

# THE POLISH CORRIDOR

“TELESINUS.”

IN the more comfortable days of our childhood, when territorial changes in Europe were limited to the extreme south-east, great solid countries stood out on our map like symbols of eternity. We did not always remember that Germany and Italy were only recently solidified, and that some bitterness lingered behind the frontiers rectified in that process. In the main it seemed a very reasonable Europe; and only the historians and the Foreign Office remembered that, from the Baltic almost to the Black Sea, Lithuania and Poland, former great powers, lay buried under the three Empires.

Lithuania had disappeared in Poland since 1569, willingly, so far as Western Europe knew; and Prussia, Austria and Russia had begun their absorption of Poland in 1772 and completed it during the early years of the French Revolution. They justified the First Partition by the plea of recovering territory stolen long ago, and extracted it without bloodshed from the anarchic and corrupt governing families. They justified the Third Partition by the fact that the shrunken kingdom, under French influence, had very recently adopted a new and ultra-liberal Constitution, and they enforced it in a bitterly fought campaign. Since 1795 Poland had been a name, but a name to arouse the intense devotion of Poles and Lithuanians alike. The last armed revolt took place in 1863-64, in Russian territory. But conspiracy and exile were still, in the twentieth century, the career most honoured by Russian Poles; expropriation and cultural repression were still the fate of Poles in Germany. In Austria, where their religion was that of the State and the clash of temperament was not so pronounced, their lot was easier; they had their just share in administration, and for some years before the Great War the raising and training of Polish semi-military formations was encouraged by the Government. Their fourth, and not their least important, homeland was the United States of America.

With the outbreak of the Great War, the reconstitution of a Polish State seems to have been acknowledged at once, not only by the Poles but also by their masters, as inevitable; and inevitably the first steps to this end were confused and even chaotic. Alone of all the States which claimed and won their freedom as a result of the struggle, Poland lay in August, 1914, on both sides of No

Man's Land; Poles alone were conscripts on both sides; and Poland alone obtained from both sides immediate promises of autonomy. In their very disunion the Poles had a bargaining power and a "nuisance value" which were promptly recognized.

The 500,000 Polish conscripts who served in the Austrian armies were probably less reluctant to march than those who mustered at Posen or at Warsaw. An Austrophil Polish National Committee was formed at Cracow in the first month of the war, and a Polish Legion was formed in the Austrian interest by Josef Pilsudski. Pilsudski is said to have obtained from the Austrian Government a pledge of complete independence for his country. He had passed five years in expiating the plots of others against the Russian Government, and twenty-two years after that in making plots of his own; and from August, 1914, to September, 1916, he fought under the Austrians and the Germans.

The German Government, for which 400,000 Poles fought, was already unpopular with its Polish subjects; and after August 1915, when German troops overran almost all Russian Poland and a governor-general was installed at Warsaw, it became unpopular across the old frontier. Seven hundred thousand Polish workmen were made conscripts for military labour, and such church bells as were not already used were taken and melted down. But the German plans for the resettlement of Eastern Europe, as applied in the autumn of 1917, included the creation of a line of buffer States, and among these were Lithuania (renamed Ober-Ost) and Poland—but merely Russian Poland. A temporary Constitution was granted to Poland by the central powers in September, 1917, and a Council of Regency set up; and when the Russian Provisional Government had fallen and the German troops on the Eastern front were needed elsewhere, Poland was formally invited to proceed to the spoliation of Russia.

On the 14th August, 1914, the Grand Duke Nicholas in the name of Russia promised autonomy to Poland; and in that month a Russophil committee was formed at Warsaw to balance the Austrophil committee at Cracow. The question soon became academic, so far as Russia was concerned. On the 30th March, 1917, Kerenski's Provisional Government acknowledged the independence of Poland; and the Bolsheviki, in their turn, not only accepted the situation but went so far, in September 1918, as to denounce formally the Partitions of 1772-1794.

The western powers were slower to join in this competitive recognition. France, in February 1917, agreed to leave the destiny of Poland in the hands of Russia. A third Polish National Committee was formed at Lausanne in August, 1917, and soon moved to

Paris under the auspices of the Entente. In April, 1917, Great Britain informed Kerenski's Government of her adhesion to the principle of a united and independent Poland; in January, 1918, she gave a similar assurance to the Bolshevik Government; in October, 1918, she recognised the Polish National Army as autonomous, allied and co-belligerent. In June, 1918, the British, French and Italian Governments announced their approval of the national aspirations of the Polish people.

