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JOSEPH PILSUDSKI

BY
MEREJKOWSKY

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DYMITR MEREJKOWSKY

Translated from the Russian

by

Harriet E. Kennedy B. A.

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You want me to give you my impressions of my visit to the Chief of the State. That will not, I fear, be easy to do, for I feel myself now, as you ask me, to be an incapable narrator, an incapable writer. For, after all, that which is most important in talk between man and man, in the spoken word, ever remains unsaid; for that which is most important is the unlooked for feeling, the emotion, the smile, the glance, the silence, the lightning, the music. And how can one recreate the lightning or narrate the music?

And as to the concrete side of my conversation, which was perhaps more fruitful in consequences, I do not wish to speak of it, first of all because I

addressed Joseph Pilsudski not in the character of a political worker speaking to the Chief of the State, but as man to man.

It has always seemed to me that contemporary religion, which does worship heroes or humbles itself before greatness, which spits upon holy things and rejects spiritual authority, that religion of childish, animal, servile rebellion, is the chief source of contemporary boorishness of soul. My religion is quite the opposite, for, according to its commandments there is nothing on earth worthier of worship than the reflection of God's face in a man's face — in the face of a Hero. For the Hero is still to-day what he was long ago — the unchanged revelation of the Godhead, the Theophany.

When he entered the room that "quiet wind" spoken of in the Book of Kings, wafted about me and I felt at once that this was — He, the Hero, *ens*

realissimus the "essence of being" as Nietzsche said of Napoleon.

I recognized yet did not recognize that form from the innumerable pictures I had seen of it: that vigorous figure of the Soldier and the Workman, that worn face, almost old, but immortally young; that steep, overhanging, convex brow, deep-ploughed with crossing furrows, like hard stone marked by the sculptor's chisel; those tightly-compressed lips of the "Great Silent One" and, under the obstinately crisped, bristling, fair eyebrows, those strangely brilliant eyes, now misty, now transparent, with their inexpressible glance deep seeing, of second sight. I knew that form would be sculptured more enduringly than in bronze by the chisel of the great sculptor — History.

I began to speak, but no words came. It seems to me that what moved me was the surprise, that I was dazzled by simplicity. I imagined that everything would

be lofty and solemn — and behold, everything was very simple.

It was in the Belvedere Palace — a plain, quiet room; with a plain, quiet sky seen through the open window, misty grey above the misty green thickets of the Lazienki Park. And he was quiet and simple like the sky.

I began to speak in French. He immediately changed into Russian. “It will be more convenient for you thus, won’t it?” he asked with a kindly smile.

He began to speak with a low voice — and I at once lowered my voice too. — It was just as if we had known each other for a very long time. What an abyss there between us and yet how near were we to each other. Friend — and Brother.

* *

Of what did we speak to each other? I could not concentrate into a few short words the contents of an hour and a half

of intercourse, nor, I repeat, would I do so if I could. So I shall only try to bring out some separate parts of it, some tones of that music, some sparks of that fire. It was an unexpected joy to me that he understood everything from a half-spoken word, he caught it from a hint, a glance, a smile, a pause in the talk.

Contemporary people, it would appear, do not perish so much from stupidity, or want of understanding, as from lack of imagination, of that sympathizing *heart-imagination* which sees deeper into the heart of all things than the most penetrating intellect. I doubt not that if people, not one person or another, but just simply people, inhabitants of the planet Earth, could imagine what is happening at the present moment on the sixth part of that planet, in Russia, they would not tolerate it for a single minute, but would all work together to put a stop to that incredible horror.

And it is just that gift of heart-ima-

gination, that gift of intuition, of second-sight, which Mickiewicz calls the chief gift of the Slavonic race, that Joseph Pilsudski possesses in a higher degree than any other politician of the present time.

He gave the best possible definition of himself when he said, during his conversation with me: — "I am at once a romanticist and a realist".

When I told him about the Bolshevik horror, I had an impression that he knew it all already, saw it from where we stood just as I had seen it over there.

He only added two particulars to my narrative. One was an anecdote about a townsman of Berdytshov who had been saved from the Bolsheviks and who was buying himself a new tie.

