

[Campbell T.]

ADDRESS

OF THE

LITERARY POLISH ASSOCIATION

TO THE

PEOPLE OF GREAT BRITAIN.

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THE LITERARY POLISH ASSOCIATION.

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ADDRESS,

&c. &c.

FELLOW COUNTRYMEN,

WITH an anxiety proportioned to the awful calamities of a nation which deserves the sympathy of every living human breast, we beg leave to explain to you the motives and the objects of our present Association.

We declare, that the fate of Poland has impressed us with sentiments, which we find the power of language scarcely adequate to express. We are filled with grief that there has not been humanity enough in the whole world to have interposed between the Polish nation and its destroyers; and we are still more struck with astonishment, that all civilized Europe has been so blind to the first law of nature, to the law of self-preservation, as to permit this aggression of a despotic government on a country whose fate is interwoven with European safety and civilization, with the interests of the world, and with the cause of human nature.

In that outraged cause of human nature, we feel it a sacred duty, not only to utter our own abhorrence of the

atrocities committed, and still continuing to be committed, in Poland, but to ask for an universal expression of British sentiments respecting this unparalleled public crime.

We conceive, that the barbarity and perfidy of the Northern Autocrat towards this brave and blameless people has been a mockery of all laws and principles that ensure the safety of nations, and the civilization of men. We defy the subtlest casuist to give his cruelties the slightest shadow of justification. They are crimes which pollute our sight, and on which it is criminal to look with indifference. They are sins which must be expiated. They are stains on the annals of our species. They are an affront to the civilized world; but, above all, they are an affront to Great Britain, whose government is solemnly bound by treaty to protect the last remains of the Polish nation.

By the treaty of Vienna, Great Britain made some small atonement (and small it was, indeed) to the once glorious kingdom of Poland for the robbery of her national greatness, and for three guilty past partitions of her territories. It was stipulated, by the treaty of Vienna, that all the portions of that Polish population, amounting to nearly twenty millions, which had been seized by Russia, Prussia, and Austria, should retain their nationality in representation and civil institutions; though, unfortunately, their constitutional freedom was then, most probably for some sinister purposes, very imperfectly defined. But the Duchy of Warsaw received by the treaty of Vienna the most definite and solemn guarantees of being suffered to remain an independent and free Polish Kingdom. It was expressly stipulated, that the Emperor of Russia was to be King of Poland in the

right of its constitution only. By that treaty, a positive national and political independence was guaranteed by Europe to a remnant of the Polish nation in the Duchy of Warsaw—guaranteed by Great Britain herself; but Russia, in mockery of all this, has set aside every engagement on the subject. First of all, the Emperor Alexander repented of his liberalism in having promised a constitutional government to Poland; and he behaved even more inconsistently than Nicholas towards the Poles, for he began by mildness, and ended by sending his brother Constantine to rule over them. Still, as long as Alexander lived, things were not so bad in that country as after his death. Nicholas ascended the Russian throne, and Constantine was made (virtually) King of Poland. He swayed with a rod of iron. His dominion was utter, and wreckless, and lawless despotism. He committed crimes and cruelties which admit of no better apology than that he was half a maniac. At the very moment the Emperor Nicholas, by his coronation oath, had solemnly sworn to the Poles to maintain their rights, as they were guaranteed to them by their constitution, the people beheld their noblest patriots chained and dungeoned, for simply claiming that constitution. Despair drove them, at last, to demand their rights, sword in hand.

But that despair, say their slavish enemies, was not uninfluenced by a hope that France would assist them. And there are amongst ourselves some persons in whose eyes this circumstance is a taint on the Polish cause. Verily, Fellow Countrymen, we would wish to unite the voices of all true Britons in sympathy with the Poles, without regard to their difference in party politics; and

