THE FACE OF POLAND

BY
BERNARD NEWMAN

Author of
"The New Europe," "The Story of Poland,"
etc.

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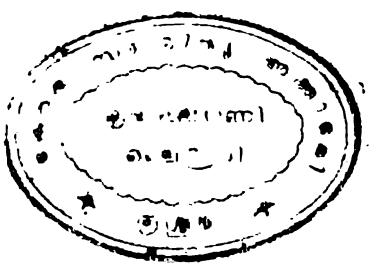

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INTRODUCTION

THE face of a country changes. The English Yeomen of Elizabeth's day would stare in wonder at our great industrial cities: the Welsh shepherd who followed Llewellyn to battle would be appalled to see the billows of smoke rising from his lovely valleys: the clansmen who rallied behind Bonnie Prince Charlie would recoil at the harsh noises of industry resounding from the Clyde.

So it has been in Poland. When, in 1772, it was disrupted by force by its three powerful neighbours, it resembled the rest of Europe in that it was overwhelmingly agricultural. Save in Silesia, where important minerals were discovered and exploited, the face of Poland scarcely changed: the rate of progress in the Russian two-thirds of Poland, was, indeed deliberately retarded by the Tsars. Thus, when Poland regained her liberty in the last days of 1918, she faced tremendous problems of development.

They were tackled boldly. Some strange ideas prevail in some quarters that the Poles are a romantic and unpractical race: that their country was a feudal state; a backward land of pleasant people whose minds were dominated by their past romantic history. This picture is utterly false. The progress of Poland since 1918 has been one of the most remarkable features of Central European development. In 25 years the country caught up the greater part of the losses of the 140 years of submergence.

There was in Poland a virile atmosphere of determination—a modern and progressive outlook, a cultural development second to none in Europe, and a business efficiency which completely contradicts popular ideas of Polish unpractical ways. With very little outside help, the Poles set themselves to make their people happy and prosperous. Given another twenty years of peace, they would have presented a remarkable picture to the world: as it was, their progress was outstanding.

They had few material advantages, as compared with the richer countries of western Europe. They substituted for the efficiency, determination, and hard work. In a quarter of a century of freedom they made considerable changes in the face of Poland, raising their country to industrial and agricultural standards which would bear comparison with any in Europe. It is true that a Pole revels in the romantic story of his country: but I never knew a Pole who did not look ahead. His first objective in 1918 was to restore his country. This achieved, he set himself to accomplish its cultural, political and economic greatness in a modern world. His success was one of the greatest romances in the long Polish story.

I

THE many races of Europe argue continuously about their "natural frontiers." There are no such things: particularly in Eastern Europe, where the Great Steppes of the Ukraine continue westwards across Poland to the German plains.

Yet it would be quite a mistake to assume that Poland is flat and uninteresting. There is little scenic

grandeur, but an immense and pleasant countryside, the heart of Poland. To the south of the country runs the broad range of mountains called the Carpathians. Here is the only suggestion of a "natural frontier" which Poland possesses; as such it is ineffective, for its passes are frequent and easy. The mountains drop away only gradually to the north, forming a wide undulating plateau. This merges into the Polish plain, broken by occasional ranges of hills. Here is the watershed of the River Vistula, the main artery of Poland.

The legendary original home of all the Slav tribes is Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia. Thence, many centuries ago, three brothers set forth. One, named Czech, crossed the mountains to the west and settled in the fertile land we now call Bohemia. Russ strayed far to the east before he found a land to his liking : he founded his family by the banks of the softly-flowing Volga. The third brother, Lech, journeyed to the north : here he found a great fertile plain, and settled at a place now called Gniezno, in north-western Poland.

The tribes increased and spread. With no serious natural barriers to forbid them, they met and mingled in the great plains of central and eastern Europe. In the 11th century the Slavs still occupied the eastern half of what is now Germany. The inevitable clash between Slav and Teuton followed, and the Slavs were pressed eastwards. The course of the long duel, still unfinished, was determined by the face of the land—the lack of any decisive natural barrier between Slav and Teuton, and between Slav and Slav. When expanding races meet in a pastoral countryside, there

is bound to follow confusion and strife. We in Britain have never fully appreciated our debt to the English Channel.

Our present purpose is to see the face of Poland, from many angles. Let it be said at once that there are areas of monotony—though these are often the most useful to man. Food is produced more readily on the unexciting plains than among the picturesque mountains. Yet we shall note intense interest in every corner of the country; where Nature fails to provide it, the people remedy the deficiency.

One interesting consequence follows from the lack of bold physical features in Poland: the Polish language is remarkably pure and free from dialects, which flourish freely in countries where communications are difficult.

II

Geologically the structure of Poland is reasonably clear. There is a tiny coastal area by the Baltic sea, a strip of flat marshes and peat bogs. Immediately follows the Baltic lake and moraine zone, with many traces of the work of the continental ice sheet: this is a region of low hills and little lakes. It stretches from Polish Pomorze (Pomerania) across East Prussia to re-appear in north-eastern Poland.

Next, to the south, comes the Central Plain. Here the soil is seldom very fertile, and hard work is necessary to raise a living by agriculture. The plain stretches from the German border to the Pripet Marshes: it is not always flat, and its monotony is relieved by frequent forests—23 per cent of the whole area of Poland is forested. The Central Plain is bordered by the Southern Uplands, running approximately pa-

rallel with the Carpathians a hundred miles further north. In the west and centre the country is pleasant —an undulating plateau of rich soil: further east a steppe-like character prevails—open, treeless plains and grassy hills.

Between the Southern Uplands and foothills of the mountains is a depression of varying width, the Carpathian Lowlands. This is not merely a fertile region, heavily populated: for tens of centuries it has formed one of the important east-to-west trade routes of Europe.

The Crapathians themselves vary in their pattern, from high rugged peaks to rounded and green hills. As might be expected, the Highland people have tenaciously retained their own local habits and culture, and by their isolation have resisted the standardisation of language and outlook which distinguishes the Poles of the plain, where ideas passed so readily from tribe to tribe, and where there were no physical features to hinder human movement.

In Poland, for so long a frontier country of Europe, men's minds turned instinctively to unity for defence, and farmers crowded together to live in villages, journeying many miles to their fields every day. The villages vary across Poland: in the west, houses are usually of brick. Further east, timber is almost always used—not only for house-building, but for nearly every form of domestic construction. The towns are just as varied: it is only a step from Gdynia, the most modern city in Europe, to towns which have scarcely changed in five hundred years.

It is important to remember that Poland suffered terribly in the first World War, when nearly a million

buildings on her territory were destroyed. It was her misfortune that she had scarcely recovered from one war before the next was upon her.

The geographical aspect of Poland has had its inevitable effects upon the spread of population. The average density per square mile is 231, ranging from 741 in industrial Silesia to 57 in Polesia, on the eastern border, a land of swamps and forests. Apart from Silesia, the greatest density of population is to be found in the fertile Carpathian lowlands, and in the Warsaw area in the Central Plain, a natural meeting-place of communications.

