

The Polish Review



HOLLAND FIGHT
NEW YORK, N.Y.

WITOLD GORZON

Polish National Hymn of Prayer

Ⓞ Lord, Thou hast to Poland lent Thy might,
And with a Father's strong, protecting hand
Hast given fame and all its glory bright,
And through long ages saved our fatherland.
We chant at Thy altars our humble strain,
O Lord, make the land of our love free again!

Thou, Holy Lord! Thy wond'rous might we praise,
Oh may it freedom's blissful sun restore,
On Polish soil the tower of peace upraise
Which foes shall tremble and recoil before!
We chant at Thy altars our humble strain,
O Lord, make the land of our love free again!

O Lord! Who rules o'er all the wide world hath,
At Thy command we raised from dust may be;
If in the future we deserve Thy wrath
Turn us to dust—but let that dust be free!
We chant at Thy altars our humble strain,
O Lord, make the land of our love free again!



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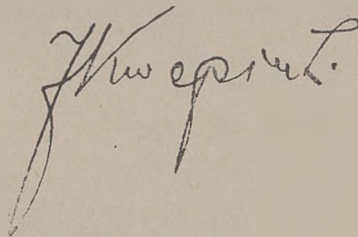
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IN this, perhaps the most tragic Christmas in the history of the Polish nation, I wish that the ties of the unbreakable friendship between the peoples of the United States of America and Poland be the herald of the early triumph of freedom and justice for the martyred land of my fathers.



JAN KWAPINSKI, Vice-Premier and Minister of Commerce, Industry and Shipping of the Republic of Poland; Head of the Polish Delegation to the UNRRA Conference in Atlantic City, New Jersey.

New York City, December, 1943.



Christmas Message of the Polish Underground

This year tortured Poland is keeping another Christmas of Peace on Earth and Good Will to All Men! What, on this occasion, are the thoughts and feelings of a people who for more than four years have suffered every indignity diseased German brains could devise? Some idea of their state of mind may be gleaned from "The last WIGILIA in Slavery" that appeared in the Christmas issue of the Polish underground publication ZYWIA last year. Contrary to Polish hopes, the war did not end in 1943. Everything in the following message is doubly true this Christmas, which from the look of things, may well be the last Christmas under the heel of German invaders!

THE fourth year of war, the fourth 'Wigilia' in captivity. In the autumn of 1939, when we spoke of sharing the wafer on the approaching Christmas Eve of Love and Reconciliation, we believed that all who had been forced to leave us would again sit at our tables.

"Three 'Wigilias' have passed since then and at our tables, covered with straw and white tablecloths, are those whom our weeping hearts remember across time and space even on the fourth 'Wigilia.' Their places stand empty. And there are other empty places. A father executed at Oswiecim, a brother hanged on the gallows, a sister in prison, at forced labor or worse in the Reich . . . Many places at many 'Wigilia' tables are empty. Time has revolved above us and its wheels have crushed many victims.

"Our fourth 'Wigilia' in slavery is at hand. We shall sit down to it sad but unbroken, serious but undespairing.

"Our personal grief, our personal loss will give way to the conviction that a New Life is being born in pain, that this birth will have to be bought with suffering; that the burden of many personal misfortunes has liberated the forces of Justice, which with fiery hands has already seized the Germanic beast by the throat and is crushing it to the ground.

"The fourth 'Wigilia' will find us imbued with the light not of faith, but of deep conviction that this is the last 'Wigilia' in slavery . . . When we sing 'Christ is born,' we shall add this living truth: 'Poland is born.'

"Out of our pain, out of our blood, out of our superhuman measure of misery, a new Republic is rising.

