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STANISŁAW
STRONSKI

"TO SAVE OUR
COUNTRY AND
PRESERVE HER
FRONTIERS . . ."

THE CONSTITUTION OF MAY 3rd, 1791, was a part of the plan devised then by Polish patriots to save the independence of Poland and the integrity of her frontiers. It was a beacon of light in the midst of the darkest night when the whole edifice of the Polish Commonwealth seemed to be crumbling. What the authors of that Constitution of May 3rd aimed at was not merely to reform the Constitution of the Republic but to save her very existence.

"To save our country and preserve her frontiers," says the lofty preamble, "we promulgate and proclaim this Constitution."

It is not surprising that this resolve to protect the frontiers of Poland and the integrity of her territory is so evident in the text of the Constitution, because it was the dearest hope of those who carried this great reform through the memorable Diet of 1788-1792, and of all those who realized the necessity of far-reaching reforms for the survival of the independence of Poland.

Indeed, the shock of the first partition of 1772 ignited a strong desire for a national resurgence, and it was this newly inflamed patriotism which step by step, day by day and year after year forged a new generation and in twenty years brought this generation to the helm of the state. The wound caused by the first partition and the severing of three provinces from the Republic was still open, and the ceaseless knocking of her neighbours at the walls of the Commonwealth made people anxious for the integrity of Poland and passionately desirous to maintain it. They aimed at the recovery of the lost provinces and in no case would they admit the loss of more territory.

The Great Diet, as we call it, was in session while a two-pronged attack, sometimes hidden, sometimes overt, was under way.

Russia treated Poland almost like a vassal state; she exercised a ceaseless pressure on the Polish Government, she had a network of agents and garrisons, and the Polish-Russian frontier was largely on paper only. On the other hand, in Prussia her Prime Minister, Hertzberg, had prepared, in the autumn of 1787, a secret plan for new acquisitions in Western Poland; the first instalments were to be the towns of Torun and Danzig, which were to round off her Pomeranian domains, acquired during the first partition; she attempted to secure these acquisitions by the treacherous Polish-Prussian alliance of 1790, whose price was to be exacted from the Poles at a suitable moment. The first aim of the Constitution's hurried acceptance on May 3rd and 5th, 1791, was to strengthen the structure of the State in order to forestall at the last moment the immediate danger of a new partition; indeed, Prussia and Russia, after a period of quarrels, had begun then, in the spring of 1791, to negotiate a new understanding with a view to a second partition. In 1792 the new Constitution was overthrown by the treacherous Targowica "Confederation" set up under the auspices of Russia, because the May reforms were rightly deemed as an impediment to the evil plans of the partitioning Powers and as a powerful weapon in the hands of the Polish people fighting desperately for the integrity of their country.

This was followed by a second partition in 1793 and, after Kosciuszko's last attempt to uphold the Constitution and the Commonwealth in 1794, the third partition of 1795 brought the final act of the tragedy of Poland.

Everything was lost, everything but the spirit of the Constitution of May 3rd. This spirit was the spirit of the struggle for an independent and free country. It remained a sacred heritage, passed on from generation to generation, and it burned until the restoration of Poland.

JERZY ADAMKIEWICZ

KOŚCIUSZKO IN BRISTOL

QUEEN SQUARE IN BRISTOL IS A SQUARE in the true sense of the word; in this it differs from most so-called "squares" in other English towns. A fine equestrian statue of the



Thaddeus Kosciuszko (from a contemporary drawing)

Prince of Orange, later King William III, by Rysbarch is erected in its centre, amidst lawns laid out in the form of the Union Jack. Enclosed on three sides by the rivers Avon and Frome which here form an extensive harbour, this square once lay next the principal highroad leading from Europe to America.

Here was the starting-point for countless expeditions of explorers and conquerors, such as the famous Merchant Venturers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Here fleets of galleys lay at anchor, laden with priceless cargoes from the new colonies. Here also, for many years, flourished an iniquitous but highly lucrative slave trade.