Political conditions have also affected the spread of people. From 1772 until 1918 Poland was divided into three : the Germans, on the north-west corner, ruled sternly but efficiently, and developed their provinces as part of Germany. The Austrians, in the southern section, were much lighter in their rule—the Poles were indeed given a modicum of self-government: this added to the density of population in the Carpathian Lowlands, to which persecuted men from Russian Poland fled for safety and a sense of freedom. In the two-thirds of Poland ruled by the Tsars of Russia conditions were deplorable : even in 1939, after twenty years of Polish effort, there remained a wide difference in the economic standards of east and west.

It should be interesting to make a superficial examination of the face of Poland. To-day the country is divided into sixteen administrative provinces. Their borders do not always follow historical lines, but the areas are chosen as political and economic entities. We will move rapidly from one to the other, pausing to glance at their salient features, whether a pastoral

countryside or industrial or historic towns: thus we should be able to form a mental picture of the physical characteristics of this interesting land.

III

We do not really know what a face is like until we have seen it smiling.

Most of the few foreign visitors to Poland approached by train from Germany, across a featureless frontier. The wiser ones took a cargo boat to Dantzig or Gdynia. Then their introduction to Poland was much more pleasant. "The Polish Corridor," Western politicians called the northern corner of Pomorze (Pomerania) the local inhabitants called it the "Kashubian Switzerland."

The title is grandiloquent, for there is no suggestion of Alpine magnificence here. The Pomorze area is a land of pleasant, wooded hills reaching six or seven hundred feet. In their valleys nestle dozens of little lakes: often the forest approaches to the water's edge. Peasant farms dot the lower slopes of many of the hills: the little towns and villages are prosperous and picturesque, their brick and timber buildings gaily decorated with coloured washes.

The people who inhabit this smiling region are somewhat apart from the rest of the Poles. They are called the Kashubians, and are the descendants of the old Slavic Pomeranians, freely intermingled throughout the centuries with other Polish tribes. For many generations they have classed themselves as Poles—they are quite certain that they are not Germans. They are akin to the Masurians, another Slav tribe occupying the southern portion of East Prussia.

The mis-called "Corridor" had been part of the Polish domain for centuries when it was forcibly seized by Prussia in 1772. Not all the Germanising influences of the conquerors could alter the smiling face of this corner of Poland. Even in the years prior to 1939, when Nazis screamed with fury at the inequity of a "Corridor" which cut off East Prussia from the Fatherland, this disputed area remained calmly and indubitably Polish.

Apart from its ethnic character, Pomorze was vital to Poland. Here the Vistula reaches the sea, and without the Vistula the country would die. It was natural enough that Poland should claim Dantzig, the port at the river's mouth. But the statesmen at Paris decided against her: the "Corridor" was certainly Polish in its population but Dantzig was largely German. So Dantzig became a Free City, economically within the Polish orbit.

The scheme could have worked—had Germany so intended. Long before the rise of Hitler, the Dantzigers were kept intransigent by influence from the Reich. They themselves might have accepted the situation, for the town prospered. But the atmosphere was such that the Poles decided to build a port of their own.

Their choice was limited, for the Polish coast-line consisted of sixty-two miles of muddy shallows. Eventually Gdynia, a fishing village of 900 inhabitants, was selected as the site of the new port. Its construction was costly, for its hinterland consisted of peat bogs! Yet within ten years it was a city of 120,000 inhabitants, with the finest port facilities in the Baltic.

The Poles are intensely proud of Gdynia, the first achievement of their re-born state. "Access to the sea" is an electric phrase in Poland. Once, far inland, I visited a cinema. The feature films aroused mild interest, but one section of the news-reel inspired the wildest enthusiasm. Not that it was very exciting—a flat, sandy beach with a modest sea. But the caption explained the excitement of the audience: it read: "Waves breaking on the Polish coast."

IV

The pleasant hills of the Pomorze region merge into the plain as we journey south towards the ancient province of Poznan. The character of the country changes rapidly. While peasant farms still dominate the landscape, the towns are more frequent, much larger, and have important industries. The chief of these are Poznan, Tourn and Bydogoszcz* the Germans call the Posen, Thorn and Bromberg. The industries reflect the agricultural character of the surrounding countryside—milling, brewing, sugar milling, timber, paper making, and the manufacture of agricultural machinery. Recently some heavy industries have been added.

Yet many of the picturesque medieval buildings still survive. Poznan was always an outstanding province in Poland, intense in its patriotism, supplying the country's first kings—their bones rest in Poznan's cathedral. To-day it is noted for its enlightened and efficient agricultural co-operative societies, a model on which many others of Eastern Europe have been based.

* Pron. Bedgosheh.

Although part of the Polish plain, the country is never monotonous. The surface is broken by innumerable small lakes, most of them sausage-shaped, long and narrow. Once a huge area was covered by marshes and fens, but many of these have now been drained, with a valuable residue of fertile fields. Communications are good—the roads are the best in Poland —and the many tributaries of the Vistula have been pressed into service to feed a network of canals.

The three largest towns are most important, but the Poles are a people of sentiment, and turn more freely to others. Gniezno is the Canterbury of Poland—and, by legendary account—the site of Lech's first settlement. But Kruszwica is Poland's oldest town: Lech may never have existed, but a Polish chieftain named Popiel certainty did. Among his tribe was a wheelwright named Piast, who in 842 A.D. became the first leader of the Polish nation—the only one of his kind in Europe who was neither a conqueror nor a warrior, but an honest artisan. It was Piast's grandson who first introduced Christianity into Poland.

The Poznan region was developed by the Germans during their occupation from 1772 to 1918. To-day the modern streets of the towns have a German appearance, but no one could alter the character of the Polish countryside. When German soldiers and officials were withdrawn from the towns, even here the Polish majority was absolute: in the rural areas it was always overwhelming.

Further south still is the province of Lodz,* a continuation of the Polish plain. While agriculture flourishes, chief interests centres on the factories of Lodz

* Lodz.

and its satellite towns. Here is the Polish Manchester. It is remarkable as a successful industrial centre almost devoid of natural advantages. The site was selected almost arbitrarily by the Tsar of Russia, and Lodz was developed as the chief textile centre of the empire. It specialised in cotton goods, but woollens and linens were also manufactured. Until 1914 its fabrics were thick and coarse, to suit the Russian climate. Now, with that market lost, Lodz has attained Western European standards.

All its raw materials—except coal—have to be imported. The only local asset is the skill of its technicians and workpeople. The whole area was devastated during the first World War, and had to begin all over again. Its successful rehabilitation was remarkable.

A feature of its industry is concentration—it differs entirely from Lancashire and Yorkshire methods of specialisation. Each factory has its own spinning, weaving, dyeing and finishing sections. Incidentally, Lodz ought to serve as a warning to town planners. It was allowed to grow without foresight, and now borders one main street over seven miles long. The result is almost as appalling as the huddled slums.