"Uniting with her in spirit, let us think of all who serve Poland as we do, giving her their work, hardship, blood and sacrifice. Let us think of the great areas of the world on which Poles are dispersed. Let us think of Polish children and their mothers still in the cold wastes of Siberia, those whom evacuating commissions have not yet reached—of Polish children wandering alone without parents, or in various international institutions, of women coming from the furthest reaches of Russia to the Polish army, of Polish fliers in the sky seeking the road to their family home, of battling soldiers and of soldiers who will never return . . . Let us think of that great army of youth working in the Reich, enslaved by German hangmen, of the thousands of mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters in concentration camps, in prisons here in Poland—of the wanderers, the deportees, the homeless, the thousands of men and women—soldiers of underground Poland, doomed to a lonely, roving life, hunted by the enemy, without pause or respite. They are all celebrating the 'Wigilia' united to us and like us longing for the breath of Freedom,—Freedom that will dawn for them all in the blue brightness of tomorrow.

"Let us remember—today we still are alone with the enemy, but the just hand of fate has already begun to move. A free tomorrow will be ours."

POLAND'S MORAL VICTORY!

by F. C. ANSTRUTHER*

POLISH resistance inside Poland is perhaps Poland's most valuable contribution to the struggle. This resistance has never for a moment ceased during the four and a half long years of German tyranny, oppression and terror. The Germans have done all they can to persuade the Polish people to collaborate and cooperate with them. Promises and threats have been in vain. A thorough search was made to find a Pole who would assume the status of a puppet ruler under German control. People of all spheres were approached, professors, workers, officials. They all refused. Not one Pole has been found who would collaborate with the Germans. Not one. They are too proud to be persuaded by bribes, too courageous to be intimidated by threats. Theirs is a great moral victory over the Germans.

... Nothing seems to change the attitude of the Poles. Not the appalling number of executions, not the tortures of the concentration camp; certainly not the attractions offered by the Germans. The Poles continue to sabotage, to wreck trains full of ammunition going up to the Russian front, to "go slow" in the factories. Trains going up to the Russian front have to be very strongly guarded and the line carefully watched, if the train is to arrive intact. Polish railway officials are hanged and left hanging along the line. But last November alone, 640 trains were wrecked in Poland as they passed through on their way to Russia. During the whole of 1942, 3,000 locomotives and 9,500 wagons with their loads were destroyed. Fifty bridges were blown up. The trains are obliged to travel at the reduced speed of 7 to 8 miles per hour, in spite of the fact that the Germans post guards along the line for stretches of 60 miles or more. This takes place all over Poland and no trains travel at night.

During last year, 200 important battles were fought between German punitive troops and bands of Polish guerrillas.

On May 3rd, 1943, the chief of the Gestapo in Poland, Kruger, was shot in the street, in Krakow. Kruger was second only to Governor-General Frank, who is the German head of the General-Gouvernement. Kruger is not the only member of the Gestapo who has paid for his crimes recently. Despite intensified repressive measures, the Poles have shot many officials of the Gestapo in Warsaw, Krakow and other towns. It was announced at the beginning of June that 54 Gestapo officials had lately been condemned by underground courts and shot.

* From "Poland's Part in the War" by F. C. Anstruther, The Polish Library, Glasgow, 1943.

Between February 1st and 12th, the Poles engaged superior German forces in battle. They had been seizing Poles from the district of Lublin with the intention of deporting them to the Reich, and the Poles defended themselves. They were helped by Polish underground organizations who were armed. The battle lasted twelve days, and the Germans brought up tanks, aircraft and field guns in addition to their machine-guns. About 50 Germans were killed and several wounded. They took revenge on the Poles by murdering hundreds and burning villages.

German soldiers and Gestapo go in fear of their lives. In the country they have to go about in large groups; they dare not go out alone. Many wounded from the Russian front were sent to Poland where they were housed in emergency hospitals. But so many of them died, that Polish chemists were arrested and their dispensaries examined.

Sabotage in the war factories is on a large scale, especially in those producing U-boat engines and parts, aircraft and ammunition. Machinery is wrecked, raw materials are spoiled, means of transport impeded and the work accomplished by Polish workmen reduced to a minimum. Some of the factories only produce 20 per cent of the normal quota owing to this.