"Just imagine, just imagine, I haven't worn a tie for two years", almost sobbed the poor fellow. The second particular was about the cemeteries in the Ukraine, how an unexpected crop of brand-new

crosses grew up upon them after the Bolsheviks left.

“Even the abyss of Russia has bottom. Some time they will reach that bottom and they will fall suddenly into ruins“.

“Beware that bottom of the Russian abyss, Field-Marshal: for it is a bottomless bottom, and that which is bottomless draws downward. Beware the bottom of the Russian abyss for Poland’s sake and for Europe’s sake“.

Again he fell silent, and I perceived that he saw that deepest depth as well as I.

The conversation passed on to Russian reaction and the failures of Kolchak, Yudenich and Denikin.

“Poland can have nothing to do with the restoration of old Russia. Anything rather than that — even Bolshevism“, he cried out in threatening anger and his eyes glittered.

He spoke with a terrible force. I felt

that here was something strong, a very rock. I was glad; but how was I to convince him, to assure him that not I alone rejoiced, that not I alone thought as he did, that all Russia thought the same?

“What can we do, we Poles, or indeed we Europeans?” he went on quietly. “You can’t exact genius from people; most of them are average folk, with common-sense; all policy is founded upon them. These folk believe in what they see, and they see only two Russias — the old, Tsarist one and the new, Bolshevist one. They have to choose between those two Russias, since there is no third...”

“There is”.

“Where is it, where? for we, too, long for it and seek it. Show us, Sir, where it is”.

What could I answer, what could I point to? To Russian Paris, London or Berlin? Whom could I mention? Milukow, Maklakov, Sazonov or Kerensky?

I recalled the "crop of brand-new crosses", and I answered:

"The third Russia is not here, but over yonder, in Russia".

"You know of it? You believe in it?"

"I believe".

Fear came upon me: What should I do if he shook his head and said quietly and simply: "But I don't believe". But he turned away in silence and looked out through the open window with simple, quiet eyes at the simple, quiet sky. I breathed more freely: Even if he does not believe now, he may some day.

Here began the chief part of the conversation — about what must be done for that "third Russia". I shall not repeat what was said, I shall only say one thing: Whatever may be said of him, Joseph Pilsudski is not Russia's enemy: He has no stone hidden in his bosom. I say that for all men, but for me he is something greater than that which men say of him now. Though forty thousand

Minorovs, Zenzinovs and Kerenskys should assure me that in my conversation with him I „sold Russia“, I should not believe them.

“I know not who is more necessary to whom: you to us, or we to you —“ cried I in the excitement of our conversation.

Now, from a distance, I understand that my cry may have seemed very like arrogance: so weak are we, so “non-existent“ as far as can be seen. But then it was not arrogance, only sincerity. And I think he understood that beyond the visible there is something different and greater.

He asked many questions about General Brusilov and about the new “patriotic“ spirit of the Red Army. And again he understood that which is so difficult, almost impossible, for anyone not a Russian to understand: he understood that most absurd of all Russian absurdities — the “national“ internationalism

of the Russian soldier — communists, the heroes of that “shameful” peace of Brest, moving on to death under Bronstein-Trotzki’s standard, for “Holy Russia“. He understood that that, too, is possible in the “land of unlimited possibilities“.. Actually the aim of our conversation was just to find a way to ward off that danger, perhaps the greatest of all both for Poland and Russia. He understood too, that here Russia and Poland stand together.

I mentioned Boris Savinkov as the one Russian in Europe to-day capable of undertaking anything for that “third Russia“. It was difficult for me to speak of Savinkov: he is my old friend, a man too near to me. But I had scarcely begun to speak when I felt that my companion thought of him almost as I did.

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And that, it seems, is all that I can say of the concrete part of our conver-

sation. I understand quite well that, because of this silence of mine, impressions will grow pale and so will the form reflected in them. But I hope that, some time or other, I shall return to that form. I cannot forget it, it remains in my memory and in my heart, indelible for ever.

Yet one trait more: Without it the picture would be too incomplete.

Speaking à propos of Savinkov about the significance of a solitary, creative individual in the history of a nation, I referred to the man himself, to Joseph Pilsudski.

"You, Field-Marshal" I said "have created Poland; you might say: "I am Poland".

"You think so?" he answered with a bitter smile. "And do you know that moments come when it seems to me that I am continually struggling with Poland, that I am fighting against Poland? I am a fairly strong man, but at times I too weaken".