V

In ancient maps the central area of Poland is shown as Mazovia: to-day it forms the province of Warsaw.

It is part of the great Central Plain, often sandy and seldom fertile. Its people are very hardworking—they have to be, or they could not survive. Their farms consist of long strips of tilled ground—a legacy of a vicious system whereby peasants used to exchange strips every five years, as directed by their Russian

overlords. Thus the land was impoverished, each man striving to get out of it what he could during his limited tenure.

To-day the peasant owns his land, and his difficulties are those of markets and world prices. The fact is that rural Poland is considerably over-populated. Once pressure could be relieved by emigration, but for twenty years most doors have been closed. Thus a farm which supported a peasant has now been divided between his three sons, with consequent lowering of the standard of living. Widespread industrialisation seems to be the only remedy for Poland's rural problems.

The central province was a battlefield in the last war, and its timber towns and villages were largely destroyed. Their rebuilding was naturally utilitarian rather than pictursque, and one Mazovian village is very like the next—a collection of wooden cottages, ends on to the road, bordering the village green, and close to the church and the inn. It is fortunate that war only lightly scarred Lowicz, the one distinctive town of the countryside.

For many centuries Lowicz was owned by the Archbishops of Gniezno, many of whom are buried in its baroque church. Because of this long existence as a separate principality, Lowicz has maintained its individual character to this day, and this is expressed in the brilliance of its costumes. They might attract little attention on the Hungarian plain or in the Transylvanian valleys, but in Poland, where clothes are generally Western and drab, they are outstanding. Only the men have foolishly allowed modern influences to ruin their inheritance. To-day they wear ordi-

nary fifty-shilling suits, and look very shoddy alongside their women. The pity of it is that the male costume of Lowicz used to be extraordinarily brilliant. Indeed, the present uniforms of the Papal Guard at Rome are based upon ancient fashions at Lowicz.

The women of Lowicz are not particularly interested in shops, for they make not merely their clothes, but their cloth. When a girl needs a new skirt her father goes off to shear a couple of sheep. The wool is then worked into threads from the distaff and woven on the hand-loom after dyeing, vegetable dyes produced locally being preferred. The skirts are the most colourful part of the feminine costume—stripes in the richest shades of orange, blue and green, with crimson as the favourite background. The loose-sleeved bodice is usually hidden by a characteristic shawl.

The annual Corpus Christi procession is an incredible survival, when hundreds of women and girls of Lowicz march through the streets carrying brilliantly coloured banners, which only serve to heighten the hues of their own costumes. Even on an ordinary Sunday the scene in the market-place beside the church is remarkable. No Hollywood picture ever rivalled this blaze of colour, this swirl of skirts, swinging from ample hips, this medley of brilliant stripes broad and narrow, this swathe of shawls, yellow and crimson.

They told me that fashions change even in handmade clothes; the width of the stripes varying from year to year; or perhaps, more accurately, from generation to generation. An expert, it is claimed, can tell in what year a frock was made by a study of its stripes; yet there is no disgrace in walking through Lowicz

wearing last year's costume. The skirts are built to last; in fact, they will never wear out. A girl will use the same skirt as long as it fits her; then she puts it away for her daughters when she has any.

VI

Warsaw is the only Polish city with a population of over a million. It is more than the nation's political capital: it is an important manufacturing centre—with heavy as well as light industries. Again—apart from communications: Warsaw stands in the centre of a plain, on the banks of a wide and navigable river—hard work and skill are the only local advantages.

The city has been well planned, and most of the industrial districts are on its outskirts. The centre of Warsaw can compare in dignity with any capital of Europe: the modern parts are very modern—some of its skyscrapers would be notable in London, and might stand without shame in New York. Although I like best the older quarters, with their narrow, winding streets, the real picture of Warsaw is of a modern city with a million and a quarter inhabitants, with dignified streets and pleasant parks, adjoining the older Warsaw, with its ancient houses and noble palaces. The cultural and social life of Poland reaches its highest levels in the city. Here is an ancient university of European fame; by its side modern colleges of art and science—and of physical culture. The boulevards and squares of Warsaw by night have a touch of Paris—overhung with the softer atmosphere of Vienna.

The Catholic cathedral of Warsaw is dignified without being imposing. Unfortunately, it is tucked away in a narrow street where a comprehensive view is di-

fficult; but close by is one of the most fascinating squares of Europe.

This is the Stare Miasto,* the old city a great open space which used to be the market-place of Warsaw. Formerly the Town Hall stood in the centre of the square, but this was destroyed by the eternal enemy of ancient buildings, fire. The rest of the square stands as it did three hundred years ago and more; many of the houses have necessarily been restored, but the spirit of their construction has not been altered. They are a blaze of colour; practically the whole of the facade of every house is covered with intricate designs, the sculptor and the painter mingling their arts.

Most of the houses are three or four storeys in height, topped by receding gabled roofs with many intriguing attic windows. By their frontage may be gauged the condition of their original owners. A commoner might have a frontage of no more than two windows, a noble three, or a prince four. There was, however, no limit to upward or backward build, and most of the houses are of substantial size, veritable palaces, with noble staircases and amazing cellars. Many of these mansions are still occupied by the decendants of the men who built them.

To me the Stare Miasto is one of the loveliest scenes of Europe. By day it is beautiful, by night it is fascinating. I wandered round the old square, illumined only by antique lanterns and—later in the night—by the light of the moon. Here was a glimpse of a waterless Venice, for the colours which in the height of the sun might sometimes appear too garish were now subdued, merging one into the other. There was but little

* Now famous, for its frantic resistance and complete annihilation.

movement; the narrow adjoining streets were full of weird shadows and strange fantasies.

The old Royal Palace is a dignified edifice fitting its scene. Unhappily, the Russians accorded it scurvy treatment during their occupation of Warsaw. Their Governor lived in some of its rooms, our soldiers were quartered in others—and even horses were stabled in rooms with ancient frescoes on the walls. Immediately after the rebirth of Poland the restoration of the palace was put in hand, but now a second wave of desolation has reduced it to a state of ruin.

Yet not all in Warsaw is pleasing. Bordering the Stare Miasto is the Jewish Ghetto. Visitors to Warsaw were put in a droshky and rattled rapidly through half a dozen streets; but this was no way to see the Ghetto—you can only traverse its narrow alleys on foot.

I am not going to pretend that it was a pleasant excursion, but it was vastly interesting. From a dozen main streets ran out hundreds of alleys lined with three-or-four-storeyed tenement houses. The ground floors were occupied by small shops, each one demonstrating its trade, not merely by a painted notice, but with a primitive picture as well. This habit was useful, for most of the notices were in Yiddish and not Polish.