Lastly, the United States furnished powerful support to the Polish patriots. For three years, from 1915 to 1918, Paderewski toured North America, placing the Polish point of view before great audiences. He obtained men for a Polish Legion and for the American Expeditionary Force, and money for relief work in Poland. By January, 1917, Woodrow Wilson had begun to suggest the creation of a united, independent and autonomous Poland; a year later the freedom of Poland, with an outlet to the sea, formed the thirteenth of his Fourteen Points.

The new State, thus blessed by all the belligerents, came into formal being when the central powers, in the autumn of 1917, gave it a Council of Regency and a Constitution; but for twelve months more Posen and Cracow were outside its borders, and its future leaders and soldiers were, for the most part, fugitives and exiles. Pilsudski was in prison at Madgeburg; Paderewski was in North America; Drowski was in Paris. Polish regiments, formed in Russia, were fighting alongside the British force at Murmansk; others fought in Kolchak's army; others, German and Austrian prisoners taken by the French or the Italians, were formed into a Polish National Army in 1918 and fought in France. The collapse of the central powers was needed before the Poles could remake Poland.

On the 6th October, 1918, the Council of Regency declared the independence of Poland, and in the next three months the exiles came home and the three main elements of the new State began to come together, not without mutual criticism. The conservative Galicians, the German-trained Posnanians, the illiterate but self-conscious majority in ex-Russian Poland, found a difficulty which both time and trial were needed to overcome in allowing for one another's points of view. A number of political parties sprang to life, and the national leaders were divided by personal as well as political animosity. But the boundaries of the new State were defined, as yet, only by the outposts of hostile armies, Russian, Ukrainian, Czechoslovak, German and Lithuanian, and the pressure from without helped to solidify the nation. The General Election of January 1919—an achievement in itself—confirmed the downfall

of the Socialist Government of Moraczewski which had been in power at Warsaw; Paderewski became Premier and Foreign Minister, and Pilsudski retained the positions of Chief of the State and Minister of War.

Pilsudski and Paderewski used the next five months, each in his way, in securing the Polish frontiers. Pilsudski and his improvised "Grey Army", in its German uniforms, reinforced by Haller's "Blue Army" in its French uniforms, fought off Bolsheviks and Germans on the northern frontiers and Ukrainians on the southern; he retook Vilna on Easter Sunday, and in May he invaded East Galicia (which is in the south-west corner of the Ukraine) and occupied it. At both points he forced the hands of the western powers; but both the Ukraine and Lithuania owed what independence they had to Germany, and the reaction in Paris was not unfavorable.

From Paris, after a long struggle, Paderewski returned in July, 1919, with a copy of that Treaty between the Allied and Associated Powers and Germany by which, in the main, the boundaries of Poland were defined. It represented a series of compromises and expedients, varied by omissions; and the last frontier line was added to the map in 1920, when Vilna was taken once more from Lithuania, and the Treaty of Riga ended the long and varied course of the Russo-Polish war.

From these crowded and confused years Poland emerged with a population of about 30,000,000 and a rich harvest of minorities. Ruthenians or Ukrainians, Jews, Germans, Lithuanians and others are believed to make up one-third of the population, and to each the Poles have given, and from each they have received, a memory of old and new wrongs. The frontiers are drawn on many different principles, natural geographical boundaries being hard to find. The most obvious anomaly of all, and in its way the most logical, is the extension through Prussia of the Polish Corridor.

The ethnographic boundaries of Poland, for many hundred years, have included a strip of territory running north, between Pomerania and Danzig, to the Baltic, and terminated by the western coastline of West Prussia. Her ancient kingdom included the suzerainty of Danzig, which makes up the rest of the West Prussian coastline. Her right to a Baltic outlet was historically justified, and admitted by all the victorious powers; and these powers were advised by their experts at Versailles that it was impossible to construct any other harbour than Danzig on the West Prussian coast. The whole course of the Vistula was indubitably Polish, except its estuary at Danzig, and the simple solution of giving back Danzig to Poland was very nearly adopted. But Danzig

has always been overwhelmingly German-speaking, while the Corridor on the western side of the city is Polish-speaking, and this difficulty was compromised in a manner suggested (it is said) by Mr. Lloyd George: the Corridor was given outright to Poland, and Danzig, with its suburbs, was restored to something like its old status as a Hansa Town. It was made a Free City within the Polish Customs area, with a resident High Commissioner appointed by the League of Nations. Poland controls its foreign relations, and has a voice in its economic life; while differences between the city and its suzerain are referred to the High Commissioner and by him, if necessary, to the League.

