

POLES WHO ARE NOT POLES

THE fact that Nazi Germany's assault on Poland's independence was the occasion of our declaring war, the bestial treatment of Polish citizens by the occupying power, and a realization of the outrageous partitions of that country in the farther past have stirred the people of Great Britain to a determination that Poland shall be again restored and justice done in her regard. And in particular the enthusiasm (not unmixed with romanticism and a rather highly-coloured rhetoric) with which over years numerous Catholics have been foremost in upholding the Polish cause has brought to that cause an atmosphere of sacredness and *mystique*.

It is the more regrettable, therefore, that the people of Great Britain in general should have in certain respects an inadequate conception of the Polish situation: that they should (as so many of them do) imagine that the inhabitants of Poland are an almost entirely homogeneous people, one in culture, religion and history; that they should believe the difficulty about Eastern Poland to be a straight issue between a united Poland on the one hand and the U.S.S.R. on the other.

To think that all subjects of the Polish State are Poles is something like thinking that all the citizens of the British Isles are English. When a competent writer in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* says that 'The Poles are more uniform in language and customs than any other great nation,' he is speaking of the Poles, and not of the non-Polish minorities within that nation. Fleure sums up the situation in his *Peoples of Europe* thus:

'In Western Poland the peasantry are Polish for the most part, the townfolk are Jews and Germans with a few Poles, and the aristocracy until 1914 was to some extent German. Further east the aristocracy was Polish and largely anti-German, the peasantry Polish, and the intermediate people still largely German and Jew. Further east still the middle class of the towns continued the same general character, but while the aristocracy was Polish, the peasantry was Lithuanian or White Russian or Ruthenian (Ukrainian), according to district.'

To which must be made the addition that much of the Eastern Polish nobility and gentry consists of former non-Polish families that have long ago become completely Polonized.

At the 1931 census the population of Poland was nearly 32 million (it was estimated at 34½ millions in 1939). Of these Polish subjects 31 per cent. (i.e., getting on for a third) were not Poles.¹

¹ Figures are taken from the 'Concise Statistical Year-Book of Poland' for 1937, published by the Chief Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Poland, courteously put at my disposal by the Polish Embassy in London.

Of the whole population, some 8 per cent. were returned as Jews, 2 per cent. Germans and nearly 3 per cent. 'assorted.' With these I am not concerned, for their present fate and state is too uncertain. But what of the 4,441,600 Ukrainians (nearly 14 per cent.), the nearly one million Byelorussians² (3 per cent.) and the 800,000 or so Polesians?

They live almost wholly in Eastern Poland, east of the 'Curzon Line,' the Ukrainians in the south, in Eastern Galicia (Halich) and Volhynia; the indeterminate Polesians in the middle; the Byelorussians in the northern provinces of Nowogrodek, Vilna and Bialystok. Poles of course are also very numerous in these districts, but over the whole area the Ukrainians, Byelorussians, Polesians and a few Russians (about 125,000) exceed the Poles by a narrow margin, 6,214,000 to 5,935,000. In the provinces of Stanislowow, Volhynia and Polesia, Poles are a minority of under 25 per cent.

It would be idle to attempt in an article even to outline the ethnic, political and social histories and relationships of Poles, Ukrainians and Byelorussians. They are all Slavs—but that does not get us far, for so are the Russians. They all speak a Slavonic language, but each a different one (those of Ukrainians and Byelorussians have a common origin with Russian). The point is that they are three different peoples. The Ukrainians and Byelorussians are not Poles who happen to live in part of districts called The Ukraine and White Russia, as some English people live in The Midlands or Wessex. And a Ukrainian or Byelorussian does not become a Pole (otherwise than by citizenship) by being incorporated in the Polish state and called a Ruthenian or White Ruthenian or even a Pole *tout court*; he is not made a Pole by the fact that for over four hundred years his ancestors, not only west of the Pripet Marshes, but far beyond, to Kiev, were under the rule of Polish and Lithuanian sovereigns (any more than the Irish became English between 1170 and 1921, or the Welsh down to the present day).

'White Russians.' And the Russians used to call the Ukrainians³ 'Little Russians.' Am I then saying that the Ukrainians and Byelorussians, so far from being Poles, are really Russians? Heaven

² I use this russified term in preference to the more usual 'White Russians' to distinguish them from the other 'White' Russians, so-called because they opposed the 'Red' revolution; I do not mean to beg the question by using it.