It was an amazing contrast to step from one of the main streets of Warsaw, thronged with well-dressed people, to a court of the Ghetto, habited by buxom girls with hair of incredible blackness, and by older women whose brief beauty has long since faded. The men wore the traditional costume, a long black coat, with round black cap with a miniature peak. The

boys were dressed in the same way, and still wear their curls about their ears, with faces as pale and delicate as those of girls. The youths were less attractive—they must never shave, and a slow-growing virgin beard is not always an adornment. Many of the older men were of dignified appearance, their long grey beards reminiscent of many a biblical picture. Except for their drab costume and their sophisticated surroundings they might have been the men who followed Saul to battle, or who on a memorable occasion thronged the streets of Jerusalem.

The filth and stench of the tenement houses were almost overpowering. Families of ten or twelve people herd in two communal rooms. As I wandered from house to house my nose was offended by the stifling atmosphere of the appalling body odour which emanated from the sweating people, particularly from the women. It seemed incredible that these people were of the same race as numbers of the Jewish intelligentsia I had met in England—or in Poland.

They hold to their religion fiercely. At sunset on Friday every shop in this district closed. I saw the Jewish population—the male portion of it, for the women are relegated to a lowly place—streaming to the synagogue carrying velvet or corduroy bags, with book or prayer-rug. For generations Jewish control over retail business was so extensive that it made commerce difficult—the Jew closed his shop on Saturday, and the Christians did not wish to buy on Sunday. In view of the numerous additional Christian and Jewish feasts—which are wholeheartedly celebrated in Poland—it is remarkable that any business was done at all.

The filth of the Ghetto was especially noticeable because Warsaw is a remarkably clean city. I remember on one occasion incurring a fine from a city policeman (my crime was not especially serious : I had attempted to walk across cross-roads diagnoally, and the City Fathers, in their wisdom, had decreed that pedestrians should cross streets at right angles). The system of fining on the spot for casual offences is adopted, and the policeman informed me that my fine would be one 'zloty' (9d.) When he found that I was a foreigner, he wanted to excuse me. Naturally, I insisted on paying. Incidentally, there is something to be said for this system of fines on the spot. I knew quite well that it is safer to walk round cross-roads than diagonally —but not until I had been fined ninepence did I do it.

The policeman wrote out receipt for one zloty, and in true English fashion I was just about to screw it up and throw it on the ground.

"No, don't do that!" the policeman cried. "If you had thrown paper on the ground, that would have cost you another zloty."

I walked on very subdued; yet as I looked about me I was ashamed. There are millions of other people in London who are just as careless as I am; consequently our streets are a disgrace. A city councillor of Warsaw would hold his hands high in horror should he pass down one of our main thoroughfares.

South of Warsaw is the thickly populated province of Kielce. Now the Polish plain rises in gentle undulations, and Kielce is a plateau, an average of a thousand feet above sea level. As invariably in Poland, agriculture is the premier industry, but in the southwest is a considerable coalfield, as well as iron, zinc

and sulphur mines. The area developed too rapidly to be picturesque. The only virtue of the industrial towns is that they are small, and escape into the pleasant countryside is easy.

One of Kielce's towns is of legendary fame. To millions of Poles Czetochowa is more important than Gniezno; the latter may be Canterbury of Poland, but Czestochowa is its Lourdes. Here, on the hill of Jasna Gora—"the Mountain of light"—is a great monastery, entirely enclosed within massive twenty-foot walls, its buildings piling up in pyramid fashion: far overtopping everything else are the church tower and steeple, the loftiest in Poland, and indeed, the tallest in eastern Europe.

There is a great church which will hold twelve thousand people—but it is not nearly big enough. On a fête day as many as three hundred thousand people from all corners of Poland will gather at Czestochowa in search of virtue. A mass service is held on the plain outside the monastery walls, the only modern feature being the loudspeakers which carry the words of the priest to the throng. I found the crowd of fascinating interest, many of them still wore the peasant costumes of older and statelier days. I found among them peasants who had saved up for months, even years, for this journey, the greatest adventure of their lives.

I am not a Catholic, but no one could fail to be impressed by the great faith of these people as the miraculous picutre of the Virgin was revealed in a chapel high above the monastery walls; a strange picture; according to tradition it was painted on wood by St. Luke. I had always understood St. Luke was a physician rather than an artist, which may explain the

faulty mixing of the colours, for the Virgin is as swarthy as any Indian, and the gilt and the diamonds surrounding her face and that of her Child only tend to heighten her colour. "The Dark Virgin,* she is known throughout Poland, and her shrine rivals any religious centre in all Europe.

VIII

Silesia is the smallest of the Polish provinces, but one of the most important. Its possession was disputed by Germany and Poland after 1918. Nearly two hundred years earlier it had been seized by Frederick II of Prussia : "I take what I want," he explained. "Then I can always find clever lawyers to prove that it is really mine."

At that time Silesia was a pastoral district; since, it has become an important mining region, for rich deposits of coal, iron, lead and zinc were discovered. Its development under German domination led to a complicated ethnic problem. The labour for the mines was drawn from the neighbouring villages, which were overwhelmingly Polish: the administrative and technical staffs were German. New towns were built —German towns—in the middle of a Polish countryside.

After the Allied victory in 1918, a plebiscite was held in Upper Silesia. On the proportion of the votes, one-third of the province was allocated to Poland; it included the most valuable mining area.

The aspect of this part of the face of Poland needs little imagination. It is not pretty, but practical. Yet the ugliness of its slag-heaps and the gloom of its

* For polish mystics this Dark Virgin is symbol of the highest Realisation and a link with the East. The colour of Her face symbolises the Great Mystery.

smoke are relieved by the adjacent heights, the wooded foot-hills of the Carpathians.

Here is one of the disputed areas of Europe. When Hitler wished to arouse the fury of his race to a German wrong he had only to wave a map and to point to the "Corridor." Here was an argument which a child could understand; yet all the while the principal bone of contention between Germany and Poland never was Pomorze or Dantzig. The real point at issue lay three hundred miles to the south. Pomorze, a pleasant land of no economic importance, touched German pride, but Silesia touched the German pocket. We shall certainly hear of Silesia again.

IX

Warsaw is the political capital of Poland; the spiritual home of the country is Krakow.

There is nothing modern about Krakow. Warsaw is a youngster of a mere five hundred years in age, but Krakow is as old as Poland itself. Not until 1596 was the capital removed to Warsaw for purely geographical reasons. Even then the Poles continued to regard Karkow with great affection.

I place Krakow very high among the cities of Europe : in charm it rivals Vienna. Its atmosphere is soft and gracious; it is one of the cities which lost nothing by the Austrian occupation. I shudder to think of gentle Krakow under Nazi rule, yet its spirit is so ancient and enduring that a mere temporary occupation will never succeed in subduing it.

Stories of Poland's ancient history return again and again to the Wawel at Krakow, a little hill by the side of the Vistula. On its summit stand a cathedral, a

palace and a fortress. The cathedral teems with history but has no great beauty. But the palace is a gem; The Courtyard is surrounded by balconied arcades; here the ladies used to sit watching the manly exercises of their knights. In gentler moments gypsy musicians played their songs of love, rousing the passion of all their hearers. To-day the music is more sophisticated, but in the days when Poland and Hungary were closely united their arts mingled freely, and many a touch of the primitive gypsy strain is to be found in the folk-music of southern Poland.