it has been no small satisfaction to the members of this Association, that it has already convened men of the most opposite political sentiments on other subjects, but who, on this subject, have only one opinion. As friends to Poland, it is not our province to offer any remark on the last French revolution more than this, that whatever it was, it would have been most natural and justifiable that the Poles should have availed themselves of it. The government of Russia was, day by day, tightening the screws of their torture. They had bled for the French nation; and if there was faith or gratitude among men, they had a right to expect aid from France. Another such opportunity might never again occur for their bursting from their bondage. And were the Poles, we ask, to throw away a chance of self-deliverance by scruples about the virtual propriety of the French or Belgic revolution? Because the grievances of those nations might not be great, were *their* grievances slight or imaginary? And, because the French and the Belgians would not endure some wrongs, were the Poles to endure interminable misery? No; the converse inference was directly necessary. The unsubmitiveness of *others* was a reproach to *their* submitiveness. And, though there is no great need of justifying the late French revolution to the majority of Britons, yet it requires no specific opinion about that event, to pronounce that if it had given a hope and an example to the Poles, it would not reflect the slightest discredit on the Polish contest.

There are certainly amongst us persons speaking the same language with ourselves, and calling the same soil their native country, who hate the very heroism of Poland, because its rallying word was liberty. But of what

account are those persons in Great Britain? Do you respect them? Can you fairly reckon such slaves to prejudice among your free population? No, you despise them, and we disdain to palter with them. We court universal British opinion, but not such atoms of its universality. Shades of Swift and Bolingbroke, defend the name of British Tory from their foul assumption! They are not Britons! They are not men! They belong to brainless and heartless Entomology.

The Poles arose and fought with an intrepidity that has scarcely its parallel in authentic history; and but for the criminal interference of the cabinet of Berlin, they would have beat the barbarians.\* As it was, they have thrown an immortal glory over their melancholy name. And it is even of this melancholy glory, that the Autocrat wishes to defraud them. He would abolish their language, and, not contented with robbing their heroes of life, he would rob the very dead of their memory, and erase them from human recollection! *That is more than he can do!* But let us look to his more practicable determinations. Poland is to be for ever annexed to the dominions of the Muscovite; its institutions and its language are henceforth to be Russian; and though Great Britain guaranteed to them a separate independent existence, the independence of the Poles, as a nation, is to be annihilated. Meanwhile the Muscovite is sending, by thousands and by tens of thousands, the wounded men, the weeping mothers, and the very youth from the schools

\* In one of the numbers of the Society's publications, a history of the policy of that government during the last contest between Poland and Russia will be given from authentic sources and diplomatic documents.

of Poland, in chains to Siberia. Would to God we could believe that report has exaggerated these atrocities! It would be wicked in us to shock you with them, if they were not literally true; and we would scorn to calumniate, if that were possible, even the oppressors of Poland. But, alas! we know those horrors to be too true. Authentic documents of too melancholy conviction lie before us.\* But we need not refer to such sources. Facts enough are already known to all of you, and as notorious as the sun at noon-day, to show the Autocrat's barbarity towards Poland. His own ukases avow it openly.

Fellow Countrymen! is all this outrage to your humanity, as men, and is all this insult to your honour, as a nation, to be passed over unheeded? Not to speak of stipulations and treaties—not to speak of the millions of money which you have paid, and which you are still paying, to Russia on the faith of *one* treaty—you are spectators of a hideous enormity; and, as human beings, you owe to humanity your public protest and universal reprobation.

As Britons, you owe it to your insulted Empire to call to account an insolent tyrant, who slaughters, proscribes, and threatens to annihilate the independence of a people, whose independence was guaranteed by yourselves. Nay, more—we conceive that your very security, as a free nation, is compromised, by permitting Russia to gorge and strengthen herself unmolested on the gore and rapine of Poland! Is this not, by sufferance, helping the cannibal to a diet that may one day nourish him to attack yourselves?

\* These documents, and other papers, will shortly appear in the first volume of the Society's publications.