Once again, suddenly, as in the first moment of our meeting, there "wafted upon me the blowing of a quiet wind". Only now, when he spoke of his weakness, I felt how strong he was with a strength not his own: „My strength is made perfect in weakness“. Only now I felt that the chosen of God stood before me.

Yes, I say to all men what I said to him. Oh, I know how hard and how terrible it is to say such a thing about a man, especially in our times when Lenins and Trotskys pass for „great men“, for "chosen ones" — chosen by whom? I know how many hot coals I shall bring down upon my head, how I shall be sneered at for my childish simplicity, but, in spite of all, I say: Lenin and Trotsky are not great men but great no-nentities.

Man is the measure of things. And what is the measure of a man? If it is not God, it is — the devil. To imitate God

is to create; to destroy is to imitate the devil. We have forgotten about God long ago and we measure a man with the devil measure. According to the measure a comedian on a throne setting fire to Rome is great; Jengis Khan is great, whether he come with a savage horde or with a telegraph and telephone; the drunken sailor blowing up a powder-magazine with the stump of a cigarette is great. But according to the God-measure these men are nonentities; according to the God-measure to put out the sun is a lesser deed than to create an atom; to destroy the world is a smaller achievement than to tend a plant. We have forgotten about God and we have ceased to worship heroes, those revelations of the Godhead among humanity, those "essences of being" — and that is why we have bowed down to those two great nonentities, Trotzky and Lenin — to the great Villain and the great Eunuch.

That is our punishment and that is our shame — all Europe's shame, all Christendom's shame.

But even if the whole world bows down to the devil and adores the kingdom of the Beast: "Who is like unto the Beast and who may do battle with it?" never he, never Joseph Pilsudski. He will save Poland from that shame, and—perhaps — he will save the world: For that is what he was elected by God to do.

* * *

As I left him the desire came to me to speak to the Poles in these words:

"How fortunate you are. How greatly to be envied by all other nations! How dearly God has loved Poland, His most illustrious daughter, thorn-crowned and stretched out upon the cross, that at such a time He has sent her such a Leader".

I am a foreigner among you but I am



not a stranger, and I say to you: "Love him". May those moments never come again in which he said: "I weaken, I am fighting against Poland". Remember: You may lose all things and find them again — bread and gold and weapons and wide lands and seaports and art and science and even your new-won glory, but never a second Joseph Pilsudski. Losing him, you lose everything and you will never find it again. Question not who is the greater, all of you or he alone. For do you know who created whom? you him, or he you? You, all together, bear him along as the wave bears the swimmer; but he supports you as the bent carryatid supports an immense edifice.

Frightful, black days are coming, nay have already come, for is it not the blackness of a final horror, is it not ultimate dishonor that the leader of a great nation, selling his own and others, honour, is bargaining with the devil like a robber with a robber, over the victims

of murder, like a procurer with a pander over a handful of gold.

To-day is black, is terrible, and to-morrow will be still more terrible and still blacker, for upon you, upon the whole of Europe hosts of barbarians are moving; something like the kingdom of Antichrist is coming towards you. Think not that I am speaking vain words to you, that I am scaring you with childish legends: other nations may think so, but not you Poles. I say the same to you as your prophets said — those three fiery figures, traced in the twilight by the finger of God for your salvation — Augustus Cieszkowski, Andrew Towianski and Adam Mickiewicz. In these black days forget ye not your prophets. I say the same as they said: Think not that Poland, like Christ, has risen from the dead and will never die again. Christ is in Poland but Poland is not Christ. The way of the Cross ends not for men or for nations, upon earth: it leads rather from

the torturing cross to resurrection and to a new crucifixion, until the mystery of God be fulfilled not only in each nation but in all humanity.

No, they are not vain words that I and your prophets speak to you: Something like the kingdom of Antichrist is moving upon the whole Christian world. Poland is the last rampart against it; the final battle will be fought here.

Stand, then, all like one man in that battle round your great leader, the chosen of God, Joseph Pilsudski. Unite your hearts like your swords and lift him up upon so high an eminence that all nations may see him as you see him, may come to know him as you know him.

If you do so you will save Poland and — perhaps — you will save the world.