Such, in the briefest outline, were the circumstances of the re-creation of the Polish Corridor. Even though it restored to Poland her old outlet to the sea, and even though the insulation of East Prussia had existed two hundred years before in a cruder form, it was a strange device for modern statesmen to sanction. Can it subsist under modern conditions? That would be its justification; and, if the situation is found too unjust or too anomalous to last, that will be its condemnation. The effect on Germany, the effects on Danzig and the characteristics of the Polish people supply the materials for the answer.

The effect of the Corridor on Germany is that of a sentimental grievance and an economic grievance; and the wound in her national pride is real and obvious. West Prussia, conquered from the "heathen Prussians" by the Teutonic Order in the thirteenth century, and wholly German territory from 1795 to 1919, is now mainly in foreign hands. All railway trains cross the Corridor with the doors locked and the windows closed. East Prussia, the second home of the Hohenzollerns for three centuries, is cut off from the rest of the Reich except by sea—and the League of Nations has acquiesced in the annexation of part of it by Lithuania. To lose territory to France was bitter; to lose it to the despised Poles—the "Saisonstaat"—was intensely bitter. But West Prussia was, in fact, an integral part of Poland from 1466 to 1772, when Prussia took it by force. Danzig was held by the Teutonic Knights from the massacre of St. Dominic's Day, 1308, to 1454; it was a Free City under Polish suzerainty from 1454 to 1577; it was Polish from 1577 to 1793, and in 1733 it stood a siege lasting 135 days in the interests of Stanislas Leszczyński, King of Poland. It was retaken from Prussia by French and Polish troops in 1807, and became a Free City again until 1814. In history the Polish grievance partly redressed by the Treaty of Versailles was greater than the German, and when the question at issue is the allocation

of a fragment of coastline, the otherwise landlocked power has the greater claim in equity. It was a gesture made in grim earnest, with a certain justified passion, when in March, 1920, General Haller rode his white horse into the waves of the Gulf of Danzig.

The German economic grievance, too, is real. East Prussia is mainly an agricultural province, which had become, in the nineteenth century, essentially linked with the rest of Germany by the exchange of crops, livestock, sugar and timber for manufactured articles. In 1913 nearly four tons of this traffic went by rail for every ton conveyed by sea. The framers of the Treaty of Versailles obliged Poland to give "full and adequate railroad, telegraphic and telephonic facilities for communication between the rest of Germany and East Prussia over the intervening Polish territory", and the Poles have given it; but the trains are slower than they were, and the wires can be tapped. New shipping lines, a subsidised air service, direct telegraph and telephone cables by sea between Pomerania and East Prussia have not availed to save the great landlords of East Prussia from the threat of bankruptcy, or to rescue the seaports of Elbing and Königsberg from stagnation. Yet the trouble seems to be due comparatively little to physical isolation, and much more to the loss of markets in Upper Silesia, Posen and West Prussia; the general rise in freights, prices and wages; and the uncompromising spirit which has made the East Prussian landed magnate the symbolic figure of reactionary pride.

The case of Danzig against Poland, less weightily backed, is more substantial. The town was occupied in February, 1920, by Polish troops, and certain rather excited military elements (as a Polish General put it) claimed (as the British High Commissioner expressed it) to treat Danzig as a conquered town. The proportion of Germans to Poles in Danzig is nearly thirty to one. In August, 1920, when the Red Army was at the gates of Warsaw, the Danzig dockers refused to handle munitions sent from England and France to the Poles, and British soldiers did the work. Co-operation between Danzigers and Poles seemed then an idle dream, though the constitution of the Free City was based on it.