Weigh all the consequences that will result to the world, and to yourselves, if you suffer the separate independence of Poland to be annihilated. The subject is worthy not only of your strong feelings, but of your deep and deliberate consideration. It is not to your mere feelings, but to your judgments also, that we would wish to appeal. Our object is to fix British attention on Poland and on Russia; to diffuse a general knowledge of the history and events of the ancient Kingdom of Poland; to collect all such information as may tend to preserve in the public mind a lively interest in the condition of that unfortunate country; and to have the cause of Poland discussed by all classes of Britons. Without such a discussion, the commonest observer may, no doubt, see that the fate of the Poles is cruel, and that the conduct of Russia is atrocious. But without examining the subject, few will understand the full extent of calamity which Poland has yet to endure, and the terrible prospects for which Europe must be prepared, from the progressive triumph of Russian despotism. It is in order that the subject may be universally discussed, that we have associated. The British press, no doubt, acts well with regard to Poland, but its efforts ought to be seconded by some permanent body, who may select, gather, reprint, and diffuse its most valuable articles on this most interesting topic; for nothing is more remarkable than the fugaciousness of the ablest essays of the daily press. In addition to the task of reviving such essays, we shall publish all the intelligence we possess respecting Poland; we shall describe that country as she once was, the parent of heroes and of sages; and we shall delineate her as she now is, the abandoned victim of spoliation.

We shall try to make the simplest mind understand what Russian policy ever was and constantly is, and what *you* and all Europe will be, if you curb not her liberticidal designs.

We are convinced, Fellow Countrymen, that there reigns among you a general concern for the fate of Poland, and a general feeling of indignation at her oppressors. But, without impugning British humanity, without disputing that the periodical press has honourably advocated the Polish cause—without denying that popular sympathy has been several times strongly manifested in its favour—and without forgetting how much your domestic politics have lately distracted your attention from this foreign tragedy—we are still compelled to remind you, that, for any practical results, your sympathy with the Poles has hitherto been of no earthly use to them; and that, supposing your sympathy had changed sides, and gone over from the Poles to Russia, the fate of unhappy Poland could not have been worse than it now is!

We can further assure you, that the Russian Court, which, through its emissaries, is ever watchfully feeling the pulse of Public opinion over Europe, has hugged itself joyously into the belief that Great Britain cares very little about the Polish nation. Shall nothing be done to check this joy of the oppressors? Are we to hear the Russians boast in our highest circles of their Emperor's triumphs obtained by perfidy over a generous and guiltless people?

But, Fellow Countrymen, we wish to make no appeal to your feelings on this subject without having facts for the groundwork of your sympathy. Indeed, there is a vagueness of information respecting Poland that impedes

universal interest. Knowing her cause to be just, we wish that interest to be not merely general, but universal.

Besides this vagueness of information, which ought to be cleared away, there are positive falsehoods respecting the Poles, inculcated by their enemies, and fostered by ignorance, of which many minds still require to be disabused. Those enemies give out, for instance, that it is no cruelty to make a Polish peasant the serf of a Russian master, because he, the Pole, is only a serf under a Polish landlord. This is utterly false. The Polish peasant is (*alas! we may now only say that he was*) a cottager, and not a serf. He differed in no respect from the English small farmer but in this, that he paid his rent in labour, and not in money. His labour, however, was limited and defined, and it left him full leisure to cultivate his own farm. As long as he could find a substitute for that labour, he could go where he liked, being neither *adstrictus glebæ* nor transferable by sale. But now, with a Russian master, who can tell what his lot will be? The Polish peasant was a free man; he himself and his children might go where they chose. The Russian serfs are like cattle, the absolute property of their masters, who may sell and dispose of them in any way they think fit, drawing an annual revenue from them, whatever the serf's trade or abilities may be. The Russian servants are household slaves to all intents and purposes. The Polish servants were free, and received their wages like our own; but Poland being now incorporated with Russia, without a separate political existence, thousands and tens of thousands of her patriotic peasantry will be dragged into Russia, under the plea of military conscription, to be there degraded under the lash

of Russian discipline, and levelled to the condition of brute animals. The Polish soldier, too, was well paid—he had six times the pay of a Russian soldier. The Polish officer was kind to him, and softened as far as he could the tyranny of Russian discipline. No! the Polish peasants were not slaves; and the manner in which they always fought belies the assertion. Such, indeed, is the horror of the commonest Pole at being given up to Russia, that the refugees in Prussia preferred being shot by the Prussians to returning home.\* Terrible indeed is the degradation that awaits the meanest Polish peasant who shall be *now* thrown back upon his wretched country! With a Russian master, he will be no longer a Pole—no longer a man; he will be as dependent on his owner's will as a beast of the field: he may be bought, he may be sold, he may be sent at the Emperor's pleasure to Siberia; but in that case, he must have his owner's permission to carry with him even a handful of the dust of his native soil, in addition to the weight of his chains. The very custom of the Poles to which we allude is a mark of their attachment to their native country. When forced to leave it, they take with them a small portion of their native earth, that it may be buried with them in their coffins if they should die abroad. Slaves are not apt to be so romantic.