³ This name means 'people of the border,' and is associated with the modern growth of national feeling among them, in spite of the fact that it is a territorial rather than an 'ethnic' name; formerly (and still ecclesiastically) they were known as Ruthenians and their territory as 'Rus.' There are other groups of them in Slovakia (Podkarpatska Rus, where they are often still called Ruthenians or Rusins), the Bukovina and the Americas.

forbid that I should be so rash as to express an opinion on a point about which the process of history, national ambitions and the resulting propaganda have produced so great a state of uncertainty. In any case the dispute seems very near a logomachy. What is, however, certain is that, facing the round million of Byelorussians in Poland, there are in U.S.S.R. $5\frac{1}{2}$ million more Byelorussians forming the neighbouring Byelorussian soviet socialist republic; and also facing the round $4\frac{1}{2}$ million Ukrainians in Poland, there are in U.S.S.R., 30 million more Ukrainians forming the neighbouring Ukrainian soviet socialist republic.

The Ukrainians and Byelorussians are Polish citizens but not Poles: they are 17 per cent. of the population, and in extensive areas of Eastern Poland are a majority of the people⁴. The 'Curzon Line,' extended south, then represents a real division, between what may be called 'integral Poland' to the west and not-so-integral Poland to the east.

However close the relationship, resemblance and historical connection between these two groups of Slavs—Poles on one hand, Ukrainians and Byelorussians on the other—the historical and cultural differences between them are real and deep. These are sometimes expressed in terms of 'Catholic' and 'Orthodox': this is not exact, but the mistake is significant as showing the kind of difference there is. It is true that Poles are Catholics of the Latin rite, and the Byelorussians and Polesians are Orthodox⁵. But of the biggest ethnic minority in Poland, the Ukrainians, 78 per cent., over $3\frac{1}{2}$ millions of them, are also Catholics—but Catholics of the Slav-Byzantine rite⁶.

In other words, the important inner difference between the two main groups of elements in Eastern Poland is cultural and religious, religious not in a 'denominational' sense but in terms of tradition and mental habit. In a rough generalization, the Poles are 'Western,' the others are 'Slav-Byzantine'⁷ Unhappily, historical events have

⁴ Lwow (Lviv, Lemberg, Leopold), the metropolis of eastern Galicia, has long had a majority of Poles and is regarded as a great Polish city; but it is a Ukrainian 'holy place' too, the seat of the revered Archbishop Szeptycki and all the great work he has done for his people over forty-three years.

⁵ There is a small minority of Byelorussians who, for historically explainable reasons, are now Catholics of the Latin rite.

⁶ In fact, the Orthodox in Poland do not greatly exceed Byzantine Catholics in number: they are about three and three-quarter million. The Orthodox Church of Poland was organised and recognised as autokephalous in 1924. Its principal elements numerically are Ukrainian and Byelorussian, but the Russian minority is important. The Moscow patriarchate always refused to recognise the ecclesiastical independence of the Orthodox in Poland.

⁷ The Ukrainians in Russia are of course Orthodox, and Count George Bennigsen has pointed out to me that the big emigrations of Ukrainians to America

It must be faced that the relations between the Polish government and its Slav-Byzantine minorities are unhappy, as the history of their relations since the restoration of Poland in 1918 fully demonstrates. It is not a matter of apportioning praise or blame but of recognizing the fact. In England we are apt to ignore the whole thing or to hear only the Polish case; but in North America, with its three-quarter million ex-Galician-Ukrainians, there are more spokesmen for the other side.

In the *Commonweal* (New York) of October 15, 1943, for example, there was an editorial contribution which accused Poland of imperialist ambitions on the strength of its government's (I quote) 'minor grabs,' e.g., of Vilna and after Munich. The writer also arraigned that government's treatment of its minorities, especially of Byzantine Catholic Ukrainians (quoting a strong article in the French Jesuit *Etudes*) and of Jews. 'If one is to accuse the Russians of religious persecution, the Poles are likewise guilty, even though their guilt may not be quite so heavy'; and the writer concludes that the suffering of minorities in Poland 'constitutes the strongest moral argument against Poland's claims to the territories which Russia wants to absorb.'

More recently (January 21) the same review has printed a long letter from an anonymous Byelorussian Catholic priest. He dots the i's and crosses the t's of the article just referred to, charging the Polish government with detailed attempts to crush out Byelorussian culture and life.

'No Polish prelate of the Roman rite,' he writes, 'raised his voice in protest against these acts of injustice and violence (in respect of Orthodox church buildings). The Catholic Ukrainian metropolitan of Lwow, Andrew Szepticky, lifted up his voice, but he was at once silenced. Poland 'Shield of Christendom'? Don't we yet realize that the godless communists of Russia could not even dream of such success as unhappily Poland has achieved in harming Christ's Church, in inspiring hatred in Russian hearts towards the Catholic Church? Remember that what Catholic Poland does, Rome does in the eyes of the average Russian. . . The White Russians will not go back under the Polish yoke of oppression: they will demand the right of plebiscite to determine their own destiny. But if they are forced to live again under Poland's rule, humanity may expect World War III.' [Italics mine.]