In one of the largest halls of the palace the Polish Parliament used to meet. This is the "Hall of the Heads," Great beams divide the ceiling into two hundred compartments; once each of these contained a carved head. Austrian soldiers found in these ornaments intriguing souvenirs when they went on leave. Extensive search has recently been made in museums and antique shops, but only forty of the heads have been recovered. Some of them present old kings of Poland, some are symbolic. There is one portraying the head of a talkative woman, a bandage tied firmly over her mouth!

One story of the Hall of the Heads is probably not true, but ought to be. A Polish king delivered his judgment, which was not just. At once one of the heads (presumably one with an unbound mouth) called out: "King, judge justly" And the startled monarch naturally reversed his decision.

Historic interest is concentrated on the Wawel, but a liberal sprinkling has strayed to the town. These royal cities of Europe have nearly always a double interest. Nobles gathered about the Court of the King,

building their mansions within reach of the palace. The burghers of the cities waxed fat on the rich custom which followed the Court. There are few of these royal cities which cannot show dignity and history in the citizen's own portion of the place.

The centre of Krakow's market-place is occupied by the Sukiennice, a Cloth Hall of stately size. It has pillared arcades within and without, and many picturesque staircases; the architecture is especially interesting, for the Cloth Hall provides a perfect example of the use of the "Polish attic." Steeply sloping roofs were essential in a country with a severe winter, entailing heavy falls of snow. Italian archietcts, whose tastes governed southern Poland, found them obnoxious after their classical creations in their own sun-swept country. Eventually they evolved a false facade —an ornamental continuation of the outside walls which hid the offensive but essential sloping roofs from public view.

In a corner of the market place is a building of great repute, the Mariacki, the citizens' church of Krakow—Mariacki means the Church of Our Lady, but local people affectionately dub it "Panna Maria" ("Maid Mary"). In spite of the absence of royal tombs, to my mind the Mariacki is decidedly more interesting than the cathedral on the Wawel. It is built in red brick, mellowed by centuries to a warm pink. It has two towers, which are irregular. There is an ancient legend which declares that two brothers were the architects of the church. They competed for a prize for the tower which should be built first, but when one found himself falling behind in the race he slew his own brother, then went on to make his own tower the

higher. The crude knife with which this foul crime was committed is still chained to an archway of the Cloth Hall.

When first I went to Krakow I arrived late at night. As I wandered through the quiet streets a clock struck the hour. Then there followed an air played from afar on a silver trumpet—an exhilarating, pleasing air floating with the summer breeze. This was the *heynal*: every hour it is sounded by a trumpeter from the tall tower of the Marjacki. By day you may hear it only with difficulty, because of the rumbling of the trams and the wooden carts below: at night you cannot miss it. Nor will you seek to avoid it, for it is a lovely and romantic survival from wilder days. Long before I heard its story I noticed its peculiarity, for the air ends abruptly.

In older days a continuous watch was maintained from the tower of the church, a guard against enemies, either marauding invaders, or fire, that scourge of ancient Poland in the days when most houses were built of wood. In 1241, as we have seen, the Tartars of Genghis Khan swept across southern Poland. As they swarmed into Krakow the trumpeter played the *heynal* to arouse the citizens, but as his warning notes resounded from the church tower a Tartar archer bent his bow; the trumpeter fell dead, the arrow through his throat. In his honour the Krakow trumpeters to this day end the *heynal* on the broken note, where death so rudely interrupted its course.

The interior of the cathedral may serve as notes for a history of Poland, but the Mariacki at least displays a history of Krakow. Here are no chapels of kings, but of citizens and trade guilds—and many of them

are finer than their fellows on the Wawel. The pride of the church was the Wit Stowsz altarpiece, carved in wood by that famous Cracow artist. It took him twelve years to complete it, but when you see it you are not surprised. The figures are lifelike and the faces have personality. Most unusual is the addition of colour to a medieval woodcarving. Hitler has now stolen this masterpiece from the Mariacki. There will be great sorrow in Krakow, but the absence of the altarpiece is only temporary.

Krakow is more than a cultural centre and ancient capital: it gives its name to one of the most picturesque of Poland's provinces. The northern section is a fertile plain, but south of Krakow rise the Carpathian mountains. Along the greater portion of their course they are pleasant rather than grand, with grass or forest-clad slopes, averaging 5,000 feet in height. On the Polish-Czech border, however, they reach their culminating point in the Tatra group, approaching 8,000 feet and of Alpine magnificence. The Tatras would be distinguished in any land, but after the hundreds of miles of Polish plain they are remarkable.

On the Polish side of the frontier are one or two small water-places: around Zakopane the mountains are grand. Their valleys are almost without exception exceedingly beautiful and their little lakes are a delight. They differ considerably from Swiss standards: the lakes are all small, but are sited very high, sometimes only a couple of thousand feet below the peaks. One of the most beautiful has a picturesque name, Morskie Oko—the Eye of the Sea. There is a legend current throughout the district that in spite of the great distance of the sea Morskie Oko is actually

connected with the Baltic by some vast underground tunnel. Local peasants even declare that on occasion it is possible to taste the saltness in the waters of the lake. The mere scientific objection that its own gravitation would force the water of the lake into the sea is dismissed with a smile.

The inhabitants of the Tatra valleys, who have preserved certain distinctive characteristics, belong to a highland tribe called the Goorals. Like all highland peoples, they are vigorous, hardy, reticent, dependable and have a fondness for weird music—they even include the bagpipe among their instruments. Their artistic costumes are most interesting, and in contrast to Lowicz they are worn by the men only: the women have very foolishly abandoned the charming creations which their grandmothers used to wear and content themselves with uninteresting mass-produced frocks. The men, however, wear tight trousers made of white homespun woollen cloth—too coarse for my liking, for when I donned a pair they tickled inordinately, so that I had to take them off. The upper parts of the trousers are gorgeously decorated in bright colours in traditional geometrical paterns. The jackets, too, are a blaze of colourful embroidery, and a goblin hat worn at a ready wide-awake angle completes a most artistic ensemble.

These Goorals are a fine type, of magnificent physique, much taller than the average Pole. Their devotion to their mountain valleys is passionate: they seldom emigrate to the Polish lowlands. There are only a few thousand of them in Poland, but several thousand more on the Slovak side of the mountains. For tourist purposes Poland and Czechoslovakia made a

very wise convention, leaving the Tatras free from frontier restrictions, so that any one might wander freely from side to side of the frontier without so much as a passport. This facility is much appreciated by the Goorals, for their own brothers can be found on either side of the frontier. They are, in fact, the connecting link between Poles and Slovaks, two branches of the western Slav race.