All this now belongs to the past. Today the old residences built of yellow sandstone, with broad windows and ornate porticos, once tenanted by city merchants, are leased out as offices or inhabited by port workers. More and more space is being taken up by business premises and warehouses, without any claim to aesthetic distinction. But the spirit of history and tradition still lingering over the place, imparts to it a singular atmosphere of stability and continuity.

On the south the Square is shut off by a group of three two-storied houses with the sober facades of the Georgian period. Together they form a group of semi-detached residences, built on a uniform architectural plan, under a single roof. Affixed to the front of the middle house there is a bronze tablet with the inscription: "The Polish patriot Thaddeus Kosciuszko stayed here in June 1797." This house now bears the number 37, formerly it was 36. The tablet was given by the two brothers Spiridon, descendants of a Polish exile of 1830, one of whom holds the office of Polish Consul in Cardiff.

It would be an error to suppose that Bristolians have forgotten about the fact that the great Polish national hero lived for a while in

In 1792 the Targowica "Confederation," in the service of Russia, opposed the Constitution of May 3rd under the banner of the defence of the liberties of the nobility. In 1942 the so-called Union of Polish Patriots, again in the service of Russia, stood up against our national unity under the banner of Red freedom. This comparison between the Targowica traitors and the Union founded on the 150th anniversary of that "Confederation" is strictly exact, and, if it is disparaging, it is not to the Moscow Union of Polish Patriots but to the men of Targowica.

Indeed, these wanted to save Poland in close co-operation with Russia, but not at the cost of Poland's independence and of her dismemberment.

"We demand," said the act of the Targowica "Confederation" of May 14th, 1792, "that the Republic should remain independent, self-governing and sovereign and with her frontiers unchanged." And the oath which the Confederates took contained the following pledge:

"I shall not allow the severance of any part of the country, be it the smallest."

their midst. On the contrary, it is sufficient to mention Kosciuszko, and immediately numerous voices are heard adding further items of interest to the knowledge about his stay already existing amongst local inhabitants. How deep must have been the impression made by Kosciuszko on his contemporaries, if today not only the memory of his presence, but also the picture of Poland as he saw her reaffirms itself instantaneously at the mere mention of his name?

Released by Czar Paul I, on conditions hitherto not fully clarified, from his St. Petersburg prison, Kosciuszko arrived at Bristol on June 13th, 1797, by way of Stockholm and London. He was bound for the States where, from the days of his participation in the American War of Independence, he possessed a number of faithful and influential friends, including amongst others, John Adams, Washington's successor as President of the United States; General Gates, the former C.-in-C. of the American Northern Army; and Thomas Jefferson, the Father of the American Declaration of Independence. Kosciuszko was accompanied by his inseparable comrade in arms J. Niemcewicz and a Polish Legion officer, recently arrived from Italy, who tended him with the greatest devotion and soothed his spirits in moments of depression by his skill in music and storytelling.

As reported by the Bristol press of the day, the state of Kosciuszko's health left much to be desired. The unhealed wound in his head and other injuries sustained at the battle of Maciejowice, caused him great suffering. He could only move about with difficulty and had to spend most of the day reclining on his couch. But these trials did not in the least impair the vigour of his mind, nor his fortitude in adversity. His profound erudition coupled with a sound philosophical outlook on life, strongly impressed itself on all who met him.

His outward appearance is described by contemporary observers as follows:

"General Kosciuszko appears to be about 52 or 53 years of age, and is somewhat below the middle size. His countenance is pleasing; his features rather sharp, and consequently expressive; his eye is penetrating, his manners polished and engaging, his conversation entertaining, his observations acute, and his reflections profound. English is his favourite language, and he expresses himself in it with great facility." (Bonner and Middleton's Bristol Journal, June 24th, 1797.)