A method of sabotage frequently carried out is the burning of crops. Rather than let the Germans have the food which they requisition, the Polish peasants burn it, though the Germans burn down their villages as reprisal, even locking the people in their houses before they set fire to them. Supplies of corn and food

coming from the Ukraine are mysteriously poisoned.

The Germans are forced to keep a large number of troops in Poland. There are about twelve divisions of regulars not including the Gestapo. Twelve divisions of troops are immobilized in Poland which might be used in Italy or on the Russian front, which the Germans would certainly rather employ elsewhere than in Poland.

When Germany attacked Russia, she tried all she could do to persuade Poland to join with her. Hoping that the fact that Soviet troops had marched into Poland would influence the Poles in favor of Germany, they appealed for volunteers for the German army. They also tried to persuade the Polish prisoners in German camps to join the German forces. But this had no effect at all.

The Germans appealed to the Poles to fight against Communism, saying that they had always been the defenders of Christianity and Western civilization. The Poles replied that they were the defenders of Christianity and Western civiliza-



EXECUTION IN WAWER—CHRISTMAS 1939

On Christmas, 1939—three months after the occupation of Poland—two German soldiers were killed during a quarrel in a small restaurant in Wawer, near Warsaw. As a reprisal, more than one hundred men from Wawer as well as the passengers on a train that happened to pull in at the station, were massacred.

The following poem, signed "Thomas" and published in Warsaw in an "UNDERGROUND ANTHOLOGY OF CONTEMPORARY POETRY," tells the story of a Wawer resident who miraculously came back from the dead to indict German bestiality.

THEY broke down the front door and roused me from sound slumber.
Greeting me with hard blows they dragged me from my dwelling.
To the clearing I trudged in a crowd of great number,
And though I wondered why, there was no way of telling.

They put a fence around us, searchlights seared our vision,
Desolate evergreens cast shadows of strange beauty,

In the nearby inn's doorway, to German derision,
Hung its erstwhile owner, as if asleep on duty.

Of us all, the dead man seemed to be the most living.
Clad in trousers and shirt, I stood in freezing weather
And felt the earth beneath me shiver with misgiving.
I heard a train whistle and pulled myself together.

Then a shot and mad running, wild cursing and wailing:
German soldiers are leading additional prizes
From the halted Warsaw train to the barbed wire paling.
A helpless, muffled "Father!" from the coppice rises.

A Volksdeutsche explained our sudden convocation:
"Yonder in the tavern, where now its owner dangles,
Two policemen were killed in bitter altercation.
One hundred Poles must die to discourage such wrangles.

"We couldn't meet our quota in Wawer population
So gave the country cause for most sober conjecture
By throwing in commuters from the Warsaw station."
The German with these words concluded his brief lecture.

I heard him with despair and yet with reassurance:
Must be bad with the Huns, if they resort to terror.
Huddled close in the cold, we waited with endurance



For death that was preceded by "trial without error."

The court room farce went on as could have been predicted.

They kicked us to our knees before the prosecution,

Quickly each one of us was legally convicted
And knew our fate would be an instant execution.

In ten minutes, ten men were stood against the railing.

My neighbor, so maltreated at the judicial inquest,

That his face was raw pulp and his eyesight was failing,

In silence pressed my hand to convey his fear's conquest.

The order to "About face" fell and passed unheeded.

They made us face the wall through furious butt-ending.

Then I recalled the tale of a man who succeeded

In escaping death from bullets by well-timed bending.

As I stooped, the machine gun barked without compassion.
I fell. Others fell on me. Now the Huns, grown bolder,
Fired upon the fallen in approved German fashion.
I felt excruciating pain in my left shoulder.

I saw a young "non-com" shoot every Polish hero
Through the head. And I vowed that e'er I'd join the sainted,
I'd choke this vicious imitation of a Nero.
But when I tried to raise my wounded arm, I fainted.

'Neath the human mountain that warmed me with discomfort
My mind began to clear and grasp the situation.
I touched my aching head and found to my great comfort
The bullet that had grazed it caused no complication.