X

In Austrian days the district about Krakow was known as Western Galicia. The present province of Lwow, Tarnopol and Stanislawow include the greater part of Eastern Galicia.

Again its aspect is varied, ranging from the Carpathian slopes to the edge of the central plain. Lwow (in German, Lemberg) is the principal town. It is largely modern, for it was terribly devastated during its siege in the first World War.

Lwow is important as an ecclesiastical centre; in this it is unique, for it has no less than three cathedrals, each with its own archbishop—Catholic, Uniat and Armenian. Of the three cathedrals, the Armenian attracted me the most; the other two are conventional enough. It is no larger than an English parish church. Colour and gilt play an overwhelming part in its decoration and some of the figures of Apostles behind the altar are rather startling. Nevertheless, the atmosphere was dignified; the ritual appears to resemble that of the Catholic Church, and of the fervour of the congregation there could be no doubt.

Nearby is Przemysl,* the pronunciation of which

* Pshemeesl.

would baffle a B.B.C. anouncer. Przemysl underwent two sieges and suffered accordingly.

Lwow is a Polish city, but many of the peasants in the villages are Ukrainians. This feature is even more pronounced in the neighbouring province of Tarnopol —45 per cent of the population is Polish, 40 per cent Ruthenian and 6 per cent Jewish. The outlook is often very local. I would ask a man whether he were Polish or Ukaranian, and he would reply, "I am from here." Often the only test of race is that of religion. If a man is a Uniat, he is a Ukaranian, if he is a Roman Catholic, he is a Pole. This method, of course, does not prove what a man is, but what he thinks he is.

One feature of this portion of the face of Poland has been greatly altered within the last ten years. As the German threat became clear, the Poles were naturally nervous about their heavy industries—nearly all in Silesia, within easy reach of a German thrust. Obviously a new industrial area was necessary.

The problem was tackled with foresight and energy. The French loan of 25 million pounds in 1937 was applied very largely to its solution. It was significant to note that while Russia and Germany were talking of Five Year Plans, the Polish Press and Polish conversation re-echoed with the continual mention of C.O.P. The initials stand for Centralny Okreg Przemyslowy, or the Central Industrial Area. In a triangle within the confluence of the rivers Vistula and San, about the town of Sandomierz, was developed a new industrial district. Existing towns and villages increased their population by thousands per cent: one new town of thirty thousand inhabitants sprang up within a year. A rural countryside found itself an

industrial district. By 1939 dozens of factories were in production and I noted that considerable reserve stocks of essential commodities had been accumulated. The mountain streams of the Carpathians had been tapped to yield the precious power, and there was even a direct supply of earth gas from the Polish oil-fields.

The German occupation of Czechoslavakia nullified the advantages of the C.O.P. Poland was then outflanked from the south, and no area was safe.

The Tarnopol province is almost entirely agricultural, a maze of peasant farms on the fertile uplands. The well-watered pastures are the home of famous breeds of horses and cattle. While the area has the appearance of a continuation of the Polish plain, occasional deep ravines reveal its true character as a plateau: sometimes its folds merge into hills, grassy or forest covered.

Further south, in the Stanislawá province, the Ruthenian proportion of the population is higher, but the features of the district are more interesting. The northern section is a fertile belt of land drained by the tributaries of the Dniester, and again famous for its cattle. Very soon, however, the country becomes hilly, then mountainous. Here is a lovely land, carpeted with dense forests of beech and fir. There are mineral resources as well—salt has been mined here for many centuries, and in more modern days oil has been tapped. But much remains to be done in local development.

As I wandered about the picturesque region, I was reminded of the Pyrenees in miniature. The mountain masses were a medley of different shades of green: the

valleys were a delight, and the infrequent villages might have strayed from a stage scene.

Nor were the people lacking in interest. Indeed in the extreme south-eastern corner of Poland, adjoining the frontiers of Czchoslovakia and Roumania, lives one of the most interesting tribes of Europe. They are not pure Ruthenians; their local name is Huculs. (It is sometimes spelt Hutsul, which is nearer to its pronunciation). Their history dates back to the troublous times of medieval Poland. We recall from our own history that when an English noble quarrelled with the king, if he were wise he fled to France or Scotland to get out of the way before the king had him imprisoned or executed. In Poland, offending nobles fled to the mountains of the south, where the king's hand lay but lightly.

Some of them fled to the fastnesses of the Tatra Mountains, where many legends of robber barons still survive. Others decided that the Tatras were not far enough removed from Karków and went in haste to the slopes of the Czarnohora, the Black Mountains, where the Carpathians bend towards what is now Roumania. There they fortified themselves, often in caves on the mountain-side. By marauding raids on the valleys below they maintained themselves in food. But man cannot live by bread alone: in the course of their raids the outlawed nobles seized not merely the local farmer's foodstuffs, but his daughters—his wife as well if she were young and goodlooking enough. According to tradition, the local girls were none too reluctant; at any rate they appear to have settled down with their noble captors, cooked their food, made their

beds and bore them children. And the Huculs are the direct descendants of these romances.

They are a strudy folk, and self-reliant: like most Highland peoples, their dialect and culture differ from those of their neighbours of the plain. Their churches are the loveliest in Eastern Europe, and most of them were built by illiterate men with no other tool but the axe: they are entirely constructed of timber—they contain not so much as an iron nail.

Eastern Galicia is to-day a disputed area between Russia and Poland. It is a pleasant land, overwhelmingly agricultural, mostly occupied by peasant farmers. Its standard of living is lower than that of Western Poland: its communications are very poor—railways are few and most of the roads are no more than dust tracks. Political dissension has retarded the development of this area of promise. It could produce much more than it does, given the necessary facilities for getting its produce to an open market.

XI

As we move to the north, away from the mountains, Eastern Poland rapidly loses its picturesque character. In the provinces of Polesia and Volhynia we return to the great plain. There are no outstanding physical characteristics, save only the frequent forests and occasional slow-flowing rivers. One of these, the Pripet, gives its name to the vast marshes which form one of the strangest areas of Europe.

I remember riding a bicycle very close to the Russian-Polish frontier. I looked upwards, rubbing my eyes. A *sea*plane was flying overhead—and when I arrived at the next town, Pinsk, a company of Polish

sailors marched down the street. And I was 300 miles from the nearest sea.

Yet there was no fantasy, but only common sense. In the Pripet Marshes there is much better landing space for aircraft on water than on land. And for defence a navy is as essential there as an army.

The Pripet Marshes are amazing. They occupy an area half the size of England. The fall of the River Pripet, a tributary of Dnieper, is only a few inches every mile, so on either bank stretch vast areas of stagnant water. The marshes are up to a hundred miles wide—not continuous, of course; occasionally there are quite large stretches of dry land. Even in the middle of a marsh a small area of land will emerge from the water's edge, only two or three feet above its level. This land, as you might expect, is subject to sudden flooding, and most houses, barns and haystacks are built on stilts.