It had appeared in 1919, as the Entente's experts said, impossible to create another port on the Gulf of Danzig, and therefore Danzig, severed from Germany, was very nearly given to Poland outright. The compromise by which Poland obtained 76 barren kilometres of coastline, and strictly limited commercial rights in an autonomous Danzig, did not satisfy Polish ambitions, and seemed, after the experience of 1920, inadequate to the commercial or even



the military security of Poland; and the Poles set to work about 1923 to construct another seaport. Gdynia, a seaside village on the western side of the gulf, was chosen as its site. Gdynia has no river and no natural deep water or breakwater, and it is not ice-free; but there, by lavish expenditure (largely of French money) the Poles have made, and hope to develop, a new seaport, complete with railways and docks, and the base of the Polish navy. Baltic-American and Anglo-Polish shipping lines have been started, and a Polish merchant navy is under formation.

The effect on Danzig of this legitimate and striking but provocative achievement is unfortunate, both sentimentally and economically. The Danzigers are Prussian, and therefore dislike and despise the Poles. They regard the Polish administration of the Vistula as less efficient than the German administration which it succeeded. They resent the inevitable costliness of being governed partly by Poland and partly by the League of Nations, as well as internally by their own legislative assemblies. Their transit trade is sustained, but their industries are damaged by heavy taxation, and by the advantages that cheaper labour and a depreciated currency give to the Polish manufacturer. And now the construction of a new seaport ten miles away, in defiance of all the rules which govern the creation of ports in western countries, has increased the dislike, the contempt and the suspicion of the Poles in this old and proud city which Poland partly controls but does not, and never did, completely possess.

The Poles alone, in the last resort, can ensure the permanence of their maritime acquisition. They start with two supreme advantages in re-entering the European family of nations, and they meet again the two great dangers to which they succumbed in the eighteenth century. The two advantages they possess lie in their indulgent foster-mothers, France and the League of Nations. The two dangers reside in their proximity to Germany and to Russia. The use that they make of these factors will determine the fate of the Corridor, and of Poland herself; and a consideration of the Polish character, as revealed between 1919 and 1931, may justify the conjecture that Poland will be able to use the advantages and parry the dangers.

I need not emphasize the good-will of France towards Poland. French money has been an essential factor in establishing Polish industry. An Immigration and Emigration Convention between France and Poland was signed twelve years ago. French military skill was responsible, in a great measure, for the fortunate issue of the Russian War of 1919-20. French officials perhaps encouraged,

and certainly foreknew and condoned, the unscrupulous efforts of unofficial Poles to undo by force the results of the plebiscite in Upper Silesia. It is an article of the French political creed that Poland's mission is to represent in Eastern Europe the interests of the Entente, and in particular those of France.

The good-will of the League of Nations was shown by acquiescence in the seizure of East Galicia and in the annexation of Vilna. Much may be said in favour of this acquiescence, but it remains for the League to justify it. The League has a special interest in problems of minorities, and those which originate in Poland are standing items on the agenda of the Council. The present point, however, is that the League would be bound to use all its resources if an act of aggression were committed against a power so large, so vocal, and so influentially backed as Poland.

The dangers of proximity to Germany and Russia still exist, though they are not so great to-day as in the eighteenth century. Germany is beaten, disarmed and impoverished; Russia is striving to evolve a new economic organisation, and during the struggle she is not fit, either physically or mentally, for aggressive action on a large scale against her neighbours. But if desperation should induce Germany, or economic failure should make it desirable for Russia, to stake all on the chances of war, there is no question that Poland would not be left to fight alone. Meanwhile, as a measure of reinsurance, she is urged by French writers to come closer to Russia, remembering that Germany is her permanent enemy, while her great but unpopular Jewish element has been for fifteen years definitely pro-German; but she has hitherto declined to commit herself.

The Poles themselves provide the most perplexing factor in this balance of probabilities. In 1794 "Sarmatia fell, unwept, without a crime." After 1931 Poland would not fall unwept, or even unaided, and her recent history is not free from new crimes as well as old follies. The record of the Republic of 1919, creditable on the whole, is not without material of which hostile critics have made full use.

