter. But the strongest testimony to his statesmanship and administrative ability lies in the fact that he made the Permanent Committee a working possibility. >

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The Permanent Committee, it will be remembered, was the Executive Council of State imposed by Russia upon Poland after the First Partition. As a foreign product it was, naturally, obnoxious to the majority of the Poles. As an instrument of government, moreover, it was by no means perfect, yet it furnished Poland with the most sensible administration she had had for two centuries. From the first Stanislaus fully recognised its capabilities and made the most of them. But the Permanent Committee, with its five separate departments, the members of which were selected from all classes, would have been a useless and cumbrous organism had not the King carefully watched over it and given to its manifold operations some sort of order and cohesion. His infinite tact, patience, forethought and amiability were ceaselessly employed in training a whole mob of raw, touchy, eternally bickering officials to work, with each other and with him, loyally and conscientiously, with the most gratifying results. Thus, within twelve years from the date of the First Partition, the Financial Department of the Committee could report that the funds in the Treasury had been increased by 5,000,000 Polish gulden, and the King was able to contribute 400,000 more out of his own privy purse towards the improvement of the administration of justice. In 1782, the Budget, for almost the first time in Polish history, showed a credit balance of 1,500,000 gulden in cash. The Education Commission had, by the same time, worked wonders. Its expenditure from 1780 to 1782 had averaged nearly three millions of gulden and it could show a surplus of 150,000. In the Ecclesiastical Department many useful reforms had been carried out by the new Primate, Prince Michael Poniatowski, the King's brother. The general improvement of the country was still more marked at the Diet of 1784. The King on this occasion was able to report that the army was now twice as large and very much better equipped than it had ever been before.

In 1786 the political outlook abroad was completely changed by the death of Frederick the Great, an event, it

was argued in Poland, which would make another partition difficult to the verge of impossibility. A growing alienation between Russia and Prussia and a corresponding approximation between Russia and Austria were now observable. Frederick the Great had always been more of a hindrance than a help to Catherine. She had frequently to complain of the treacherous, underhand proceedings of the Philosopher of *Sans Souci*, during the first twelve years of her reign. For his shifty, sentimental successor, Frederick William II., who with all the will to damage her had not the courage, she always entertained a wholesome contempt. She now began to think that, in the circumstances, Austria would be more useful to her than Prussia. Apart from a strong personal attraction, the great bond of union between Catherine and Joseph II. was the grandiose "Greek Project." Joseph simply desired to partition the Turkish Empire between Catherine and himself by way of eclipsing the fame of Frederick the Great. Catherine's more extravagant imagination dreamed of re-establishing the Greek Empire under her grandson, the Grand Duke Constantine. With her thoughts entirely occupied by her magnificent oriental speculations, Catherine was now far less interested in Poland than heretofore. She was even inclined to relax her hold upon that country and admit it into her political system as an active ally. Her decision had momentous consequences both within and beyond Poland, and profoundly influenced the fate of King Stanislaus, as we shall see in the following chapter.

CHAPTER VIII

AT THE PARTING OF WAYS

The last chance of Poland a close alliance with Russia—Catherine and her ministers not unfriendly disposed towards Poland—Characters of the leading Russian Ministers—Ivan Osterman—Arkady Morkov—Alexander Bezborodko—Catherine absorbed by the Eastern Project—Prussia the natural enemy of Poland—Russia her natural ally—Efforts of Stanislaus to bring about an understanding between Russia and Poland—Sagacity of the King—His efforts to revive the military spirit in Poland—Stanislaus offers Catherine the terms of an alliance—Programme of the Potocki faction—The picnic of potentates and princes—Catherine snubs Potocki at Kiev—And flatters Stanislaus at Kaniow—The interview in the state barge—Reconciliation of the King with Felix Potocki—The second Turkish War—Catherine's embarrassments—Rise of the Prussian party in Poland—Character of its chief representative, Ignatius Potocki—His mischievous influence—Revolution in the policy of Prussia after the death of Frederick the Great—Frederick William II. encourages the anti-Russian party in Poland—Character and antecedents of the new Prussian Minister in Poland, the Marquess de Lucchesini

WE have now come to that interesting and critical period of Polish history when a unique and unlooked for opportunity of saving the Republic, at almost the last moment of the eleventh hour, suddenly presented itself. This last chance, as we must call it, was the prospect of a close and cordial alliance between Poland and her secular antagonist—Russia.

We have already seen how Count Nikita Panin, the political mentor and the premier minister of Catherine II. during the first twenty years of her reign, had endeavoured to save Poland from being partitioned, and how all his efforts in that direction were frustrated by his numerous enemies in the Russian Council of State acting in concert

with Frederick the Great. Even after the Partition, Panin had endeavoured to bolster up Poland as much as possible in order to make of her a serviceable ally to Russia. It was with this object that he had improved her Constitution, strengthened her administration, and even consented to a considerable increase in her army. (Panin was now dead, but his system, as regards Poland, had to some extent survived him. At any rate there existed at the Russian Court a tradition in favour of a philo-Polish policy. Certainly at this time (1786-1787), neither Catherine nor her ministers entertained any active feeling of hostility against the Republic. It was generally recognised at Tsarkoe Selo that there were two policies adoptable towards Poland and two only: a policy of influence and a policy of absorption. The former policy implied a Poland dependent and subordinate but autonomous and intact. A policy of absorption on the other hand, implied fresh partitions, as it was inconceivable that either Prussia or Austria would ever allow Russia to incorporate the whole of Poland within her Empire.) It is obvious, therefore, on the face of it, that a policy of influence was likely to be more profitable to Russia than a policy of absorption. In the latter case Russia would be obliged to share her Polish spoils with Prussia and Austria, whereas in the former case, all Poland would be at her absolute disposal, and, in case of need, the Polish army might always be employed to advantage against either Austria or Prussia, or against them both. Thus the general feeling at the Court of St. Petersburg was rather in favour of an alliance with Poland than otherwise. More than this, however, cannot be said. The Polish question, just then, was not the dominant question with Russian statesmen. The Empress, in particular, had other and more important matters to think of. Her mind was absorbed by the gigantic scheme or speculation known in Russian History as "The Greek Project," which aimed at the expulsion of the Turks from Europe and the revival of the Empire of Theodosius and Justinian beneath the sceptre of a Russian Grand Duke. The destruction of the Ottoman Empire

had already been agreed upon secretly with the Emperor Joseph II. The first step towards the consummation of this project had been the deliberate occupation of the Crimea (April 1783) by Potemkin when the last Tatar Khan became a subject of the Russian Empress. Then followed a period of suspense and hesitation. Catherine, evidently, had not yet quite made up her mind as to what the next step must be. Consequently her policy was vacillating and tentative. Nor could any of the new generation of Russian statesmen by whom she was surrounded offer her much assistance. She had trained most of these men herself and loved to call them "my pupils"; but at this crisis their political views were as divergent as their characters.

At the head of her official hierarchy stood Count Ivan Andreevich Osterman, a taciturn, dignified, highly respectable sort of superior foreign-office clerk. As Vice-Chancellor, Osterman nominally presided over the Russian Foreign Office during the last sixteen years of the reign of Catherine II., gave audiences to foreign ambassadors, and communicated to them the views of the Empress. But he was always very imperfectly informed of what was actually going on; very often knew nothing of the contents of the treaties and conventions which he had to sign officially; and served, principally, as a sort of public indicator of the Empress's ostensible policy when at the very time, perhaps, she was meditating something entirely different. But Catherine did him an injustice when she dubbed him "a blockhead." Though not a brilliant man, Osterman had great experience and profound common sense which made him decidedly adverse to a speculative policy. He was not unfriendly disposed towards Poland, but would have postponed any alliance with her till after the settlement of the Greek question.

Another prominent member of the Russian Foreign Office was Count Arkady Ivanovich Morkov, a diplomatist of many years standing, who owed his position partly to his excellent knowledge of French and partly to the support

of the new reigning favourite, the youthful Platon Zubov. Morkov possessed a most resolute temper and was Russian to the core, but his influence was somewhat neutralised by that of his former protector but actual rival, Alexander Bezborodko, whom the foreign ministers rightly regarded as the soul of Catherine's cabinet. Bezborodko was the most subtle and accomplished diplomatist that Russia had yet produced. Every affair of importance was invariably submitted to him beforehand, the Empress placing the highest value on his opinion. He was an expert on the Oriental question in particular, and all his despatches were models of lucid exposition and literary excellence. Too much was thrust upon him, however, and as, moreover, his dissolute and disorderly life * left him comparatively little time to devote to affairs of State, everything placed in his hands was liable to be indefinitely postponed, to the great annoyance of the foreign ministers and the great inconvenience of the Empress, to whom Bezborodko knew himself to be indispensable. Bezborodko favoured Austria, Morkov leaned towards the Prussian alliance, while Osterman sometimes sided with the one and sometimes with the other, so that Catherine, at this period, was more perplexed than profited when she applied to them for counsel. Nevertheless on the eve of the Second Turkish War, all three ministers were inclined to make some concessions to Poland if the interests of Russia could thereby be promoted. It only remained for Poland to take advantage, as far as possible, of the new combinations at the Russian Court.

It is the highest tribute to the political sagacity of King Stanislaus that he recognised from the outset that the proper, and indeed the only saving policy for Poland, was a close alliance with Russia on almost any terms. The bitter lessons of the First Partition had not been thrown away on him. They had rudely awakened him to a sense of his true position ; they had completed his political education ; they

* On one occasion Catherine was obliged to remove an eminent actress out of the reach of Bezborodko as his infatuation for her seriously interfered with his official work and brought public business to a standstill.



ALEXANDER ANDREEVICH BEZBERODKO, THE CHIEF COUNSELLOR
OF CATHERINE II IN HER LATER YEARS

had impressed his acute and receptive mind with the unalterable conviction that the arch-enemy of everything Polish was neither the orthodox Russian nor the Holy Roman Empire but the Prussian monarchy. There can be no question that this conviction was perfectly sound. But for Prussia there would, very probably, have been no partition at all. But for Prussia the actual partition might have been a slight excision instead of a serious mutilation. Prussia had ever been antagonistic to Poland in the past, and there was no guarantee against her antagonism in the future. The Poles and the Prussians could never be friends. The characters of the two peoples, the interests of the two nations, were so diametrically opposed, that their enmity seemed natural and inevitable. Nearly one-half of the actual Kingdom of Prussia consisted of territory wrung from the necessities of the Polish Republic, and it was notorious that Prussia coveted still more in order to round off what she possessed already. It was equally notorious that Poland was powerless to protect herself from further encroachments. What, then, was she to do? Obviously she must look about for some ally sufficiently interested in her preservation to prevent the Hohenzollerns from satisfying their land-hunger at her expense. There was only one such contingent ally and that was Russia.

It is true that Russia and Poland had been secular adversaries. Their hostility, was as ancient as their history, and every page in that history had been coloured by blood and fire. But, at any rate, they were not strangers to each other. If they were foes, they were also kinsfolk. They were of the same race and almost of the same language. They had many common interests. Their respective nobilities were more or less connected. Even their ancient religious differences had ceased to be acute. One-third of the whole population of Poland belonged to the Orthodox Faith. Finally, they had a common hatred of Prussia. Both Russia and Poland regarded the Prussian Germans as aliens, as outsiders, as their real and true enemies, as interlopers who had driven disruptive iron wedges into the once

solid structure of the old Slavonic World. No doubt any approximation between the Russians and the Poles was bound to be tentative and experimental. Both had too much to forgive to be friends all at once. Nor could any really stable alliance be concluded on anything like equal terms. Russia was far too powerful to concede, Poland was far too feeble to claim a parity of conditions. Subordination on the part of the Republic, domination on the part of the Empire, were, from the very nature of the case, the indispensable preliminary conditions of an alliance, and against such conditions it was inevitable that Polish pride and Polish patriotism should rebel. But the fact remains that, in the middle of the eighteenth century, the best heads of both nations believed in the possibility of such an approximation; it is certain that such an approximation would have been beneficial to Poland; and, consequently, it is to the honour and credit of King Stanislaus that he endeavoured to bring it about.

The King took in the whole situation with the foresight and sagacity of a true statesman. His scheme, while accommodating itself to present circumstances, looked for its perfect fulfilment to the future. Above all things he desired to make Poland strong and independent; but he foresaw that the process must be gradual and secret. In any case his project presupposed a preliminary period of dependence upon Russia. He argued, however, and justly, that so far from being derogatory, such dependence could not fail, ultimately, if properly managed, to be salutary to the Poles themselves. After all, it was only meant to be a period of self-discipline and recuperation. To appreciate properly the King's idea, it should always be borne in mind that the Polish State was neither more nor less than a loose confederation of gentlemen whose one recognised obligation was military service. Such a political system was, no doubt, an anachronism, but Stanislaus had to make the best of the only material at hand, and he proposed, in the first instance, to make this semi-mediæval institution at least efficient by inuring it to the military discipline it so sorely needed.

That a sovereign personally so pacific and philosophical should thus venture upon so drastic an expedient was, certainly, most extraordinary, but there can be no doubt that he was right in so venturing. War was the only school in which the ancient military virtues of the Polish nobility could be revived, and the best chance of obtaining a thorough education in that school was a close alliance with the Russian Empire which, impelled by the ambitious sceptre of Catherine II., was just about to plunge into the most incalculable of military adventures. We of the twentieth century are so accustomed to assume war to be an unmitigated evil that we are tempted entirely to overlook its nobler, its curative properties. Yet it has been the mature and deliberate conviction of some of the best and wisest men of every age, our own included, that, in certain contingencies, war alone is able to arrest the course of national decadence. History, fairly and carefully scrutinised, points irresistibly to the same conclusion. Anyhow, as regards Poland, there can be no doubt whatever that the discipline of warfare alone was capable of dissipating the sluggishness and curbing the egotism of the half-million or so of armed and unemployed gentlemen who claimed to represent the whole nation. For seventy years the Republic had been engaged in no regular warfare. The immediate consequence of this long and enervating peace was that the ancient chivalrous spirit of the nation had been well-nigh extinguished, and with the martial spirit the public spirit of the *szlachta* was also disappearing. The Poles had become a nation of triflers and pettifoggers. To such trivial depths had Polish society sunk during the last twenty years that, throughout that period, the only questions which had excited any general interest at all were: Ought Soltyk, the crazy Bishop of Cracow, to be put in a lunatic asylum or not? and: Was or was not the adventuress Dogrumowa employed by the King to poison Prince Adam Czartoryski? Stanislaus II. argued fairly enough that, in such miserable conditions, the quickest way of bringing about a better state of things was to give the Polish nation something serious to think

about, something which could really arouse it. An active participation in the military adventures of the Russian Empire, as the direct result of a close alliance with it, was obviously the shortest cut to such a goal. There can be little doubt that Stanislaus meant, ultimately, to take the fullest advantage of the influence which the possession of an efficient standing army cannot fail to bring to every State. For example, he intended, if possible, to recover some of the lost provinces of Poland so as thereby to justify his policy ; raise the prestige of the Polish State abroad ; and bring it, once more, within the European concert.

The King's "wishes" in their fullest form are embodied in the draft memorandum to Deboli, the Polish minister at St. Petersburg, a few months after the famous meeting at Kaniow presently to be recorded. It was an ably drawn document, the terms of which, evidently, had been very carefully considered.* While tacitly assuming the hegemony of Russia, it aimed at substituting for the shameful and oppressive dependence based on the Russian guarantee of 1773, relations of a more intimate and more honourable character. In view of the prospective conquest of Turkish territory by Russia, which was taken for granted, Stanislaus desired that by way of compensation for the lost Polish provinces, a slice of Bessarabia with the port of Akkerman, which would give Poland some share in the Black Sea trade, should be transferred to the Republic. The Russian Ambassador, Stackelberg, supported this "wish" on the ground that its realisation would establish a useful neutral zone between Russia and Austria. The King further desired that the succession to the Polish throne should henceforth be hereditary instead of elective ; that an offensive and defensive alliance should be concluded between Russia and Poland, placing the forces of the Republic at the disposal of the Empress in the ensuing war ; that Russia should pay Poland subsidies to the amount of 100,000 ducats per annum and all the expenses of any Polish contingent ; that the

* It was kept such a profound secret that only the most intimate associates of the two monarchs knew anything about it.

Polish executive should be strengthened and the royal prerogative increased; that the King, in certain circumstances, should have a veto on the decrees of the Diet; that his civil list should be raised two millions and his debts paid; and that he should have at his disposal sufficient patronage to make his friendship valuable and his influence paramount in Poland. The only one of these proposals which the Empress peremptorily rejected was that which would have converted Poland from an elective into an hereditary monarchy, certainly the most important of them all. Everything else, however, she was ready to concede—with certain limitations. But it was somewhat of a shock to her to find that her new ally was almost penniless. As a business woman she could not, of course, help regarding as a little one-sided a bargain in which she was expected to do nearly everything because the King of Poland could do next to nothing. This was by no means the first time that the clever public policy of Stanislaus was damaged seriously by his private vices, and, unfortunately for him, it was not to be the last. Nevertheless, the general outlook was, on the whole, by no means discouraging. The Russian Vice-Chancellor, Count Osterman, even went so far as to say to Deboli: "Be sure we shall not leave you in the lurch, but remember: you also must do something for us!" Such words from the mouthpiece of the Russian Empress to the Polish minister at St. Petersburg were most significant. They demonstrated that Russia had changed her ancient tactics completely, and now preferred to see Poland moderately strong instead of absolutely helpless.

But the King and his friends were not the only persons in Poland who desired to contract a close alliance with Russia. The little band of reactionaries who followed the standard of Felix Potocki and his friends the Grand-Hetman Branicki and the Grand-Marshal Rzewuski had the like ambition though with very different intentions. The object of the King was to use the Russian alliance as a stepping-stone for higher and better things. As projected by him, it was the first serious attempt to extricate Poland from

her present entanglements, and set her firmly on her feet again in the right path, with courage in her heart and a sword in her hand. The Potocki faction would simply have plunged her back into the hopeless and helpless anarchy from which she was struggling to emerge, by perpetuating aristocratic misrule under a still more stringent Russian guarantee of the ancient Constitution. These men were not consciously traitors perhaps. They have even been called "conscientious traitors." But they were so absolutely incapable of looking beyond the narrow limits of their own caste that they identified the Polish nobility with the Polish nation and were the sworn enemies of every reform and improvement ("innovations" they called them) which threatened, however remotely, their own inordinate prejudices. Hence their determination to keep things exactly as they were. Hence their absurd jealousy and hatred of what they misnamed "sovereignty," or the natural use of his legitimate prerogatives by a constitutional King.

In the course of 1787 the two rival factions had a singular opportunity of laying their petitions and their homage at the feet of the Russian Empress. Early in the year Catherine gave herself up to that magnificent and prolonged picnic of Potentates and Princes whom she took with her from the shores of the Baltic to the shores of the Euxine to admire her recently completed arsenal at Kherson, and marvel at the brand new fleet which Potemkin, in an incredibly short time, had constructed and fully equipped for battle in the harbour of Sebastopol. The greater part of this brilliant triumphal progress was a water *fête*, the imperial state barges, with an attendant flotilla of galleys, starting from Kiev on Dnieper and following the course of that broad river to the southern Ukraine. When, in February, the Empress arrived at Kiev she found Potocki and Co. already awaiting her good pleasure. But the undignified haste with which these Polish magnates had stolen a march upon their King profited them not at all. When they presented themselves before the Empress, Catherine received them very coldly, ridiculed their pretensions, and was, manifestly,

bored by their obsequiousness. She bluntly refused to transact any business with them. For three months these "friends of Russia" danced attendance upon the Russian autocrat. During the whole of that time they were never so much as invited to the Empress's table, and the whole Court ostentatiously turned its back upon them.

Very different was the reception of Stanislaus. It was on February 23, 1787, that the King of Poland set forth on an expedition from which he anticipated the happiest results. He was accompanied by the Russian Ambassador, Count Stackelberg, by that exquisite drawing-room Paladin the Prince de Ligne, and by his own nephew, Prince Joseph Poniatowski, the beloved "Pepi" of his private correspondence. A whole host of Polish celebrities and dignitaries of both sexes swelled the royal retinue. This little trip cost Stanislaus 100,000 gulden, and, if only he had remained firm to his own principles, he need never have regretted a penny of it. It was the worst time of the year for travelling and the roads were villainous, but everything passed off happily enough, and "the most handsome of monarchs" whom his nieces admiringly compared to Henry of Navarre, arrived, safe and sound, at Kaniow where he proposed to wait upon the Empress as she passed down the river on her way to the fortress of Ochakov. Catherine welcomed her elderly but still amiable and elegant ex-lover with charming cordiality. When the Poles came to pay their respects to her she ordered her Russians to make haste and wait upon the King of Poland. The brief intercourse between the two courts was of the most lively and friendly description. Messengers, with gifts and compliments, were passing perpetually from the one to the other. The Empress had politely fixed upon St. Stanislaus's Day for the King's private interview with her. This interview took place on one of the state-galleys. Stanislaus arrived incognito as Count Poniatowski. As he came on board he was received with a salute of honour and a long flourish of trumpets. The visit was ultra-ceremonious and lasted only a few hours. Stanislaus could not prevail upon Catherine to stay till

dark to see the illuminations and fireworks which he had especially prepared for her delectation at a great expense. Before his departure, however, Catherine removed the Order of St. Andrew from her own breast and pinned it on to his. He returned the compliment by sending after her the Order of the White Eagle in brilliants. Business, indeed, the Empress refused to transact. "A barge on a river is no fit place for discussing affairs of State," she laughingly replied to all his diplomatic endeavours, "wait till I am back at St. Petersburg!" But from the suave and smiling Bezborodko, who accompanied Catherine as Secretary of State, Stanislaus received the most satisfactory assurances. And the Empress's servants had been working in the King's interests elsewhere. (At Kiev Prince Potemkin had taken Felix Potocki aside and earnestly represented to him that it would be as well if he buried all his ancient differences with the King of Poland. Potocki, who was not without common sense, took the hint and this very desirable reconciliation between the King and the mightiest of the Polish magnates was cemented at Tulczyn, Potocki's "capital" where, in the autumn of 1787, he welcomed his sovereign with profound respect and entertained him with princely splendour. In return, Stanislaus appointed Felix commander of the Polish Army of Observation on the southern frontier. "Our close alliance with Russia," wrote Stanislaus on this occasion, "is essential to the glory and the preservation of our people.")

On his way back from Kaniow to Warsaw, Stanislaus encountered the Emperor Joseph II., at the little town of Korsun. Joseph, who, full of the Eastern Project, was hastening to join Catherine at Mohilew, warmly assured the King of Poland that neither he nor the Russian Empress had the least desire for any more Polish territory. "We want neither stock nor stone of it," said he. Stanislaus was highly gratified by this assurance. He wrote to one of his nieces, immediately afterwards, that the troubles of the Poles were now over and that a happy time for all of them was at hand. In the joy of his heart he even paid

for five hundred masses to be sung at Cracow for the souls of as many of his defunct kinsfolk as he could call to mind.

Stanislaus returned to his capital radiant and reassured. Nothing definite, indeed, had yet been arranged with Russia ; but, anyhow, he was assured of the benevolence of the Empress and that was, certainly, not a bad foundation to build upon. He also was statesman enough to foresee that Catherine was about to embark on a sea of troubles, and diplomatist enough to calculate that those troubles would be Poland's opportunity. The present situation could only be transitional. Friendly as she had been, Catherine, nevertheless, had, so far, shown little disposition to treat Poland as one ally should treat another. She knew that she was paramount in Poland, and paramount she meant to remain. At present she looked no further than this. Stanislaus had, perhaps, asked too much, but she had certainly given much too little. Stanislaus's political outlook was more than justified by the course of events. Within twelve months of the meeting at Kaniow, things had happened which made "Russia's haughty Dame" more conciliatory and complaisant. The immediate effect of her pleasant triumphal picnic to the Ukraine was to arouse the long-suffering Turk from his apathy, and precipitate a war for which Catherine was totally unprepared although she had done everything to provoke it. Instantly all her numerous enemies were on the alert. It was now that Great Britain took up the *role* of chief Turcophil which France had sustained for more than 300 years. From the first, the British Government had been suspicious of Catherine II. The refusal of the Russian Empress to assist in the subjugation of "His Majesty's misguided subjects in America" had increased the coolness between the two Courts, and when Catherine had begun to apply the principles of the Armed Neutrality of the North to British commerce, public opinion in Great Britain was profoundly irritated against her. Great Britain, moreover, was jealous of Russia's increasing influence in the Mediterranean, which threatened to injure the English Levant trade, so that when the second Turkish

War broke out it was clearly the correct policy of the Court of St. James's to assist the Porte as much as possible by multiplying Catherine's embarrassments. Prussia, especially disturbed by the new Austro-Russian alliance, laboured assiduously, and not very scrupulously, to promote the same object. 1787 was the critical year. While Catherine was perambulating the Ukraine, scattering rubles and epigrams in every direction, Great Britain and Prussia were helping to bring about a Swedo-Turkish alliance. It was hoped that Turkey and Sweden would declare war against Russia simultaneously ; but Gustavus III., who had his own very real grievances against Russia, was prevented, by constitutional trammels, from invading Finland till July 1788, whereas the Turks began hostilities by besieging, ineffectually, the fortress of Kinburn as early as October 1787. The real tug-of-war did not come, however, till 1788, when Joseph II., acting as his own generalissimo, poured his troops into Turkish territory. The upshot showed that the Emperor was no warrior and that the Turks had lost nothing of their ancient valour. The imperial troops suffered bloody defeats and were driven back headlong into Hungary. Joseph owed his life entirely to the fleetness of his charger, and had not Marshal Laudon taken over the supreme command at the last moment the Austrian army must have been annihilated. The Russians were more fortunate. Rumyantsev took the fortress of Chocim by assault ; the Prince of Nassau-Siegen destroyed the Turkish fleet at the mouth of the Dnieper ; and Suvarov put 30,000 Osmanlis to the sword at the storming of Ochakov.

These extraordinary conjunctures set all Poland in a ferment. Those who were not behind the scenes and had no idea of the King's secret understanding with Catherine naturally jumped at the conclusion that now the long expected moment for the Republic to cast off the detested Russian yoke, with the assistance of Prussia, and strike out an independent line of her own had at length arrived. The chief representative of this new school of politicians was Ignatius Potocki, a distant cousin of Felix, but of greater

natural ability and far more enlightened than his kinsman the Red-Russian magnate who, by the way, cordially detested him, while Catherine bluntly dubbed him "a scoundrel." * The Poles, on the other hand, have always considered him one of their most enlightened patriots. Let us see if we can arrive at a true estimate of the character of this chameleon-like politician whose colour invariably changes with the point of view.

Count Ignatius Potocki, Marshal of Lithuania, one of the six sons of Eustathius Potocki, was now in his six and thirtieth year. Originally, he had been educated at Rome for the priesthood ; but, on the death of his father, he flung off his clerical habit (which, certainly, never well became him) and plunged into the more congenial arena of politics. His handsome face, distinguished manners, and illimitable and unshakable self-confidence, instantly brought him to the front. He profoundly impressed the more serious men of his day by his deep and daring political combinations, as well as by the superior and sarcastic eloquence with which he defended his own views and contemptuously thrust aside those of his opponents. In social intercourse Ignatius Potocki was always very calm, very cold, and very condescending. Every word, every gesture, gave those around him distinctly to understand that he regarded himself as immeasurably more important than any of his contemporaries. He used frequently to say that he resembled St. Francis Xavier, "who, like myself, was compelled to preach the Gospel to beasts." Preaching, certainly, was his strong point, but his natural indolence shrank from hard work, and he, very unwillingly, quitted the ethereal regions of abstract speculation for the solid earth of facts and figures. He desired fame and distinction rather than power, and was therefore quite content to be considered (as he generally was) the most original and eminent statesman of the Stanislavan period. The King alone saw through him and appraised him at his real value. The intellect of Ignatius Potocki was a curious blend of

* Principally because he was such a firm friend of Prussia.