Despite the bitter frost, I did not feel the coldness.
By now, I'd grown accustomed to my pain and bleeding.
Hope was born in my breast with astonishing boldness
And rose to the Redeemer in submissive pleading.

I fainted and revived—God alone knows how often.
At long last I was safe. 'Twas His great contribution
To prove the reappearance from the very coffin,
Of witnesses of crimes that cry for retribution!

—Rendered into English by HALINA CHYBOWSKA.

tion and that they would most certainly not fight for the Germans, for that very reason. A German paper published an article which stated that the only two European peoples who were not fighting against the Russians were the Poles and the British. The article added that both these peoples were hopeless.

Something must be said about Poland's underground press. It is one of the chief means by which the spirit of resistance is maintained. There are about a hundred of these publications: most of them are weeklies, though some are monthly issues devoted mostly to technical and professional matters, economic and agricultural problems and education. Bulletins take the place of daily papers and give news which has been received by wireless, chiefly the B.B.C.

The spirit of the papers is shown by their names, "Poland Lives," "The Struggle Goes On," "Tomorrow," etc. Production is very difficult; some of the papers are printed, some are run off on duplicators. Paper is very scarce and, above all, secrecy must be maintained. The papers are financed entirely by voluntary contributions from readers; some of these contributions even consist of loaves of bread and pieces of sausage for the dinners of those who are working on the paper. Some of the publications run into several thousands of copies and enjoy a large circulation, since they are passed from hand to hand. Distribution, a most dangerous task, is carried out mostly by women, young people and children.

Sometimes the printing press is discovered and there are more victims for the firing-squad. Distributors are tortured to make them reveal the headquarters of the paper. Very often, they do not know, so well is the secret kept.

Perhaps one of the most significant pointers to Polish morale is the fact that the secret press devotes most of its space to problems of the future. The present is considered to be only a temporary tragedy and resistance is a job to be done, not to be written about. Reports on the activities of other underground fronts in Europe are also given, thus keeping the Poles informed of the activities of their fellow-workers in this great struggle against the Germans.

Leaflets, with unpleasant personal facts about German leaders and local officials, are distributed to the German troops and population, together with warnings that all is not going well for Germany. This undermines morale.

... On May 3rd, 1943, Poland's National Day, the loudspeakers on the streets of Warsaw were heard to play a Polish patriotic hymn "Rota," then a stirring address was given, urging the Poles to continue to fight against the Germans, and telling them that victory was coming. After this, Poland's National Anthem was played. This was uninterrupted, Polish patriots having wired up the loudspeakers to a secret place from which they broadcast. The effect on the population was tremendous. The people, who had not

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CHRISTMAS IN BLOOD AND TEARS



CH R I S T M A S
Eve is a family holiday for all Poles. This is the only day of the year when the whole family gathers for the traditional "Wigilia" supper and breaks unleavened bread, or "oplatek," when the first star appears in the sky. The war has upset this tradition. Polish fighting forces at sea, on land, in the air, in prison camps can rejoin their families, in Poland or abroad, in spirit only. Here are three pictures of Christmas Eve, December, 1942, as spent on a Polish destroyer, in a German prison camp and at a Night Fighter Station somewhere in England.

Sculpture in wood — by Jan Szczepkowski.

destroyer, in a German prison camp and at a Night Fighter Station somewhere in England.

* * *

CHRISTMAS EVE AT SEA

A storm broke at nightfall and for a time our minds were taken off the approaching holiday. Everybody was tired after the watch. We hung up our clothes to dry and stretched out under blankets. On Christmas Eve the storm let up, visibility improved, the wind diminished. At eight o'clock, as the first watch went on deck, the sun rose. A short while after the plane escort was zooming above us.

"We want to photograph you," the Sunderland winked.
 "Thank you, but we haven't shaved for three days."
 "That's O. K.; we can touch it up," the plane reflector signalled back.