The roads are built up on causeways: so is the one railway which crosses the Marshes—a very important one, by the way—one of the main lines from Moscow to Warsaw. But the local roads, which are only sand tracks, are not nearly as important as the waterways. I believe I said that the Marshes were stagnant. That is true of great stretches, but there are hundreds of miles of clear water, where a very faint stream makes its way to the river. If it were not for the freshening effect of these channels, Polesia would be a mosquitoes' paradise. There are one or two there, anyway. But the biggest local scourage is rheumatism —well understandable, in a district where everything is damp.

These winding, twisting channels of clear water, moving slowly between the wilderness of weeds, carry the bulk of the local trade. Peasants take their produce to market in flat bottomed boats which they pole along—at least, those who live near a road use a horse and a long wooden cart, but most find a boat easier. How the people ever find their way along the twists and turns, always changing, is a mystery to me, but they do.

Once the extent of the Pripet Marshes was even vaster than it is to-day. But about 50 years ago the Russians started to drain them—a colossal job much bigger than the draining of the Zuyder Zee or the Pontine Marshes. Then the Poles carried on. Now nearly 8 million acres have been reclaimed, yet so far only the edge of the job has been touched.

The reclaimed land is very fertile. Flax and rye are the chief crops. There is plenty of timber, for the local pine tree is even hardier than most of its kind. The houses are almost invariably built of timber, in little settlements.

These hamlets are almost completely self-supporting in a primitive way. Life is very simple, but no man need starve. His wife makes clothes from the flax—or even from wool, for there is a local breed of sheep. Rye bread is unappetising but very nutritious. And there are fish by the million in the Marshes—every local man is automatically a fisherman; he seldom uses a rod, but a circular net, wading deep into the water to drag it along.

There is no place in the world like Pinsk, in the middle of the Polesia district. There are only two or three buildings more than one storey high. One is the

cathedral, the other is the watch tower where fire-watchers stand day and night. Pinsk has been burned down on the average three times every century.

The market is a delight. The wooden boats tie up beside a quay; here are the stalls, well stocked with necessities, and business is brisk. Often the basis of trade is barter. I saw a man exchange a small sheep for a stewing pot, a slab of salt and a can of paraffin. I was reminded of the scene in the René Clair film where a man paid for his drink with a hen; the waiter brought him a chicken and two eggs as change, and he gave the waiter one of the eggs as a tip.

Naturally the aspect of the Polesia Marshes varies with the seasons. In spring the area is like a great lake, with occasional islands. Then, as the Dnieper falls, it can carry off more water from the Pripet and square miles of damp meadows are exposed. The hardy peasants rush in to garb a crop while they can.

Life is hard and the prospect is dreary. Yet I found beauty even in the Polesia Marshes—the most wonderful starscapes I ever knew. Night after night I sat alone, outside a peasant hut, just stargazing.. The only sound was a faint splash of water made by a beaver, till in the distance I would hear the howl of a wolf.

The population is sparse, naturally, and I would travel for hours without meeting a soul. Once the road slipped into the marsh, and I had to wade through the mud. I picked up a stick to scrape my legs. It was not a stick, but the breastbone of a man.

So I was reminded of the desperate battles of the last war, when Russians and Germans fought to the death in this watery wilderness. Passchendaele was

mild compared with the Pripet Marshes. Nearly half a million men literally disappeared in the muddy shallows. A wounded man had no chance; he was sucked down into the mud, to die.

XII

It is not surprising to find that Polesia is the most sparsely populated area of all Poland. Here and in Volhynia an older form of agricultural organisation still prevails, and the larger estates take the place of the small peasant farms of the rest of Poland. Successive expropriation measures have, however, considerably reduced the private estates, and there is every indication that the policy of peasant proprietorship will be more rigorously applied.

(It is a common taunt by opponents of Polish policy that Poland is a feudal country, dominated by the great landlords. This is not true even in the backward easten provinces, which suffered for 140 years under corrupt and inefficient Tsarist Russian rule, and it is fantastically incorrect when applied to Poland as a whole. Only 15,000 holdings in the whole of the country exceed the moderate area of one hundred and twenty acres (this figure alone disputes the unjustified taunt that Poland is still a land in the hands of a squirearchy), while 3,200,000 holdings are actually less than fifty acres—and of these 1,100,000 are less than five acres).

Lublin, the next province to the west, is of a similar geographic character. The greater part consists of an undulating plain averaging 800 feet above sea level, though in the river valleys there are more swamps. The forests are very extensive, and to some degree ac-

count for the sparse population. Nevertheless, agricultural production is high. Although some of the soil is sandy, other stretches consist of rich, black earth.

Largest forests of all are to be found to the north, in the province of Bialystok. That of Bialowieza, indeed, is one of the greatest in all Europe.

As I approached it, I halted on rising ground to survey the enormous sea of green spread before me. It is over 500 square miles in extent, but even this figure gives but a poor idea of its massive glory, for the main forest throws off satellite woods by the hundred, as a city breeds suburbs. Before the World War Bialowieza was the property of the Czars of Russia, who assumed the rights of the Polish Kings after the partition of Poland. For many centuries it remained the only primeval forest in our continent. No man might fell a tree under pain of severe punishment. Nature took its own course; as a tree fell so it lay and rotted. Some of the trees were of tremendous size; I saw pines 200 feet height.

To-day a part of the forest is being exploited—there is even a rickety miniature railway which runs along the forest rides, penetrating its vastnesses. But the Polish Government wisely has left a portion of the forest exactly as it was, in its primeval state.

Bialowieza of recent years has been much in the news, for Presidents of Poland gave hunting parties to diplomatic visitors. In the heart of the forest they erected what was termed a hunting-box, but which you and I might consider a substantial mansion. Certainly its site was well chosen, for the forest teemed with wild life so that it was without rival in the whole

of Europe. You might shoot at your will the wolf, the badger, the hare, the fox, the lynx, the deer, the boar; or, most thrilling of all, you might essay to bag a bison.

Many people look upon the bison as a purely American animal, yet centuries ago Europe—particularly eastern Europe—swarmed with them. By 1914, however, they were almost extinct, except for zoological specimens. Only one herd survived in the wild. It consisted of over five hundred bison which roamed the great forest of Bialowieza, and only the Czar and his guests might shoot them. Whether the bison bred rapidly or whether the Czar's guests were poor shots I do not know, but the number was not seriously diminished—until the war. In 1915 the Germans occupied the forest: the Czar's regulations meant nothing to them; often they were short of supplies, and a full-grown bison provided two tons of meat. At the end of the war the vast forest was combed for survivors; of the herd of five hundred only seven remained. The Polish Government very wisely decided to save the species from extermination. A portion of the forest, nearly twenty square miles, was set apart, encompassed by a great stockade, so that the bison might be protected against illicit intruders. The policy paid; the seven increased their numbers, and when I visited Bialowieza some years ago had already increased to forty. The long history of the European bison is not yet closed.