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acuteness and perversity. Thus he was convinced, rightly enough, that Poland could never arrive at a settled government by her own unaided efforts, and that an hereditary monarchy was indispensable for her. Yet the only means to this end which he would recognise was an intimate alliance with the King of Prussia. When it was objected that the Polish nobility would never assimilate with Prussian Junkerdom, he would simply smile, shrug his shoulders and remark lightly: "Perhaps not; but, in that case, we must hound on the burgesses against the nobles and liberate the serfs." Like all the members of the House of Potocki, Ignatius regarded the Poniatowscy in general and the King in particular as his natural enemies. Yet it was only after his failure to approach Stanislaus through one of his mistresses that he took up an attitude of irreconcilable antagonism to the Crown and became the oracle of the family clique, largely composed of intriguing, passionate and revengeful women, who, from 1787 to 1790, were the mainstay of the Prussian party in Poland. At the head of this clique stood the feather-brained Princess Isabella Czartoryska, who desired, above all things, to place her son-in-law, the Prince of Wurtemberg, on the Polish throne. The Vice-Hetman Rzewuski, who hated the King for private reasons, was the Princess's most humble servant, and she was also energetically supported by that ambitious virago the Princess-Marshal Lubomirska, who brought into the party her numerous daughters and their husbands of whom Ignatius Potocki was one. We shall see, in the sequel, what irreparable damage all these superior people did to their country. And the tragedy of it was that they only recognised when it was too late that, with the best intentions, they had taken the wrong road, the road that led to ruin, and that the unfortunate King, whom they would never listen to, had been in the right after all.

Hitherto the Prussian Government had not considered it necessary or desirable to maintain a party of its own in Poland. Such a step would have been regarded at St. Petersburg as an offensive trespass upon Russia's preserves

and the Court of Berlin knew better than to provoke the Russian Empress wantonly. Hence the Prussian envoys to Poland had been second-rate, poorly-paid *chargés d'affaires*, the mere jackals of the splendid and imposing Russian ambassadors. > Benoit, Frederick the Great's envoy, had starved on a salary of £25 a year; gone about in a threadbare grey suit with a steel sword; lodged at a cheap suburban inn; and paid official visits in a hackney-coach. His successor Buchholtz cut an equally insignificant figure. He was never supplied with money sufficient to acquire any really valuable information, and his despatches, composed mostly of scandal and gossip, were absolutely misleading. Poland, in fact, was looked upon as outside the Prussian sphere of influence altogether. < But, on the death of Frederick the Great, the policy of Prussia underwent a complete change. Ewald Friedrich Hertzberg, who now controlled the Prussian Foreign Office, based his "system" on a complicated scheme of international exchanges mainly at the expense of Poland. > Briefly formulated, Poland was to surrender Dantzic and Thorn to Prussia and receive back Galicia from Austria, who, in her turn, was to be compensated at the expense of Turkey, by the restoration of the Passarowicz frontier,* while Prussia and Austria were to assist the Porte to get the best terms procurable from Russia. This meant that Prussia, while studiously preserving an apparent friendliness with all her neighbours, was really trying to suck the utmost advantage out of their troubles without the least scruple. In a word, the "system" of Hertzberg only differed from the "system" of Frederick the Great as petty larceny differs from highway robbery.

The key to Hertzberg's false and crooked diplomacy is to be sought in Prussia's mortal fear and jealousy of Russia—an inheritance from the Frederician days. The prospect of Russia dominating Europe was a perpetual nightmare to Frederick William II. and his ministers, and both the Austro-Russian Alliance and the approximation of Poland towards Russia filled them with the utmost consternation.

* Which would have given her northern Servia and western Wallachia.

The prevention of the latter contingency in particular was held to justify any and every expedient, and when rumours began to reach Berlin of an actual secret treaty signed, or about to be signed, between Russia and Poland, the Prussian Court determined to oppose, with all its might, the Russian influence in Poland. The first step, obviously, was to establish a Prussian party in Poland itself and, with this object in view, Frederick William II., in October 1788, despatched as his accredited minister to Warsaw as keen a diplomatist as it had ever been the good fortune of the Prussian monarchy to possess.

Geronimo, Marquess de Lucchesini, was one of those numerous Italian adventurers who haunted the Courts of Europe during the eighteenth century. Frederick the Great, with characteristic brutality, reminded him of the fact that he was an adventurer when, as a mere youth, he had first presented himself at Potsdam. "How often, sir, will the Marquesses of Italy be base enough to sell themselves to the Monarchs of Germany?" were the words with which Frederick opened the interview. "So long, your Majesty, as the Monarchs of Germany are fools enough to buy them," was the instantaneous repartee. Frederick smiled as he tapped the golden *tabatière* which the Polish Chancellor, Garowski, used to compare to Pandora's box, and Lucchesini was appointed the King's lector on the spot. In this confidential post his ears were even busier than his lips. Nothing escaped this keen-witted observer, who combined Italian subtlety with French *esprit*, and, while diligently learning the business of a diplomatist in the most advanced of all schools, he completely won the favour of his master, who recommended him warmly to his successor. Over Friedrich William II. Lucchesini, for many years, exercised a paramount influence, which gave the Polish wits occasion to observe that he had the command of "*le plus gros corps de l'armée*," it being notorious that the King of Prussia if not the greatest was certainly the biggest soldier in his own forces. Lucchesini's own personal appearance was scarcely prepossessing. He was meagre, dark and puny, and had

had the misfortune to lose an eye while engaged in a chemical experiment. Yet, despite these serious external disadvantages, the Marquess was one of the most fascinating of men. His manners were soft and insinuating, and he possessed the rare faculty of seeming to open his heart unreservedly to every one with whom he conversed. The impressionable Poles instantly took him for what he pretended to be and rewarded his hypocritical candour with the fullest confidence. The Princess Isabella Czartoryska, in particular, always fancied that Lucchesini was her slave, when, as a matter of fact, she and her associates were but the political tools of the dangerous little fellow who had the heartiest contempt for them all. >

CHAPTER IX

THE FRIENDSHIP OF PRUSSIA

Opening of the Quadrennial Diet—Its marshal, Stanislaus Malachowski—Character of the Diet—Negotiations with Russia—Political divisions of the Diet—Rejection of the Russian alliance—Arrival of Lucchesini—Polish hatred of Russia—The Diet attacks the Constitution guaranteed by Russia—Polish army raised to 100,000 men—Degradation of the King—Efforts of Lucchesini to bring about a rupture between Poland and Russia—Prussia demands the withdrawal of the Russian troops from Poland—Impotence of the Russian Ambassador Stackelberg—The "Patriots" and the "Parasites"—Prussia instigates Poland to abolish all the Russian guarantees—Affected indifference of Catherine—The policy of pin-pricks—Russia's sudden respect for Polish territory—The new Polish Constitution—Proposed cession of Dantzic and Thorn—Conclusion of a Prusso-Polish alliance—Views of England on the Polish question—Negotiations of Mr. Hayles with the Polish Government—Unwisdom of Poland in rejecting the Dantzic project—Pitt's opinion of it—Would Prussia have remained loyal if Dantzic had been ceded to her?

It was on October 6, 1788, that the famous *Sejm Czteroletni*, or Quadrennial Diet, which was to decide the fate of Poland, assembled at Warsaw. The elections had been favourable to the King. Broadly speaking, all the well-to-do gentry, except in the north-eastern provinces, where the influence of the reactionary magnates was paramount, had declared themselves in favour of a constitutional reform which should strengthen the Executive and do away with the worst of the old abuses. In order that the proceedings of the Diet might be more untrammelled, it was converted into a Confederation, an arrangement which enabled it to decide everything by a majority of votes. The Marshal, or President, of all such confederated Diets possessed, *ex officio*, immense powers, including, virtually,

the chief executive functions and the initiative in all the negotiations with foreign Powers. It was therefore of vital importance that so large an authority should not be placed in the hands of another scoundrel or traitor like Poninski of evil memory who had held the office during the confederated Diet of 1772, and universal was the approbation when the King placed the presidential *bâton* in the hands of Stanislaus Malachowski, the deputy for Sandomeria.)

In many respects the choice was an excellent one. The new Marshal belonged to a very ancient and wealthy aristocratic family, but it had ever been the tradition of his House to hold rather with the squires than with the magnates, and this policy, unflinchingly pursued, had made the Malachowsky the most popular noblemen in the land. Their patriotism, untainted by the usual prejudices of the Polish patricians, was pure and disinterested, and they were always ready to sacrifice their privileges for the Commonweal. Stanislaus Malachowski set a noble example to his peers, a few years later, by emancipating his serfs at a considerable personal loss. As a magistrate his conduct had ever been blameless. Indeed so just and honourable was he in all his dealings that he was generally known as "the Polish Aristides." Intellectually, Malachowski could not, perhaps, be described as highly gifted. He was neither a good speaker nor a good penman. He shared the general ignorance of his countrymen about foreign affairs. He lacked experience as an administrator. He was no diplomatist. On the other hand, his judgment in ordinary matters was sound ; his acquirements were solid, especially in the domain of economics ; and he was, admittedly, an authority on Polish constitutional law.) His fairness and equity would have made him a model president of an ordinary legislature in quiet times. Unfortunately, he was called upon to preside over a Diet, the like of which Poland had never seen before, at a period of acute crisis, when firmness of character was a more valuable quality than any combination of all the virtues. It soon, however, became painfully evident that Malachowski had no control

over the tempestuous assembly he was supposed to direct. <His very anxiety to do his duty and avoid the least semblance of partiality made him unduly tolerant of obstruction and indisposed to rebuke excesses in debate of which he secretly disapproved. Or, as the English minister at Warsaw, Mr. Hayles, epigrammatically put it: "this good and virtuous old man feared nothing so much as to be thought to be afraid." Thus he let the deputies and even the spectators in the galleries do very much as they liked, and "they barked at him and badgered him," and interrupted him, and took no notice of his rulings, till he was very often inclined to quit the presidential chair altogether and leave them to their own devices>

The Diet over which Malachowski had to preside differed materially from all the preceding Diets of Poland. Elected beneath the stress of unusual circumstances, animated by the desire of carrying out political reforms in accordance with the spirit of the age, a generous enthusiasm was its leading feature. The benches of the Deputies were filled, for the most part, by young and energetic men educated in a new school, stimulated by new principles, penetrated by a burning patriotism which professed itself ready to do all things and suffer all things for a beloved country. <As to the sincerity and goodwill of the majority of these young Deputies there cannot be the slightest doubt. If enthusiasm alone could have saved Poland, at that moment Poland would, undoubtedly, have been saved. But enthusiasm without experience to teach and sagacity to guide it is a very dangerous quality. Poland ultimately fell not because she was wanting in heroism, but because she lacked the very rudiments of prudence and self-discipline, and she lacked these essentials of all good government because during the last two hundred years of her existence she had taken her stand, simply and solely, upon individual liberty, that is to say, a liberty which refused to recognise any external authority and shut its eyes and ears against all the warnings and teachings of history. Hence the phenomenal simplicity of the Polish Diet of 1788-1791. Perhaps

there never was a legislative assembly so profoundly ignorant of its own duties and obligations, so easily imposed upon by native demagogues and foreign intriguers, so absolutely uninstructed as to what was actually going on around it, so incompetent to repair a crazy Constitution, let alone construct a brand new one. I am well aware that this is not the generally accepted opinion of the character of "The Great Diet," as the last Polish Parliament has so strangely been misnamed; but the ensuing record of its sayings and doings (necessarily a brief one as this book is not so much a history of Poland as a biography of King Stanislaus) will, I hope, acquit me both of injustice and exaggeration.

True to his principles that an alliance with Russia was, in the circumstances, the best thing for Poland, the King privately communicated to Malachowski, immediately after his nomination as Marshal, the secret negotiations which had been proceeding with Catherine II. Malachowski agreed that an alliance with Russia would be most serviceable; but, before giving it his absolute adhesion, he stipulated that the Republic should first be released from the Russian guarantee of the ancient constitution, the very mention of which was a vexation and a humiliation to all true patriots. To this the King assented, and it was, no doubt, in consequence of this assent that when the long-delayed treaty of alliance, drafted by Bezborodko, reached him at last from St. Petersburg, he rejected it because its conditions seemed to him to be too onerous and tending to make Poland a mere mercenary of the Russian Empress. But, in spite of all this, Stanislaus persuaded Malachowski to agree that nothing should be done by the Diet to irritate Russia needlessly. "Prussia," he said to the Marshal of the Diet, "is to be feared most of all just now because we are so weak, and we can only become strong with the help of Russia." Malachowski at once acquiesced.

At the opening of the Diet we find three separate factions confronting each other. Of these the King's party, which originally included more than half of the Deputies, was the largest. The most ardent and energetic of the would-be

reformers were grouped, however, around Ignatius Potocki and Prince Adam Casimir Czartoryski. Equally opposed to the Party of Reform and the Royal Party was the faction of the ultra-conservative magnates under Xavier Branicki and Severin Rzewuski. But the richest magnate of them all, Felix Potocki, now reconciled with the King, warmly supported his Russophil policy. As the commander of the Polish troops on the Turkish frontier (the only regular army the Republic had), Felix was now in a position of great authority and responsibility. He was also once more in favour with the Russian court. The Empress had recently sent him a sword and epaulets covered with brilliants.)

The Marshal of the Diet had no sooner delivered his opening address to the House (October 13, 1788) than the Prussian minister, Buchholtz, presented a declaration to the Diet protesting against any Russo-Polish alliance as inexpedient for Poland as well as offensive to the Court of Berlin. He offered, at the same time, the alternative of an alliance between Poland and Prussia. The Prussian declaration produced a profound impression. It was the first time that one of the great Powers (and that too a participator in the First Partition) had come forward so decidedly against Russia. And the tone of the Prussian note was even more remarkable than its tenour. Its polite and respectful language was utterly unlike the diplomatic insults which the great Frederick had been wont to hurl at the head of the Polish Republic. The Diet was highly flattered at being addressed as an independent Power by the greatest military monarchy in Europe. The King, however, only too well aware of the real designs of Prussia, persuaded Malachowski to leave the reply to the Prussian declarations to him, and the result was that the Prussian offer of alliance was rejected in a note of equal dignity and courtesy.

It was immediately after this episode that the little one-eyed Italian Marquess appeared upon the scene. He found the Polish patriots very sanguine and elated. The open

championship of Prussia had given the necessary impetus to the long-accumulating but hitherto silent and inert hatred of Russia, and, once set in motion, it was plain that its irresistible weight must carry everything before it. This hatred of Russia was very natural. From the beginning of the reign of Stanislaus, the Poles had suffered unforgettable, unutterable things from the tyranny and the brutality of the Russian Satraps who dictated the orders of the Russian Empress in the Polish capital. Repnin, Saldern, and Stackelberg had treated the Polish nation like the dirt beneath their feet. The Russian armies quartered in Poland had freely exploited the country and treated it as if it belonged to them. The men and women of all classes in Poland who had seen and felt these outrages, day by day, for five and twenty years had every right to regard the Russians as their deadliest enemies. On the other hand, the views of these justly aggrieved Polish men and women were very limited. They knew nothing of politics. They were not behind the scenes. They were, of course, totally unaware of the really benevolent views of Catherine towards them in the abstract; bitter injuries and insults in the concrete were all that came within *their* ken. Quite as naturally, their hatred of Russia extended to everything which had come to them from and through Russia, even when it had turned out to be a blessing in disguise. The Constitution of 1775, which existed under the Empress's guarantee, was a case in point. It had restricted the Republic within a very moderate political programme, yet there can be no doubt that it made for order, economy and stability. But, whatever its merits, it was, after all, the invention of the enemy, and, therefore, abominable to the Polish patriots. To them it was simply a badge of servitude. To obliterate it, as speedily as possible, was their one desire. But now, suddenly, they encountered an unexpected obstacle in the King. Stanislaus was, perhaps, the only man in Poland who grasped firmly the full significance of what the patriots were about to do. He alone was in a position to survey the situation, in all

its bearings, from a wide and lofty outlook. A large portion of his Civil List was regularly expended in secret-service money and he was kept very well informed of what was going on at the neighbouring courts. He justly divined that to destroy the existing Constitution was tantamount to declaring war against Russia which had solemnly guaranteed it. He was perfectly well aware that the Patriots had nothing to put in the place of what they were so eager to destroy. If any one had the right to counsel the Polish nation it was he. Yet the instant he opened his mouth to protest against the suicidal policy of the Patriots, he lost all his popularity, was branded as a Russophil and a traitor, and deprived of all power to do the slightest good. For the next three years, reduced to the condition of an automaton, he was constrained to sit through the interminable debates of the hallucinated Diet, now and then putting in a warning word but, for the most part, helplessly looking on while the Patriots floundered along after their new guide, the agile and sparkling Lucchesini, who, like some treacherous *ignis fatuus*, was to lead them far away from the solid ground of useful alliances and constitutional liberty, into the unfathomable morasses of isolation and confusion.

The Patriots opened their campaign against the Government by attacking the War Department of the guaranteed Constitution. This institution had, to a great extent, been under the control of the King, who had spared no pains to make the little Polish army a thoroughly efficient force. Though no soldier himself, he knew a good soldier when he saw him and in Komarzewski who, in 1774, had quitted the Prussian service with the rank of Lieutenant-General, Stanislaus had found the best military coadjutor he could lay his hands upon. During the next twelve years, the King and the General between them had converted what had been the merest scarecrow of an army with more officers than soldiers, and destitute of everything normally appertaining to a regular army, into a well-armed, well-disciplined fighting force of over 10,000 infantry and 8000 cavalry,

while an admirable system of recruiting had been introduced with the object of gradually accustoming the whole male population of Poland to military service. Only the want of money and the necessity of proceeding with the utmost caution, so as not to offend the susceptibilities of the neighbouring Powers, had confined this great and salutary reform within relatively modest limits. The simple cause of this "miracle" was that, for once, the Polish army had been placed under the control of a really responsible War Department administered by a really capable man. (Unfortunately, the War Department was tainted by the Russian guarantee while the capable man was a favourite of the King's. This was quite sufficient to make both the Department and the man obnoxious to the Patriots. Komarzewski was accordingly dismissed and the army was removed from the control of the War Department and placed beneath the immediate jurisdiction of the Diet. Vainly did the King protest against such an unnecessary and mischievous dislocation. He was defeated by seven votes in a house of 249 members.)

(Having got the army under their immediate control, the Patriots now proposed that it should be raised from the nominal figure of 30,000 to 100,000 men.) The motion was acclaimed not only by the House, but also by the audience in the galleries, the so-called "arbiters," who well deserved the name, for they had almost as much influence on the deliberations of the Diet as the deputies themselves. The ladies were especially fervent and clapped their hands and waved their handkerchiefs as if they were in a theatre. Prince Adam Casimir Czartoryski thereupon rose to his feet, and turning to the King exclaimed: "Your Majesty can read in our eyes the general willingness of every citizen to give up his possessions in order to strengthen the fatherland." Then, gallantly bowing to the ladies in the galleries, he added: "Even that sex which is the most beautiful ornament of nature and whose eyes can inflame us to heroic deeds, even that sex shares the general joy and I may say inspires it." The motion was then carried amidst a perfect tempest of

applause which drowned the voice of the Marshal as he submitted it to the House. Then Stanislaus, in a voice trembling with emotion, expressed his gratitude to the Deputies.—“I could not very well do anything else,” he wrote the same evening to his friend Deboli, the Polish minister at St. Petersburg.

◁The next important thing the Diet did (Nov. 5) was to declare its session permanent. This was another forward step in the direction of independence, but it was also another large breach of the Russian guarantee.▷

Abroad, the motion for raising the army to 100,000 men produced a very unfavourable impression and tended more than anything else to discredit the Republic in the eyes of all responsible statesmen. To begin with, the scheme was impracticable. An army of 100,000 was equivalent to a tenth part of the male population of Poland. ◁The adequate maintenance of such a force would, at the lowest estimate, have been 40,000,000 Polish gulden or more than double the total revenue of Poland at that time.▷ Well might Mr. Hayles, the British minister at Warsaw, express his amazement at the levity which could pass such a resolution, without first stopping to count the cost of it.

Meanwhile the Diet was vigorously prosecuting the anti-Russian campaign by pulling the rest of the guaranteed Constitution to pieces. ◁The Permanent Committee, or Governing Board, was now the chief object of attack. The most remarkable session of the ten days' debate (October 30 to November 10) was that of November 3-4, which lasted sixteen hours, during which the King never quitted the throne. The Permanent Committee which had rendered such inestimable services to Poland was assailed as fiercely as if it was the Spanish Inquisition, or the Secret Council of Venice, while Stanislaus was seriously compared to Ivan the Terrible and the Emperor Tiberius. At last, at four o'clock in the morning of November 4, after eighty orations had been delivered, the House divided, and by 149 votes to 114, the War Department, the most important section of the Permanent Committee, was

abolished. There was as much joy in Warsaw at the result of this debate as if the Poles had won a signal victory over the Russian army.

For the first time in their history, the representatives of the Polish nation had resisted the pressure of Russia and deliberately gone their own way. Whether it was the right way or not they never troubled to inquire. It was a victory certainly, but a victory won by the ignorant, anarchical elements of the nation over practical statesmen who, anyhow, stood for decent and orderly government. All the loudly-cheered arguments of the Patriots were of the most flimsy and fantastic description. They were fighting against bugbears and phantoms which only existed in their own imagination. They were fighting the phantom of a royal army supposed to be hostile to liberties which were never for a moment endangered. They were fighting the phantom of a Russophil Executive the members of which had been freely elected by the Diet itself and deserved right well of their country. They were fighting the phantom of a despotic monarch who so far from being able to injure others was incapable of defending himself. When argument failed them they had recourse to abuse. It is impossible to justify their disgraceful treatment of the King on the plea, reiterated *ad nauseam*, that he was the slave of Catherine. It was from no abstract love of Russia, but because of the lawlessness and impotence of his own subjects that Stanislaus was forced to look to Russia for support. To lean upon Russia was the best conceivable policy in the peculiar circumstances. That the King was often weak, that he yielded, too much and too frequently, to the arguments of the Russian Ambassador, regardless alike of his royal and his personal dignity, that he allowed himself to be unduly influenced by the women of his own family, his sister Pani Krakowska and his nieces for instance, nobody can or will venture to deny. But just because of his well-known infirmity of purpose his subjects, surely, were bound, alike in honour and duty, to support their always well-meaning Sovereign. To have done so would, certainly,

have been to their own advantage. For we should never forget that Stanislaus possessed many useful and brilliant qualities which, had they been allowed free play, might have more than neutralised his defects. But instead of upholding the feeble arms for the sake of the far-seeing and resourceful head, the Poles, at the most critical period of their history, deliberately thrust aside and kept aloof from affairs a monarch whose superior insight and sagacity were natural assets of no inconsiderable value. They even mulcted him of his covenanted prerogatives and heaped all manner of indignities upon him. The King was by the very nature of his office not merely the servant of the State but the defender of the Realm. To deprive him of the command of the army was, therefore, to use the apt phrase of a contemporary, "to degrade him to the level of a stalled ox."

But for the insidious promptings of Lucchesini it is doubtful, however, whether the Polish Patriots would have dared to go so far as to abolish an institution actually guaranteed by the Russian Empress. But even this was not enough for the enterprising marquess. He would have made the Poles go a step further still. He would have driven them, there and then, to an actual breach with Russia by demanding the withdrawal of the Russian troops from Poland and full compensation for all the damage they had done during the occupation. As early as October 29, 1788, he wrote to Hertzberg as follows: "I have in readiness here some agitators who await but a word from me to rush off to the border provinces and create confusion by attacking the Russian troops there. All they want is an assurance that Prussia will assist them." Immediately afterwards General Usedom received orders from Berlin to move his division close up to the Polish frontier in order to be ready to enter Poland, on the first signal from Warsaw. Prussia hoped to be able to fish a Polish province or two out of the political waters she was bent upon troubling.

On November 25, Lucchesini and his colleague Buchholtz waited upon the Russian ambassador Count Stackelberg

and, in the name of the King of Prussia, demanded the immediate withdrawal of the Russian troops from Poland. To this demand Stackelberg made no definite reply; but the same day he sent a note to the Marshal of the Diet plainly warning him that any alteration of the Polish Constitution of 1775 would be regarded by its chief guarantor, the Russian Empress, as an act of hostility on the part of Poland. This note was read in the Diet on November 26, whereupon the King, in a loud voice, warned the House against placing any confidence in Prussia especially as Poland had no adequate army of her own to rely upon. Then, for the last time, he defended his Russian policy. "There is no nation in the world, I say it advisedly, whose interests conflict less with ours than do Russia's. I am convinced that if I were to furnish the Empress with proofs of our good dispositions towards her, she would not oppose our internal reforms, whereas if we repulse her overtures we shall only bar the door against her benevolence. I will not tell my people what, no doubt, they would like to hear, but I will tell them what I think is best for them." Immediately after this manly speech, and amidst indescribable uproar, the King adjourned the House for four days to give the deputies time for reflection.

Unhappily, things had by this time come to such a pass that any one who dared to have an opinion contrary to the opinion of the Patriots was branded by them as an enemy of his country. This hatred of Russia was natural enough, but it was, none the less, irrational. The Patriots overlooked the fact that at the partition Russia had been content with a relatively small portion of the spoil on the express understanding that she might establish an exclusive protectorate over the rest of Poland. Insulting and humiliating as this protectorate may have been to the *protégé*, it was, at any rate, an improvement upon what had gone before, postulating, as it did, a better administration and even a larger regular army for Poland. In a word, the Russian protectorate was, in the circumstances, the best provisional government for Poland and, by the exercise

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of a little patience, diligence and common sense on the part of the Poles themselves, might, ultimately, have been shaken off altogether. < Russia, be it remembered, had no annexation projects at this time so far as Poland was concerned and offered her far more liberal commercial advantages than either Prussia or Austria. Indeed it may be boldly affirmed that a quarter of a century would have sufficed to make Poland strong and independent if her leading statesmen had only been content to act cordially together and do their duty diligently each in his own office and station. "Keep quiet and await the death of Catherine II. before attempting any revolutionary reforms!"—was the counsel of the wiser heads and no counsel could well have been sounder. On the other hand, a mere glance at the map should have convinced the Patriots that the friendship of Prussia was, at best, a prohibitively expensive article. The north-east Polish provinces, including the cities of Dantzic and Thorn, penetrated like a wedge almost up to the Prussian capital. Prussia could never hope to have a firm footing either in West Prussia or Silesia till she was actually in possession of the long coveted north-eastern Polish palatinates. These salient facts the Polish patriots absolutely ignored, but Catherine never lost sight of them and she was by no means disposed to allow Prussia to plunder Poland so long as Poland remained on friendly terms and in close alliance with herself. Prussia's one chance, therefore, of obtaining the coveted territory was to bring about a rupture between Russia and Poland and to this end all the efforts of her ministers were directed >

And, unfortunately, it was by no means a difficult task. As already suggested, Poland had long and bitter scores to settle with her tormentors as represented by the Russian ambassador at Warsaw and it must have been a delightful sensation, after so many years of acute suffering, to be able to insult the tyrant Stackelberg with perfect impunity, beneath the ægis of the sympathetic Prussian Court. But Stackelberg himself was no longer the tremendous personage he had once been. It was generally known

that his position at his own Court was somewhat precarious. Latterly the Empress had not been very well pleased with her Ambassador's conduct of her affairs in Poland. Stanislaus had had cause to complain to Catherine of the outrageous insolence of Stackelberg, and Catherine had sharply reminded Stackelberg that in dealing with Stanislaus he was dealing not with an equal but with a Sovereign. When, in the course of 1787, Stackelberg had waited upon the Empress at Kiev, she had made no secret of her displeasure. She remarked audibly to those about her that the ambassador had aged visibly since last she had seen him ; that, evidently, he ate too much ; and that his jokes had lost their former piquancy and flavour. We can quite understand that after this trying experience the digestion of the poor old epicure suffered materially and his health visibly deteriorated. At Warsaw a great retribution awaited the discomfited bully. Pasquils were fastened to his door. People looked him up and down or turned their backs upon him at public assemblies. On one occasion when he visited the theatre he found his usual seat occupied by a Polish squire who refused to surrender it. Unfortunately, the Poles forgot that in insulting the Ambassador they were insulting the Empress's representative. Catherine had a long memory for injuries, real or imaginary, and not one of these slights were forgotten by her.* Politically Stackelberg was now quite unimportant. All his efforts had failed to save the War Department and he helplessly looked on while the remainder of the old guaranteed Constitution toppled about his ears.