Kosciuszko first alighted at the "White Lion," at that time a famous coaching inn (now "Grand Hotel"), in the centre of the city near the Council House. Here he was waited on by the two Sheriffs of Bristol to welcome and congratulate him on his arrival.

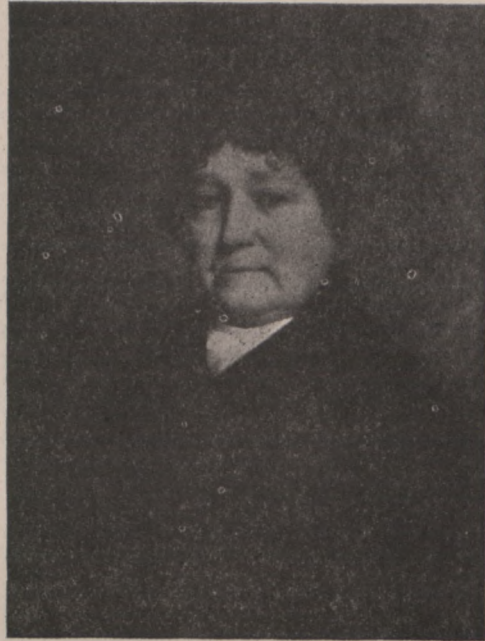
Passers by in the street stood still, whispered to one another and assembled in groups. They waited in silence, eager to catch a glimpse of this great man whose deeds, famed in history and legend, stood out against the background of his country's tragedy, and were fast becoming a source of inspiration in the west. Crowds followed his coach when, after a few hours, he moved to the house in Queen Square where he

The leaders of the Targowica "Confederation," though foolishly blinded and though there were many ordinary scoundrels among them, sincerely believed that a close understanding with Russia would save Poland from a new partition. When this partition came, in January 1793, they were thunderstruck and particularly so their leaders Count Felix Potocki, Count Rzewuski and Suchorzewski.

The Union of Patriots of today will be spared disillusionments similar to those of its Targowica predecessors. This Union has been the first to proclaim its complicity with the dismemberment of Poland planned by Russia. Understanding with Russia is not meant by it as a real independence, but as a subjugation of Poland to Russia. It does not even exclude the possibility that Poland may be made a part of the Soviet Union. Thus the leaders of the Union of Patriots are much worse traitors than the men of Targowica.

The Polish struggle for freedom, integrity and independence under the banner of the Constitution of May 3rd, was related then, between 1789 and 1795,

stayed as the guest of the first American Consul in Great Britain, Vanderhorst and his family. From now on this house became a place of pilgrimage for the entire population of Bristol. A huge concourse of people filled the broad Square from morning to night. Bands played before Kosciuszko's windows. A steady flow of visitors and deputations of all kinds and



American Consul Vanderhorst (from a contemporary portrait). Published with the kind permission of the Bristol Museum and Art Gallery.

conditions craved to be received by him. The Vanderhorst family, who were devoted to him and concerned about his health, did all in their power to exclude all trivial callers, but despite this contemporary reports state that he could not be fully protected from the importunities of the curious and ambitious.

The foremost citizens of the town, moved by affection and esteem, presented him on June 17th with a small service of plate (value 100 guineas) accompanied by an address which, in part, reads as follows:

"With equal admiration and solicitude, did we watch the unparalleled efforts of your exalted genius, your intrepid valour, and unshaken constancy in the defence of the freedom and independence of your country against the hordes of haughty, rapacious and sanguinary tyrants."

An eye-witness has left a striking and colourful description of the scenes enacted on June 19th, 1797, on the departure of Kosciuszko from Bristol to America. He sailed from the Kingroad at the mouth of the river Avon on the American ship "Adriana" (Captain Lee). From the Vanderhorst house to the nearby quayside General Kosciuszko was attended by innumerable people bidding him farewell with every

to world events just as it is today. Her heroic struggle against the German and Russian aggressions stirred the world and evoked many proofs of sympathy. The fate of Poland was then decided largely by the outcome of storms unleashed by the French Revolution, and then as now, Prussia and Russia alternated between a policy of enmity and friendship, the latter one always motivated by their desire to stamp out Poland.