The roads of Bialystok are quite inadequate, but the province is drained by four navigable rivers—the Niemen, Biebrza (Bóbr), Narew and Bug. The common-

est sight on Polish rivers is that of huge rafts of logs floating down to the mills, or even to a seaport.

Though there is some industrial activity in the few towns (the woollen mills of Bialystok itself are famous), the region is again overwhelmingly agricultural. The climate is wetter and colder than that of Western Poland: marshes are frequently encountered, with occasional peat bogs: these latter are a boon, as the area is so far from the Polish coalfields in Silesia.

XIII

The two north-eastern provinces of Poland, Nowogrodek and Wilno (or Vilna) are of ethnic and political interest rather than economic importance. Along the greater part of the Polish eastern border, we have noted, Ruthenians form a big proportion and sometimes even the majority of the population. In the north-east this situation is reversed, and the Polish majority is absolute over a mixed White Ruthenian, Lithuanian and Jewish population.

For centuries this has been disputed ground. Once Wilno was the capital of a great Lithuanian Empire, which in 1386 joined its fortunes with those of the kingdom of Poland. Thence the city assumed a Polish character, and there is no doubt about this to-day. Nevertheless, the Lithuanians have never ceased to demand the return of their ancient capital.

Wilno is far more than the centre of an important political problem; it is one of the most fascinating cities of Europe. It has few signs of the dignity of Warsaw or the gentle charm of Cracow; its atmosphere is friendly but primitive—the atmosphere of a city whose culture has been retained by fervent

missionaries under discouraging conditions. Their intense activity is reflected in Wilno's ecclesiastical buildings. From a point of vantage on the castle hill Wilno reveals itself as a city of spires and domes —a remarkable vista scarcely equalled in Europe. Nor does closer acquaintance disappoint.

Apart from its historic interest, which is great, the cathedral of Wilno is the least attractive of all its churches. It is solid rather than picturesque and at the time of my first visit was not looking its best; some time earlier the River Wilija had overflowed its banks in a disastrous flood, and the cathedral was one of the buildings seriously damaged. Practically the whole floor was washed away and parts of the foundations rendered insecure.

In startling contrast is the church of St. Peter and St. Paul, on the outskirts of the city—internally the most ornate specimen of ecclesiastical architecture I have seen anywhere outside Italy, its decoration was entirely the work of Italian artists. Practically every square inch of the interior—roofs and walls alike—is a medley of white plaster intricately shaped into cunning designs. While some of these are conventional, others are original and, what is more, exceedingly beautiful. The ceiling is magnificent, and I am not surprised that artists make the inconvenient journey from all corners of Europe to consider its remarkable detail. I confess that the total effect was somewhat overpowering—you can have a little too much white plaster—in spite of the artistry of its work.

In one of the chapels is a strange representation of Christ—a modelled figure to which beard and hair have been added in real human hair. The effect is re-

markably lifelike; this maybe accounts for the legend which for many generations has pervaded the countryside. This is a miraculous figure, declare the peasants; the hair and beard grow just like those of a living man, and have to be cut periodically. The priests from time to time deny the story, but that makes no difference. Peasants believe what their fathers tell them, in spite of their respect for the priest, and year by year thousands of people make long journeys to worship before the shrine which harbours such a miracle.

Yet pride of place among Wilno's shrines goes not to the cathedral of St. Anne's or even St. Bernardin, but to the Ostra Brama, the Sacred Gate, second only to Czestochowa as a miraculous centre. The Ostra Brama is a gateway, a relic of the ancient fortifications, covering the end of one of the principal streets of the town. Actually over this street itself, built above the arch of the gateway, is the little shrine which houses a miraculous picture of the Virgin; a strangely Eastern effigy face, and hands painted on wood, clothing and crown raised in glided metal, against an altar wall covered with valued gifts from pious pilgrims.

There is a legend that it does not matter at what hour of the day or night you pass the Ostra Brama, you will find people kneeling before the shrine. I am inclined to believe that this legend is substantially true. Once I passed the gateway at three o'clock in the morning, and there were still people kneeling on the sidewalk; one of them was a policeman on duty. By day there is no question: and at almost any hour you are bound to see dozens of people kneeling on the path in front of the shrine, to say nothing of those

who have taken up nearer positions. Three times a day a special service is held at the shrine and then the street is utterly impassable because of the throng of people kneeling before the unveiled picture. All traffic is diverted during the hour of the service and for some time afterwards.

The city is much more interesting than the province, which is a medley of forests, marshes, lakes and farmland. It is, however, relieved by low ranges of hills —a continuation of those which make the region of Pomorze (Polish Pomerania) so pleasant. Communications are poor.

XIV

Such, then, is an outline sketch of the face of Poland. Again it has been scarred by the ravages of war; such has been its fate throughout history. For centuries it was the outpost of Christendom, holding the boundary of civilisation against the invading hordes from the east. The task was hard, since the land had no natural defences, but it was never shirked. Those who knew the Poles were not surprised that they were the first to stand up and say "No" to Hitler, in spite of the appalling suffering which was bound to follow. Very soon we shall have an opportunity to repay our debt to this gallant people.

Our survey of Poland from west to east may leave an erroneous impression in the mind. The west is the most advanced section of the country, the east is still in process of recovery from the long years of Tsarist domination. I suggest to the reader that he should now return to my Introduction. For the picture I have painted was always changing, year by

year, with startling rapidity. It may be misleading, too, by reason of human delight in romantic survivals and picturesque scenes rather than of industrial development. To us modern factories are ordinary, but peasants in traditional costumes are an intriguing study.

Our task was to journey over the land of the peasant: yet, had we halted to examine his mind, we would have found a progressive urge, a modern outlook, a determination to betterment, based on a passionate love of his land and race. In the industrial cities of the west we would have noticed a live, alert, practical spirit of progress, a realistic interpretation of modern conditions, which contrast vividly with popular misconceptions of Polish romanticism. One feature dominates the atmosphere of Poland: outrage. For centuries they were surrounded by enemies, and stood alone: always they were a powerful and political and cultural force in Central and Eastern Europe: they do not believe that their mission has exhausted their usefulness. They know what it is to face adversity, but they do it bravely. Once their courage was tested by barbarian invaders, now by economic ills. But while Britain and U.S.A. cowered beneath the blows of the world slump of 1930, Poland actually made considerable advances during the dangerous years.

The Poles recovered from the devastation of war, and set themselves along a course of modern progress, largely by their own faith and enterprise.

If we had allocated to Poland one-tenth of the loans we poured into Germany after 1918, then the story of 1939 might have been written very differently. This

time we must not fail: it will not be enough to efface the scars of war—we must help the Poles to lay the foundation of a new development. In the past they have done a great deal with a very little: but their land is potentially prosperous. Given a fair start—which was denied to them in 1918—I believe that the Poles will advance their economic status, for they are industrious, energetic, sturdy and enterprising. I am equally confident that they will advance towards political greatness.