Yet it is a question whether the position of the Russian Ambassador was quite as wretched as that of the Polish King. Stackelberg could, at least, demand his recall and so get out of this public pillory ; but the King was fast bound in misery and iron and all sorts of indignities were heaped upon him by the Patriots. For instance, it had

* *E.g.*, the estates of the gentleman who appropriated Stackelberg's seat at the theatre were the first to be devastated when the Russian troops invaded Poland in 1793.

been the practice at every Diet, during the last twenty years, for the poorer deputies to sit down day by day with the King at the table of the Court Marshal and some fifty covers were generally provided for them on these occasions. At the Diet of 1788-92, however, the majority of the Polish gentlemen considered it "unpatriotic" to dine with their own Sovereign. They preferred to accept the hospitality of the leaders of the Opposition Prince Karol Radziwill and Prince Adam Casimir Czartoryski. Nearly every day there were free fights in the streets, or at the entrance of the Diet, between the lacqueys and the coachmen of the "Patriots" and the "Parasites"—the latter being the generally adopted nickname of the Russophils. In the Diet itself the Royalists were interrupted and howled down repeatedly, and the Marshal rarely had the courage to intervene and protect them. In these circumstances it is scarcely wonderful if the numbers of the Royalists diminished day by day till they were reduced to a mere handful. The Polish ladies were especially bitter against them. It had long been the fashion for these *grandes dames* to interfere in affairs of State. Already their conduct in this respect anticipated the axiom of the great Napoleon twenty years later, that in Warsaw the men signified nothing and the women everything. The Princess Isabella Czartoryska who took the lead in this policy of agitation was indefatigable in inflaming the patriotic hotspurs more and more against Russia and the King. She used to applaud and cry, "bravissimo!" when the most offensive epithets were hurled at Catherine in the House, and Malachowski was afraid to call to order the first lady in the land. The orators who distinguished themselves on these occasions were afterwards invited to supper at the Blue Palace and crowned with wreaths by bevvies of beautiful young damsels. The Princess also took a lively part in the intrigues of Lucchesini, with whom she was in constant communication. On her birthday the Ambassador presented her with an exquisite filigræ cap adorned with a portrait of the King of Prussia which she wore ostentatiously for the rest of the evening.

Nevertheless, at the last moment, the King succeeded in persuading Malachowski and the more moderate members of the Opposition to restrain their followers from precipitating a rupture with Russia and it was resolved that an appeal should be made to the Empress direct for leave to modify in a liberal sense, the Constitution she had guaranteed. It was a sound political instinct which induced the King to make this supreme effort, and its immediate effect was to compel the Prussian Government to show its hand openly for the first time. Hitherto, Frederick William II. had sedulously avoided pledging himself definitely to Poland. To embroil her with Russia and spoliage her in the process had been his sole object. But now, vehemently urged by Lucchesini publicly to support the Patriots against Russia unless he would lose Poland altogether, he despatched to his representative at Warsaw a declaration to the effect that he would consent to the abolition of the Russian guarantees and was even prepared to secure the Patriots in the possession of their liberties. This declaration was read in the Polish Diet on November 20, 1788, and received with acclamation. From that moment the King knew that he had lost the game. Against such an unexpected trump-card as that nothing could stand. There was henceforth no more talk of negotiating with Russia. Why, it was plausibly urged, should Poland go on bargaining for some slight modification of the guaranteed constitution with one of the guarantors far away when another of the guarantors, close at hand, had recognised her right to abolish it altogether? Was it wonderful that the magnanimity of the King of Prussia should have filled the House with a transport of enthusiastic gratitude? Henceforth the supremacy of Prussia in the Polish Diet was an established fact. Henceforth Lucchesini had only to manipulate the patriotic majority to his heart's content. As a contemporary well put it: the Diet had become a big organ with Lucchesini for the organist. Henceforth the King was reduced to the passive *role* of a spectator or, at best, to that of an outsider who was, very occasionally, permitted

to tender his expert advice to a perplexed and distracted Legislature.)

On December 23, 1788, the House adjourned till January 7, 1789. On reassembling it vigorously resumed its anti-Russian campaign by proposing the total abolition of the Permanent Committee and the substitution therefor of six Departments of State (War, Foreign Affairs, Finance, Education, Police, and Justice) under the immediate jurisdiction of the Diet and acting independently of the King and of each other. This was a practical application of Ignatius Potocki's pet theory of "a division of powers." Its obvious and immediate consequence could scarcely fail to be a dissipation of all authority just when a strong centralised government was indispensable. The debates began on January 9, 1789. Stanislaus once more solemnly warned the House that the proposed abolition of the Permanent Committee would be a direct violation of treaties that were still binding. "Is it right or sensible," he concluded, "to take such a step when we know we are not strong enough to abide by its consequences? We are exposing ourselves thereby to the utmost danger." The King and the Primate sustained, single-handed, all the attacks of the Opposition. Most of the Senators, though convinced of the utility of the Committee and in favour of its retention, kept silence. The division took place on the 20th when 120 deputies voted for and 11 only against the abolition. There were 62 abstentions. Utterly exhausted by his efforts, Stanislaus finally acquiesced in the fatal verdict. "Whatever happens I will never be separated from my people," was his excuse—or explanation. The Primate alone persisted in his opposition and was one of the minority of eleven.)

And what did Russia say to this ostentatious throwing down of the gauntlet? The King was somewhat relieved on this head by a private assurance from Deboli, his minister at St. Petersburg, that, according to the Russian Vice-Chancellor, Osterman, the Empress did not mean to gratify the King of Prussia "by losing her temper over this little

affair." <At first, indeed, Catherine was profoundly irritated. Only by a very great effort of self-control did she consent to preserve a passive attitude> The real cause of her almost uncanny calmness on this occasion is to be found in the correspondence of the Austrian Chancellor, Prince Kaunitz, with the Austrian minister at St. Petersburg, Count Cobenzl. Kaunitz described the Polish patriots as big children who were "to be taught sense but not provoked." To provoke them, he argued, would only throw them into the arms of Prussia when they might become dangerous. Catherine acquiesced. The Poles might choose whatever Constitution they liked, she said. She was content, for the present, to let Austria (just then about to secede from the Turkish War) deal with Prussia while she herself pursued her victorious course along the Danube. <But this philosophical affectation of indifference was a mere blind. Bezborodko, with his usual acumen, had pronounced a Prusso-Polish alliance equally dangerous to Russia in peace or war and opined that another partition was now the only means of preserving the political equilibrium. The Empress perfectly agreed with the dictum of the shrewdest of her counsellors, but her hands being full for the moment she dissembled her wrath and postponed her vengeance. But it had now been resolved at Tsarkoe Selo to destroy Poland, even with the assistance of Prussia, rather than forfeit the dominant influence of Russia over the Republic.>

In Poland, unfortunately, the patience of Russia was attributed to indifference or embarrassment. Lucchesini industriously encouraged the false idea and unceasingly spurred on the Patriots to fresh acts of hostility against Russia. <On January 23, 1789, the Polish Diet commanded the Russian Commander-in-Chief Rumyantsev to withdraw the Russian troops, immediately, from the territories of the Republic despite the fact that diplomatic negotiations on this very subject were actually proceeding between the two Courts. On February 16 the Diet received an unusually courteous note from the Russian Cabinet

treating the Republic as an independent, friendly and allied Power. In this note the assembled Estates were respectfully requested to consent to a postponement of the evacuation of Poland by the Russian troops inasmuch as a hasty withdrawal of the same would interfere seriously with Russia's operations against the Turks. Any insistence upon such an evacuation, would, it was added, be considered a distinctly unfriendly act. Many of the deputies would have ignored this note and persisted in the original demand. Fortunately for them, it suited the policy of Prussia just then to be watchful and cautious as regards Russia, so Lucchesini received instructions to restrain the impetuosity of the Patriots within due limits (March 1789), which he did effectually enough. On April 16 another Russian note reached the Diet asking permission for a Russian division to march through Polish territory to the seat of war in terms so conciliatory that if only all the previous Russian notes had been of the same character there need never have been any unfriendliness between the two countries. This second note was duly communicated by the Diet to the Prussian Court for instructions. Frederick William II. thereupon advised the Diet to permit the passage of the Russian troops through Poland, but only in companies of five hundred men at a time marching separately and at long intervals. Catherine, so long accustomed to regard Poland as a Russian province, was furious at these conditions. Osterman warned Deboli, the Polish minister at St. Petersburg, that the Poles had better beware of bursting a string already strained to breaking-point. "So long as we are waging war with Turkey," he added, "our troops must pass through your borders. To prevent them from doing so would be tantamount to making the war impossible. If you break with us you may be quite sure that a second edition of the Partition of Poland will shortly be published."

In April the Russians began to send their magazines out of Poland, whereupon the Poles levied tolls upon them as they crossed the frontier, an unheard-of proceeding as

military magazines had always been treated as imperial property and for that very reason were held to be toll-free. The situation now became very critical. But it was again saved by Prince Kaunitz who sent to St. Petersburg an intercepted letter from Hertzberg to the Prussian minister at the Porte urging the Turks to hold out as the King of Prussia hoped, in the course of July, to make Poland's complaints of the Russian troops a pretext for declaring war against Russia himself. Catherine took the hint and immediately ordered the Russian army to skirt the Polish border instead of crossing it, though the long detour through the deserts of Bessarabia was a tiresome and costly operation. Thus the treacherous design of the King of Prussia to embroil Poland with Russia was thwarted for the second time.

The Empress's declaration of her intention not to violate Polish territory was accompanied by a still more astounding document from her chief Satrap, Prince Potemkin, apologising for the damage done in Poland by the Russian troops. At the same time, in his capacity of a Polish magnate,* he expressed his sympathy with the Republic and begged it to accept from him a gift of twelve cannons and five hundred carbines. This extraordinary letter was actually written in Polish and in it he blamed the Poles gently, almost tenderly, for having previously addressed *him*, a Polish citizen, in *French*.

After this, common sense and common civility alike dictated the adoption of at least a conciliatory attitude towards Russia on the part of the Poles. Unfortunately, under the changed conditions, a policy of pin-pricks proved irresistible to them. In the course of the summer, the Castellan Szweykowski was sent to the Ukraine to assist the Russian commandants to remove their magazines and provender waggons. In August he reported that all the Russian troops had evacuated the territory of the Republic; that the Russians had paid for everything in cash; and that Potemkin had, at the same time, contracted

* He had obtained his *indigenat*, or patent of nobility, some time before.

for the delivery in Moldavia of a further considerable quantity of Polish corn on unusually advantageous terms for the Polish farmers; but that, to his and the general disgust, the first of these consignments of corn had been stopped on the Polish frontier by Polish patrols. The Castellan urged the Diet to remove this vexatious restriction without delay, naturally supposing that this would be done as a matter of course. But the more violent of the patriots, secretly inspired by Lucchesini, ever intent upon the double object of hampering Russia's military operations and still further damaging Poland in the opinion of the Empress, vehemently protested against the transport of the corn on the ground that it would be a violation of the neutrality of the Republic and, in especial, very unfriendly to the Turks. Malachowski, the Marshal of the Diet, reasonably objected that arbitrarily to cancel private contracts would not only be highly injurious to Polish trade but was actually *contra fidem publicam*. Nevertheless, on August 7, the affair was fiercely debated for eight hours during which the chief obstructionist, Pon Suchorzewski, spoke no fewer than ten times. Finally, permission to export the corn was granted but only by a majority of six. Lucchesini, however, not content with this, procured the reopening of the debate on the 11th and, after another wrangle of nine hours it was decided by 73 votes against 18, that the exportation of the corn should only be permitted for three weeks longer and should cease altogether on September 1. The immediate effect of this stupid ordinance was to inflict a very material loss upon Poland by preventing the Polish landowners from selling their immense accumulations of grain at exceptionally high cash prices, and to persuade Potemkin that Poland was meditating active hostilities against Russia. It is at this point (September 1789), that the King, partly from weariness, partly from weakness, shifted his position. He now frankly abandoned the standpoint of the Russian alliance, which the Diet had made impracticable, and attempted to follow a policy of compromise by making use of Prussia without offending Russia. "The minimum

of mischief for my country—that must now be my motto and polestar,” he wrote to Deboli.

The Diet had already forestalled him by formally demanding the good offices of Lucchesini and of the British Minister Mr. Hayles, in order to bring about an alliance between Poland and Prussia. “We are about to frame our new Constitution,” said the Polish delegates to the two ambassadors, “and this we cannot do unless Prussia guarantees it beforehand.” Thus the very people who had abolished the old Constitution because it existed under a foreign guarantee now demanded another foreign guarantee for the new Constitution they were about to frame themselves.

Frederick William II. was much embarrassed. As a matter of fact he regarded as practically worthless an alliance with so weak and anarchical a state as Poland. But circumstances proved too strong for him. His alarm at the brilliant and apparently decisive victories of the Russians and the Austrians on the Danube, in the course of 1789 and the vehement representations of Lucchesini that the Poles would lose all faith in the promises of Prussia if she did not come to terms with them at once drove him, at last, out of his cautious and expectant attitude. Early in December 1789, he officially informed the Poles that he was willing to enter into an alliance with them and place his whole army at their disposal; but first they must frame their Constitution so that he might have a stable and independent Government to negotiate with. But, all the time, he secretly hoped that the process of Constitution-making would result in a civil war between the clashing factions and thus give him a pretext for direct intervention. But again he was disappointed. So anxious were the Patriots to meet the views of Prussia that in twelve days the new Constitution actually passed through the Diet, which then adjourned till February 3, 1790.

The new Constitution came hot from the pen of Ignatius Potocki and, as might have been expected from such an origin, was fanciful, ingenious and absolutely impracticable. It was on the model of the French National Assembly,

modified (and the modifications were by no means improvements) to suit the idiosyncrasies of the Polish Republic. It was scarcely possible for any Constitution to insist as emphatically as this one did on the sovereignty of the people and the superfluity of the Sovereign. Indeed, it is difficult to understand why the impotent lay-figure of a King was retained at all, unless it was to enhance the majesty of the omnipotent Diet. Not a single deputy seems to have realised that the absolute authority thrust by the Potocki Constitution upon a single Corporation (the Diet) precluded the possibility of a real Executive and, consequently, was far more injurious than even the absolutism of a monarch could ever be. Still there it was—the first draft of a brand-new Constitution, the details of which were to be elaborated subsequently. Prussia, therefore, had no longer any valid excuse for postponing the negotiations for an alliance.

On December 30, 1789, the draft of the new Constitution was placed in the hands of Lucchesini and the negotiations for an alliance began, very unwillingly on the part of Prussia. Nothing could really be more opposed to the inclinations of Frederick William II. than a league with a weak State scarce able to defend itself. There was the additional objection that it would be difficult even for Prussia to plunder an ally whom she had solemnly undertaken to protect. But absurd as the alliance seemed to Frederick William II. he durst not reject it for fear of permanently alienating the Poles, who would no longer be put off with bare promises. Frederick William II. decided, therefore, though much against the grain, to continue the negotiations with Poland, but, at the same time, obtain an equivalent for the trouble and expense he was incurring, in the shape of the long coveted cities of Dantzic and Thorn. On February 24, 1790, Lucchesini formally presented this demand to the Polish negotiators by whom, three days later, it was rejected. To save appearances Lucchesini thereupon discreetly withdrew his demand. The warmest partisans of Prussia were, not unnaturally, disgusted by

this curious specimen of Prussian disinterestedness. But the disgust of the Patriots was as nothing compared with the astonishment of the Court of Berlin at the summary rejection of the Dantzic-Thorn cession project. Hertzberg had so completely made up his mind that Poland, for her own sake, would willingly surrender the two cities that he had actually taken the necessary measures for their occupation. Nevertheless, jealousy of Austria, who at this time offered Poland a very advantageous guarantee treaty (the Patriots, with criminal folly, never even communicated it to the Diet though Stanislaus urged them to use it, diplomatically, in order to obtain better terms from Prussia) forced the hand of the King of Prussia. On April 23, 1790, an offensive and defensive treaty was signed between Poland and Prussia, whereby each of the contracting parties engaged to help the other with a fixed number of troops, or its equivalent in money in case either of them were attacked by a third Power. Two days after the ratification of this treaty Lucchesini congratulated his master on the fact that the destiny of Poland now depended upon the future political combinations of Prussia. "Poland," he wrote, "is now, absolutely, at your Majesty's disposal. It can serve either as the theatre of war (with Russia or Austria), or as a bulwark for Silesia or as an object for obtaining compensation in case of complications with Russia."—Such conscienceless perfidy towards a newly made ally is perhaps unexampled even in the sordid annals of diplomacy.

Even now Prussia did not at once abandon the idea of obtaining territory from Poland by voluntary concession. From April to July 1790 Hertzberg and his royal master were intent upon what is generally known as the Galician Exchange affair. In brief, Poland was to relinquish Dantzic and Thorn to Prussia in exchange for Galicia which Austria was to be persuaded to retrocede in return for compensation from Turkey. But Austria, at the Congress of Reichenbach, July 1790, prudently declined to part with solid acres in Galicia for the sake of mirages in the Orient. Prussia then made one last attempt pacifically to secure

Dantzic and Thorn with the assistance of England (whose political interests at that time were identical with her own) by holding out to Poland the bribe of a highly advantageous commercial treaty. The management of this business was entrusted to Mr. Hayles, the British Ambassador at Warsaw, and it must be admitted that, even from the Polish point of view, there was something to be said for it.

On August 10, 1790, Hayles expounded the new scheme to Stanislaus. "I have no hesitation in assuring your Majesty," said he, "that if these two towns are ceded to Prussia, Great Britain will be prepared to go to war with that Power if she does not give to Poland, in return, the fullest commercial liberty in every direction, including the abolition of all tolls. Holland in this respect will go with England. England has as warm an interest in the treaty as Prussia herself. She would thereby obtain a proper market for all the requisities of her Navy, in case she were unable to get them from Russia. England could obtain these products much cheaper from Poland and Poland would make millions by the arrangement." But Hayles pointed out at the same time, very cogently, that all these advantages were unattainable as long as Dantzic retained her prohibitive *jus stapulæ* which forbade the sale of Polish products to and through foreigners while Prussia retaliated by imposing a crushing 12 per cent. toll on all wares exported from Dantzic. Finally, he proved to demonstration that, in the actual state of things, Dantzic and Thorn were, from a commercial and fiscal point of view, absolutely valueless to Poland. Unfortunately the patriotic pride of the Poles was unequal to the sacrifice of Dantzic and Thorn. On September 3, 1790, the Diet decreed, unanimously, that every portion of the territory of the Republic should be absolutely inalienable for all time. Subsequently this decree was incorporated with the fundamental laws. In the circumstances such a decree, natural and even laudable as it might be as an abstract principle, was extremely imprudent. The fact should never be lost sight of that by rejecting Russia

and subsequently committing herself to the Prussian alliance, Poland was bound to accept all the consequences of such a momentous step. It was in the highest degree unreasonable to suppose that the Republic could enjoy all the advantages of the Prussian Alliance for nothing at all. Poland had deliberately contracted a partnership with Prussia by which she hoped to profit largely. But Prussia had an equal right to look for some profit from the arrangement, and an accretion of territory was the only visible means of obtaining it. When, then, the Polish statesmen suddenly turned round upon their new ally and refused to allow her any compensation for her proffered services, their behaviour, to say the least of it, was unbusinesslike. After that, Prussia could take no real interest in an alliance which was practically worthless to her, and those who knew anything about the methods of Prussian politicians in the past might very easily have predicted that these same politicians would repudiate their treaty with a light heart at the very first opportunity. The King clearly recognised this. "So the thing is done," he wrote on hearing of the decree of the Diet, "God grant that it may not irreparably damage the fatherland."

But the severest condemnation of the policy of the Polish Diet on this occasion is to be found in the attitude of the British Government which, from first to last, meant nothing but good to the Republic. In November 1790, Stanislaus sent Oginski on a special embassy to London to contract a commercial alliance between Great Britain and Poland. Oginski set out the views of his Government in a long private audience with Pitt, whereupon Pitt declared that the soundest policy for Poland was to contract a commercial treaty with Prussia under the guarantee of England and Holland. "Such a treaty," he argued, "would be well worth the cession of Dantzic, and in case of such cession, I would guarantee Poland against the oppressive tolls and the fiscal chicaneries of Prussia, and send our own agents into the interior of Poland to purchase Poland's raw products. This intercourse would, necessarily, lead to the re-opening

of such purely Polish ports as Kowno, and others like it, which were once so flourishing that English and Dutch merchants used to settle there."—"The Polish trade is of great importance to England and Holland," he continued, "your corn, flax, hemp and hides can easily compete with the similar products of Russia. Your flax is the best we can get anywhere. Take my word for it, the conclusion of such a commercial treaty under our guarantee, would be of great advantage to us and we would never let Poland suffer in consequence of it in any way."

(In the beginning of 1791 the British Government went a step further. On January 21, the Duke of Leeds empowered Hayles to inform the Polish Diet that England desired to enter into political and commercial relations with Poland on the sole condition that Poland would make it possible for Prussia also to accede thereto. But the British Government let it be clearly understood that the cession of Dantzic to Prussia was the only way of guaranteeing the free transport of Polish products through Prussia. Hayles proceeded to carry out his instructions not only officially but by means of the publication of a pamphlet entitled: "Memoir on the present interests of Poland." His arguments were very much to the point and clearly inspired by a feeling of real goodwill towards Poland. "We would strengthen and save you," he said. "We don't want you to be a mere sally-port for Russia. We don't at all want this Moscovite Colossus . . . to dictate to the rest of Europe. But if you won't understand your own interests, we shall be obliged to come to an understanding with your rival, Russia, to your great detriment. Everything depends upon your decision; but, if you do not decide quickly, it will be out of your power to decide at all.")

But it was all of no avail. The Poles would not cede a foot of their territory. Hayles duly reported his failure and the causes of it, to the Duke of Leeds. His tone is irritable, but his reflections are just enough. "In this country," he writes, "an Ambassador has to deal with some three hundred individuals most of whom are in the

most profound ignorance of the actual condition of their own land, and have no idea of foreign politics. Most of the members of the Diet have lived in the country all their lives and had to do with nothing but agriculture till the very day when they were transplanted to a political arena in which everything is in a state of confusion."

The question remains : would the cession of Dantzic and Thorn have kept Prussia loyal and Poland secure ? Some German historians affirm that it would have had this effect ; but, carefully reviewing all the circumstances of the case, and especially taking into consideration the character of Prussian diplomacy in general, such a contingency must be pronounced problematical at the very least. Prussia might have remained loyal for a time—but for how long ? For no longer, certainly, than it paid her to be loyal. Catherine II. knew only too well the value of Prussian honour, and the bribe of Great Poland, the connecting link between East Prussia and Silesia, which, with the aid of Russia, Prussia could always have secured, would at any time have brought Frederick William II. over to the side of the Empress. Still, it might have been wise of Poland to have taken the risk of this contingency. Had she ceded Dantzic and Thorn in return for a highly lucrative commercial treaty under a strong Anglo-Dutch guarantee, very serious obstacles would have been thrown in the way of future repudiation on the part of Prussia. Even Frederick William II.'s elastic code of honour might have shrunk from estranging the Western Powers by so patent and prodigious an act of perfidy. Poland would, at any rate, have gained time, and the briefest respite would have been of incalculable importance to her. Unfortunately the mistaken patriotism and the incurable simplicity of Poland prepared a golden bridge for the retreat of her Prussian "ally" from an unprofitable and, consequently, an untenable position. >

CHAPTER X

THE "COUP D'ÉTAT" OF MAY 3, 1791

Inefficiency and helplessness of the Polish Diet—The national vices impede the necessary reforms—Army reorganisation—"The voluntary and perpetual sacrifice"—Its failure—Decline of the public credit—Constitutional reform—Madame Decker—The Black Procession—Hostility of the gentry to the claims of the burgesses—The Civic Constitution—Obstinacy of the Diet—Skilful intervention of the King—Adoption of the Civic Constitution—Favourable impression abroad of this act—The question of an hereditary succession—Its peculiar difficulties—Stanislaus eloquently defends it in the Diet—The appeal to the nation—The political deadlock—Preparations for a *coup d'état*—Scipione Piattoli—Conspiracy to bring about a Revolution—The King and the new Constitution—The *coup d'état* of May 3—Dramatic scenes in the Diet—Swearing in the new Constitution—*Te Deum*

THE Polish Diet had committed itself to an alliance with Prussia which could be of no service to either of the allies until the Polish nation had been converted into a modern state with a fixed budget, an adequate army and a stable government. To accomplish this difficult but essential transformation was the original object of the convocation of the Quadrennial Diet in 1788. Let us see how the Polish legislators set about their Herculean task. I shall regard the whole course of events mainly from the standpoint of the King, first because my narrative is biographical rather than historical, and, in the second place, because the superior abilities and experience of Stanislaus naturally gave him the lead in domestic as well as in foreign affairs.

With the abolition of the guaranteed Constitution the Diet became the one administrative and legislative authority

in the land, and from the moment when it entered upon its usurped functions the political Utopia so long imagined and desired by the Polish gentry seemed, at length, to be on the point of realisation. The Marshal of the Diet was now theoretically and *ex-officio* the supreme executive officer of the Republic; but he had little opportunity to discharge this office. How could he find time to control the details of the administration when, for weeks together, he had to conduct the debates of the chamber, introduce bills, defend them in the tribune as well as in the cabinet, and be ready, at a moment's notice, to negotiate with the foreign ministers and with the leaders of the various groups in the Diet itself—in a word, how could he, fairly, be held responsible for everything that went on within as well as outside the Chamber? The greatest genius would have been unequal to such a burden and Malachowski, though a good and honest man, was anything but a genius. As a matter of fact, the Diet had deliberately destroyed all the usual machinery of government and therefore must be held immediately responsible for the resulting confusion. Even its genuine reforms were not immediately beneficial. Thus the deputies had fondly imagined that by doing away with the *liberum veto*, and introducing in its place decisions by majority, it had struck at the very root of Polish legislative inefficiency. It was speedily to discover that a majority is the most dangerous of despots, especially when it is obsessed by the mania that it is not only omnipotent but omniscient. This, unfortunately, was the case with the majority of the Polish Diet.