The days of destiny in the life of nations are long and they are numbered by years.

During the six years between 1789 and 1795, when the sun of her freedom was setting, Poland shone with the glory of the life-giving principles of the May Constitution. Poland lived to see the four years, between 1919 and 1923, which brought the Treaty of Versailles, the Treaty of Riga, and the recognition of the Polish eastern frontier by the Western Powers. Now for five years, ever since 1939, Poland has been fighting again for her independence, her existence, her freedom and her integrity, and this struggle is not yet nearing its end.

mark of admiration and respect. The General appeared to be deeply moved by these manifestations in his honour. When he entered the small boat which was to convey him to the vessel loud cheers rose from all sides, which the General's suite, out of regard for his health, vainly endeavoured to subdue. The ovations were taken up during his whole passage down the river by the successive groups of spectators lining both banks of the river; they were echoed by the crews of ships met on the way, who broke out into loud hurrahs, waved their handkerchiefs, and tossed their caps on high in endless bursts of enthusiasm.

It is difficult to understand the real reasons underlying the enthusiastic reception of Kosciuszko in Bristol without visualising the then political situation which, in many respects, was similar to that of today. Only a year previously the younger Pitt had delivered his memorable speech in Parliament in which he tried to justify England's inactivity in the matter of the partitions of Poland. The population of Bristol, like that of other British ports, had originally been very much attracted by the slogans of the French Revolution, but of late had been thoroughly disillusioned. The war with France was in full motion and its menace to England was all the greater in that the three great European Powers, engaged in crushing all opposition in the territories they had recently stolen from Poland, had turned their attention away from the west. At the same time, there arose on the political horizon a new and powerful enemy of England, of whom Bristol's famous citizen Edmund Burke (by the way an admirer of Polish democracy) had said that "This new despot would probably exercise the most completely arbitrary power that ever appeared on earth."

In these circumstances the memory of Kosciuszko remained alive amongst the citizens of Bristol, not only as that of a warrior for the freedom of his own country, but also, as stressed by contemporary writers, of one who assisted in giving liberty to the western world. Bound up with Kosciuszko's name, and forming an inseparable whole with it, is the picture of Poland, free, undivided and independent, for which he did not cease to fight until the end of his life.

THE LATE TADEUSZ KIELPIŃSKI

LAST WEEK DR. TADEUSZ KIELPIŃSKI, A Member of the Polish National Council and a well-known journalist, died in the Polish Hospital in Edinburgh. He was born in Cracow and studied at the Jagiellonian University, where he got his Ph.D. in 1923. His studies were interrupted by the first world war during which he served first in the Austrian Army and then, between 1918 and 1920, in the Polish Army. For reasons of health he had to reside mostly abroad. He settled first in Italy and later in Paris, where he was for many years correspondent of the "Polonia," a Christian-democratic paper published in Upper Silesia by the late W. Korfanty. He always warned his countrymen against the German danger. He was also war correspondent during the Spanish Civil War, which interested him greatly as a first experiment in total war.

At the outbreak of this war M. Kielpiński joined the Polish Army and was promoted to the rank of Captain. He was employed in the educational department of the High Command, lectured to the troops and wrote for the Army Press. He also wrote a book on future Poland.

In 1942 he was appointed a Member of the Polish National Council, and left the Army. He worked mainly in the military and foreign committees of the Council and impressed his colleagues as a talented speaker. He continued his journalistic work and the readers of "The Common Cause" must remember some of his articles, published in our fortnightly. In his writings he constantly stressed the necessity for a spiritual rebirth of Europe and of basing its life on Christian principles.

ST. SOP.

