

# MEMORIES OF A FAIR LAND

## *Poland Before the Germans Came*

*Specially written for "The Listener" by Cecil W. Lusty*

[No. I.]

**W**HEN I heard Mr. Chamberlain's momentous tocsin summoning Liberty to resist Aggression, then the dramatic announcement from Warsaw to the German people, I felt that I had escaped from a horrible nightmare. Something was at last going to be done. I felt, too, that Poland was no longer just a place in the gazetteer, but a living and real neighbour.

But what of the newly tortured people, for whose succour Britain and France are hammering at Germany's Western Wall, and to whose ravaged cities our thoughts are winging? Just who are these valiant Poles, what is their history and what are their customs, dreams, and aspirations?

The sorrows of Poland open the floodgates of vivid memory. I think of my home in Warsaw, of a host of Polish good companions, happy in their work and their play, and brimming over with plans and hopes for the re-born Poland.

I think of the colour and pageantry that is Poland, of Lowicz peasant women in hand-woven voluminous skirts striped with gay colours, of Tatra "highlanders" in picturesque tight-fitting trousers, flowing tunics, and wide-brimmed hats, and of harvest reapers, when the crop is gathered, decorating girls with flowers, all singing and making merry.

### **Armistice Night**

I think of thousands of candles twinkling in the war cemeteries on Armistice Day night, of carefree maidens, in accordance with folklore casting magical wreaths into the storied Vistula, of Polish children joyfully chanting national songs in the Warsaw broadcasting studio, illustrating a talk I was broadcasting in English.

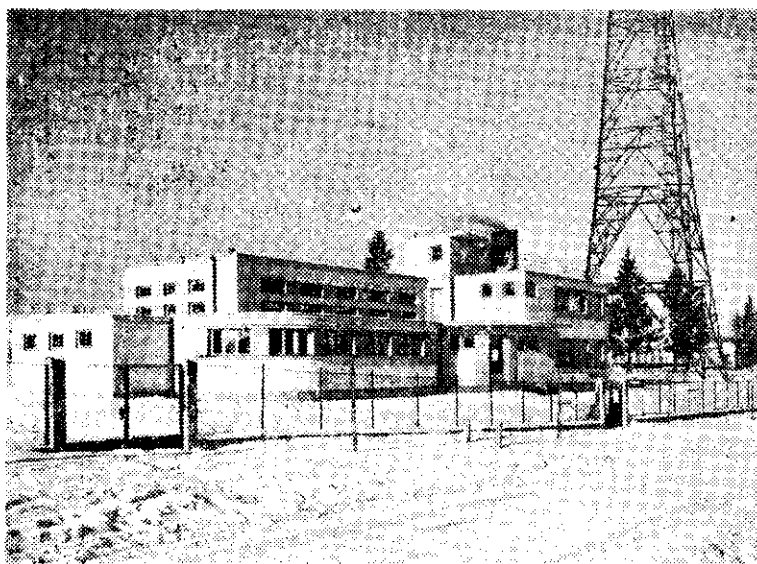
Now I hear from Daventry and read in the cable news of death raining from the skies on these fields and towns; of centuries-old cloisters, such as at Czestochowa, in flames; and cities of antiquity, beauty, and legend, such as Cracow, in enemy hands.

### **Love of Country**

But let me in these articles write not of war-scarred Poland, but of the Poland that I know and love, of a people who, despite their history of fire and sword, of dismem-

bering Partitions and untold suffering, have preserved the unquenchable embers of that greatest of Polish traits—love of country. It is this innate faith in Poland's destiny as an independent nation, as exemplified in Dabrowski's eighteenth century national hymn "Mazurka"—the theme of which is "Poland is not lost forever"—that is the key to the soul of Poland.

Democracy is not wrong in supporting Poland. Early Poland was a republic of free



*The radio station at Lwow (Lemberg), under snow*

men; the majority of her old kings were elected by the people—from 1572 without regard to their origin—and elected Parliaments, in effect, ruled the country. So democratic was Poland in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that in Parliament a solitary determined protest could defeat practically any measure.

### **The First King**

I will first tell something of the romance of Polish history, as I have read it in stone, glass and tapestry in Polish cities, as I have heard it recited by Polish hearths. The first crowned king, in 1025, was Boleslas the Brave—great grandson of Piast, wheelwright prince who, around 842, created Poland by uniting various Slavonic tribes—whose jagged sword, damaged on the golden gate of Kieff, became the coronation sword of Poland.

The Piast dynasty eventually ended with the death, in 1370, of Casimir the Great, whose memory is writ large in the Wawel

Cathedral, Cracow—the Westminster Abbey of Poland—where the German invaders accorded Marshal Pilsudski's tomb military honours. Casimir bequeathed his crown to his nephew Louis, King of Hungary, whose successor was the girl-queen Jadwiga.

### **The Legend of Jadwiga**

In the Wawel I have seen the stone crucifix on which, so speaks legend, the image of Christ turned to the fifteen-year-old girl, in response to her prayers for guidance, telling her to renounce her love, youth and beauty and to marry, for the good of Poland, Ladislas Jagello, a Lithuanian prince. Thus came the union of Lithuania and Poland and the two-hundred-years' Jagellonian dynasty.

"Remember Jadwiga, for the good of Poland," Polish children are taught. The cry was repeated by Polish women and boys in 1920 when, in the trenches of Warsaw, they withstood the Bolshevik onslaughts.

### **"Saviour of Christendom"**

Last of the Jagellonian kings were Sigismund Stary and Sigismund August. Then began the election of kings. A century later came John Sobieski, saviour of Vienna and Christendom, whose memory is perpetuated by the Wilanow Palace, Warsaw, and by impressive monuments in Lwow and other cities which have now been the scene of fierce fighting or of air-raids. Finally came Stanislas August Poniatowski, favourite of Catherine the Great of Russia.

### **Not Yet Peace**

There quickly followed the darkness of the Partitions, resulting finally, after the defeat of Kosciuszko, in Poland, in 1795, losing her independence. But Poland, although dismembered, was not dead. Eventually came August, 1914, and the gathering of Pilsudski's legions which largely paved the way for Poland's ultimate independence, proclaimed in November, 1918.

But peace was not yet. In 1920 the Russians swept over the country, and Polish women have told me how they shouldered rifle and scythe until the "Miracle of the Vistula" saw the enemy routed.

Now once more the cry goes up: "Remember Jadwiga, for the good of Poland!"