The entire British community is very far from being fully aware of the horrific amount of human misery that has been bespoken for unhappy Poland since the Autocrat decreed her annihilation. Execrable as the old

\* See the Letter addressed by T. Howe, Esq., of the United States, to Thomas Campbell, Esq., and other papers, in the next publication of the Society.

partition of the country might be, it included no horrors like those which are now going on. Independently of confiscations and punishments, the Emperor is making war on the very sources of civilization; he is carrying off libraries, abolishing the study of philosophical and political science in the schools of instruction, and proscribing all the moral knowledge that ennobles man. The sufferings of Poland are prospectively deepening. Many well-meaning persons may no doubt be heard to observe that the evil is now done, that it cannot be undone, and that it must be submitted to. But whether it must be submitted to or not, the evil is not yet done, nor half done—it is only begun, and it will require much time, and blood, and tears, to be consummated. Let the Poles, say those good-natured observers, live but quietly under Russia, and she will spare them. But no, we say, and we can prove it, Russia will not spare them, and, in consistency with her savage policy, she cannot spare them. As she has begun, so she must end with them. In plain truth, she can have no reign over Poland *now* but a reign of terror; and if Europe permits her, she will beyond all doubt annihilate Poland with atrocities on a larger scale than human history has ever recorded.

If permitted, Russia will—not at once, indeed, but she will systematically and surely, and not very slowly—exterminate the flower of the remaining Polish population, and leave the forlorn residue exactly in the same state that the Helots were in under Sparta, deprived of every means of fostering and preserving their nationality. Before Warsaw was last taken, different plans had been already discussed by the Autocrat's cabinet, as to what



should be done with the unhappy kingdom of Poland, in the event of its re-subjugation. Conciliation was out of the question, and was never mentioned. But to get rid at once of millions of Poles, by sudden slaughter or dispersion, was a difficulty even to their merciless conquerors. It was therefore determined that Poland should be politically put to death, by the translocation of as many Russians as possible into Poland, and of as many Poles as possible into the wildest parts of Russia, first, on pretext of punishment, and secondly, under that of military conscription. Now, if we consider the two-fold effects of this translocation, it may fairly be questioned, whether the sentence of sudden death on millions of Poles would have been a harder sentence than such a wholesale mode of national destruction. The most merciful fate that a Pole can now expect is to be spared being sent into Siberia. In fact, the equalization of slavery in both countries, Russia and Poland, as well as the acquisition of forfeited Polish estates, was again anticipated as a blessing by the Russian aristocracy; as a repetition of the scandalous robbery which took place after the last partition, that would well reward all the trouble of reconquering the country. The first tidings of the Polish insurrection, though it alarmed some of the Russian nobility, gave joy to most of them. It was awkward, they said, to be obliged to hear at St. Petersburg of a Diet of representatives at Warsaw, and of a people setting up for a constitution, whilst the Russians had none.