A still worse evil was the utter helplessness of the Chamber against obstruction. This was due to a lack of ordinary forethought. There was no trace of standing rules during the first year and a half of its existence. Every deputy was free to get up and perorate to his heart's content whenever and however he chose. There was very rarely anything even approximating to what we should call a regular debate in the Polish Diet. Except latterly, and on quite extraordinary occasions, the time of the House was taken up by

an interminable succession of irrelevant speeches. Very frequently, nobody could tell what was the subject actually under discussion. Malachowski was far too patient, far too little indignant, to do his duty as Marshal. Sometimes the King and the Marshal combined could only, with the utmost difficulty, persuade a member, bursting with ill-repressed garrulity, at least to wait until the member actually on his legs had sat down again. <The two characteristic types of Polish parliamentary oratory of this period were Pan Suchorzewski and Pan Sucholdolski who spoke on every occasion, often a dozen times in the course of a single debate. These two gentlemen, always obstructive, always reactionary, always interminable, always irrelevant, might very well be regarded as comical figures but for the infinite mischief they wrought.>

It was only on comparatively rare occasions, when the whole Chamber happened to be in a particularly good humour, or when the most inveterate debaters had talked themselves into a condition of temporary aphasia, that any measure could be passed through the House at all. The King and Malachowski were always on the look-out for such favourable interludes and learnt at last to scent their approach with unerring instinct. Whenever their opportunity came, they would proceed, suddenly and adroitly, to introduce the more indispensable measures and carry them through before the chamber had had time to recover from its surprise or its exhaustion.

Even more serious than these technical difficulties, as they may be called, with which the Polish Diet had to contend, were the hereditary national vices—class prejudice, public parsimony, aristocratic pride, democratic intolerance of discipline, excessive individuality—which the most enlightened deputies, with all the good-will in the world, could not shake off completely even when they had begun to recognise the necessity of doing so. These national vices and their consequences have already, incidentally, been alluded to in these pages. Here I would only exhibit them as obstructing legislation and minimising the chances of good government.

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Take, first of all, the way in which the Diet dealt with the vital question of the re-organisation of the national forces. It will be remembered * how the whole Assembly acclaimed, enthusiastically, the proposal to raise the army from 18,000 to 100,000. When, however, the time came to give practical effect to this noble if somewhat impetuous ambition by finding the ways and means for it, the attitude of the Polish legislators was by no means so satisfactory. At first, indeed, things seemed to go along pretty well. On March 16, 1789, the clergy, after some demur, agreed to pay a tithe towards the strengthening of the army and grant an additional free-gift for the same object. Ten days later the Marshal of the Diet proposed that the gentry should do the same, whereupon a deputy, Pan Zielinski, arose and moved an amendment to the effect that the question of supply should be postponed to an investigation into the actual condition of the army—obviously an attempt to put off the consideration of the odious tax indefinitely. At this the whole Chamber was indignant and Count Stanislaus Potocki, in a vigorous speech, expressed the sense of the House when he declared that it would be indecent if the gentry, after taxing the other estates, should try to shirk its own responsibilities to the fatherland. Zielinski, however, obstinately held out against the whole Chamber and the King had to summon him to the steps of the throne and argue with him for half an hour before he could be persuaded to withdraw his amendment. This difficulty had no sooner been got over when another deputy moved that the proposed impost should not be called "a tax" but "a voluntary and perpetual sacrifice of the nobility." This motion was hailed with applause, and the Marshal congratulated the House on doing what none of the preceding Polish Diets had ever done before. The Marshal, the Ministers, and the Deputies thereupon proceeded to the throne to kiss the hands of the King, as a pledge of their devotion. And all this effusion of sentiment because the Polish Deputies had at last done what the members of every other Parliament

* See last chapter.

do in the way of business as a matter of course, that is to say, engaged to find the necessary funds for national exigencies. The King in order not to be behind his subjects in liberality, thereupon surrendered, for the same purpose, the spigot-tax, which brought him in about 200,000 guldens per annum.

“The voluntary and perpetual sacrifice” was estimated to yield thirty-six millions of Polish guldens, or only about five million short of the enlarged army budget. “We will sacrifice half our possessions, nay, our very lives to save our country!” the patriots had shouted when the motion to raise the army to 100,000 men had been carried unanimously. A few of the Magnates were certainly as good as their word. Jan Potocki offered to surrender a fifth of his property and charged his estates with a sum equivalent to 10,000 guldens a year. His brother, Joachim, equipped three hundred troopers at his own expense, and Prince Karol Radziwill 2000 more. Malachowski supplied the army gratis with artillery from his own foundries and raised a loan on mortgage of 900,000 guldens to supply the Bank of Poland with ready money. But the very splendour of these individual examples only served, by contrast, to throw into a darker shadow the meanness of the community. On May 15, 1789, fifteen commissioners were sent on circuit through the 121 counties of Poland to search the various land-registries, examine the landed proprietors on oath as to the value of their estates, and assess the tax accordingly. As, however, these commissioners were armed with no powers of control, or with authority of any sort, they were obliged to depend absolutely on the honour and conscience of the respective landowners for their data. The result might have been anticipated. The thirty-six millions on which the Government had counted speedily sank to six millions. Fresh chicaneries and evasions gradually reduced it to the petty sum of 700,000 guldens, or about 6 per cent. of the amount originally estimated. Thus that magnificent, heaven-storming rocket, “the voluntary and perpetual sacrifice,” fizzled down to earth a sordid and useless stick. >

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Meanwhile, in the Diet itself, the army debates dragged on, month after month, without arriving at any conclusion. From the end of July to the middle of October 1789, the military budget was discussed in no fewer than forty-five sittings—an all-engulfing ocean of otiose gabble. In particular the salaries of the superior officers gave rise to endless acrimonious disputes frequently resulting in duels and general confusion. The sole result of all this expenditure of physical energy was the retention of no fewer than thirty sinecures, at a cost to the nation of 800,000 guldens, whereupon the Diet, from sheer weariness, referred the whole subject back to the War Department.

No wonder that these senseless proceedings seriously affected the public credit. Foreign bankers began to ask themselves whether a nation incapable of self-government was worth financing. The Genoese bankers who had, at first, been inclined to advance the Polish government fifteen millions, suddenly became anxious as to the nature of the security to be offered, and, in February 1790, refused to commit themselves. The "Patriots" then proposed a loan from the Prussian Government and actually opened negotiations with it on the subject. But this proposal the King strenuously and successfully opposed on the ground that it would only lay bare the nakedness of the land and, consequently, be derogatory to the Republic. It was on this occasion that Stanislaus made a gift of his splendid collection of gems and jewels, including the Order of St. Andrew in brilliants, with which Catherine II. had invested him at Kaniow, to the Polish Treasury. The more pressing financial difficulties were then surmounted by a hearth-tax which produced ten millions of guldens.

But it was the army which suffered most from the maladministration of the Patriots. They took it over from the King a small but really effective force, in less than two years they had degraded it to the level of a mob. The principal causes of this retrogression were, first, the irresponsibility of half a dozen independent departments which were supposed to look after the army between them with the result

that none of them looked after it at all ; and, in the second place, the paralysing want of funds due again to the parsimony of the Polish landowners. (There is no need here to enter into details, but a significant commentary on the military reforms of the Quadrennial Diet was provided, in the sight of all men, when, on the eve of the anticipated outbreak of war between Prussia and Austria in 1790, a Prussian general officer was sent to examine the actual condition of the Polish army with a view to its co-operation with the Prussian forces. The Prussian general reported that the Polish army was quite incapable of active service in the field, whereupon the military authorities at Berlin recommended that, in case of war, it would answer the purposes of Prussia better if Poland remained neutral instead of acting as a belligerent.)

All this time the Diet was painfully labouring to frame on modern lines a constitution corresponding to the needs of the country and the wishes of the nation. The rebuilding of the whole political fabric of a State from the very foundations must always be the crucial test of statesmanship. In Poland, as we shall see, it could only be accomplished, at the last moment, by a *coup d'état*. It is true that Ignatius Poticki's draft constitution * had been accepted, provisionally, as a basis to be elaborated subsequently, in order to expedite the conclusion of the Prussian alliance ; but when the House went into Committee on the subject it soon became apparent that anything like agreement was impossible. All the time-honoured prejudices of the gentry—suspicion of the Crown, jealousy of the middle classes, the egotism of proprietorship—were instantly aroused and proved to be so many roaring lions in the path of Reform. The two questions which agitated the Chamber the most were the "Civic Constitution" which aimed at restoring to the burgesses the franchise of which they had been so shamelessly deprived by the gentry two centuries earlier, and the conversion of the Government from an electoral into an hereditary monarchy.

* See preceding chapter.

The question of the "Civic Constitution" had been forced upon the attention of the House as early as 1789. The initiative was taken by Jan Deckert, Burgomaster of Warsaw, who induced no fewer than 141 Polish towns to send deputies to the Diet with a petition of rights. The moment was opportune. At that very time the eyes of all Europe were fixed upon the banks of the Seine where the Burgesses of France had triumphed over the nobility, and compelled an absolute monarch to comply with their demands. So far from being welcome to the Polish gentry these strange happenings plunged them into something very like a panic. They at once imagined that a similar revolution was about to break forth in Poland and that the King would not fail to take advantage of it. The leading magnates were particularly alarmed, possibly because they had the most to lose. The Grand-Hetman Branicki kept loaded pistols by his side day and night and treated Burgomaster Deckert so civilly, whenever he met him in the street, that Branicki's astonished friends asked him the reason of this sudden and extraordinary politeness to a plebeian. "I have an eye to the future and would avoid being hanged if possible," replied the Grand Hetman. A few days previously, Prince Casimir Sapieha, on inquiring for a box at the theatre was told that they were all engaged. Sapieha, knowing that Madame Deckert generally took a box for the season, coolly ordered that it should be divided into two boxes forthwith. "It is much too big for a burgomaster's lady," said he, "and I want to accommodate it for my mistresses." Madame Deckert, however, had too much spirit to submit to this insolence. She ordered that her box should be left intact. Then she wrote a brief note to Prince Sapieha directing his attention to what was going on in Paris. The Prince was much impressed and at once submitted.

On December 2, 1789, 200 delegates from the Polish boroughs, headed by Deckert, proceeded from the Town Hall to the Palace to present their petition to the King. It had been drawn up with great ability by Kollontaj, always in the front rank of reform, and its demands, bold and

outspoken enough, certainly, were nevertheless, considered reasonable by all reasonable men including the King, Malachowski, and Ignatius and Stanislaus Potocki. Briefly they amounted to this: restoration of the privileges enjoyed by the municipalities in 1569; personal security; the right to possess landed property; eligibility to all civil and ecclesiastical appointments; freedom from the jurisdiction of the aristocratic tribunals; and the possession of the parliamentary franchise. The King received the Deputation graciously, but, at the same time, warned them to be careful. Excessive dogmatism and tumultuous demonstration might, he opined, do more harm than good. Moderation, after all, was the nearest way to the goal. But there was nothing stiff or ceremonious about the audience; and, after kissing his Majesty's hands, the Burgesses departed with the comfortable conviction that Stanislaus was at heart, their friend.

The Diet was far less obliging. It affected to regard "the Black Procession," as it called the civic deputation to the King, as seditious agitators; refused to receive the Burgesses personally; and scolded them severely through the mouths of its officials. Nevertheless, even within the Diet itself, the Civic Constitution found a few eloquent and courageous advocates. The deputy Gutkowski reminded the House that the wretched condition of the Polish towns was due entirely to the general dilapidation caused by the bad government of the Republic, while Pan Chreptowicz, one of the Secretaries of State, urged, eloquently, that it was the bounden duty of the Diet to deliver Poland from the disgrace of oppressing the burgesses. After a three days' debate (December 16-18) the whole question was referred to a special Committee of which Chreptowicz was appointed the Reporter, and nothing more was heard of the matter for eighteen months. Finally (April 5, 1791) Chreptowicz presented to the Diet the draft of a new "Civic Constitution," revised and amended by the King. It was, virtually, a recapitulation, with some amplifications and improvements, of Deckert's original petition. The old stock arguments that the enfranchised Burgesses

would become the tools of despotism, and that it would be injurious to the gentry for the middle classes to hold land, were instantly brought forth again re-furbished by the reactionary deputies; but the House, which had been partially renewed at the end of 1790, was now more liberally disposed, and the defenders of the rights of the Burgesses far outnumbered their opponents. The King was, naturally, one of the foremost champions of a project of which he was the joint author, and he spoke frequently and eloquently in its defence. He declared that as King he had sworn to defend the rights of all his subjects and not merely the privileges of the nobility. Any amelioration of the condition of the Burgesses, he argued, would benefit the whole nation and the gentry along with it. But the Opposition was obstinate and succeeded, in Committee, in striking out the clause which restored to the Burgesses the right of representation in the Diet, a right they had possessed as early as the reign of King Alexander (1501-1506). As this was the vital clause of the "Civic Constitution" the political prospects of the Burgesses now seemed hopeless indeed, when, to the general amazement, the reactionary deputy, Pan Suchorzewski, one of the two notorious parliamentary "spouters" already alluded to, suddenly presented to the Chamber "a draft civic law" framed by himself, in which he proposed that the Burgesses should possess the franchise on condition that they voted only on commercial and economical questions; that those of them who were officers in the army or judges in the courts should be ennobled; and that henceforth the towns should be represented in every Diet by thirty Burgesses. The Opposition was dumfounded. Suchorzewski's amendment, though somewhat differently expressed, was virtually identical with the royal project which he himself, shortly before, had so fiercely opposed. Evidently, pride of authorship had completely blinded him as to the nature and scope of his own motion. The King promptly perceived and took advantage of his opportunity. Rising from the throne he declared that he would accept with pleasure a project so

much better than his own and, there and then, submitted the Suchorzewski amendment to the judgment of the Chamber, which adopted it unanimously. Stanislaus himself subsequently declared that nothing but a miracle could have put it into the head of such an oddity as Suchorzewski to give such good counsel. Four days later the Opposition began to realise what they had done. As, however, it was now impossible openly to rescind their own vote they attempted to attack "the Civic Constitution" on side issues. This, however, the King would not permit. In a sober and sensible speech he implored them not to stultify themselves in the face of Europe by repudiating a statute which the Chamber had adopted, without a dissentient voice, less than a week before. Against this not a single word could be said and the matter seemed to be settled, once for all, when a deputy, Benedict Hulewicz, arose and protested that the Burgess franchise would be dangerous because there were so few Catholics in the Polish towns and he feared religion would suffer if their influence were increased. This was too much for the gravity of the House, as Hulewicz was a notorious free-liver, and when it came to Hulewicz's turn to kiss the King's hand at the close of the session, Stanislaus whispered in his ear: "You old rascal! You are always running after the girls, you regularly eat meat on Fridays, you embarrass the Bishops by your indecent practical jokes and now, forsooth! you come here and pose as an ardent Catholic! I warn you, sir, that if I have any more of your opposition, I shall repeat, word for word, to the House what I have just said to you in private." Hulewicz, it is needless to say, gave the King no further trouble. >

The tidings of the passing of this memorable reform, and of how largely the King had contributed thereto by his sagacious counsels and his spirited speeches, speedily spread through Warsaw. On the following day three hundred of the most eminent burgesses of the City, headed by their Burgomaster, proceeded to the Palace and petitioned for an audience. When the King appeared, the whole Deputation fell at his feet and thanked him with tears of joy.

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Stanislaus also was deeply moved. He declared that such a demonstration of affection was a sufficient recompense for twenty years of trouble and vexation. Towards the end of April, the Marshal of the Diet showed his respect for the newly enfranchised municipality of Warsaw by inscribing his name as an honorary citizen in the city register at the Town Hall. His example was followed by Prince Jablonski and other liberally-minded magnates. Thanksgiving services were held by the Burgesses all over Poland to commemorate the happy event. Foreign observers were also very favourably impressed by the self-abnegation of the aristocratic Diet on this occasion. "One cannot fail to be struck," wrote De Caché, the Austrian Minister at Warsaw, to his Court, "by the very remarkable and unexpected change in the sentiments of this nation when the Polish nobility, which, hitherto, has so jealously guarded its importance and its privileges and has regarded the Polish burgesses as the mere creatures of its convenience, could now harmoniously resolve to make these same burgesses the partners of its privileges. . . . No doubt this change was, to a great extent, brought about by the enlightenment which His Majesty has always endeavoured to spread among his people."

(Nevertheless, as we have just seen, the "Civic Constitution" had only been carried through the House by a lucky accident. The still more important question of the hereditary succession proved to be absolutely insoluble by legislative methods. It could only be settled, as we shall now proceed to show, by the drastic expedient of a *coup d'état*.)

The peculiar difficulty of the hereditary succession lay in the fact that it struck at the very root of aristocratic predominance in Poland. The largest concessions to the Burgesses would, after all, leave them but Burgesses still; but the conversion of the government of Poland into an hereditary monarchy, even if it did not directly add to the power of the Crown, would, anyhow, largely increase its majesty, and depress, to a corresponding degree, the position and the pretensions of the Nobility. So long as the Polish

magnates could elect their King, they might very well be excused for regarding him as the first among equals rather than as their superior ; but his superiority would be obvious and indisputable if the crown ever should belong to him and his heirs, as hereditary Sovereigns, by right divine. The pride of the reactionary Polish magnates revolted at the idea of such an insulting innovation. They argued, justly enough from their point of view, that by accepting it they would abdicate a political hegemony which they had held for centuries. That the elective system had been the main source of all Poland's misfortunes, that its abolition must be the first step towards a better order of things, affected them not at all. The welfare, nay, the very existence of their country, demanded the change, but their patriotism was unequal to the sacrifice involved.

< In the Diet itself, the party in favour of " Hereditary Monarchy " was the more popular and patriotic ; but the " Free Election " party was the more numerous and violent. Fortunately, it had no capable leaders and therefore lacked cohesion > The King was obliged, officially, to remain neutral as the *pacta conventa* which he had signed, as usual, at his coronation, precluded him from having any opinion on such a fundamental question. He was free, however, to express his personal views. Both parties were already under arms when, on September 26, 1790, the Marshal of the Diet moved that a " Universal " or Manifesto, should be submitted to the local Diets, or Dietines, which elected the deputies to the Grand Diet, on this single question : shall the Elective Monarchy of Poland be converted into a Hereditary Monarchy ? The debate then began. The " Free Election " party took their stand upon national tradition and ancient custom, and cited, in defence of their views, the numerous statutes which solemnly declared that whoever dared to tamper with the elective system should be treated, *pro hoste patriæ*. They argued, with considerable skill, that these ancient statutes deserved peculiar respect because they had been passed unanimously by free assemblies and were entirely free from the stigma of a

foreign guarantee. The advocates of the hereditary system pointed out, in reply, the many instances of the havoc wrought by the elective system. Stanislaus himself wound up the debate. He began by reminding the House, with great force and solemnity, that, according to all human probability, he had not many more years to live, and that, after his death, the throne, in the circumstances, could not fail to become an apple of discord among those whose ambition might covet so dangerous a prize. In that case the country would be plunged into civil war—and why? Simply because an obsolete prejudice required that all their decisions should be unanimous on the point in question. "Now is the time," concluded the speaker, "to prevent this evil. I am breaking no oath when I advise you to remove, betimes, the dangers which will inevitably arise after my death. I earnestly counsel you to endeavour to dam back the flood of foreign influence which would fain overwhelm our liberties and impose upon us its own arbitrary decrees. My very coronation oath binds me to neglect nothing which may contribute towards the well-being of the nation."

⟨This manly appeal paralysed all further opposition and on September 20, 1790, it was resolved that the following "Universal" should be addressed to the local Diets: "Is it the will of the nation during the lifetime of the present Sovereign to prevent the dangers of an interregnum by choosing a successor to the throne?" On September 30 the Elector of Saxony was chosen by the Diet, suddenly, unexpectedly, but unanimously, as the fittest successor to Stanislaus. The same day the "Universal" to the Dietines was promulgated.⟩

The elections consequent upon the manifesto passed off with the utmost tranquillity. Nowhere was there the slightest disturbance. The Russian Embassy at Warsaw made no sign. The partisans of Russia in the provinces scarce seemed to exist. Only in the distant palatinates of Volhynia and Braclaw, where reactionary influences were strongest, was there any determined opposition. Both

these provinces sent deputies to the Diet pledged to demand the restoration of the old order of things. But all the other provinces were, unanimously, in favour of the hereditary principle and the election of a successor to the throne during the lifetime of the reigning King. Of the 172 deputies ultimately returned to fortify the Diet (which now numbered about 500 deputies in all) two-thirds were in favour of the reforms, including the change in the succession.

On December 20, 1790, the session was re-opened ; but it soon became evident to the more perspicacious that the Diet was unequal to the task of reforming the Constitution for which it had been called together. Its numerical unwieldiness, the timidity of its President, the irrestrainable volubility of its members—especially of the new members—and, above all, the obstructiveness of the Opposition, paralysed all legislative action. As, moreover, no standing orders, or regulations, had yet been framed, the House was at the mercy of those of its members who had the loudest voices and the toughest lungs. On January 1, 1791, the simple question of the order in which the business of the House should be taken led to an inconclusive debate which lasted sixteen hours. Two more days were wasted in a fruitless attempt to limit the duration of future debates. By the middle of January 1791, the state of public business was precisely the same as it had been in the middle of December 1790. The principal obstructionists were the Volhynian deputies who took their orders from the arch-reactionary, Felix Potocki, who, disgusted by the philo-Prussian policy of the Diet, had retired to Vienna, where he was already gathering around him the band of aristocratic malcontents who, twelve months later, were to unmask themselves as rebels and traitors. The Volhynians would not hear of a radical reform of the Constitution and as, according to the fundamental laws, every constitutional question could only be decided by a unanimous vote of the Legislature, the whole business of the House soon came to a deadlock. "At our present rate of progression," observed one of the royal secretaries, Tomas Dluski, "it will take us

three and a half years, at least, to get our precious Constitution ready."

The only possible issue from this state of fruitless expectation and extreme uncertainty was a *coup d'état*, especially as it was above all things necessary to prevent the interference of Prussia, whose hands would be free so soon as the long Turkish War, now, at last, drawing to a close, was concluded. Vague, disquieting rumours of another impending partition were already in the air. Wojna, the Polish Minister at Vienna, was the first to report these rumours. Deboli, the Polish Minister at St. Petersburg, wrote to the same effect and urged the King, repeatedly, to take prompt measures, even the most extraordinary and sensational, to provide for the safety of the Republic. Stanislaus's own position was now very much stronger than it had been six months before. (Since the renewal of the Diet his partisans had more than doubled, and Ignatius Potocki, the leader of the Patriots, who had so long held aloof from the King, was now persuaded to be reconciled to him and combine their forces in a common struggle for the liberties of their country. The author of this felicitous coalition was the Florentine ex-abbé, Scipione Piattoli, whose ardent soul had been won unreservedly for Poland by a pamphlet of Rousseau's. Highly educated on purely literary lines, sceptical as to religion, which he regarded, indeed, as only another name for superstition, yet overflowing with an exalted enthusiasm for humanity, he first appeared in Poland in 1787, where he was received with effusion by all the friends of the new ideas, including Ignatius Potocki, Hugo Kollontaj and the King, who though in different political camps, all followed, in their own way, the progressive, tricoloured flag of young France.) Piattoli was a puny, sickly-looking, little fellow, but he literally bubbled over with ingenious notions and original arguments; possessed irresistible powers of persuasion, and could, easily, do the work of ten men far better and in less time than they could have done it themselves. His infinite good-nature and absolute unselfishness endeared him to every one with

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whom he came into contact. In 1790 he was introduced to Stanislaus and instantly conceived a passionate devotion for that still charming and seductive potentate. <Henceforth it became the ambition of his life "to serve and save the King."—"With whatever eyes your Majesty may look upon me," he cried, "I would live for you and die with you." The poor King, who was not used to the language of loyalty, naturally felt grateful to the gushing little Florentine and made him his secretary with a considerable salary, not one penny of which Piattoli could ever be induced to touch. Soon Stanislaus became very intimate with the ex-abbé; gave him his entire confidence; and was frequently closeted with him for hours, despite the warnings of his own family. They bade him beware of an adventurer who belonged to a Jacobine Club at Paris and whose views were so blown upon at Rome that he durst not show his face there.>

<It was at the suggestion of Ignatius Potocki that Piattoli was admitted into the secret council of the King's friends, originally seven in number, formed, at the beginning of February 1791, to bring about a liberal and peaceful revolution.> Most of their earlier meetings were held in Piattoli's apartments at the Palace. The affair was conducted with all the secrecy of a conspiracy which, indeed, it was. The very Kammerherr, who, with a lighted candle in each hand, conducted Stanislaus to and from the *rendezvous*, was not only devoted to his master but deaf and dumb besides, so that his discretion was unimpeachable. All the conspirators were agreed that the approaching peace between Russia and the Porte must not find Poland unprepared. All of them, except the King, believed that the Prussian alliance and a national Constitution in full working order would be the surest guarantees against active hostility on the part of the Empress. <As, however, experience had demonstrated the futility of the Diet's own efforts at constitution-making, they now begged the King himself to draw up a new form of Constitution suitable to the peculiar circumstances of the case. It would have been better for Poland if this tardy appeal had been made two years earlier ;

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but Stanislaus was not the man to reject the entreaties of his subjects even at the eleventh hour. He immediately set to work and presented his rough draft, written in French, on the model of the English Constitution, to his fellow conspirators with the words: "There you have the day-dreams of an aged citizen!" They were delighted with it as well they might be for "the day-dreams of an aged citizen" were the most practical and sensible rudiments of a Constitution which had ever been proposed for Poland. Briefly, the Stanisлавian Constitution converted Poland into a limited monarchy of the modern type. The Executive was vested in the Crown alone, the legislative functions and the power of the purse belonged exclusively to the Diet. The *liberum veto* and "the free election" system were forever abolished. The Polish crown was to be hereditary in the House of Saxony. Kollontaj at once proceeded to translate the King's French draft into excellent Polish, at the same time expanding its provisions so as to make it still more susceptible of sweeping reforms in the near future. Piattoli and Ignatius Potocki also had a hand in it. Unfortunately, some slight difference of opinion amongst the many collaborators as to the next step to be taken, together with the coincidence of current public business, delayed the further progress of the affair for more than a month. Then fresh warnings from the Polish ministers at foreign courts and an encouraging demonstration from the burgesses of Warsaw revived the energies of the plotters. In mid-April the meetings in Piattoli's apartments were resumed and sixty friendly members of the Diet were admitted into the secret. The adjournment of the Diet for the Easter vacation, almost immediately afterwards, gave the conspirators an idea which brought matters to a crisis. The House was to re-assemble on May 2. It was the usual practice to devote the first fortnight after the recess to financial business which excited little or no interest. On such occasions there was, generally speaking, a very poor attendance of deputies. Upon this remissness the conspirators calculated their plans. It was proposed on May 5, or immediately after

the beginning of the new session, to rush the Constitution through a thin House with the aid of as many well-disposed deputies as could be got together for the purpose and who were to be advertised beforehand of what was required of them. At the end of April the King thought he ought no longer to conceal the conspiracy from the Marshal of the Diet. Malachowski offered no objection to the King's plan; but he seems to have been somewhat indiscreet, though there is no conclusive evidence at hand that he actually betrayed the secret to the Opposition. Anyhow, they got wind of it and their leader, the tipsy Grand-Hetman Branicki at once warned his friends to be in their places by May 5. He is also said to have got his huge broad-sword sharpened and made ready for every emergency. Thus, at the last moment, the conspirators were obliged to reconsider their plans. At a meeting held at Piattoli's rooms on April 28, at 4 o'clock in the morning, it was agreed to carry out the *coup d'etat* on the 3rd instead of on the 5th of May, and to adopt a number of precautionary measures to facilitate its success. The King's nephew, the young, handsome and popular General, Prince Joseph Poniatowski, was to surround the Palace with troops to protect the Estates from the violence of the reactionaries, while Kollontaj undertook, by means of his various agents, to secure beforehand, the burgesses of Warsaw for the revolution.