Our mood improved as the barometer rose. But our faces grew long again when the plane left us with a "Merry Christmas."

We decided to hold the traditional Christmas Eve supper, or "Wigilia" when we reached port. Today the Commander spoke to us over the ship's loudspeaker at 6 p.m.

"Gentlemen," the Commander started, "for us Poles Christmas and in particular 'Wigilia' is a family holiday, a day of the hearth. To us it brings back the warmth shining from the eyes of our near and dear ones; with whom we share the unleavened Christmas wafer, the 'oplatek.' Its atmosphere is peculiar to our homes. Today service conditions do not permit us to sit down together to the traditional 'Wigilia.' Yet our thoughts turn to Poland, to our homes. There is not one home, not one family in Poland today that could count all of its members in its group. We Poles are scattered over all lands and on all seas. Vacant are the places we used to occupy at home. They are vacant for the fourth time in this war. Some will never be filled again. Many tears will be shed as mother, wife or sister turns her eyes to the place that belongs to Janek or Adam. The seat that is empty today. They do not lose hope and faith. His place is set, they are waiting for him . . ."

"One thing should make us happy. It is a source of hope and of manly pride. It is that we are on the sea, on a Polish ship sailing under the Polish flag. That in doing our duty we help toward the return of the time when those



Wladyslaw Raczkiewicz, President of Poland, sharing the Christmas wafer with Polish fliers.

vacant places at our family tables will again be occupied. God grant it in the nearest future. That is my wish to you all on this Christmas Eve."

We broke the "oplatek" and embraced each other without words. The ship's doctor did not come down to the mess. The commander found him standing at the rail looking at the rich purple and violet that stained the sky and waters as the sun set.

"Doctor, the 'oplatek.'
 "Thank you, Captain, thank you."

The engineer walked up after a moment, and the commander discreetly walked away.

"Adam get hold of yourself," the engineer said.
 "Cynic," sobbed the doctor.

The first star appeared. The sea was calm now, the convoy as usual at night, was smoking. In the distance we heard the first depth charges.

* * *

CHRISTMAS EVE IN STALAG * * * B

"What a pity these D . . . Germans should have such perfect weather for Christmas," Kriegsgefangener Bartczak exclaimed, as he looked out into the descending darkness.

The cold spell has broken and the wind that prevented sleep last night, left a beautiful white pall under which even the Stalag looked good.

"Well, they're a lot of Poles under this German sky. God couldn't deny us a fair Christmas. Gosh, we should be thankful that we can at least look on a brighter world through the barbed wire," Skora objected.

He had a special interest in the holiday because he had brought a fir tree from the forest in which he worked. He had become quite important and was doing his best to make

our prison Christmas pleasant. He pasted paper toys, carved them out of wood and bartered for some candles with the barrack "Gefreiter." From early morning he would not let anybody walk on the newly scrubbed floor. He also got our prison superintendent to postpone supper an hour until the first star appeared in the sky. Our "Wigilia" menu was plain everyday potato soup.

Sergeant Okroja, who to aggravate the Germans, never removed his Cross of Valor, came out in front of the barrack to wait for the first star. The red sunset still glowed on the snowy slopes which today, more than ever, reminded him of his home town, Wilno. He jumped at Bartczak and Skora for no reason at all, and pulled his moustache, but could not chase away the insistent memories. The memories of that last "Wigilia" in 1938 in the Antokol barracks. It seemed that it was only yesterday.

"If only our pilots," said Skora, "would drop a bomb or two in the vicinity, I would not regret this "Wigilia" in the Stalag. We haven't heard their work for about a week now."

"So now you want bombs for Christmas Eve, another one of your fantastic notions," the Chief growled. But he couldn't keep from looking up at the horizon. He was no longer searching for stars but for planes.

The evening was quiet. The first stars of another "Wigilia" in prison punctured the sky.