The faults of the former Elective Kingdom—failure to act as a united nation and to see the realities of international life, were those of the great and small squires who ruled it and the serfs who cultivated its soil. They are reproduced, in a measure, in the peasant deputies of the Sejm to-day, and in the peasant Prime Minister who went to get in his harvest in July, 1920, while the Bolsheviks were a few miles from Warsaw. But the peasants, at any rate, are not serfs to-day, and the squirearchy has learned



from its masters and has produced professional and industrial classes. The Austrians admitted their minority subjects to political and administrative life. The Germans taught their Polish subjects co-operation and self-defence, and stiffened their backs. The Russians, indeed, gave little to the Poles but a sense of martyrdom. But the century and a quarter of partition and subjugation was a period in which the face of all Europe was changed by education, invention, and the establishment of popular governments, and the position and the outlook of the squire and serf changed, to some extent, with the times. In an age when the aspect of Spain and that of Ireland are being altered before our eyes, we need not believe that the lessons of the past are never learned. Change in the centre of gravity produced by a democratic constitution may turn a nation's destiny. The sundry changes of a hundred and twenty-five years, within and without Poland, have enabled the new republic to display a cohesion and a relative efficiency which were not expected by its first critics.

The Poles have redeemed their follies, in more than one department of national life, within these thirteen years. Pilsudski said that it was their "weakness and powerlessness" which forced him to a gambler's throw against the Bolshevik armies in August, 1920, but with the same troops who had struggled back from Kiev in almost fatal disorder he destroyed the same Bolshevik armies in a month. Grabski allowed the Polish mark, and after it his newly minted zloty, to follow the German mark nearly to the same extinction; but he re-established Polish finances, and the Polish banks were unaffected while German and Austrian banks were closing their doors last summer. Their industries, although organised in the strictest fashion by the State and for the benefit primarily of the State, are on the whole much more prosperous than those of the same territory in 1913. Their frequent parliamentary deadlocks were resolved by Pilsudski in 1926, when he entered Warsaw with his troops and established a super-parliamentary dictatorship, and more fully last year, when he obtained a clear majority in parliament for his nominees. Shortly, Poland has survived and become stronger during a very difficult period.

For the first crimes which they committed against the European code, and in particular for the seizure of Vilna in 1920 and the insurrection in Upper Silesia in the same year, the Principal Allied and Associated Powers were their judges, and in both cases they were very lightly handled. In the case of Vilna they felt, quite genuinely, that they were regaining one of the former great cities of Poland from a rather negligible country which the Germans had

reinvented. In the case of Upper Silesia they were trying, with some French support, to hasten the legal adjudication to them of a district where most of the population spoke Polish, and which they believed was essential to the balance of their industrial life. These two blows with the mailed fist, successful as they proved, have not been repeated.

More recently the League of Nations has been called to judge the Polish treatment of racial minorities, and in particular of the Ruthenes in East Galicia and the Germans in Posnania. The past weakness of the Allied Powers will make it harder for the League to insist on justice, if justice has not been done; and perhaps a memory of Auxiliary Police in Ireland, or of the bombardment of Damascus, may weaken the arm of one or another influential member of the League. Even since the war it has not been easy, for even the leaders of our civilisation, to deal justly with unreasonable races. But Poland is an original member of the League; she has had a seat on the Council; she has tasted the pleasure of pulling the levers of the new machine, and the more freely that machine is used the greater hope there is for justice within the nations.

The analysis, however, is not complete when we have discussed nations and the League of Nations. If we speak of Germany or Poland, sooner or later we must mention Stresemann and Bruning, Paderewski and Pilsudski. For obvious reasons, such men do not personify a nation; they help to twist its actions, with or without its real agreement, to a certain temporary objective. They emerge and are obeyed; they may be disowned in their lifetime, as Woodrow Wilson and Lloyd George have been; it might be better if, like Pitt and Lincoln, they died in or before the hour of victory; but they affect events, and the events affect their people permanently. No man in Poland has filled this part, in the last ten years, except Josef Pilsudski. His character is not essentially Polish, but his biography must be, more nearly than any other man's, the recapitulation of the contemporary history of this country.

Pilsudski was born in 1867, of a noble Lithuanian family. From his home, and at school in Vilna, he learned to look on the liberation of Poland as the ambition of his life; from fellow-students at Cracow University he learned socialism. At the age of twenty he was sent to Siberia for five years on a false accusation of complicity in a terrorist plot. He came back to Vilna in 1892; and next year, when the Polish Socialist Party was established in Warsaw, he became "Comrade Viktor". He was soon the party's chief organiser, its arch-conspirator, and its only editor;

and in February, 1901, when his secret press was discovered, he was sent to prison in Warsaw. He feigned madness, was removed to an asylum at St. Petersburg, and escaped in May, 1902.