On May 2, the Diet met for the first time after the Easter recess; discussed some unimportant financial business in a languid way; and then dispersed till the following day. In the evening there was a private meeting of friendly deputies at the Radziwill Palace. There the draft of the new Constitution was read, but no discussion was permitted, and the meeting separated amidst joyful cries of: "Agreed! Agreed!" Later the same evening the chief confederates met at Malachowski's house to decide as to their course of action in the Chamber on the following day. It was resolved to capture public opinion by the startling announcement of another impending partition of Poland and for this purpose, Matuszewicz, the deputy for Brzesc, and one of the

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Secretaries of State, had already been ordered to prepare, from the despatches of the Polish Ambassadors, a report on the political situation, for presentation to the Estates. An attempt was then made to secure the signatures of a hundred friendly deputies to the projected *coup d'état*. The deputies shrank back from giving their signatures, but a solemn promise of non-obstruction was obtained from them at the last moment.

Early on May 3, an unusual commotion was observable in the streets of Warsaw. Regiments of foot and squadrons of horse were seen hastening from the barracks to the Palace where the Diet was about to assemble. They were speedily followed by the civic guilds, headed by their presidents, with their banners borne before them. The streets were thronged by excited, gesticulating crowds of all classes. The most disquieting rumours were afloat. Every one was in a state of febrile expectation. People whispered to each other that something great, something unusual, was about to happen, and that the fate of Poland depended upon the events of the next few hours.

The Hall of Session was already full to overflowing. The galleries were thronged by women of the upper classes. The benches of the deputies were surrounded by extra-parliamentary politicians and agitators. In front of the Marshal's barrier sat Prince Joseph Poniatowski with the King's adjutant, General Golkowski. A score or so of Uhlans stood near them at attention. The throne was surrounded by numerous officers of the Royal Guard. The opponents of reform had taken their seats betimes, but each of them was speedily surrounded and separated from his fellows by two or three of the confederates, who never lost sight of them for a moment.

On the stroke of eleven, the King entered the Hall of Session preceded by the Marshal of the Diet and followed by a numerous retinue. He was greeted with loud applause. The High-Steward then struck his staff thrice to impose silence, and, amidst a deep hush, Malachowski opened the session. He reminded the deputies of the disasters which had

already befallen the Republic. He warned them that still more terrible disasters might momentarily be expected. Then he beckoned to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to read aloud the latest despatches from the Polish Ambassadors abroad.

At that instant the impatient and irresponsible orator, Pan Suchorzewski, suddenly rushed into the middle of the Chamber, plucked from his neck and cast from him with a gesture of loathing the Order of St. Stanislaus which the King had recently conferred upon him, and then, finding further progress impossible in the crowded Chamber, threw himself upon the ground, crept on all fours under the benches to the foot of the throne, and loudly demanded leave to speak. "We are being gagged, gagged, gagged," he yelled. "Put me in chains if you like, I don't care, but speak I will. If it is a matter of saving the country, I agree to any measure you like except this revolution." Perceiving, however, that his wild gabble produced no effect, while his purple, perspiring face, shrill voice and mad antics provoked the deputies to laughter, he suddenly turned round and rushed from the Chamber.

Secretary Matuszewicz then proceeded to recite extracts from the foreign despatches. They were serious enough certainly. From Vienna, Paris, Dresden, and the Hague came reports of Prussian intrigues aiming at a fresh partition of Poland. Still more alarming were the news from St. Petersburg. Deboli, the Polish Minister at the Russian Court, reported that Catherine's official mouthpiece, the Russian Vice-Chancellor, Osterman, had said to him: "If you Poles are eternally wrangling and squabbling among yourselves without coming to any conclusion, you will lose all your provinces and be made quiet that way." He concluded with a note of warning: "Our divisions and disorders are only too welcome to our neighbours who will take the first opportunity of compensating themselves at our expense." Finally, Matuszewicz turned to the throne with these words: "Such, Sire, is the political situation abroad. It behoves your Majesty and



STANISLAUS II DEFENDING THE MAY CONSTITUTION IN THE
DIET OF 1791



the illustrious Estates to provide for the safety of the Republic."

For a moment intense silence prevailed. Then an uneasy muttering was audible, in the midst of which Ignatius Potocki slowly arose. All eyes instinctively turned towards the leader of "the Patriots" who for so long a time had been the most determined opponent of his Sovereign. In view of the danger threatening the Republic, said Potocki, there was but one thing to be done—appeal to the King for counsel. "You, Sire," he continued, turning towards Stanislaus, "you, Sire, have the authority, the will, and the talents which entitle you, and you only, to render this service to the Republic. God grant us grace to forego for ever our private animosities."

Stanislaus immediately stood up and beckoned to all the Ministers and Senators to draw near to the throne. Then, very solemnly, he declared that after what they had just heard it was obvious that any further delay in establishing a new and stable Constitution must be fatal to Poland. "I propose," he concluded, "to read to you a project, carefully drawn up and earnestly recommended by many well-disposed citizens." Cries of "The project! the project!" came from every part of the House. The draft of the new Constitution was then read. It was received with shouts of: "Zgoda! Zgoda!" (*Agreed! Agreed!*) Malachowski, on behalf of the Diet, thereupon thanked the King for giving them the best of all possible Constitutions and begged him to confirm and strengthen "the new contract between King and People," by swearing to observe it there and then. The Chamber supported the petition of its Marshal with loud cries of: "We beg! We beg!"

So far the whole programme of the confederates had been carried out as pre-arranged with unlooked-for success. Everything seemed settled and the swearing to the new Constitution was about to begin, when Suchorzewski suddenly reappeared in the midst of the Diet carrying in his arms his little son, a child six years old. He shouted that the new Constitution was not only a treason against

the nation but a conspiracy against himself and his family. He therefore threw himself upon the protection of the Chamber and would not stir from its sacred precincts as it was the only place where he could feel personally secure. In the uproar which ensued, Suchorzewski was speedily surrounded by a group of deputies indignantly protesting. "Lock up the madman!" "Cut him down!" they cried. One gentleman took the terrified child from his father's arms and carried it away. Unfortunately, however, the persistency of their ring-leader encouraged the Opposition to raise its voice once more and a long and acrimonious debate began, which threatened to drown the Constitution in floods of irrelevant eloquence. To prevent this the King directed Malachowski, as Marshal of the Diet, to take the opinion of the House upon the matter forthwith. The Marshal, very adroitly, ordered all those who were in favour of the Constitution to keep silence and all those who were not in favour of it to come forward and speak. This placed the malcontents in a very awkward position by revealing their numerical weakness, for it was now patent that they could only count upon eleven members in a House of more than two hundred. Before they could recover themselves, Zabiello, the deputy for Livonia, moved that all who loved their country should vote for the new Constitution on the spot and that his Majesty should set the example by swearing to observe it first of all. He then left his seat and approached the throne followed by all the Ministers and Senators and the great majority of the deputies. Surrounding the King, they begged him, with enthusiasm, to wait no longer but take the oath. The ladies in the galleries, waving their hands and fluttering their handkerchiefs, and the general public on the floor of the Chamber concurred. Loud cries of: "Long live the King! Long live the Constitution!" resounded on every side. For the moment the Diet had ceased to be a legislative assembly and had become a huzzahing mob. The enthusiasm within the Chamber penetrated first to the corridors of the Palace and then to the crowds outside and soon all the streets and squares in Warsaw were ringing with cries of:

"Long live the King! Long live the Constitution!" In all that vast assembly the sole dissentient was the irrepressible Suchorzewski. Unable to make himself heard any longer, he flung himself down in front of the throne and the mob of Senators, Ministers and Deputies trampled him under foot as they rushed forward to take the oath. The wretched man would have been trodden to death on the spot had not the gigantic deputy, Pan Kublicki, snatched him up and taken him out of the Chamber like a child, yelling and struggling to the last.

Meanwhile, the din and tumult around the throne had become so great that Stanislaus was obliged to mount upon his chair-of-state and make signs that he would speak. Silence instantly prevailed, and the King, in a loud voice, expressed his desire to accede to the unanimous wish of the Diet that he should swear to observe the new Constitution. "Let some of you who are priests come forward, therefore, and prescribe for me a proper form of oath," he concluded. Turski Bishop of Cracow and Fr. Gorzewski thereupon approached the throne, and while the former recited the proper formula the latter held a copy of the Gospels wide open in front of the King. With his hand resting firmly on the Holy Gospels, Stanislaus took the oath. The whole assembly, in an ecstasy of joy, thereupon flung their caps into the air, and, with streaming eyes, shouted: "Long live the King! Long live the King!" After taking the oath, the King exclaimed: "*Juravi Domino et ne pœnitibet!* I call upon all those who love their country to follow me to Church there to take the oath in common and, at the same time, to thank God for permitting me to complete so solemn and beneficial a work."

By this time it was seven o'clock in the evening. The session had lasted eight hours. The last rays of the setting sun were illuminating the vast concourse of people in the square outside when through the gates of the Palace in solemn procession came the members of the last independent Polish Diet on their way to the venerable church of St. John, headed by their two * Marshals. No sooner did the

* One representing Poland, the other Lithuania.

assembled burgesses perceive the Marshals than they burst through the ranks of the soldiers, seized Malachowski and his colleague, Prince Casimir Sapieha, in their arms and carried them on their shoulders to the doors of the Church. The King was already there kneeling in front of the altar. The Senators, Deputies and Ministers took their places in silence behind and around him. Then Prince Sapieha who, hitherto, had been one of the most determined opponents of reform, arose and declared that although the new Constitution contained much of which he disapproved, he felt, nevertheless, that it would be wrong of him to resist any longer what was so evidently the will of the nation. He would therefore cheerfully follow the example set him by his King and the great majority of his fellow citizens. Upon this he was warmly embraced by his colleague Malachowski and then all present, in order of precedence, took the oath to the new Constitution. A *Te Deum* was then solemnly intoned by the officiating clergy, the crowd outside singing in unison with the congregation which thronged the Church. Higher and higher swelled the triumphant chant till it overwhelmed the deep tones of the organ and the still louder salvos of artillery which hailed the great event from the citadel of Warsaw.

The Polish nation was justified in its rejoicing. For the first time in its history it had received from the hands of its Sovereign and its Legislature a Constitution which would, under ordinary circumstances, have provided the surest guarantee of its future prosperity. Time only was wanted to accustom the people to the working of the new political machinery and correct its inevitable but trifling blemishes as experience revealed them. A brief respite from alien interference, ten, nay, even five years of peaceful self-development might have placed regenerate Poland beyond the reach of foreign malice and domestic treason. But alas! the Nemesis which always waits upon the sins of nations was inexorable. Poland was permitted no such time of necessary trial and training, no such healing period of recovery, the Constitution of 1791 came too late to save her.



STANISLAUS II PROCEEDING TO CHURCH TO SWEAR TO THE CONSTITUTION OF MAY 3, 1791
FROM THE PICTURE BY MATEJKO



CHAPTER XI

THE VENGEANCE OF CATHERINE

Displeasure of Catherine at the Polish Revolution—Her affectation of indifference—The new Russian Ambassador at Warsaw, Yakov Ivanovich Bulgakov—Extreme difficulties of Catherine II. during the year 1791—The Poles choose the Elector of Saxony as the successor of King Stanislaus—Alarm of the Elector—Bungling of the Polish Diet—Prince Joseph Poniatowski—His character—Felix Potocki appeals to Catherine to protect the liberties of Poland—Formation of the Confederation of Targowica—Curious letter of Felix to his son—Advance of the Confederation on the capital—Its tyranny and depredations—The triumph of Felix—Celebration of the anniversary of the May Constitution at Warsaw—Presages of coming disaster—The Russian declaration of war and the defection of Prussia—Prince Joseph appointed Commander-in-Chief of an army which does not exist—Kosciuszko—His character—The Campaign of 1792—Overwhelming disadvantages of the Poles—Battle of Zielence—Treachery of the Prince of Wurtemberg and other officers—Battle of Dubienka—The King accedes to the Confederation of Targowica

IF at Warsaw the proclamation of the Constitution of 1791 was rightly celebrated as a national and patriotic triumph, at St. Petersburg the momentous event was naturally regarded from a very different point of view. To Catherine it came as a deliberate affront, an open challenge, nor was her temper likely to be improved by the humiliating reflection that she must pocket the affront because, for the moment, she could not take up the challenge. The Poles, she argued, had treated her scurvily. Her advances had been flouted, her overtures rejected. She had offered them her friendship—and peace; they had preferred her enmity—and war. Well! be it so! They should have what they wanted. In her own good time she would show this ungrateful and unprofitable people that if her amity was a

guarantee of welfare, her enmity would, infallibly, bring with it disgrace and destruction. At present, however, the political situation demanded the exercise of extreme caution. Not till she was the mistress instead of the slave of circumstances could she permit her avenging arm to fall. She must, in the meantime, mask her fury with a semblance of serene nonchalance. It was this cat-like capacity for patiently, tirelessly watching her prey till it was absolutely within her reach, which made Catherine such a dangerous adversary.

To all outward appearances, therefore, the Russian Empress remained indifferent to the proceedings of the Polish Diet. Even the recall of her Ambassador signified, seemingly, rather a change of persons than a change of principles. It was notorious that Catherine had long been dissatisfied with Stackelberg, and every one at Warsaw was charmed with his successor, whom they declared to be the most amiable of men. This successor was Yakov Ivanovich Bulgakov, who, after an academical career unusually brilliant for those times, had, in 1761, begun his career in the Russian Foreign Office. In 1781 he was appointed Minister Plenipotentiary at Constantinople, by far the most important post in the Russian diplomatic service, where he had worthily upheld the high traditions of his distinguished predecessors. Bulgakov was a man of astounding industry. Though, perhaps, one of the hardest worked of the Empress's servants, he, nevertheless, always found time to continue his literary studies, and during his seven and twenty months of imprisonment in the Seven Towers at Stambul, into which he was thrown on the outbreak of the second Turkish War, in 1787, he translated into Russian for his own amusement, nearly thirty volumes of the Abbé de la Porte's encyclopedic: "*Voyageur françois, ou, La Connaissance de l'Ancien et du Nouveau Monde.*"

Bulgakov arrived at Warsaw on September 7, 1790. His instructions were to adopt an absolutely passive attitude, observing everything, reporting everything, but doing

nothing at all. "You are to win the hearts of these people by gentle, friendly, cautious behaviour, *till the Turkish War is over*," wrote Catherine significantly. Bulgakov was an ideal Ambassador for the situation. He had been trained in the secret, underhand school of Oriental diplomacy, and preferred to work by subterranean methods. During his brief stay in Poland he more than justified the Empress's expectations. He came with a brilliant suite of *attachés* and at once set up a magnificent establishment. He seemed to have come for the sole purpose of providing the Poles with additional amusements. The most sensational, the most provocative events (from the Russian point of view) left him politely indifferent. All the friends and acquaintances of his predecessor were invited, regularly, to his frequent and soon famous dinners at which the most exquisite dishes, invented by the best French cooks, were served on silver plate and rare porcelain. Still more popular were the simple, honest gentleman's whist-tables, which attracted crowds of Polish Senators and Deputies. For the most indifferent players speedily discovered to their delight and surprise, that, however they might fare elsewhere, at the Russian Ambassador's, at any rate, they invariably held good cards and won respectable stakes.

Bulgakov reported that the feeling against Russia was increasing rather than diminishing. "It is the fashion here, just now, to be Russophobe," he wrote. This was true enough, but when he added that Prussia had placed 150,000 ducats at the disposal of the King for distribution among the Deputies and that everything relating to the succession to the Polish throne had been settled beforehand with the King of Prussia, he was woefully at fault. The fact was that the Court and the Patriots held aloof from Bulgakov altogether, so that he was not in the secret of things and had to depend on loose gossip for his information. Not one penny had been secured from the King of Prussia by Stanislaus, and, so far from consenting to the project of an hereditary monarchy in Poland, Frederick William II. was very much opposed to the very idea of such a thing. Never-

theless, Catherine believed Bulgakov implicitly, and the contents of his reports embittered her ever more and more against the Poles.

All through 1791, however, she was obliged to keep quiet. That momentous year was, perhaps, the most anxious period of her life. The astounding victories of her generals on the Danube had excited against her the jealousy of all Europe and she knew that, at any moment, she might have to deal with a formidable coalition. In January, Great Britain and Prussia delivered to her an ultimatum with regard to Turkish affairs which was almost tantamount to a declaration of war. In March, Pitt announced in the House of Commons that inasmuch as all the efforts of the King and his servants had failed to bring about a peace between the Russian Empress and the Ottoman Porte, his Majesty trusted that his faithful Commons would vote extra supplies sufficient to equip a strong fleet for immediate despatch to the Baltic. Despite the vigorous protests of the Opposition,* the Ministry carried their motion by a majority of eighty. The Russian Cabinet, thereupon, unanimously implored Catherine to yield to the demands of Great Britain and Prussia and abate her claims upon Turkey. She resolutely refused. "The God of Russia is great," was the only reply she vouchsafed to their entreaties. Then she rallied all her forces for a supreme effort and made vigorous preparations for the resumption of a war which had already lasted four years and cost her 400,000 men. In August, Repnin's brilliant victory at Machin brought the Turk to his knees at last, and, in the meantime, the threatening clouds in the West had disappeared from the political horizon. In May, Pitt became aware that Prussia did not want a war with Russia; public opinion in Great Britain, especially in commercial circles, protested more and more vehemently against the Russophobe attitude

* Catherine was so pleased with Fox's attitude on this occasion that she not only placed his bust between the busts of Cicero and Demosthenes at Tsarkoe Selo, but is said to have paid his debts through the Russian Ambassador at London.

of the Ministry ; while Sweden, Denmark and Holland refused to be tempted into another Northern War by any amount of subsidies. So the British Cabinet lowered its tone and the British fleet was not sent to the Baltic after all. In July, Catherine re-opened negotiations with the Porte, and on January 9, 1792, the faultless diplomacy of Bezborodko secured for Russia one of the most advantageous treaties of peace she had ever signed.

Resoluteness, unity and perspicacity had rescued Russia from a situation of extraordinary difficulty. The want of these three great saving qualities was now to plunge Poland back into the quagmire of anarchy at the very moment when she seemed, at last, to have struggled on to firm ground.

The authors of the Constitution of 1791 had accomplished a good and great work, a work which deserved to succeed inasmuch as it was based on real good-will, on individual self-sacrifice, on genuine patriotism. The new Constitution was by far the most promising form of government which Poland had ever possessed because it was the voluntary act of the best of the Poles themselves, thoroughly convinced of the absolute necessity of what they were about and supported by the vast majority of their fellow citizens. Against the sincerity, the earnestness, the political morality of these men not one word can fairly be said. Their aims were lofty, their intentions excellent, their proceedings just and right. Unfortunately, with the exception of the King, they were amateurs in politics and veritable children in diplomacy. This was inevitable. All the Patriots had had very little experience in affairs. The very little they happened to know they had learnt from books, books of the worst possible kind, from a practical point of view, because they were saturated with the fanciful theories and the misleading optimism of Rousseau and the Encyclopædists. Hence the simplicity, the amateurishness, the rashness of the politicians of the Quadrennial Diet. Their hearts were undoubtedly in the right place, but they had no heads for business—and politics, as they were speedily to discover, is the most difficult and exacting form of business.

For instance, take the crucial point of the new Constitution—the question of the succession to the throne. In view of the age and infirmity of King Stanislaus it was obvious that it could not be very long before the throne must become vacant. The Diet, recognising the fact, had, consequently, chosen as his successor Frederick Augustus, Elector of Saxony. In some respects the choice was not an infelicitous one. The Elector was personally popular in Poland. As a Catholic he was acceptable to a majority of the Poles. As a Sovereign Prince whose ancestors had reigned in Poland for two generations and whose claims were not, at first, unfavourably regarded either by Russia or Austria, he was, certainly, the candidate least likely to be disturbed either by civil discord or foreign interference. On the other hand, he was a Prince who hated surprises and was very easily frightened. Yet, knowing this, the Poles elected him without consulting his wishes or even officially informing him of the honour in store for him. Nevertheless, some vague rumours of what had been done reached the Elector, privately and circuitously, and, as might have been expected, Augustus Frederick wrote, at once, in great alarm, to King Stanislaus plainly telling him that he could not think of accepting the Polish crown until the three neighbouring great Powers had consented thereto, and even then he must stipulate that his election should not cause the shedding of a single drop of blood or the burning of a single hut. Such excessive caution, so many difficult, not to say impossible, conditions were, in the circumstances, tantamount to a refusal. Yet the Polish Government took no steps to reassure the Elector, and the Polish Minister at Dresden, Jan Nepomuk Malachowski, a raw youth who should never have been entrusted with so important a post, chose this inopportune time to take a long holiday, leaving behind him a timid and inexperienced *attaché* without any instructions. Thus, incredible as it may sound, although Frederick Augustus was elected the successor to the Polish throne early in 1790, he was not officially informed of the fact till nearly twelve months later when Ignatius Potocki sent Thaddeus Matus-

zewicz to Dresden to ascertain his views. All that Matuszewicz could get out of Frederick Augustus was a vague expression of gratitude to the Polish nation. Only then did the Polish Government seem to realise that the Elector was not to be had for the mere asking. Piattoli now suggested that Ignatius Potocki himself should immediately proceed to Dresden, first to make sure of the Elector, or, failing him, one of his family, and then go on to Berlin to enlist the sympathies of the King of Prussia in the project. But Potocki was either too indolent or too preoccupied to undertake the double mission at once; other business, supposed to be of more importance, intervened; and so the matter rested till, at last (April 16, 1792), the Elector declined the Polish crown altogether.

The withdrawal of the Saxon Elector was a serious blow to the hopes of the Polish statesmen. Yet they took no step to find a substitute although they had in their very midst one who, in ordinary circumstances and normal conditions, would have been an irreproachable candidate for the throne, in the person of the King's nephew, Prince Joseph Poniatowski.

Joseph Poniatowski was the only son of Prince Stanislaus Andrew Poniatowski, who had settled betimes at Vienna; married the wealthy Bohemian Countess Kinska; and become, to all intents and purposes, an Austrian subject. The young Joseph seemed likely to follow his father's example. His education, excellent in its way, was more on cosmopolitan than patriotic lines and up to his twenty-first year he was somewhat of a stranger in Poland. The beauty and amiability of "little Pepi" made him a universal favourite, and the whole Poniatowski family combined together, happily in aim, to spoil him. King Stanislaus in particular doated upon his nephew. At the age of fifteen Joseph was already an officer in the Austrian army and completely emancipated. For the next six years he shone as one of the most striking and original figures in Austrian and Polish society. Devoted to pleasure and gaiety, he was reputed the most daring horseman, the most accomplished

dancer and the most dangerous Don Juan at Vienna and Warsaw. But mere amusement was incapable of satisfying permanently an essentially self-sacrificing and chivalrous nature. Already he longed for nobler exploits. In his eighteenth year he seized the first opportunity of seeing active service and followed the Austrian forces to the Danube on the outbreak of the Turkish War of 1787. At Szabacs he brilliantly distinguished himself but was dangerously wounded. The convocation of the Quadrennial Diet first awoke in the heart of the young Prince that pure and ardent patriotism which was to cover both himself and his country with such deathless glory. He begged and obtained the leave of the Emperor Leopold to quit the Austrian for the Polish service, and, hastening to Warsaw, placed his sword at the disposal of the Republic. His royal uncle received him with enthusiasm ; gave him a clear start by paying off all his debts amounting to some 30,000 ducats ; and made him a major-general. He would have raised him to the dignity of Grand-Hetman had he dared. For a moment Stanislaus even dreamed of recommending Joseph as his successor, but speedily abandoned the idea because he was convinced that even if the Diet consented to such a thing (which was more than doubtful), the reactionary magnates would, infallibly, have plunged the country into a civil war rather than have accepted a second Poniatowski as their King. Yet the ability of Prince Joseph was not inferior to his patriotism. At Vienna he was already regarded as indisputably the ablest general in the Polish army and the best professional experts had the highest opinion of his military talents. General Möllendorff, the oracle of the Prussian general staff, requested Lucchesini to tempt the Prince with the command of a Prussian division while he was still an Austrian officer. Von Goltz, the new Prussian Minister at Warsaw, reported that Prince Joseph possessed the qualities most likely to win the confidence of the Poles. He was young, handsome, obliging, skilful in all bodily exercises, and of a lively and brilliant understanding. The only objection to him was that, if he became King, his military



PRINCE JOSEPH PONIATOWSKI



capacity might make him dangerous to his neighbours. It is a melancholy reflection that a foreigner, and a Prussian officer to boot, should have been the first to recognise the peculiar fitness of Prince Joseph to succeed his uncle on the throne. Unfortunately, the Poles themselves had long since lost the faculty of arriving at an understanding about their own great men and preferred to turn to second-rate foreign potentates who refused to have anything to do with them. It was this moral and intellectual blindness more than anything else which made the whole situation so desperate.

The nearer we approach the miserable *dénouement*, the more we must feel amazed at the boundless neglect and nonchalance of the Polish Government. In the higher official circles, extravagant confidence alternated with paralysing hesitation. Everywhere, down to the very last moment, there prevailed a stone-blind ignorance of the gravity of the situation. Not a single step had been taken towards the mobilising of the army and placing the country generally in a state of defence. Instead of that, when the Diet reassembled on March 15, 1792, its attention was engrossed by a petition from the inhabitants of the far-distant eastern palatinates that a Church dedicated to Divine Providence should be built at Warsaw in commemoration of the Constitution of May 3, 1791.

And while the friends of the Constitution were debating and debating in as leisurely a fashion as if the political millennium of Poland had actually arrived, the enemies of the Constitution were actually compassing its downfall. The natural leader of the malcontents was Felix Potocki. On the overthrow of the Russian party, Felix had quitted Warsaw in high dudgeon and wandered about for a time in Italy like an evil spirit seeking rest and finding none. Evidently he still hesitated to betray his country, but he was already on the brink of that decision. It needed but the slightest impulsion to topple him over into the abyss of treason. That impulsion came when the Polish Government commanded him, within three months' time, to return

to Poland and take the oath to the new Constitution under penalty of outlawry. Then all the long-smouldering pride and resentment of this haughty, self-willed magnate against a King whom he despised and a Parliament which he detested, burst into a devouring flame. Casting his last scruples to the winds, he resolved, forthwith, to appeal to the deadliest enemy of his own country, the Russian Empress, for protection and vengeance. First he hastened to Jassy, where the negotiations between Russia and the Porte were drawing to a conclusion, and, finally, to St. Petersburg, taking along with him his accomplices Rzewuski and Branicki.

By this time Catherine had quite made up her mind about Poland. The Republic was to be rendered quite harmless for the future by a second partition. A secret understanding to that effect had already been arrived at with the King of Prussia. A decent pretext for direct interference was now all that she wanted and this was supplied when Felix Potocki and his associates arrived at the Russian capital and besought her to protect the ancient liberties of the Polish Republic against the dangerous foreign innovations of the Constitution of May 3, which they said, had been imposed upon the Polish nation by an unheard-of combination of force and fraud. Catherine received the Polish magnates with engaging courtesy. Well aware of the inordinate vanity of Felix, she treated him on terms of perfect equality, as if he were a sovereign-prince; adroitly flattered him by pretending to be much impressed by his arguments; and declared that she could really refuse nothing to such a genuine patriot. The infatuated traitor took her words for Gospel truths, and actually believed that he was making a tool of her. She not only undertook to restore the old Constitution by force of arms and place a Russian army-corps at Potocki's disposal for that purpose, but even promised to respect the territorial integrity of Poland, a point on which the petitioners, to their credit, laid particular stress. Such a promise cost Catherine nothing, for she never meant to keep it. No

sooner was Poland at her mercy than she flung Potocki aside "like a sucked orange" and repudiated "the territorial integrity" stipulation with cynical effrontery. On one thing, however, Catherine insisted emphatically. The Poles themselves, she said, must take the initiative by forming a Confederation and publicly inviting her cooperation in the name of the Polish nation. On May 14, 1792, a Confederation was accordingly formed at the little town of Targowica in the Ukraine. Its proclamation demanded the dissolution of the Diet, the abolition of the Constitution of May 3, 1791, and the complete restoration of the vicious old form of Government. Every one who refused "to cast off the chains imposed upon us by the May Constitution" was branded as a promoter of slavery and an enemy of his country. Finally, "as the nation lay beneath the yoke of foreign elements" and was consequently unable to right itself by its own efforts, they appealed with confidence "to the great Catherine" relying upon her well-known love of justice and magnanimity. And this Confederation, which spoke with such a loud and threatening voice, consisted, in the first instance, of only ten persons besides the three original conspirators.