* * *

The prisoners stood between the bunks around the square room. Skora put out the lights, only the miniature candles on the Christmas tree glowed in the darkness. They stood shoulder to shoulder, clean shaven, physically unbroken by the years spent in prison.



Christmas Eve with refugee orphans in a Polish Soldiers' Canteen.

Sergeant Okroja broke pieces of the black prison bread instead of the traditional "oplatek." At first the words stuck in his throat. He could not speak, finally he began in a soft, strange voice.

"God did not grant that we spend this Christmas at home in Poland, nor as soldiers in the fields. Again we break this prison "oplatek" but I do not lose hope that it is for the last time in our lives. I wish you all to spend your next "Wigilia" in free Poland. What suffering is destined for us we shall bear without complaint. That we cannot help. We shall not forget that we are soldiers. We shall return to Poland."

They broke the bread in silence. One sob shook the group.

* * *

CHRISTMAS EVE AT AN AIR BASE

The atmosphere was tense at the Night Fighter Station, somewhere in England. Here it was late afternoon and we still did not know whether we would fly on operation tonight. Could it be that this Christmas Eve we would be forced to stay on the ground? Nothing could be less desirable for us Poles. We had a score to settle with the Huns.

All the signs on the field indicated that something was in the offing. The mechanics were crawling all over the ships, giving them a final polish, tanks were filled with gas and, the surest sign of all, bombs were being loaded.

All of us stuck to the dispersal, watching the clock hands. It would soon be getting dark.

Walek crushed his cigarette, stamped up and down the room impatiently. He walked up to the window, stuffed his fists into his pockets and stood motionless for a long while. Suddenly he veered around, looked at the gang and said: "Well, it's 'Wigilia,' boys, the stars will soon be out. Wonder what they're doing over in Poland?"

He grew silent, a gloom spread over the whole crew. We had been so wrapped up in the prospects of the night operation that we had not thought much about those we left in Poland.

This sad moment was broken by the Intelligence Officer.

"Gentlemen, the following are to get ready . . ." and as he read the names some of the faces brightened. He then gave the code and the formation as well as the direction. It would be Germany again.

"Better luck next time," the Intelligence Officer waved to those who were not going.

A few minutes later the gong for scramble sounded. We all rushed out into the half light of the winter night.

"Good luck!"
 The motors ripped through the silence, shouts were heard now and then: "Good luck!" "O! K!" "Cheerio!" "Be good!" "Don't forget to come back!" "Get one for me!"

The crack and sputter of the motors slid into a smooth hum. They were off.

We who were left behind strained our eyes and ears until they disappeared.

"Look! The star of 'Wigilia!'" someone pointed. We stood in silence and looked at the star. Each one of us sent up an unuttered prayer.

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POLISH CHRISTMAS TIME FESTIVALS IN ART

by DR. IRENA PIOTROWSKA

occurrences, that none of the old painters seemed to have found them worth recording. It was the birth of Polish genre painting, at the turn of the 18th century, that drew the attention of Polish painters to Polish folk festivals. Up to the middle of the last century, however, these representations are extremely scarce, but rapidly increase in number, and quality, until the outbreak of the present war.

Polish Christmas festivals begin with the traditional *wilia*, or supper, on Christmas Eve. This supper is eaten all over Poland, many traditional dishes being served. On the table under the linen table cloth, hay or straw is scattered. This, according to the belief of the faithful, is done to commemorate the birth of the Child Christ in a manger. Scientists tell us, however, that this custom is an old agrarian winter ceremony dating from prehistoric times. Before Christmas Eve supper begins, the head of the family breaks a consecrated wafer of unleavened wheat flour, called *oplatek*, with each member of the household and his guests, to show that he is ready to share with

them, if need be, even the last piece of bread. Such consecrated wafers are sent in letters to absent relatives or friends, and have always, in the past as at present, been sent to political prisoners or prisoners of war, whenever possible . . .

