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Polish Ministry of Information, Stratton House, Stratton St., W. 1.

October 13, 1944.

This is to inform you that the following article appeared in the October 12, 1944 issue of THE WEEKLY REVIEW:

THE TRAGEDY OF WARSAW

At 10 p. m. on the 2nd of October the Home Army in Warsaw surrendered. The climax of one of the noblest war tragedies ever enacted was reached, when the garrison that had sustained the full brunt of a highly trained mechanized army for nine weeks found itself without ammunition, without food, and without medical supplies in a burning city whose cellars were filled with its wounded and the streets with its dead.

Never before in the history of war has there been known so prolonged and so stubborn a resistance against such tremendous odds. For there existed no stronghold to strengthen the defence; no weapons save a few small arms and what could be wrested from the enemy to withstand the devastating attack from heavy guns, air bombing, and incendiarism; no stores of food or of medical supplies. No nation, save one imbued with a patriotism, courage, and endurance that defied suffering and death, could have risen to such heights of self-sacrifice. None could have paid a higher price for its devotion to the cause of freedom.

There is a grandeur in high tragedy that has never failed to appeal to the European mind. It was the ancient Greeks who first appreciated it, picturing it as the outcome of an unequal struggle of human beings with an inexorable Fate. The Christian Faith amplified and sublimated it in the tragedy of the Cross. Since then--since, that is to say, selfless suffering for truth has been made the gateway to the immortal heritage of man--human tragedy has been associated in Western minds with a glory surpassing the limits of humanity. It has become a symbol and a pledge of the heights to which ordinary men and women can rise.

The Second Battle of Warsaw, as it has been called, fulfils this high conception of tragedy. The Capital of a Christian nation has twice withstood the hordes of barbarism within five years. Twice the odds have been too great and it has been devastated. These two failures have the quality of the greatest victories. Its defenders have been annihilated, but the spirit of freedom--of the cause of Europe--endures. Warsaw has shown to the world that that spirit is unconquerable, and has thereby given hope to all oppressed peoples. She has given a shining example of the lesson taught by all true tragedy, that success and failure are in the deepest sense interchangeable terms--or rather that success is only reached through the doorway of failure.

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(Page 2 continued, WEEKLY REVIEW) October 13, 1944.

Nor is the story of Warsaw lacking in the accidentals of tragedy. We may see in it elements of the irony that characterized the Greek drama, when we look back upon the twenty years between the wars during which everything seemed to be moving to a long span of prosperity and freedom after the oppression of the past. Fate had been overcome--or misread; signs of the coming storm were hidden from the characters of the play. Nor was the first breaking of the tempest--furious and devastating as it was--a full measure of what was to come. With an extraordinary resilience and courage the Poles continued the struggle everywhere, and at last once again Fate seemed on the point of being cheated. Then in the middle of renewed hope and increasing successes the second blow fell. It was met with an even greater display of devotion and courage, but it could not be averted: Warsaw was burnt to the ground and its inhabitants are either dead or in bondage.

That is where Aeschylus would have ended. Fate, as always and against all seeming, had triumphed once again.

But we who are heirs to the Christian tradition not only see other marks of tragedy which have no expression in the Greek genius, but we also look forward, past the climax at which the Greeks would have stopped, and see in this heartrending failure, not the triumph but the defeat of Fate. For Fate does not possess in our eyes the omnipotence attributed to it by the Greeks. There is something beyond it making it subservient to a faith that nothing can conquer. The Greek tragedians submitted their victims to the lash of anger and misrepresentation from their friends, but it was the anger of those ignorant of the whole truth. It is the Christian tradition that has seen in cowardly insults and gross calumny a further element in the tragedy--and the enlightenment--of the world.

Warsaw and the Polish nation have suffered these insults and endured this calumny over and above the agony of failure and death in battle. The "Polish National Committee of Liberation" has belied every word of its high-sounding name in its conduct towards Poland in general and Warsaw in particular. It has done its best to blacken the courage of the Home Army by pretending that its attack upon the German army was a political move against the Soviet. It has slandered General Bor and pronounced him a criminal. It has, finally, denounced the Home Army--to whom it refused assistance--for ceasing to fight, when no food or ammunition remained. And it has done all this while itself taking no part in

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(Page 3 continued, WEEKLY REVIEW) October 13, 1944.

the fight against the enemy, and while attacking without cessation the legitimate Government of what it calls its own country.

What must those Polish troops and airmen be thinking who, during the nine weeks' agony of Warsaw, have been mentioned on every front where they are fighting for their gallantry and success, in arms? What must those of them be feeling whose homes are in Warsaw? What is it that inspires them still to continue the struggle?

Their inspiration is the inspiration of high Christian tragedy, and that alone. Their homes, their Faith, their nation, their European tradition, these are the things they have seen battered and desecrated throughout history. It is the tragedy of Poland.

But Fate will never conquer their indomitable spirit.

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