That these men* were infatuated fools rather than deliberate traitors is plain from Felix Potocki's letter to his son Felix George, then a lieutenant in a Polish Cossack regiment, urging him also to turn his sword against his own country. This document is almost pathetic in its mental confusion, its incurable simplicity and its general topsyturvydom. "I am a Republican," begins Potocki, "and I would retain the Republic intact with all its faults. . . . It is all very well to introduce from Paris a new way of cutting your clothes or wearing your hair, but it would be the height of madness, and even a crime, to allow a French *savant*, who knows nothing of the circumstances, to do away with our ancient rights and customs and establish among us a metaphysical Constitution. Not everything is

* One of them, Benedict Hulewicz, subsequently wrote to Kollontaj: "Stulta mens nobis non scelerata fuit."

good and perfect because it can be expressed prettily on paper." After this hit at the Reformers, he proceeds to justify his own questionable methods and set forth the whole duty of a Polish nobleman as he understood it: "Providence sanctions extraordinary methods to save the Republic when ordinary means fail. The great Catherine holds out her hand to the nation, let us accept it with gratitude. And remember, my son! you must fight against every novelty in the Constitution of the Republic. Recollect that only those Republicans stand fast who know and respect the past and refuse to allow the customs of their ancestors to be ridiculed. . . . Remember, my dear Felix! that you were born a Polish nobleman. Love your Order, therefore! Let the privileges of that Order be ever sacred to you. Guard them by every means which God may give you. For our Order is the basis of the Republic, nay, it is the very Republic itself."

In a subsequent manifesto he declared that the Russian army marching along with him was only there to defend the Confederates from attack. This document was really a fulsome panegyric of the Empress. The Polish reformers are even severely taken to task for "insulting her."

The actions of the Confederates during their long march from the Ukraine to the Capital, beneath the wing of a Russian army, was an instructive commentary upon their patriotic profession of faith. At every stage of their progress they scattered manifestoes and ukases, as if from another Pandora's box, full of abuse and defamation of the reformers and lauding Catherine to the skies. At every place they came to they formed punitive tribunals by means of which they terrorised their political opponents in the name of Liberty. All the existing officials in the line of march were dismissed with contumely, all the villages and mansions of the "hostile" nobility, that is to say, those who had acceded to the May Constitution, were destroyed. All the decrees of the Polish Government were declared invalid, all who declined to submit to the Targowicians and their Russian supporters were proscribed. Malachowski was cited

to appear before the Confederate tribunal "for converting a free Republic of gentlemen into a tyranny," and Felix's own cousin Ignatius "for trying to destroy the friendship existing between the Republic and its glorious friend, Her Imperial Majesty, the Empress of Russia." The Russian auxiliaries were freely quartered upon the inhabitants of the provinces through which they passed, who were commanded to furnish them with provisions and forage "without taking receipts." When the victims protested or complained they were haled off to Siberia as "enemies of their country." To a polite and deprecating letter from the King, Felix replied with insults and menaces.

On September 4, all the Targowicians combined in a general Confederation at Brzesc Litewsk. On the 5th, Felix made his triumphal entry into Teresapol surrounded by his Russian protectors. The whole population, preceded by their magistrates and guild-masters, went forth to meet him with banners and music. The whole of the following week was given up to receptions, banquets and mutual laudations. All the dwellers in the neighbouring regions were swept into the camp by force to give a colour of public rejoicing to these celebrations. Most of the people were obliged to dwell in tents as there was no room for them in the towns and villages. A huge light-green pavilion was erected for the reception of Felix and his friends opposite the old Church of the Jesuits. In this Church, after the singing of a solemn *Te Deum*, the removal of the Blessed Sacrament from the altar, and the bringing in of a huge Crucifix "to be a witness of the proceedings," as Felix expressed it, the General Confederation held its first assembly. The same day Felix dined in state in his Green Pavilion off gold plate, and while the health of the Empress was drunk, amidst loud salvos, the health of Potocki's own lawful Sovereign was *forgotten*. By the evening the banquet had become a carouse in the old Polish style at which toasts to "Freedom restored" and "Her Imperial Majesty" were kept up till the speakers subsided for the night under the table.

At Warsaw, meanwhile, preparations were afoot for celebrating the anniversary of the May Constitution. It was to take the form of laying the foundations of the new Church to be dedicated to "Divine Providence" toward the expense of which nearly every palatinate in the country had subscribed. Never had Warsaw been fuller or gayer. Everything seemed to breathe hope and joy. The function was to be of unwonted splendour. The King determined on this occasion to wear, for the first time, his new and magnificent mantle of state incrustated with silver white-eagles, though it was not quite finished. At the last moment sinister rumours (supposed to have been circulated by the Russian Minister, Bulgakov) of a plot against the King's life on the part of the Warsaw Jacobins* caused a panic at Court. The King confessed, communicated and made his will as if on the point of death. But in spite of warning anonymous letters and the dissuasions of his friends, Stanislaus would not postpone the ceremony. It was resolved, however, for his better security, that the Holy Sacrament should be carried immediately before him in the procession in which delegates from all the towns and provinces of Poland were to take part. High Mass was previously celebrated in the Church of the Holy Cross in which a crimson throne had been erected for the King within a railed enclosure. Around the throne was an amphitheatre of boxes, covered with purple cloth, admission to which was by ticket only. The *Te Deum*, which had been specially composed for the occasion by Pasiello, was to be sung by a choir of 200 voices. The King drove to Church in "a magnificent crystal coach" surmounted by two winged geniuses or angels who held a gold crown above his head. The Nuncio followed immediately afterwards with a numerous suite clad in cloth of silver. All the foreign diplomatists were there except Bulgakov who had gone into the country the evening before. The ladies present wore white dresses

* There certainly was some sort of Jacobin Club at Warsaw under the protection of the French minister, Descorches, but the Jacobins in the Polish capital were quite insignificant as a political party.

with red scarves—the national colours. All the gentlemen were in parade or gala uniform. Conspicuous among the attendant clergy was the venerable figure of Theodorus Rostocki, Metropolitan of Red Russia, whose voluminous, long-sleeved, black *czamara* was all ablaze with gold and jewels.

After the King had welcomed the principal delegates in a brief speech from the throne and the delegates had responded by kissing his hands the service began. Suddenly the whole Church grew as dark as if night had fallen. A violent storm of wind and rain burst over it. But the tempest passed quickly away and the sun flooded the whole congregation with light at the very moment when the first notes of the *Te Deum* burst forth. After Mass, the King, escorted by a battalion of the musketeers of the Royal Foot Guard, set out for "Mount Calvary" a hillock at the foot of which the foundations of the new Church were to be laid, preceded by the City Guilds with their banners, the Religious Orders, the Judges, Senators and Deputies. After a short consecration service by the Primate, the place was dug, the stone was laid, the King struck it with the silver trowel, the cannons thundered forth—and then the heavens were again darkened and again there was a furious tempest of wind and rain. "I am not superstitious," says Niemcewicz, an eye-witness of the ceremony, "but I must confess that when, as the King, after placing several coins, all of them struck during his reign, beneath the foundation-stone, seized the trowel and began to mix the putty with it, and the sky, up to that moment serene, began to grow dark and a tempest of wind and rain descended, I must confess that many of us took it for an ill-omen for the durability of the Constitution." "It was," says another eye-witness, "as if Providence rejected our offering and refused to take us under Its protection."

And presently Job's messengers came flocking in from every direction. The very day after the dedication of the church of "The Divine Providence," a note from Berlin gave King Stanislaus to understand that if the Polish

Government intended to defend the principle of hereditary monarchy and the new Constitution by force of arms, it must not reckon on the support of Prussia. Unable at first to believe in the possibility of such a shameful repudiation of the most solemn engagements, the King sent Ignatius Potocki to Berlin with a letter reminding Frederick William II. of his treaty obligations and formally demanding the assistance due from him in the circumstances. Frederick William received the Polish Ambassador with chilling coldness. When Potocki reminded him that it was he who had first brought about the strained relations between Russia and Poland, undertaking, at the same time, by a special convention, to assist the Republic in case of hostilities, Frederick William was exceedingly embarrassed. At first he was quite at a loss for an answer. Then, in some confusion, he murmured something about circumstances altering cases. In his official reply to the King of Poland he peevishly declared that the May Constitution had been adopted without his knowledge and consent and that, consequently, he could not undertake to defend it.

Almost simultaneously the Russian Minister Bulgakov presented to Chreptowicz, the Polish Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, a formal declaration of war, a printed but undated copy of which had been in his possession for some weeks. A few days afterwards, the Russian army crossed the Polish border in three divisions, and private advices from Deboli at St. Petersburg told the King of the formation of the Confederation of Targowica beneath the protection of a Russian army-corps.

On May 21 the Russian declaration of war was read in the Diet. The King implored the House and the crowded galleries to take the matter calmly and the declaration was read aloud amidst the most profound silence. Then Stanislaus, in a very lucid and vigorous speech, pointed out that the declaration obviously aimed at destroying not only the work of the Diet but the Diet itself including all their recently recovered liberties. Otherwise Russia would never have gone the length of supporting the rebellion of a mere

handful of reactionaries against a Constitution sanctioned by what was, virtually, the will of the whole nation. He next reminded them that, in view of the desertion of Prussia, a desertion doubly base because Prussia had, all along, deliberately urged the Diet to do everything of which she now affected to disapprove, they must depend entirely on their own resources. As for himself, he meant to be wherever his presence might be most required. On the 22nd, the Diet appointed the King Dictator, on which occasion Stanislaus solemnly declared that, if necessary, he would sacrifice his life for his country. Then, after hastily decreeing a national loan, on the security of the national domains, a *levée en masse* of the entire male population and other defensive measures, all of them, unhappily, too late, the Diet dissolved, leaving the destinies of the nation in the hands of the King.*

The King appointed his nephew, Prince Joseph, Commander-in-Chief of an army which practically, was not yet in existence. A Polish writer, with fine irony, has thus described the situation: "Prince Joseph asked for magazines, reserves, covering fortresses, hospitals, artillery, a commissariat, a military-chest, cavalry and infantry." The War Commission replied: "We have none of these things at present but we will do our best to provide them gradually as the war goes on. You have full powers, remember! We make you Commissariat-General as well as Commander-in-Chief. Work miracles with all your might! Have not we also been working miracles during the last two years? Have we not raised the army from 18,000 to 50,000 men? It is true that half the cavalry has never been drilled in the saddle. It is true that the calibre of the carbines is different in every regiment. It is true that none of the regiments has its full complement or the same sort of weapon. But what's the use of bothering yourself about all that now?"

* Characteristically enough, even after the declaration of war, the Polish Government never gave the Russian Ambassador his passports although the Embassy was now, notoriously, the focus of an active conspiracy against the Patriots and the King.

We must send abroad and get all we want as soon as we can. The army will, of course, have to be armed somehow. In the meantime, your courage, your mother-wit and your patriotism, must supply the place of all these unfortunate deficiencies. What else are you here for? ' "

Prince Joseph, when summoned before the Commission of War to suggest a plan of campaign, was the only general officer who had the courage to declare that, from a purely military point of view, the case of Poland was well-nigh desperate. In his opinion, it was foolish to attempt anything with such inadequate resources. He desired, therefore, to be relieved of the supreme command, at the same time expressing his willingness to serve under any other general who might be appointed in his place, provided that the army was sufficiently reinforced beforehand so as to guarantee at least some small measure of success. But the King replied that at such a crisis the main thing, after all, was to do one's duty with the means in hand, and defend one's country to the uttermost like a true Pole. The Prince was further encouraged by the assurance that as soon as hostilities began, the King of Prussia * would hasten to his assistance with at least 30,000 men, as provided by treaty. This appeal to his duty and his patriotism was decisive. Without another word of objection, the young Commander-in-Chief hastened to the front.

On reaching the Ukraine Prince Joseph found things even worse than he had anticipated. The troops he had to command were the *débris* of the frontier army of observation which Felix Potocki had formed and led during the Russo-Turkish War, and were largely infected by the chronic insubordination of their former chief. Most of the officers of Potocki's regiments were doubtful of success and disinclined to fight. Some of them had to be cashiered on the spot, others deserted to the enemy during the course of the struggle. The really loyal officers were either too young or too old and, generally speaking, few of them had the

* The Prussian note had not yet been received and Frederick William II. was still confidently depended upon as an ally.

least idea of military discipline. There was, however, one most notable exception in the person of Kosciuszko.

Andrew Thaddeus Bonaventura Kosciuszko, though the junior general in the Polish service, was now in his forty-eighth year and thus sixteen years older than the Commander-in-Chief. So far his career, though by no means inglorious, could scarcely be called successful, and his very exploits had done him more harm than good in Poland. As one of the numerous *protégés* of the Czartoryscy, he had received the rudiments of military training in the School of Cadets where he had devoted himself, with ardour, to the study of mathematics and engineering. From 1769 to 1774 he completed his education in Germany, Italy and France, more particularly at the military school at Versailles. During his holidays he made two tours of inspection among the principal fortresses of France in the course of which he imbibed, eagerly, many of the new French ideas about liberty and equality. On his return to Poland an unlucky love-affair (he had the presumption to aspire to the hand of a great lady against the wishes of her family) speedily drove him once more into exile. In 1776 he returned to France and enlisted as a volunteer in the army sent by the French Government to assist the American rebels. Nine years later he returned to Poland with the Cincinnatus Order and the reputation of a great military engineer. In his own country, however, he was a stranger, and a stranger on whom some very eminent persons looked askance. On attending a Court *levée* he was received with marked coldness. King Stanislaus, noticing the inscription on the Cincinnatus Order: *Omnia relinquit servare rempublicam*, which Kosciuszko wore upon his breast, gravely shook his head and hinted, pretty plainly, that there were other duties, nearer home, besides duties to distant Republics. "Methinks," he added, "this inscription savours somewhat of fanaticism." So Kosciuszko was passed over and forgotten. Till 1788 he lived in retirement on his little estate. Then the Princess Lubomirska interceded for him and urged the King to give him

employment. By this time circumstances had completely changed and experienced officers were very badly wanted in Poland. On October 13, 1789, therefore, Kosciuszko was appointed a general of brigade.

From the first there was a natural antipathy between Prince Joseph and Kosciuszko. The fundamental difference of their characters excluded the possibility of anything like intimacy or sympathy. As regards birth, education, public views and private ideals, they belonged to different spheres. Prince Joseph at his best was a mediæval paladin, at his worst an indulgent, easy-going patrician, by no means insensible to the many good things which life had to offer him. Kosciuszko was an austere and thorough-going republican of more than Spartan sternness and simplicity—a sort of Catholic Jacobin, if such an anomaly be conceivable. Yet both were heroes, both were patriots of the noblest type. Jealousy of each other never entered, never could enter, into those generous spirits. Each of them always recognised and did the fullest justice to the other's abilities and services. And when, in the last but most glorious hour * of Polish history, the Polish people rose as one man at the appeal of Kosciuszko, Prince Joseph, flinging all family considerations and all aristocratic prejudices to the winds, was among the first to lay his sword humbly at the feet of the new Dictator.

The only instructions Prince Joseph had received were to avoid assuming the offensive, lest the Prussians might say afterwards that the first act of aggression had come from the Poles; to spare his army as much as was compatible with keeping the enemy back; and to keep open his communications with the capital. For the rest he was to act according to circumstances, the largest discretion being allowed to him in this respect.

The Polish generals being thus committed beforehand to the defensive, their operations depended entirely on the strategy of the enemy, and were necessarily halting and tentative. The Russian plan of campaign, on the other

* 1794.



KOSCIUSZKO



hand, was based on an exact knowledge of all the Polish positions. Thus, every moral as well as every material advantage was on the side of the invader. The Polish forces were scattered all over the district lying between the Slucz and the Dniester. The Russians proposed to surround and separate them, cut off their communications with Warsaw, and wipe them out in detail. This surrounding movement was so ably conceived that it seemed impossible for a single Polish brigade to escape. Nevertheless, Prince Joseph succeeded in concentrating all his forces and took up a strong position at Lubar with his front protected by the Slucz and its morasses. It was hoped that the army might rest here for a time, but the Russian advance was so energetic that this proved to be impossible. Early on June 5, the Poles were obliged to fall back upon the fortress of Polonne where a quantity of much-needed stores had, in the meantime, been collected. Despite the incessant pursuit of three hostile columns (each one of which was larger than his whole army) provided with artillery four times more powerful than his own, Joseph made good his retreat to Polonne, thanks, mainly, to the valour of the rear-guard, under Kosciuszko, which stood firm among the marshes of Boruszkowico and, after holding the enemy back till the evening, safely rejoined the main body with the sacrifice of seven guns.

Two hours later the Cossacks of the Russian advance-guard appeared outside the walls of Polonne. The confusion in the Polish army was great, its weariness was still greater; but Prince Joseph, having convinced himself, in the meantime, that the fortress was untenable, there was nothing for it but to retreat still further. Accordingly, after setting fire to the superfluous magazines and spiking forty-five cannons, the retreat was continued (June 17) to Zielence where Prince Lubomirsky had received orders to await the Commander-in-Chief with 6000 reserves and a quantity of stores and ammunition. The attempt of the Russian general, Kachowski, to outmarch the Poles led to the first general engagement of the war. When Markov's

detached division, 8000 strong, reached Zielence they found it already occupied by 2200 Polish infantry and 800 cavalry, very strongly posted, and at once attacked it. A battle now began in which the whole of the Polish main army was gradually engaged as it came up. The engagement lasted from seven in the morning till five in the afternoon and, after desperate fighting on both sides, the Russians were forced to retire with the loss of some thousands of men. The victory was due partly to the skill of Kosciuszko in the disposition of the Polish artillery which commanded that of the Russians from a superior height ; and partly to the heroism of the Polish generals, all of whom brilliantly distinguished themselves. At the crisis of the struggle, when the Polish centre was borne down by the sheer weight of the Russian column, Prince Joseph, placing himself at the head of his one reserve battalion, led it into fire and retrieved the fortunes of the day.

Prince Joseph has been severely blamed for not following up the victory of Zielence. Kosciuszko always maintained that if Markov's retreating corps had been instantly pursued it might have been annihilated. Many of his contemporaries agreed with him. Prince Joseph himself regretted his remissness subsequently. "I have sometimes lost a victory because I was too afraid of being defeated," he is reported to have said. But there is another side to the question. We know from the *mémoires* of a contemporary, General Zajaczek, that, at this stage of the war, many of the Polish officers had not that perfect confidence in their young Commander which they had six weeks later and that the Prince was only too well aware of the fact. A generalissimo who has good reason to fear that his subordinates will not adequately support him at a crisis has an excellent excuse for avoiding risks. It should also not be forgotten that the Russian army, though defeated, was by no means demoralised. It retreated leisurely in a solid square formation. A half-hearted attack upon it by inferior forces might have failed, and failure in the circumstances would have been ruination. That the *morale* of the Polish

army was still very unsatisfactory is plain from two very disagreeable incidents which happened almost immediately after the battle. Brigadier Rudnicki, under the pretext of making a recognisance, deserted to the enemy, and Prince Lubomirsky was relieved of his command for more than equivocal conduct. Apparently, therefore, Prince Joseph was right in resting upon his laurels. And, after all, Zielence was no contemptible triumph. In congratulating the victor, King Stanislaus appositely reminded him that it was the first pitched battle won by a Polish army since the days of Sobieski.

The glad tidings of Zielence was all the more acceptable at Warsaw inasmuch as from every other quarter came nothing but news of disgrace and disaster.

The command of the northern army had been entrusted to Prince Louis of Wurtemberg. This appointment should never have been made. It was due partly to a feminine intrigue (the Prince was the son-in-law of the Princess-Marshal Lubomirska who desired to see him on the Polish throne) and partly to a piece of false diplomacy, being meant as a sop to Prussia to whose interests the Prince was entirely devoted. So thorough a Prussian could only be a very lukewarm Pole at best, and it is now pretty clear that Wurtemberg meditated treachery from the moment that he assumed the command. A fortnight after his appointment, he wrote to the King that gangrene had attacked an open wound in his leg and that, consequently, he feared he would be unable to open the campaign. After four more bulletins on the same subject, within four days, he declared that he could not move from the spot till the Polish Treasury had sent him 4000 ducats. Then Stanislaus understood what was really the matter. Wurtemberg received his *congé* * and General Judycki was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Lithuanian army in his stead. All too late. "The sick leg of the Prince of Wurtemberg has done us

* He at once posted off to Berlin giving out that he was on his way to the Spa of Wilhelmsbad to nurse his wound which, it is hardly necessary to say, was a purely fictitious one.

irreparable mischief," wrote the King to Prince Joseph. Judycki, a brave and honest, but not particularly able man, could not recover the lost ground. On June 12, the Russians occupied Wilna, the capital of Lithuania. On the 24th, they captured the magazines prepared for the Lithuanian army at Nieswicz, while Judycki was in full retreat upon Grodno. It was to Prince Joseph and Kosciuszko alone that Poland now looked for succour.

But by this time it was as much as Prince Joseph could do to snatch his own little army from destruction. Since the battle of Zielence he had been compelled to retreat continually. Towards the end of May he reached Ostrog on the Horyn. The place was so strong by nature that a little spade-work could have made it impregnable against a ten-fold larger army. This was so well known at Warsaw that every one there felt convinced that Prince Joseph would remain at Ostrog for at least two months and thus give the King time to get together another army-corps. Ostrog was to be the rock of deliverance against which the whole might of Russia was to exhaust its fury in vain. Imagine, then, the grief, the astonishment, in the Polish capital when the news arrived that Prince Joseph had stood fast at Ostrog barely a couple of days and was already in full retreat towards the Bug! The most injurious suspicions were instantly and openly expressed against both the King and his nephew. The least of the accusations brought against them was the betrayal of their country in collusion with the enemy. Couriers were at once despatched to the army to discover the cause of this sudden retreat, and till they returned Warsaw was in a state of violent agitation. Yet the explanation was so simple that it might easily have been guessed beforehand. Immediately after Zielence, the Polish Commander-in-Chief received the paralysing intelligence that there were but a dozen charges left for the cannons, and provisions for only two more days. Subsequently, General Golkowski, the royal adjutant, himself reported that he had fasted for twenty-four hours in the camp with the rest of the army, and that the Polish

artillery could only fire one shot to every twenty shots of the enemy. So desperate, indeed, was the situation that Prince Joseph felt bound to send a *parlementaire* to the Russian Commander, General Kachowski, asking for a suspension of hostilities for four weeks. General Kachowski, well informed by the deserter, Rudnicki, of the wretched condition of the Poles, refused to allow them even a week's respite. They must either accede to the Confederation of Targowica or lay down their arms was his ultimatum. To this dishonour Prince Joseph would not submit and the army set off for Dubno. All that the Polish commander could now do to put some heart into his officers, before resuming the interminable retreat, was to distribute among them the star and ribbon of a new Order, "Pro virtute militari," instituted by the King to commemorate the victory of Zielence.

At Dubno, a small place between the rivers Horyn and Styr, Prince Joseph expected to find the long-promised but never forthcoming provisions and stores and the King himself, the original plan of Stanislaus being to bring the reserves thither in person. Instead of all these things Prince Joseph found at Dubno—an empty wilderness. After a few hours of indispensable rest he made for the river Bug as rapidly as possible in order to throw himself between Warsaw and the hotly pursuing Russian legions, according to his strict instructions.

On July 12, the Polish army, now 12,500 men, took up a very strong position in the marshy ground behind the Bug, which a long drought had made unusually low for the season. On the 17th appeared Kachowsky with 28,000 men. The key of the Polish position was the village of Dubienka, in the mist of deep swamps and virgin forests where Kosciuszko had entrenched himself with 6000 men. Leaving his lieutenants to make diversions against Prince Joseph and General Wielhorski, who were posted some miles further off, Kachowsky, after carefully reconnoitring Kosciuszko's position, resolved to attack it himself with 19,000 men and forty-six guns. At three o'clock in the afternoon the

Russians advanced in three columns. The struggle was stubborn. Kosciuszko could scarcely hope to win against a three-fold odds and an immense preponderance of artillery. All he could attempt was to retard the advance of the Russians as long and inflict as much damage upon them as possible. In this he succeeded. The Battle of Dubienka lasted for seven hours—far into the night. Thrice Kachowsky directed a general assault upon the Polish position, thrice he was repulsed with heavy loss. Then Kosciuszko fell back in perfect order upon the village of Krasny Starow. The Russians pursued him for two hours, but their temerity cost them nearly 3000 men besides those who had fallen on the battle-field. By this time the whole Polish army was in full retreat, neither Prince Joseph nor Wielhorski being able to prevent the other Russian divisions from crossing the river, whose unprecedented shallowness made a sustained defence impossible.

The glory of Dubienka belongs, unquestionably, to the Poles. They had inflicted far more damage on the Russians than they had received themselves, and, for the first time during the war, were now permitted to retire unmolested. Full of renewed courage and confidence, Prince Joseph finally halted his army at Kurow. He was now almost within touch of the capital. He knew that for many weeks past his uncle had been assembling another army in the environs of Warsaw. It was calculated that between them they could put nearly 50,000 men in the field, and with this relatively large and fairly well-equipped army the Polish Commander-in-Chief had resolved to stake everything on one decisive battle. Alas! this heroic resolve was never to be realised. Prince Joseph had scarcely pitched his camp at Kurow when a despatch from Warsaw descended upon him like a thunderbolt: the King had acceded to the Confederation of Targowica! In plain English, Stanislaus II. had openly thrown in his lot with the worst enemies of his country.

CHAPTER XII

“CHE FECE PER VILTÀ IL GRAN RIFIUTO”

The King's great opportunity in 1792—The symbolical municipal banquet—Confidence and energy of the King—His courage fails on the approach of difficulties—The ultimatum of the Empress—Abject surrender of Stanislaus—The Council of State holds him responsible for the future—Stanislaus urges the army to surrender unconditionally—Spirited reply of Prince Joseph—Resignation of all the Polish officers—Arrival of Felix and the Russians at Warsaw—Prince Joseph and the King—Joseph's passionate appeal to his uncle to hold aloof from traitors—The Prussian invasion—Disillusionment of Felix Potocki—He is challenged by Prince Joseph—Arrival of the new Russian Ambassador, Yakov Efimovich Sivers—His character—His letters to his daughters—His descriptions of Stanislaus and of Polish society—Stanislaus compelled to go to Grodno—Odd spectacle presented by Grodno during the Diet—Manners and costumes—The Ambassador and the King—Opening of the Diet—Negotiations with Russia—Refusal of the Diet to treat with Prussia—The Dumb Session—The second partition—The last days and death of Stanislaus II.