The most beautiful and expressive Polish Christmas Eve supper was painted by Jacek Malczewski in 1892. It is called *The Christmas Supper of the Polish Exiles in Siberia* and is owned by the National Museum in Cracow. On the table cloth, spread over straw, hard bread and tea await the exiles. The leader of them solemnly unpacks a letter with the consecrated wafers. Deep silence prevails . . . in his thoughts everybody is back home with his dear ones. The light of a candle, shining through the hand of one of the exiles, struggles with the dimness of the night.

While the breaking of the consecrated wafer is at least several centuries old, the Christmas tree is comparatively recent. It was introduced into Poland from the West, early in the 19th century and was quickly adopted in towns.



Old Polish "Turon" Rites—by Zofia Stryjenska.

Among the peasants it has never become popular. Also in the towns new and typically Polish Christmas ornaments and toys have been developed during the last thirty years, fashioned from colored paper, straw, and blown eggshells, inspired by peasant art motifs.

After Christmas supper is over, and the gifts are distributed, the older members of the family prepare for the midnight "Shepherds' Mass," the *pasterka*, thus called because the shepherds were the first to greet the new-born Christ. Through town streets and country roads, covered deep in snow, thousands of people walk or ride in sleighs to the churches, through the black night, in the country illumined solely by lights falling from the windows of the cottages, by stars and the whiteness of the snow. Such picturesque scenes have been represented over and over again by many 19th century Polish genre painters, as for instance, Alfred Wierusz-Kowalski (1849-1915).

Christmas Day itself is devoted chiefly to prayers and family life. It is on the following day that the gay festivities start. The most ancient of these is the so-called *Turon*. It is celebrated on any day following Christmas, in certain localities on New Year's Day, sometimes even later, long after the Christmas Time period has passed. Villagers, dressed as animals, go from home to home singing carols and merrymaking, and are treated in return with food and drink. A bear, a goat and a wolf are among them. But the most important of the animals is the *turon*, a fantastic beast with a large wooden head which has enormous jaws that open and close. The *Turon* was a pagan festival held in prehistoric times around the New Year, in honor of the old Slavonic god Radegast, the God of horses, of winter, of courage, of power, and of speed. This pagan ceremony has been artistically visualized by the greatest woman artist of resurrected Poland, Zofia Stryjenska, in one of her paintings representing old Polish rites.

But the *Turon*, observed as a Christmas festivity by Polish peasants was depicted almost a hundred years earlier, by the illustrator K. W. Kielisinski (1810-49), who in 1837 executed

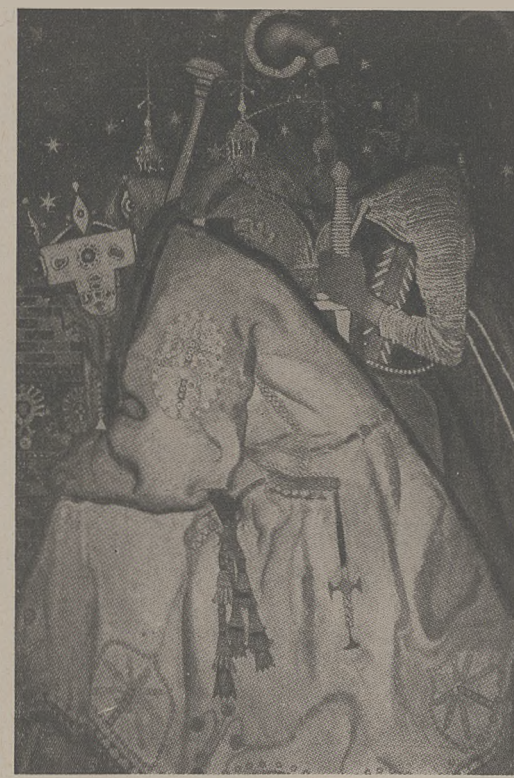
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Peasant Christmas "Turon"—by Bogna Krasnodebska.



Christmas Eve Supper of Polish Exiles in Siberia—by Jacek Malczewski, 1892.



Adoration of the Magi—ptych by Kazimierz Sichulski.