He now settled—if settlement is a suitable word—in Cracow, formed his rifle corps, and harassed the Russian police by spasmodic outrages; he even went to Japan in 1905 with the offer of a Polish corps to serve against the Russians. The day came when the gates of war opened wide, and in August, 1914, he led his 2000 riflemen into Russia—or rather into Poland.

By September, 1916, a German governor-general was installed in Warsaw, and an Austrian in Lublin. Poland was freed from the Russians; Pilsudski had formed a secret organisation of several thousand men, the "P. O. W.", to free her from the Austrians and the Germans. His original legions, after long and bitter quarrels with the Austrian authorities, faded out; and after six months' trial of a civil post at the German headquarters in Warsaw, he broke with the Germans. He was imprisoned at Madgeburg from July, 1917, to November, 1918, and he occupied his time in organising on paper the Polish Government and Army of the future.

Released unconditionally on the 8th November, 1918, and sent off to Warsaw, he found himself, on the 10th, Chief of the State and Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Army. He ordered his old socialist colleague Moraczewski to form a Government, and he himself created the Army and disarmed many thousands of dispirited German soldiers.

On the 1st January Paderewski arrived in Warsaw. He brought to the new State the help of his great influence with the Allies and with the Poles of France and America, and clearly it was for him to present the Polish case at Versailles. For this purpose he formed a Government, which the electorate approved a fortnight later, and he went to Paris as Prime Minister and Foreign Minister. Paderewski returned in July with his laurels, but they did not last. He was too logical, too gentle, too scrupulous, too conservative for politics as Pilsudski played that game, and in December he resigned and left Poland.

Pilsudski, for three more years, rode the whirlwind. He fought the Russians and the Lithuanians, and flouted the Principal Allied and Associated Powers, but he did not stoop to fight the hostile parties in the Sejm. When the new Constitution came into force, in December, 1922, he refused to be President; when a hostile Government took office in July, 1923, he resigned his command.

He lived by writing until May, 1926, when a new Government picked a quarrel with him. In two days, with the Army and the

working-man behind him, he had forced his way into Warsaw and overthrown the Government. He had his nominee made President; he became Minister of War, and from October, 1926, to June, 1928, Prime Minister. At last, in 1930, he obtained a compact majority in the Sejm.

He is not the average modern Pole, glorified. Of that type it will be said, as of Dr. Johnson,

Religious, moral, generous and humane  
He was, but self-sufficient, rude and vain,  
Ill-bred, and overbearing in dispute.

Pilsudski is not religious, nor moral, nor generous, nor humane, though he has the other qualities. His greatness consists in an overwhelming force of character, based on a mystical conviction of a purpose and a destiny. He is adored or hated. He has had thousands of blindly devoted followers, but no colleagues; and when he has despaired, the nation has lost hope. He is a man of action and even more intensely a thinker; but whereas his actions are intelligible, his thoughts have generally defied lucid or logical expression. He can cover his natural roughness by a deliberate and most effective charm of manner. He has raised himself on socialism, and the anti-socialists are still his enemies; but he has given Poland only freedom and a disciplined army. He has renounced religion, but he is devoutly superstitious, and the present Pope is his personal friend. He and his people have received the help of France in each emergency, but he was rude to Waygand in the crisis of 1920, and cold to Foch. He has dreamed of an eastern empire, and accepted Vilna and Lemberg as all the fulfilment of which his countrymen are capable. He, a storm-centre for thirty years, has accepted the duty of keeping his country steady.

Such is the career, and such the character, of this most human of the present European Dictators. The character has formed, and the career sums up, modern Polish history. The foundations of the State are laid, and its boundaries, in most European eyes, are settled. When this intense and dominating personality has left the nation that he remade to smaller men, and the glories and disillusionments of his age become memories; when business, politics and the army settle down to work in their own spheres; then in the evening of our own days the map of Eastern Europe will resume its look of solidity, and to another generation the Polish Corridor, that modest seaboard of an important power, will become a striking, a venerated, and even a popular relic of the days of self-determination.