WHEN the Polish nation, at the crisis of its destiny, placed the dictatorship in the hands of King Stanislaus the great opportunity of his life had come. This testimony of public confidence was, indeed, somewhat belated. It was also unaccompanied by any material accession of strength or power. To put it bluntly, the Diet had got itself into such a hobble that it was only too thankful to shift the responsibility for its own blunders on to the shoulders of some one else, and the most natural and convenient some one else happened to be the King. This was hard upon Stanislaus, no doubt. Had he been appointed Dictator in 1788, when all the political conjunctures were exceptionally favourable, Poland might easily have been saved. In 1792 all that Poland, wounded

and cast down, could do was to fight valiantly behind her shield to the very last. In the circumstances, Stanislaus might well have been excused if he had declined to accept the Dictatorship. But the fact remains that he did not refuse it. He accepted it freely, and by so doing he pledged himself, come what would, to be faithful to his solemn and inspiring charge. The nation had entrusted him with what is the most sacred treasure of every nation—its glory. It was for him, at the head of the armed manhood of Poland, to defend the national glory to the end, or perish for it on the field of honour. The mere attempt to do so would have rallied the *élite* of the people around him. We have seen what the army did in the most desperate circumstances and how it resolved to turn again upon the enemy as soon as it received reinforcements. And if the tone of the army was still bellicose, the tone of the capital was still more so. "I believe," says Prince Adam Casimir Czartoryski, "that Poland might have been saved if the King had had sufficient audacity to mount his horse and sufficient magnanimity to prefer his country—and honour—to his crown—and comfort." In this opinion of an onlooker there may, perhaps, be some exaggeration, but it shows, at any rate, what the contemporaries of Stanislaus expected of him when all hope of foreign help had been abandoned.

And, at first, it really seemed as if the King would rise to the high level of his new responsibilities. We have seen with what sublime dignity he rebuked his nephew for hesitating to accept the command of the army from purely prudential reasons. Was not self-sacrifice a nobler virtue than prudence? Stanislaus persevered in this heroic vein throughout the month of May and the first fortnight of June. Never had he been so eloquent, so energetic, as during these six weeks. On May 13 the Municipality of Warsaw gave a banquet to the Court and the Diet in the Radziwill Palace, at which 500 guests sat down. This banquet was absurdly decried by the enemies of Poland (including the Prussian Minister Lucchesini) as a Jacobin orgy because the banqueting-hall was profusely adorned

with those symbolical devices so dear to the hearts of the sentimental legislators on the banks of the Seine. In one corner of the room, surmounting a flight of steps, stood an altar with “a perpetual fire” (*Patriotism*) burning thereon. In another part of the room were two elegant and striking columns. One of them was wreathed with civic garlands intertwined with laurels, and a dog couchant (*Fidelity*) surmounted the whole. The other column was surrounded by the fruit of the pomegranate and crowned with pomegranate blossoms (*Concord*). Close to the chimney-piece a cock (*Vigilance*) saluted the dawn (*The May Constitution*) from the top of a lofty pedestal. Finally, a flight of steps, covered with martial emblems (*Valour*), led up to another altar at which Mutius Scævola was plunging his hand into the flames (*Steadfastness*). This was a feast after the heart of the artistic and sentimental monarch who was hailed with acclamations when, in a perfervid speech, he appealed to the patriotism of all who were present, and invited them to come forward and help their country. The most tightly-drawn purse could not resist this appeal. One rich banker lent the King 100,000 guildens on the spot, without interest, for two months. A wealthy magnate thereupon capped the generosity of the banker by laying down 40,000 more as a free gift. Many others followed their example. Altogether Stanislaus could not have collected much less than a quarter of a million on this occasion.

It was five days after this that Bulgakov presented the Empress's declaration of war. Still Stanislaus was not seriously disturbed. A conciliatory but dignified reply was promptly sent to St. Petersburg, in which the action of Poland in taking up arms in self-defence was justified as the first duty of a free nation. It was resolved to raise a million and a half by taxation to arm “the faithful defenders of the country,” and orders for artillery and military stores were placed at Liège and Berlin. As the head of the army the King displayed uncommon activity. He even thought of clipping short his much-admired grey locks in order to look more like a soldier, and though, at the last moment,

he shrank back from making so terrible a sacrifice, in all other respects his zeal and martial spirit were irreproachable. Attired in the neat uniform of the National Cavalry, he used to gallop into the great square in front of the Palace, and regularly review the Horse Guards and the Foot Guards which marched out of their barracks to meet him. He made beautiful speeches to them on the necessity of military discipline ; he harangued them heroically on their duty to their country ; and when he had wound them up to the proper pitch of exaltation he administered patriotic oaths to them which they took with tears of enthusiasm. He also formed a camp at Praga, a suburb of Warsaw, on the banks of the Vistula, where 2000 recruits were gradually assembled. The King stimulated their ardour by picnicking among them with the ladies of his Court, when the camp was comfortably inspected and patriotic toasts were drunk all round. At this period Stanislaus was full of confidence. " If all my innumerable arrangements go off as I wish them to do," he wrote to Prince Joseph (May 23, 1792), " I hope to march in mid-June with 5000 or 6000 men. . . . As soon as I begin to march I think I can count upon my troops growing like a snow-ball, for the great majority of our countrymen seem animated with the same spirit of courage and indignation against the injustice and especially against the perfidy of our *émigrés*."

This was a good start, but, unfortunately, it did not last. By the middle of June the courage of Stanislaus was ebbing fast away. He had counted all along on the solemn promises of assistance from Prussia and, at the end of May, Prussia had shamefully betrayed him. Then came, close upon the heels of one another, a whole succession of Job's messengers. the treachery of the Prince of Wurtemberg, the steady advance of Felix Potocki and the Targowicians, the simultaneous retreat of Prince Joseph and Kosciuszko behind the Bug. A sudden paralysis seemed to fall upon the Polish capital. The " Watch," or Council of War, appointed to assist the King in military operations, was more and more thinly attended as time went on. Presently its

sessions ceased altogether. The energy of the recruiting officers was visibly slackening. Recruits of any sort could now only be obtained with the utmost difficulty, many even of those who had first come in ran away again. Even now the King had not, ostensibly, abandoned the struggle—he still fought, but alas! it was with the pen instead of with the sword. On June 22, he took the first step towards a surrender by appealing direct to Catherine for an armistice and Bulgakov despatched this letter to the Empress by special courier. Catherine naturally delayed her answer till all her arrangements had been perfected and Poland lay actually at her mercy. Not till July 23 did Bulgakov place her ultimatum in the King's hands.

The reply of the Empress was sharp and short. She flattered herself, she said, that his Majesty would accede without delay to the Confederation of Targowica, which had been formed, with her sanction, to restore the ancient liberties of the Republic as guaranteed by treaty. In a word, Catherine ignored altogether the petition for an armistice and ordered the King to unite with the traitors who had brought in the Russians.

It is due to Stanislaus to say that his first movement on reading this insolent and contemptuous demand was one of generous indignation. He declared, with tears in his eyes, that he would abdicate rather than surrender the glorious Constitution of May 3. But this return to his better self was only of an instant's duration. His character was naturally soft, his temperament essentially easy-going. He had never made the slightest effort to fortify himself by self-discipline. Even in his best days he had always had a preference for half-measures, and now ill-health, advancing age, and thirty years of perpetual compromising with conscience, had eaten away the little moral stamina he had ever possessed. When, then, the fierce torrent of Catherine's wrath suddenly carried him off his feet he sank unresistingly into the turbid depths of shame and infamy.

On recovering from the shock of the Empress's ultimatum, Stanislaus asked the Russian Ambassador two questions :

"Will the Prussians really enter Poland?" "If we have need of them they will," replied Bulgakov. "What, then, do you advise me to do?" "I advise you," replied the Ambassador gravely, "to trust implicitly in the magnanimity of her Imperial Majesty."

On quitting the Ambassador, Stanislaus shut himself up in his room with Plutarch to seek fortitude from the examples of the heroes of antiquity, but it was in the bosom of his family the same evening that his future conduct was really decided. His wife Pani Grabowska, his sister, Pani Krakowska, his niece, Pani Tyszkewicza, flung themselves upon his breast, clung to him, wept over him, and implored him, passionately, not to abandon them to poverty and wretchedness, but to accept the conditions of the Empress and even humble himself before Felix Potocki and the Targowicians. Any sacrifice, they argued, would now be worse than useless. It was all very well for him to talk of hastening to the camp and sacrificing his life on the battle-field, but what would become of them if anything happened to him? How could he have the heart to leave them? The scene was heart-rending. The plea was irresistible. What could he do? Blood is surely thicker than water? So the King, the Statesman, the Patriot were all forgotten in the tender husband and the affectionate brother. As it seemed impossible to save his country, Stanislaus determined to do the next best thing and save his family. Thus when, on the following morning, he presided over the Council of State his mind may be said to have been made up beforehand.

The Council had no sooner assembled than the Empress's ultimatum was read. Then the King, after declaring that further resistance was impossible, announced his unalterable determination to accede to the Confederation of Targowica forthwith. Kollontaj, anxious, above all things, not to lose his recently won dignity of Vice-Chancellor, concurred, though the May Constitution had been the work of his own hands. This time-serving *abbé-petit-maitre* had always been selfish and grasping. To the very last he preferred his own interests to those of his country. He also nourished the

vain hope that by acceding to the Confederation of Targowica he might be able to control it. The Chancellor of Lithuania, Joachim Chreptowicz, an honest, well-meaning man, took the same side from sheer timidity. In him, as in so many other Polish politicians of the period, we notice that most repulsive of all combinations—high intelligence and feeble character. But, to the credit of Polish patriotism, the majority of the Council protested vigorously against any surrender. Malachowski offered, within an hour, to put 100,000 guildens in specie in the King's carriage if he would proceed at once to the camp and stake everything on another pitched battle. Even in case of defeat, urged Malachowski, it was still possible to retire upon Sandomir and Cracow as King John Casimir had done, in still more desperate circumstances, a century and a half before. Soltan and Ostrowski supported Malachowski. Ignatius Potocki opined that a continuation of the war was quite practicable, and he declared, prophetically, that the assurances of Russia as to the territorial integrity of Poland were not to be trusted. A hot and prolonged discussion ensued till Ignatius Potocki, perceiving that the mind of the King was inaccessible to further argument, solemnly held him responsible to the nation and to posterity for his future conduct. On the final vote Stanislaus was defeated by thirteen (twenty to seven). Nevertheless, after a brief silence, he persisted in his intention of acceding to the Confederation of Targowica. There was now no more to be said. The King, as Dictator, had authority to override the decisions of the Council of State.

Stanislaus now set about persuading Prince Joseph and the army to follow his example. To most men in his position it would have been agonising to put the necessary arguments upon paper at all. But Stanislaus, by this time, had lost the faculty of distinguishing right from wrong. His facile pen consequently acquitted itself of its odious task without scruple as without shame. He began, naturally, by throwing the real difficulties of the situation into the darkest light. There was not enough money in the Treasury to pay the

troops during the next quarter. The Civil List was at zero. The Dutch loan had turned out a complete failure. Two-thirds of the national contributions were lost because all the eastern provinces were occupied by the enemy. No arms at all had been received from abroad. The artillery ammunition was exhausted. There were only eight siege-guns available. When the magazines on the Vistula were emptied there would be no money left to restock them. In these circumstances it was clear that the war must come to an end of its own accord in a few weeks. Another battle might, perhaps, be won by a combination of all the Polish forces, but such a contingency was very problematical as the Russians in the field outnumbered the Poles in the proportion of two to one, and had four times as many guns. In any case the Russians had the wherewithal to remake any number of armies after any number of defeats, whereas a single disaster would ruin the Poles altogether. Why should the lives of so many brave men be needlessly sacrificed! The only thing to be done was to accede to the Confederation of Targowica. By so doing some fragments of the May Constitution might, perhaps, be saved and Poland could then go on again. Finally, "Pepi" was commanded to hasten back to the arms of his loving uncle, Kosciuszko, to whom the King sent the patent of a lieutenant-general as a reward for his distinguished services, was to take over the command of the army.

The reply to this craven epistle was a noble outburst of indignation. So far from returning to his uncle, Pepi adjured the King to hasten at once to the army with all the reserves he could get together and perish gloriously on the battle-field. Stanislaus mournfully declined "such a vain honour." So far from feeling any shame he even assumed an injured tone. He bitterly complained that at the very moment when he had sent Kosciuszko his patent of lieutenant-general that officer had wounded him to the very quick by scornfully rejecting the distinction. But, in spite of everything, Stanislaus insisted that the army should accede to the Confederation and suspend hostilities. Rather

than obey such an order all the officers in the army, with a single exception, thereupon sent in their resignations with the warm approval of the Commander-in-Chief, who not only publicly defended their conduct but refused to be separated from his comrades. The officers showed their appreciation of Prince Joseph's spirit by subscribing on the spot sufficient funds to have a medal struck bearing the Commander-in-Chief's effigy on the obverse, and on the reverse the words: *Miles imperatori*.

The army had saved the honour of the nation and, at the same time, struck Felix Potocki and his sham Confederation a mortal blow. After this public protest of the army, no one could say that the Targowicians represented anybody but themselves. To have pretended that they represented the country would have been a patent absurdity. Catherine was profoundly irritated. Anxious, as she always was, to have the public opinion of the civilised Western Powers on her side, she desired to give a varnish of dignity and magnanimity to her vindictive and disreputable proceedings. Henceforth this was impossible. The Polish business stood revealed in all its turpitude. There was nothing for it but to have done with it as rapidly as she could. The King, at any rate, now belonged to her, body and soul. As the sole remaining representative of the Polish State, he was, for the moment, invaluable to her. As for her other dupe, Felix Potocki, the time had nearly come for him to be cast contemptuously aside into the limbo of things forgotten.

On August 5, 1792, a strong Russian division arrived at Warsaw and pitched its camp in the suburb of Praga. The tidings of its approach caused a general exodus of all the “patriots” and “constitutionalists.” Ignatius Potocki, Kollontaj and most of the other liberal leaders took refuge at Dresden or Leipsic. Prince Joseph, with some of his officers, had returned to his old home at Vienna. On the 12th, the Russian Ambassador, Bulgakov, gave a great banquet to his friends at Warsaw, when covers were laid for 100 guests of both sexes and the health of the Russian Empress was drunk with enthusiasm. On the 19th, he

waited upon Stanislaus at the Palace in order to introduce to him the officers of the Russian General Staff. They were all in gala uniform, richly bedizened with ribbands, gold chains and diamond stars, and they treated the unhappy monarch with insulting familiarity. On the following day a proclamation was issued forbidding, under the severest penalties, the wearing of the Order *Virtute militari* instituted to commemorate the heroism of the Polish troops at Zielence. Every one who neglected to comply with this edict was branded as : " the tool of despotism and the enemy of the national liberties." There was even some talk of having this medal publicly destroyed by the common hangman, but even King Stanislaus could not be induced to go quite so far as this. Early in November, Felix Potocki and his swashbucklers, swelling with pride and truculence, made their triumphal entry into Warsaw. Felix was animated by the most virulent hatred of the King and ingeniously sought for opportunities of insulting him every day. He dismissed the Royal Guard, substituting for it Russian troops who were quartered upon the city and half ruined it by their exactions. He lectured Stanislaus, in the presence of his own Court, on the proper duties of a Sovereign. He dispersed the Polish army all over the country, taking care to separate the various corps by intervening Russian divisions, so as to make a general rising impossible. And the King submitted to everything, content to play the miserable part of a dumb witness in the tragic drama going on around him.

With what feelings the better part of the Polish nation regarded this ignominious submission can well be imagined. Nowhere was this feeling stronger than in the army, and of all the officers in the army, perhaps the one who suffered most was Prince Joseph. For it was his own uncle and benefactor who had done the nation this dishonour. From his childhood upwards Joseph had owed almost everything to the King. The most amiable feature of Stanislaus's character had ever been his warm affection for his family, and none of his family had he loved so dearly as his little

“Pepi.” Upon this prime favourite he had lavished all the treasures of his tenderness and benevolence. Joseph had returned this affection with the devotion of a loving and grateful heart. It is not too much to say that the kinsmen stood to each other rather in the relation of father and son than of uncle and nephew. What, then, must it not have cost Prince Joseph to renounce such an intimacy? As early as September 9 he had written: “Good God, sir! why are you not here, why cannot you become a private individual?” This delicate hint that it was the duty of the King to abdicate rather than dim the lustre of his crown was quite thrown away upon Stanislaus who, three days later, replied as follows: “I must remain where I am to pay your debts and mine, and provide the means of subsistence for you and your sister.” To this the Prince made no answer. What answer could be made to a man who measured everything—honour and duty included—by its pecuniary value? Shortly afterwards, tidings reached Joseph of the scandalous attempt of the Targowicians to degrade and destroy the Order instituted to commemorate the victory of Zielence. At this crowning outrage, he could keep silence no longer. On October 10, he addressed to his uncle a passionate appeal to dissociate himself from such scoundrels, an appeal to which no true patriot can listen even now without emotion.

“I am exceedingly vexed that the proposal of the Confederates to have the engraver’s plate of the army medal broken by the hands of the common hangman has not been carried out. Such an act would have been the finest eulogium, the most flattering testimony of merit, I can ever hope to acquire. These gentlemen have so degraded themselves, have sunk so low in the opinion of Europe, that their reprobation must, in the eyes of all honest folks, be the highest praise, while their indulgence, or friendship, must overwhelm with opprobrium and ignominy those who are unfortunate enough to be the object of either. I would rather beg my bread, I would rather perish miserably, I would rather expatriate myself and renounce for ever the

pleasure of embracing you again, than change my present sentiments or allow these scoundrels to suppose that I am capable of any feeling towards them but hatred and loathing. . . . Any act of weakness towards them on your part would be the greatest torment you could inflict upon those who love you and your good name. Deign to remember, Sir, that you are a King! Deign to remember that you are responsible to the whole nation for your honour, and if your anxiety for the welfare of this same nation may partly excuse your conduct hitherto, any weak indulgence in the future towards these betrayers of their country, even if it be due to your love for a few private individuals, would be an infamy which future generations would never forgive you. You are at present, sir, surrounded by people either too weak or too cowardly to present things to you from this point of view. But deign to believe in the sincerity of *my* heart, deign to listen to the voice of truth at least from *me*! I love you, Sir, more than my life; but your honour, your reputation, are dearer to me than yourself. If you sacrifice these inestimable treasures—for so *I* deem them—what will be left to you that is worth anything at all? . . . One must be vile and contemptible indeed, to be blinded and deluded by the tinsel of an authority usurped from their country by a pack of traitors.”

The “pack of traitors” was not to usurp “the tinsel of authority” for long. In the middle of November 1792, their star was at its zenith, by the middle of February 1793, it had been blotted out of the political firmament.

On January 16, 1793, a note was issued from Berlin announcing the entry of Prussian troops into Great Poland. The pretext of this invasion was the spread of the horrible maxims of the French “Jacobins” in Warsaw. To prevent the violation of Prussian territory by these intriguers (it was not stated where or by whom), and to protect the neighbouring lands from contagion, the King of Prussia felt it to be his duty to send General Möllendorff, at the head of an army-corps, to protect the well-intentioned. The occupation of the city of Thorn, four days later, was the first of

those acts of “protection.” A month later Dantzic also was in the hands of the Prussians.

Then only did the scales fall from the eyes of the Targowicians and, for the first time, Felix Potocki saw yawning in front of him the abyss of ruin to the brink of which his insensate pride and blind hatred had conducted him. He understood at once that the Prussian troops could not have entered Poland without the consent of Russia. Too late, in a note addressed to the Prussian minister, Buchholtz, he demanded the instant withdrawal of the Prussians from Poland. No notice was taken of his communication. He then issued a manifesto urging the Polish nation to rise *en masse* at the first summons. He might just as well have urged a supine, gagged and pinioned prisoner to leap to his feet and draw his sword. Next, with characteristic simplicity he appealed to his Russian friends to drive out the Prussians. They gravely assured him that such a proceeding would be contrary to treaty-obligations. As a matter of fact, a treaty for a fresh partition of Poland between Russia and Prussia had already been signed (January 23, 1793), though it was kept a profound secret till its ratification on February 28. In his distress and confusion, Felix finally published a feeble apology for his conduct, desiderating, rather late in the day, the absolute unity of men of all parties “to save their common country” and deprecating any recriminations as to the past. But his own past blunders now rose up and confronted him. Prince Joseph sent him a furious epistle overwhelming him with the most bitter reproaches. Felix replied in much the same strain, whereupon the Prince challenged him to single combat. King Stanislaus thereupon intervened and bade his nephew restrain his impetuosity which was producing the most mischievous effect. Joseph hotly refused to obey his uncle. “These people want to clear themselves of all the blame and shame of the approaching partition of Poland,” wrote he, “and they shall not do so if I can help it. All I have left to me is a little bit of honour, for God’s sake, sir, do not deprive me of this last consolation.” Then

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Stanislaus, always with an eye to the main chance, warned his headstrong young kinsman that he was ruining himself by his conduct. "I have just heard from the new Prussian ambassador," he wrote, "that in consequence of your letters to Potocki, the Empress, by a special ukase, has ordered the confiscation of all your estates. There you see the consequences of your disobedience to my orders! If this confiscation includes the starosty of Wielma, your aged mother will be reduced to penury." * But Joseph was inflexible. He declared that he did not care what happened so long as he preserved his honour intact. He was quite sure that all honest men would respect him for acting uprightly. "People who have sound legs and arms, and consciences clean and without reproach, are not likely to starve," he added. The threatened duel never came off, however. Potocki thought twice before fighting the national hero on a point of patriotism, and, presently, Prince Joseph was expelled from Vienna as "a most dangerous rebel," at the direct suggestion of the Russian Empress who, to the very end of her life, bore an implacable hatred against him and Kosciuszko for successfully resisting her armies. Thus the Prince entered upon that long pilgrimage which finally brought him into the service of the great Napoleon.

It will have been noticed from the above correspondence that King Stanislaus had, by this time, become his own man again. His tone is now more assured, more peremptory. He waives aside appeals and entreaties. He will not listen to arguments. He expects to be obeyed and says so. This agreeable transformation was synchronous with the arrival in Poland of a new protector, who was also an old acquaintance of the King's, in the person of the new Russian ambassador, Count Sivers, who superseded Bulgakov in January 1793.

From the beginning of her reign, Catherine had been very careful in the choice of her representatives at Warsaw. Each in his turn had been selected to meet a particular

* The King ultimately persuaded Catherine to restore this starosty to the poor old lady.

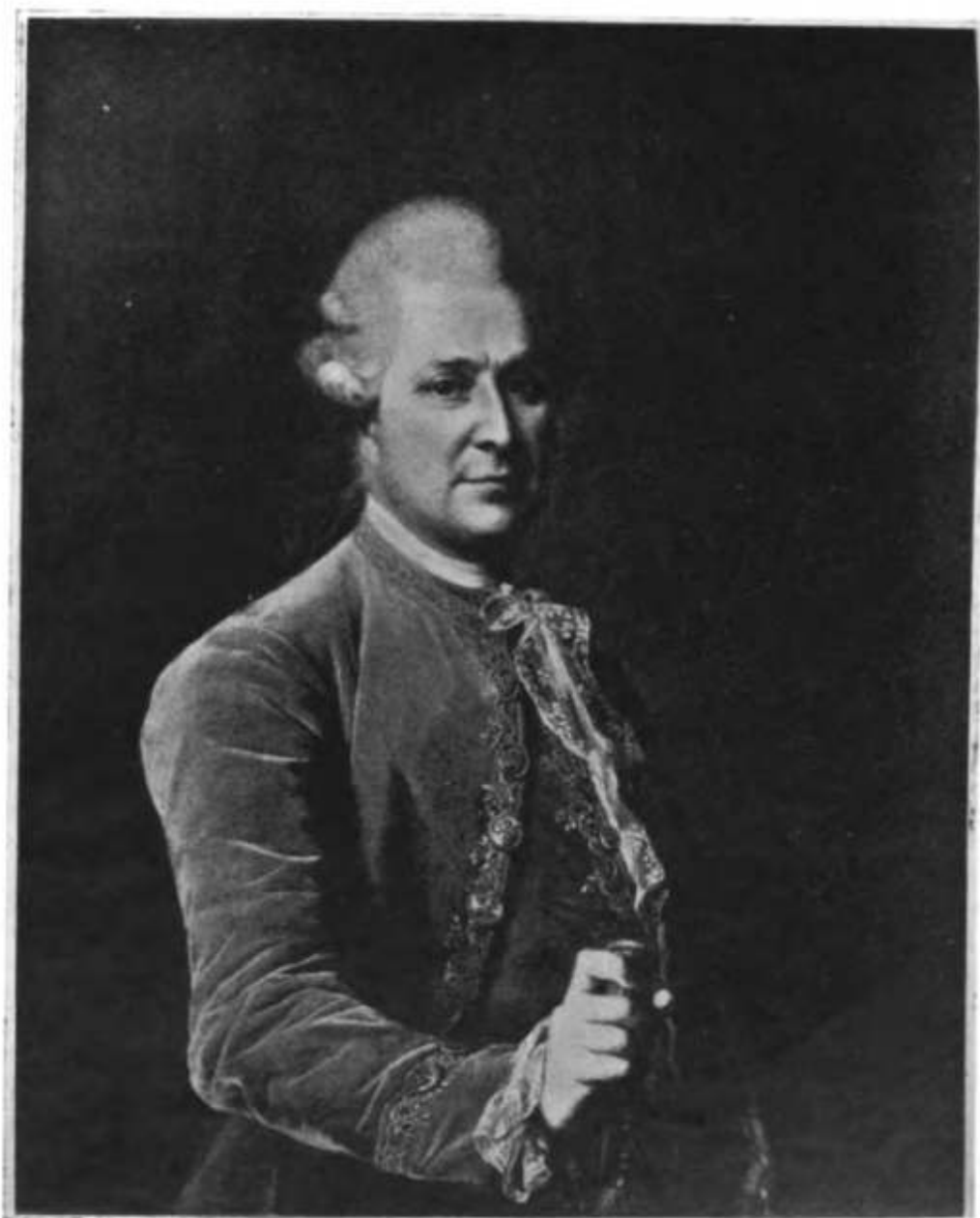
contingency ; their respective characters had varied with the endless permutations of the Empress's policy ; but they had all been the right men in the right place. When the Polish nation had to be coerced by terror, the masterful and truculent soldier-diplomatist Prince Repnin, or the brutal, time-serving Holsteiner Saldern, had been employed. When, during the first Turkish war, the Polish Court had to be conciliated, Repnin gave way to the urbane and courtly Volkonsky. When, immediately after the First Partition, it was necessary to frown down all opposition and amuse the King at the same time, a bully who was also a *bel esprit* was wanted, and the witty and sarcastic Stackelberg got the post. When again, during the second Turkish war, Poland broke away from Russia altogether and drew near to Prussia, the situation became so critical that a patient, quiet, observant envoy who could hold his tongue under any and every provocation was the proper person for Warsaw—and Bulgakov was sent. But now an ambassador of quite a different kind to any of his predecessors was required. The situation, if no longer dangerous, was now extremely delicate. Despite her most solemn promises to the contrary, the Empress was about to partition Poland for the second time. The King was to be her chief tool, but it was clear to her that he was a very unwilling tool who must be handled with extreme adroitness. If he were hectorred, or hustled, or flurried, he might break down altogether, or disqualify himself in some other disconcerting way. Tact and tenderness were the qualities most wanted here. The new ambassador must therefore be the King's sincere friend as well as the Empress's trusty servant. Such a man was difficult to find, but Catherine found him at last. She summoned from a retirement which was a semi-disgrace a statesman whom, through no fault of his own, she had not employed for nearly twelve years, although he had been one of her most useful ministers, and sent him as her plenipotentiary to Poland.

Yakov Efimovich Sivers was in his sixty-second year when he quitted the seclusion of his Livonian estate to do

the business of the Empress at Warsaw. During the first seventeen years of Catherine's reign, first as Governor of Great Novgorod and subsequently as Governor-General of Novgorod, Pskov and Tver, he had rendered the Empress notable service, especially as her adviser on all economical questions. His abrupt dismissal in 1781 was due not so much to his differences with the Imperial favourite Prince Potemkin as to his frank strictures on Catherine's wasteful ways, of which, both as a sound financier and as an honest man, he could not possibly approve. He used, frequently and bitterly, to complain that the Empress could never be made to realise the injury she did to the national economy by her financial operations. At last, pique and irritation moved Catherine to remove a counsellor who had become too much like an accusing conscience. For a dozen years or so Sivers diverted himself with horticulture, for which he had a veritable passion, and the education of his daughters to whom he was tenderly devoted, till the Empress once more condescended to remember his existence and recall him to the great world of affairs.