On these confiscating and translocating schemes towards Poland, Russia has begun to act in right good earnest. Some of her atrocities have been laid bare to the public view, but only a sample of them. We spare our-

selves for the present the task of reciting their disgusting details. Painful, however, as that recital would be, we are prepared to show that the outrages inflicted on this friendless people have never been exposed to their full amount. It is our duty to assure any such persons as may fondly believe that the sufferings of Poland are at their close, or that they will terminate with her submission, that they are much mistaken. Suppose, although it is no very easy supposition, that their oppressors could heartily forgive them, still those oppressors cannot forget that the Poles are a brave and a sensitive people, and that they have among them the remnant of a chivalrous nobility, and of a bold and patriotic peasantry. What security of tenure can oppression ever have over such a people, whilst there remains a portion of them unable to forget that they are Poles? And how can Russia fulfil her threat of annihilating Poland, but by annihilating the spirit of the nation? She must necessarily persevere, then, in the translocating system. She must continue to cover the roads of Russia with Polish prisoners, and pretences will never be wanting. She must get rid of all, or as nearly as possible of all, Poles who are discontented or suspected of discontentment. She must deflower the nation, and, by one means or other, dispose of all its patriots, high and low, who may have either spirit or property. Russia will do all this, if she be permitted; and she will leave at last, in what was Poland, nothing but an abject population—poor, knouted, enslaved, without a public-minded nobleman, or clergyman, or scholar, to speak to their countrymen in their own language. As the annihilation of Poland, however, has not been yet consummated, Europe might still prevent it; and the voice of Britain, already

challenged by her insulted dignity, would be of no slight avail in awakening European remonstrance. It is not for us to detain you with discussions on foreign politics; but thus much we may say, without fear of contradiction—that over all the Continent of Europe, there is among the people only one voice and feeling respecting Poland. But the Continental press being enslaved every where, except in France, the subject cannot be discussed on the Continent with due publicity. On that account, it is the more incumbent on the free and patriotic press of our own great country to continue the discussion; and when our domestic affairs shall be more settled, as we trust they will soon be, we expect that this momentous foreign question will obtain a large share of public attention.

And we hope, Fellow Countrymen, that it will obtain more than your transitory attention. Generous as Britons are, it seems as if Poland were fated to experience their generosity only in fond words and fits of recollection. At the treaty of Vienna, we heard of independence having been secured to a remnant of that once great kingdom. A constitution, too, was promised to the Poles, and it was given to them in writing, but they were scandalously withheld from enjoying it; and for years and years they suffered injuries, inferior to their present calamities, no doubt, but still deep and dreadful injuries. *Yet, who among us, during all these fifteen years, ever felt for the Poles, or perhaps, ever thought of them?* Their wrongs were inflicted in silence; and Poland, though man owed her benefits, was chained, like Prometheus, unseen by man. The first intelligence of what this gallant nation had suffered, reached us in the clash of their swords with those of their oppressors. Is it

destined to be so once more? And is this people, that produced Casimir, Copernicus, Sobieski, and Kosciuszko—this people, once the deliverers of Christendom, and to this day the models of modern heroism—is this people to be the theme of a day, and then to be dropt into oblivion, and *annihilated?* Enlightened England, avert the doom!

And you can avert it, Fellow Countrymen. Your uplifted voice could countermand this hideous annihilation. The Autocrat believes that you care nothing about the Poles. Ye men that have British hearts, undeceive him, and let him know that even the poorest man in England has “a tear for Poland.”\* Honour to that test of the poor man’s sympathy! That tear for Poland is a sacred drop, and it will work like a holy spell against her unhallowed oppressors. At such a demonstration, our hope revives that ye will manifest an universal feeling; and though Poland, whose cause our hearts espoused, is fallen, and though we mourn for her as lost, and as dead for the present, yet your strong compassion is the Hercules that will restore her, like another Alcestis, from the tomb.

The Autocrat would pause before he said *nay* to the voice of twenty-four millions of Britons, who may have difficulties, but none which, in a just cause, they could not shake off, like “dew-drops from the lion’s mane.”

It must rest with your general opinion, and it will, no doubt, also depend upon circumstances, how you are to treat the question of Poland as a practical political question of a party. We presume not to advise you in what specific manner you should declare your sentiments on the

\* At the great meeting at Birmingham, the people from Wolverhampton had their banners inscribed with these words.

subject. We only repeat our opinion, that an universal declaration of your sentiments, in some shape or other, is due to the cause of humanity, and to the honour of our native land. Give us your support, and we solemnly promise that we will not slacken in the cause we have espoused.

THOMAS CAMPBELL,

*President.*

Sussex Chambers,  
Duke Street, St. James's.



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