The last two sentences are, of course, the expression of one man's opinion. But we cannot comfort ourselves with assurance that it is an isolated opinion; there is too much evidence that such an atti-

tude is common (not necessarily general) in Eastern Poland. It may seem incredible to us that any Catholics and other Christians, of whatever nationality and culture, if faced with the alternatives of living under an antipathetic Polish government or the government of Soviet Russia, should choose the atheist U.S.S.R. But it is not incredible in those distant lands. As a matter of fact the Byelorussian priest quoted does not explicitly assert that choice: but he does say that 'the White Russian can forgive the Russian communist far more easily than he can the Polish Catholic: the former wanted him 'to live and to live well,' but the latter plotted against his life from the beginning.'

We are far too inclined to regard the Eastern Poland problem as a simple though very difficult issue. It is in fact extremely complex, and even more difficult than we suppose.

And this over-simplification does great disservice to Poland's cause: an atmosphere is being created in which it will be more and more difficult to get justice and right done in her regard. Increasing numbers of ordinary British people are saying, 'Oh, bother Poland!' They are inclined to be 'fed up with Poland.' And one reason for this is that Poland has been represented to them, not only as a 'victim nation' (as indeed she is), but almost as an immaculate, impeccable victim: one that suffers endless and hideous wrongs but is herself almost incapable of other than just and right and Christian behaviour; a nation whose difficulties and tragedies have all been thrust on her from outside: a homogeneous, harmless people under an enlightened government, a state with no ambitions or aspirations that would cause trouble with reasonable people.

This picture of Poland makes many in this country suspicious. We have only to look into our own hearts and back into our own history to realise that it is too good to be true of any nation. Poland's spokesmen would help her cause a lot if they would modify that picture somewhat: if they would, for instance, unambiguously recognise the existence of that 'Byzantine frontier' and what it means, and refuse to skate so delicately over certain events in Eastern Poland between 1919 and 1939. For example: There is a pamphlet on *Poland and Russia*, by Dr. J. Weyers, and, published by the Polish Publications Committee, one on *The Eastern Boundaries of Poland*, by Professor A. Bruce Boswell. Both are excellent and useful so far as they go: but they minimize the discontent and difference and disabilities of the Slav-Byzantine minorities, and dismiss violent feelings and occurrences with such smooth phrases as 'Polish policy towards the national minorities was not free from faults' and 'relations between Ukrainian leaders and Poles have not always been good.' Dr.

Weyers says that 'Neither the White Ruthenians nor Ukrainians regard themselves as Russians and they resent being considered as such,' without adding that many of them resent even more that they should be regarded as Poles. Minority propaganda, especially Ukrainian, has over-stated and exaggerated its case too—which helps to show how strong the differences and feelings are.

If there were a little more objectivity and frankness we should not so often hear the suspicious comment, 'You do protest too much'; outsiders would not be so readily aggravated to wish for Poland and Russia 'a plague on both your houses'; for they would recognize that Poland's spokesmen at least were preferring candour to propaganda, and would be better informed about the difficulties with which her people and their leaders have to contend⁹.

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THE LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT OF HETMAN ZOLKIEWSKI.

[Stanislaus Zolkiewski, Chancellor of Poland, was born in 1547 and died fighting as a hero against the Turks in the fated battle of Cecora, on October 6th, 1620. He won great distinction as a classical scholar in his youth, but it is as a loyal and courageous general that he is known. For in spite of Sigismund III's unfriendly distrust he served his King faithfully to the end. He advised the King against war with Muscovy, but obeyed when ordered to lead the army; and, in spite of constant embarrassment from the Sovereign's antagonism, won the campaign at Kluszyn only to have his terms repudiated by Sigismund. His life was filled with disappointments of this sort, but his staunch faith preserved him from disloyalty or even bitterness, as may be seen in this Testament. He was an outstanding politician, a great strategist and victorious general; he was a patriot, who may also one day rank as a saint. He received the Grand Hetman's staff in 1613, and thenceforward was engaged in fighting the infidel Turk. In so many bloody campaigns he often contemplated his own death on the field of battle. So it is not surpris-

⁹ Since this article was written in April, certain happenings and alleged happenings among Polish citizens in Great Britain has done something to inform the public of some of these difficulties, but not in a satisfactory and objective way.