For all his philosophy, the old man was delighted with this sudden turn of Fortune's wheel. "Fancy, my child!" he wrote to his eldest daughter, shortly after his arrival in Poland, "fancy me drawn from my profound solitude . . . to see myself at such a post as this! I have only to utter a word to be obeyed instantly by a King and a whole nation! . . . I have at my disposal an army of 200,000 men! My dear girl! what a whirligig human destiny really is!" "But," he adds in another letter, "I hate to see about me unhappy people who expect everything from me and whom I cannot help at all. Yet I hope to do *some* good and prevent much evil. Such are my aims and wishes, may Providence strengthen me therein!"

These amiable aspirations were perfectly sincere. Sivers was more than benevolent and kind-hearted, he was what his western contemporaries would have called "a man of sentiment." The Polish view of his character which represents him as a venerable-looking, soft-spoken hypocrite, a



YAKOV EFIMOVICH SIVERS, THE LAST RUSSIAN AMBASSADOR TO POLAND



Machiavelli beneath the mask of a patriarch, is, indeed, perfectly intelligible. Sivers was the Empress's chosen instrument for inflicting upon defenceless Poland the mortal injury of the Second Partition, and he accomplished his invidious task thoroughly. How could the Poles regard such a man with anything but eyes of hatred? But he was no hypocrite. It should also not be forgotten that, at first, he was kept quite in the dark as to the real significance of his mission. His instructions gave him no hint of an impending partition. General Igelström, the Russian commandant at Warsaw, was far better informed. Not till nearly three months after his arrival did Sivers know exactly what was required of him. When he did know it he did it without hesitation, but also with as much consideration for the feelings of his victims as was possible in the circumstances. Business was business, but that was no reason why the amenities of life should be banished from it. Firm as a rock as to the execution of the Empress's decrees, he could neither be cajoled nor imposed upon; but to those who were ready to submit to the inevitable he was ready, and even eager, to be patient and compassionate beyond measure. Such, then, was the true character of this much abused minister.

Sivers' letters to his daughters give us a vivid, minute picture of King Stanislaus and his entourage. They also abound with curious details about contemporary Polish society. In every line we recognise an acute and practised observer. The ambassador reached Warsaw on February 9, 1793, and had his first interview with the King on the following day. It was not the first time they had met. Forty years before, when both of them had just set forth to seek their fortunes in the great world, they had encountered at London, were mutually attracted to each other and had become fast friends. The memory of those early days had never faded, and the old amity now revived in spite of the awkward and distressing circumstances in which they now resumed their acquaintance. Sivers, evidently, was much affected at the miserable position of his old friend. It is

also quite clear that, like every one who approached Stanislaus, he was not insensible to the personal charm which that unfortunate monarch exercised, to the very last, on all who approached him. "The King," he wrote to his daughter, "is still a handsome man who wears well though his face is very pale, but one can see that a dark veil has been drawn over his soul. He speaks well and even eloquently, and is courteous and attentive always and to every one. He was dressed in purple, by way of mourning for the King of France, and had an eyeglass in his button-hole and a small flat watch on the sleeve of his left arm. He is lodged badly, served badly, slighted, despised and betrayed, and yet he is the most amiable of men. Leaving his high position out of the question, and regarding him simply from the personal point of view, I may say that his good qualities far outweigh his bad ones. Certainly, after Louis XVI., he is the most unfortunate of monarchs. He loves his kinsfolk most tenderly, and it is just these very people who have been the cause of all his misfortunes." The King's morganatic wife, Pani Grabowska, is described as "pock-marked and very much painted," but the ambassador was much impressed by the King's sister Madame de Cracovie. "The personal qualities of this lady," he writes, "entitle her to general respect. Her whole exterior speaks for her. She has moral worth and dignity combined, yet her very dignity is softened by an amiability which wins you at once. She is the model of a patrician matron." The King's brother, the Primate, is excellently focussed in a couple of sentences. "He is made for a Monarchy rather than for a Republic, wears a red cap though he is not a cardinal, and would be a Mazarin if he could."

The higher circles of Warsaw were eager to *fête* and feast Sivers, but the ambassador's frail health and simple tastes revolted against all such entertainments. "My life is a perfect torment here," he wrote to his daughters, "I am overwhelmed by these interminable banquets and these eternal public functions. Three great dinners I might have managed, perhaps, but I am threatened by more than thirty.

. . . You know how I hate card-parties. Well, I have only two whist-tables in my apartments at Warsaw, so people leave me as early as five o'clock in the afternoon." It soon became generally known that domestic and horticultural subjects alone could interest Count Sivers, and the dowager Princess Radziwill completely won his heart, at a dinner-party, by talking of nothing but their respective families and promising him some shoots of a new kind of honeysuckle which bloomed all the year round.

The only thing which really detained Sivers at Warsaw was the refusal of Stanislaus to go to Grodno, the place fixed upon by the Empress for the assembling of the Diet which was to conclude the second partition treaty. Grodno was chosen as being an insignificant little town easily controllable by the Russian and Prussian armies which were gathering around it, whereas the atmosphere of Warsaw was supposed to be infected by Jacobinism and consequently dangerous. At first, however, the King would not go to Grodno. He guessed what would be expected of him when he got there, and he declared to Sivers that he would rather die in a dungeon than sign a second partition treaty. He invented all sorts of excuses for postponing his journey thither—ill health, old age, the vileness of the roads, want of money. Nevertheless the gentle but persistent pressure of the ambassador finally prevailed. He assured Stanislaus, with perfect sincerity that there was no thought of another partition. It was sheer imagination, delirium. He, Stanislaus, would be forced to do nothing against his will. He was King now, and King he would remain to the end of the chapter. All the Empress wanted was the restoration of the old guaranteed Constitution. Still Stanislaus held out. Then Sivers promised that if he went to Grodno, the Empress would undertake to pay all his debts. This bribe the King was unable to resist. Although Catherine had twice already rescued him from bankruptcy, his liabilities were, once more, overwhelming. At that moment his debts stood at the highly respectable figure of 1,566,000 ducats, or about £783,000, and he saw not the slightest possibility of paying

them. What might he not do for himself and his family, if he were only relieved of this incubus? He hesitated no longer but quitted Warsaw in a closed carriage through a cordon of Russian troops posted on both sides of the road, all the way to the Vistula, to protect him from the insults of the mob. He broke his journey at Bialystok, one of the residences of his sister, where he received a letter from Sivers confirming his worst suspicions. "I am very sorry to confess to your Majesty," wrote the ambassador, "that your anxiety about the fate of Poland unhappily turns out to be justified.* There is, I fear, nothing for it now but to submit, unconditionally, to the will of her Imperial Majesty." At this Stanislaus again rebelled and refused to move a step further; but another letter from Sivers, expressing his "grave displeasure" at his friend's dilatory tactics, prevailed over the King's timid scruples. He resumed his journey, and on April 23, 1793, arrived at Grodno.

The first official act required of the unfortunate King after his arrival at Grodno was the signature of a manifesto summoning an extraordinary Diet. The Empress, with exquisite malice aforethought, had insisted that this document, the prelude to a fresh partition, should be issued on the anniversary of the glorious Constitution of May 3, 1791. Stanislaus, deeply wounded by the insulting juxtaposition, burst into tears as he signed the manifesto. In the bitterness of his heart he now expressed his willingness to abdicate if he were guaranteed a pension of 50,000 ducats a year. Sivers, in great alarm, dissuaded him from any such intention which would, at that moment, have seriously embarrassed the Empress.† The manifesto was then issued. It was illegal in form inasmuch as the Polish Chancellor refused to countersign it; but what did

* Sivers himself had only been informed of the projected partition a few days before.

† Catherine herself subsequently admitted that she would not have known what to do if Stanislaus had taken such a step. For the moment he was indispensable.

one illegality, more or less, matter when the whole situation was, in the highest degree, anomalous, and Poland lay absolutely at the mercy of the partitioning Powers? The Prussians had, by this time, occupied the whole of Poland's north-western, the Russians the whole of her eastern provinces. In the course of May the so-called “elections” were held beneath the pressure of Russian bayonets, and Sivers, by a cunning combination of threats and promises, easily contrived to obtain an assembly after his own heart. But even he could not exclude from it a score or so of courageous patriots who were gradually to leaven the whole sluggish mass of venal or indifferent deputies and impede, though they could not prevent, the execution of the decrees of the omnipotent ambassador.

From May to September 1793, Grodno presented the oddest of spectacles. In the wake of the big political brigands, who came thither to filch whole provinces by means of an armed diplomacy, flocked hundreds and thousands of lesser adventurers and adventuresses, courtiers and courtesans, *chevaliers d'industrie*, gamblers, sharpers and rogues of every description, intent upon diverting into their own pockets some tiny rivulets from the rich golden streams which flowed into the little Lithuanian town out of the seemingly inexhaustible treasuries of St. Petersburg and Berlin. Nine-tenths of the Polish deputies were housed and fed by Sivers and received from him one hundred to six hundred ducats a week according to the value of the services rendered by them in the Diet. Sivers also had in his pay one of the King's secretaries, Herr Friese, who spied upon his royal master, ransacked his correspondence, and daily reported to the ambassador everything that the King said or did. Still more useful to Sivers was Monsieur Boscamp, another member of the King's suite. The ingenuity and thoroughness with which this gentleman performed his functions of spy-in-chief amazed the ambassador himself. Boscamp made the most difficult things easy. He purchased deputies wholesale or retail as the occasion required. He negotiated successfully with the most scrupu-

lous conciseness. The most obstinate waverers were not always proof against his blandishments. It was he who suggested that Pan Chreptowicz, the one able and incorruptible Minister of State who accompanied Stanislaus to Grodno, should be compelled, "for the benefit of his health," to take the waters at Carlsbad.

It was Sivers' policy to make everything as pleasant as possible for the Poles during the session of the Diet. Averse to violent measures, except in the last extremity, he always preferred to bribe, wheedle, or cajole his victims into subservience. Nevertheless it is clear from his letters to his daughters that much that he had to do went very much against the grain. He frequently complains that he is leading a dog's life. He is even doubtful whether he can hold out much longer. "Here am I obliged to give dinners of sixty covers to all sorts of distinguished drunkards not one of whom I know or care to know," he complains on one occasion. Frequently, after presiding for hours at banquets which he loathed, he had to sit up till three o'clock in the morning giving audiences, settling differences, and answering despatches. His only relaxations were conversations on literary and artistic subjects with the papal Nuncio Saluzzi, or listening to the excellent concerts at the Castle where Signora Camilla sang Italian *arias* "like an angel." It was with something like disgust that this correct and dignified old gentleman regarded the mania for amusement going on all around him, though his liberally dispensed roubles helped largely to stimulate it. The gaming-tables were busy all day and all night. The influx of pretty women into Grodno was extraordinary. A few came thither to seek for husbands among the ruins of their country, but most of them were content to fleece the innumerable Russian officers who strutted about the town with nothing to do but spend their money. The bizarre costumes of these ladies gave a strange exotic colouring to the motley scene. This was the time when a passion for antiquity prevailed at Paris, and the so-called "Greek mode" now became as popular on the banks of the Niemen as it was on the banks

of the Seine. Short skirts, sandalled feet, naked busts, and a toilet generally suggestive of a state of nature were the rage. An all-engulfing whirlpool of reckless gaiety swept society along with it. Ball succeeded ball, banquet followed banquet. There were fireworks and illuminations every day. The gaming saloons were full to overflowing.

In the midst of this perpetual orgy the poor old King, broken by sickness and anxiety, was the proper object of pity rather than of contempt. Absolutely without means, he was dependent for his material existence upon a nominal 3000 ducats a week doled out to him, on good behaviour, by Sivers, yet out of this he contrived to send 1000 ducats to Prince Joseph at Brussels with apologies for not being able to send more. Whatever we may think of Stanislaus' weakness of character, it is impossible to withhold our sympathy from the much-tried man who never lost his natural sweetness of temper in the most distressing and humiliating circumstances. His sole consolation now was the company of a little group of faithful friends who clung to him in his misfortunes simply because they loved him. These included his sister Pani Krakowska, his two nieces, his Italian secretary Ghigiotti, his old Kammerdiener Ryx, and, above all, his favourite equerry, Kicki,* a man of real courage and devotion, who was the intermediary between the King and the little patriotic group in the Diet, the so-called “Zealots.” Kicki's influence over the King at this period was most salutary. To the very end he never failed to inspire Stanislaus with noble and chivalrous resolutions.

On June 17, 1793, after hearing the usual mass and sermon, the Diet opened its sessions in the Great Hall of Grodno Castle, at one end of which a throne had been erected for the King with armchairs around it for the Senators and benches in front of it for the Deputies. The central space was left vacant, as also were the galleries, which should have been placed at the disposal of the public but were generally occupied by Russian officers. The Marshal, or President, of this, the last Polish Diet, was a ruined gamester,

* Pronounced “Kitsky.”

Stanislaus Bielinski. Sivers could not have found a more serviceable tool than this insignificant and disreputable person. A nod from the Ambassador sufficed to procure his election by a unanimous vote of the House.

It is unnecessary to set out in detail the proceedings of the Grodno Diet. What could be expected from a carefully selected and constantly terrorised assembly of hirelings and reactionaries, representing only seventeen out of thirty-seven palatinates, driven by Russian bayonets to Grodno in order "to come to an amicable understanding" with despoilers who took good care to keep their victims in durance vile till they had done what they were commanded to do? The result was a foregone conclusion. Yet even this helpless and debased assembly revolted against its tyrants and displayed, at last, a spirit and a constancy not unworthy of the best days of the Republic. At its third session the Diet protested vehemently against the Empress's breach of her solemn promise to respect the territorial integrity of Poland. In this matter the King himself took the lead. He declared that he had only acceded to the Confederation of Targowica on receiving the express assurance of the Empress that Poland should be left intact. From this point, he added, with spirit, he could not depart. Sivers thereupon presented a joint note from Russia and Prussia ignoring the question now raised, which was, indeed, unanswerable, and demanding that a Committee should be formed, forthwith, to conclude a treaty with the partitioning Powers. The Diet refused to recognise the pretensions of Prussia, but announced its readiness to treat with Russia separately. On June 2, a second joint note was handed in to the effect that the interests of the two Powers being identical their claims must be taken into consideration simultaneously. The Diet countered by ignoring Prussia altogether and, at the same time, offering Russia a treaty of alliance, which amounted, practically, to an act of union. This was a very clever move and Sivers was considerably embarrassed by it. He applied to his Court for fresh instructions in order to meet this unexpected difficulty. But

Catherine had committed herself too deeply with Prussia * to draw back now, and the Ambassador was curtly directed to carry out her Majesty's original commands. On July 1 Sivers tried to overcome the obstructive tactics of the Diet by arresting seven of the “Zealots.” The House thereupon suspended its sessions till the deputies should be released, and released they were on the following day. On the 4th, after ordering the Russian Commandant, General Igelström, to concentrate his troops nearer to Grodno, Sivers seized the property of the King's nephew, Pan Tyszkiewicz, accused Stanislaus to his face of being a *sans-culotte*, and finally (July 22), by threatening to confiscate the estates of every member of the Diet, procured the signature of the partition treaty with Russia. Despite the most earnest entreaties from the King and the Diet combined, he would suffer not the slightest alteration to be made in it. It was, he said, not a bargain but an ultimatum.

Nevertheless, in one respect, at any rate, the Diet had got its way. It had succeeded in separating the Prussian from the Russian negotiations, thereby effectually stigmatising the peculiarly atrocious behaviour of Prussia. For reprehensible as the methods of Catherine II. might be, they were almost venial as compared with the methods of Frederick William II. Catherine had, at least, openly taken the risks of a bandit who boldly attacks an enemy against whom he has a grudge. Frederick William II., on the other hand, had come up from behind, after the fight was over, to help pillage a victim whom he had solemnly sworn to defend. Such unexampled treachery fanned the smouldering embers of Polish patriotism into a fierce flame. The opposition to Russia had been lukewarm and anything but unanimous; but against the pretensions of Prussia the Polish deputies stood together in a solid phalanx. Stanislaus even appealed direct to Catherine for help, and his appeal was warmly supported by Sivers who opined,

* We know from the correspondence of Bezborodko, that Russia had not the means, at this time, to engage in a war with Prussia, a war which would have been the inevitable result of any suspension of the partition.

confidentially, that something ought really now to be done for Poland. Catherine was inexorable for the most cogent of all reasons, she could not help herself, she durst not run the risk of a breach with Prussia. On August 17 the Polish treaty with Russia was ratified, though only with the utmost difficulty, in a session which lasted from 4 o'clock P.M. till dawn on the following day. "I hope the Empress is satisfied now," said Stanislaus to Sivers. Then, turning to the Ambassador, he exclaimed excitedly, "I would enter the Russian service as a common soldier if only I could thereby save my remaining provinces from the grip of Prussia." On August 26 the Prussian propositions were laid before the House and, after a stormy debate, a motion for their rejection was carried. On the 28th the Prussian Minister Buchholtz threatened to occupy the southern provinces of Cracow and Sandomir if the treaty were not agreed to at once. Enraged at the tone of the Prussian note, which was "as insulting as if it had been addressed to slaves," the "Zealots" moved that all negotiations with Prussia should instantly be broken off. A tumult of three hours' duration ensued, and ultimately the House adjourned for a couple of days. In the meantime Buchholtz conferred with Sivers, and both Ambassadors arrived at the conclusion that only by the employment of the most violent expedients could the opposition be crushed. Accordingly, on September 2, two battalions of Russian grenadiers with four cannons marched into Grodno and surrounded the Castle. The gunners, with lighted lunts in their hands, stood beside their guns. The corridors of the Hall of Assembly were lined with sentries. A picket composed of twelve Russian officers, headed by General Rautenfeld, entered the *Izba*, or Chamber, and posted themselves behind the seats of the Deputies, while the General sat down on the left hand side of the throne. The Deputies, as they entered in twos and threes, between a file of soldiers with weapons crossed, were informed that they would not be permitted to leave their seats till a resolution had been come to, but that they might freely express their opinions on the matter in hand. At four o'clock, by which time

most of the Deputies had assembled, the King entered and took his seat on the throne. His attention was immediately directed by one of the "Zealots" to the unwarrantable presence of "strangers in Russian uniform" in the House. "Till these intruders have withdrawn," continued the speaker, "the business of the Diet cannot legally be proceeded with." Stanislaus at once declared that the Russian officers were there without his knowledge or consent, and, after some disturbance, it was agreed to send a deputation to Sivers demanding the withdrawal of the interlopers. For two hours the House remained silent and passive awaiting the reply of the Ambassador. Sivers consented to the withdrawal of the officers but insisted upon General Rautenfeld remaining, and with this compromise the House had to be content. The Prussian draft treaty was then considered, and, after being very much altered and cut about, was sent to Sivers to be despatched by him to Berlin. The Ambassador then permitted the exhausted Deputies to depart to their lodgings. They had sat uninterruptedly for twelve hours.

An interval of rest and relaxation ensued. The birthday of the King was celebrated by a banquet which was followed by a ball and a concert given by the Russian officers. A fortnight later a courier arrived from Berlin with the Prussian treaty. Despite the earnest recommendations of Sivers to the contrary, all the alterations and amendments made by the Poles had been struck out. The Prussian Court not only refused to make the slightest concession, but threatened to occupy all the remaining provinces of Poland if its demands were not instantly and completely satisfied. Sivers at once perceived that there was now nothing for it but to give a final twist to the screw and so extort an unconditional submission from the wretched Poles. Accordingly, on the night of September 22, he had the four most resolute of the "Zealots" seized by Cossacks and removed from Grodno. The tidings of this arrest spread rapidly and on the following morning the streets of the little town were entirely deserted and as silent as the grave.

Two battalions of Russian grenadiers were again posted round the Castle, with their guns, ready to fire at a given signal, pointed against it. Inside the House, General Rautenfeld was already in his place before the throne, when the Deputies began to arrive. On the Marshal declaring that the session was opened, he was interrupted by loud cries of: "It is not opened, it will not be opened till our four Deputies have been released." After two hours of incessant uproar, it was decided to send a message to Horodnica, Sivers' country mansion, demanding the instant release of the Deputies. The messengers returned with a note from the Ambassador politely expressing his regret that the unruliness of the Deputies should have compelled him to arrest them, but refusing to release them till the House had accepted the Prussian treaty in its entirety. At this a fresh tumult arose, above the din of which could be heard the voice of the Deputy Kimbar: "What right has a foreign minister to direct the course of our debates?" The House thereupon decided, unanimously, that no business should be transacted till the arrestants had been released, and a second deputation was sent to Sivers with a note to that effect. The deputation returned at midnight with an abrupt refusal. The Ambassador, thoroughly angry, declared that he would not now release the Deputies even if he had orders from St. Petersburg to do so. He added that if the Prussian treaty were not signed before the House rose, General Rautenfeld would know what to do. Even after this the King made a personal appeal to Sivers through the Bishop of Wilna, a notorious Russophil, but the Bishop returned empty-handed. Still the House refused to allow the Prussian protocol to be read, and, on the motion of Pan Raczynski, the Deputy for Sandomir, it was finally resolved to protest against the use of violence by maintaining an attitude of absolute silence. "Our silence," he said, "will be more eloquent than fruitless opposition. It will best interpret our feelings and our situation." The House adopted the proposition, and from that moment all the Deputies remained dumb. Presently General Rautenfeld



CATHERINE II IN THE LAST YEAR OF HER LIFE
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rose from his seat and approached the throne. “I implore your Majesty to command that the Prussian protocol be read,” said he. Stanislaus replied, with dignity, that inasmuch as the Deputies were forbidden to speak according to their convictions, silence was now their sole remaining means of defence. Rautenfeld, whose instructions did not provide for this unforeseen contingency, posted off to Sivers. On his return, he informed the King that his orders were not to let the Deputies go till they had voted the Prussian project, and that bundles of straw would presently be brought into the Chamber for the accommodation of the members of the Diet during the night. This announcement was received with unbroken silence. A motion, recommending submission to superior force, read by the one Prussophil deputy in the House, Pan Ankwicz, was treated in the same way. Hour after hour passed. The clock struck three hours after midnight and still the Deputies sat there as immovable as statues. Then Rautenfeld again approached the King and urged him to direct that Ankwicz’s motion should be submitted to the consideration of the House in the usual way. “I have not the power to compel the Deputies to break their silence,” replied Stanislaus drily. The General thereupon began pacing up and down the floor of the House. His clanking stride was the only sound which disturbed the stillness. At last he moved towards the door exclaiming: “Very well, then! I must execute my final instructions and introduce the grenadiers.” He was stopped on the very threshold by the timid voice of the Marshal of the Diet, Bielinski, who declared that he was about to put the matter to the vote. Then, in a louder tone, he cried: “Does the House agree to the Prussian protocol?” Absolute silence. Bielinski put his question a second time with the same result. He put it a third time. The stillness was unbroken. “I take it then, that it is agreed to unanimously, for silence gives consent,” cried the Marshal. “I therefore invite the Committee appointed for that purpose to sign the protocol.” It was by this impudent and ignominious expedient that the difficulty was overcome and

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Prussia got her share of the plunder of Poland. Immediately afterwards the King closed the session of "the Dumb Diet."

By the second partition treaty, definitely ratified on January 4, 1794, Russia gained 250,700 and Prussia 58,570 square kilométres more of Polish soil. The miserable remnant of the ancient kingdom was then compelled to re-accept its vicious old Constitution under the guarantee of the partitioning Powers.

The first partition of Poland has sometimes been excused, plausibly enough, on the grounds that it was a regrettable necessity; but no sophistry in the world can extenuate the villainy of the second partition. The theft of territory is its least offensive feature. It is the forcible suppression of a genuine and promising national movement of reform, the hurling back into the abyss of anarchy and corruption of a people who, by incredible efforts and sacrifices, were struggling back to liberty and order which makes this great political crime so wholly infamous.¹

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Not very much more remains to be told of the doings of King Stanislaus. He had no part or share in the marvellous insurrection of 1794, which shed such deathless glory on the last struggle of the dying Republic for life and liberty. The Kosciuszko rising took him quite by surprise, and, at first, he did not grasp its true significance. Thus, on April 9, he wrote to Prince Joseph that he, Stanislaus, was bound to act with Russia against Kosciuszko because the latter was a rebel who would not recognise his authority. Only ten days later, when the whole nation had declared for the Liberator and expelled the Russians from Warsaw and Wilna, the King ordered his nephew to hasten to the camp of Kosciuszko without a moment's delay. "As the nation has resolved to risk the uttermost," he explained, "the precepts of prudence no longer apply and I will not be separated from my people." But the people simply ignored the useless and discredited old trimmer. Throughout the dictatorship of Kosciuszko the King was simply

shoved aside and treated as of no account. Kosciuszko provided for his personal safety while less illustrious partisans of Russia were being hanged in the streets—and that was all. When the insurrection had finally been extinguished by Suvarov in torrents of blood, Stanislaus was compelled, very reluctantly, to quit his capital (January 7, 1795) which he foresaw he should never see again. He was sent first to Grodno where he was placed in the charge of his old friend Prince Nicholas Repnin. He was treated honourably as became his rank, and 11,000 ducats, not very regularly paid, were assigned to the maintenance of his tiny Court. He amused himself by reading, playing billiards, and writing his memoirs. On November 23, 1795, he was compelled to abdicate. “I do so,” he declared, “for the sake of my unhappy country.” Then he burst into tears and Repnin, much moved, helped the broken old man to descend the steps of the throne. As a matter of fact the abdication was equivalent to a confirmation of the third partition which swept Poland altogether out of existence. In return for this last act of submission, the Empress confirmed the ex-King in the possession of his private estates. In a not unkindly letter, she advised him to spend the remainder of his days in Italy, preferably Rome, as being best suited to his political situation and his predilection for Art. She permitted him also the choice of his route to the Eternal City so that he might avoid all the places “most likely to evoke painful recollections.” But Stanislaus preferred to remain at Grodno and took up botany as an additional diversion. The death of Catherine (November 17, 1796) profoundly affected him, though he benefited by it very considerably. In a letter, full of sympathy and affection, the Emperor Paul invited Stanislaus to settle at St. Petersburg and assigned to him a pension of 100,000 ducats. The three petitioning Powers had already agreed to pay his debts between them. The Marble Palace was given to him for a residence and his first visitor there was the Emperor himself attended by his whole Court. From henceforth the ex-King lived in ease and comfort occupy-

ing himself for the most part with his books, of which he now began to make a complete catalogue.

Stanislaus II. died, rather suddenly, on February 12, 1798, of an apoplectic seizure, in his sixty-sixth year. On hearing of the last illness of his guest, Paul at once hastened to his side and never quitted him till all was over. The funeral of a crowned head was generously accorded to his remains by the Russian Emperor. Paul himself rode in front of the hearse at the head of the Life-Guards with his drawn sword reversed. The Ministers and Dignitaries of the Russian Court followed in parade carriages adorned with the royal arms. The White Eagle standard, embroidered with the escutcheons of Poland and Lithuania, was borne before them by a herald. The Metropolitan of St. Petersburg conducted the funeral service. All the regiments of the Guard were drawn up on both sides of the Nevsky Prospect from the Marble Palace to the Catholic Church, where the relics of Stanislaus were reverently laid within a mural niche. By the Emperor's especial command, two stately standards were placed over the tomb to mark the last resting-place of the last King of Poland.