IN Poland, Christmas Time covers the entire period from Christmas Eve, which begins with the appearance of the first star on December 24, to the Three Kings' Day, or Epiphany, on January 6. Many colorful old customs have been kept up for centuries during this two-week period in Poland. Some of them date back to the middle ages, some are pre-Christian. Although many of these traditional holiday observances are followed by all classes, rich and poor alike, the most ancient are those faithfully preserved by the peasants who, living closer to earth and nature, better understand the symbolism of the ancient rites. When after the acceptance of Christianity by Poland, many new religious feasts and rites were introduced by the monastic orders, the older customs were not abandoned entirely but skilfully blended with Christian festivals into very picturesque ceremonies, just as the present Christian festivities in Mexico are a mingling of old Indian rites and those of the Church. Christmas Time customs in Poland are very numerous and may vary from village to village, but the principal are observed throughout the length and breadth of the land. They have in many ways influenced the character of Polish painting, sculpture, and even that of Polish stage decoration. It is these customs and influences that I shall attempt to describe.

While the picturesqueness and local character of Polish Christmas festivals have added local color to many an old Polish religious painting and sculpture, despite strong Western influences, the Christmas customs themselves, as interesting and typical Polish ceremonies, were not recorded by artists until the beginning of the 19th century. The people of Poland had become so accustomed to them, as every year



The Carolers—faience by W. Rudzinska-Wypychowa.

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 a number of drawings representing Polish peasant Christmas festivities of his days. If not from a purely artistic point of view, his drawings are of great value as ethnographic documents. During the second half of the last century the prolific illustrator E. Andriolli (1837-93) also made a series of old Christmas customs printed as wood engravings in magazines. Among those the most outstanding one is the *Turon*, full of unbounded humor and captivating grotesqueness. He was the first artist who caught the true spirit of this ancient masquerade, in ancient days so often and so unsuccessfully condemned by the Church.

until it became inseparably incorporated into other Polish Christmas festivities. This same spirit of the grotesque pervades two outstanding works of modern artists of Independent Poland, the painting by Teresa Roszkowska, reproduced in the last Christmas issue of *The Polish Review*, and the woodcut by Bogna Krasnodebska, reproduced herewith.

In these last two pictures, along with the *turon*, and the other beasts, carolers are seen carrying a large, lighted star. It adds a Christian atmosphere to the celebration, as it symbolizes the star that led the three Wise Men from the East to the Manger in Bethlehem.

During Christmas time small peasant boys often wander independently from house to house carrying stars and sing carols. They fashion the star of cardboard and colored paper, and fasten it to a long stick so that it revolves like a pin-wheel. It is lighted inside. Among the many works of art representing carolers with a star, the most striking is perhaps the expressive wooden sculpture by the young Polish



"Jaselka", Tyniec. 18th cent. National Museum in Cracow.



Polish Christmas Puppet-Show exhibited at the Paris Exposition in 1925. Executed by the students of the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts.

artist Karol Tchorek, exhibited at the New York World's Fair in 1939.

Along with the star, these small peasant boys carry a miniature box-theater made of colored paper, called *szopka*. In these miniature puppet-shows, the Holy Family and numerous other figures are shown around the manger.

In contrast to the *turon*, the custom of going from house to house with a small box-theater is of purely Christian origin. Its sources must be traced to the practice of arranging of the Bethlehem Stable—in Polish called *jaselka*—in churches during Christmas Time, and which came to Poland from Italy not later than in the 13th century. There exists a description of such a Bethlehem Stable, set up in Wawel Cathedral at that time. By the manger with the Infant, figures of the Mother of God and of St. Joseph, sculptured in wood by guild artists, were placed. Around them a multitude of other figures adoring Christ were artistically distributed. The figures were painted and dressed in contemporary attire, often very precious, to give the whole a life-like appearance. Aside from the Holy Family, all figures were movable. The shepherds were mounted on small wheels, and could be moved around; the Three Kings knelt down by means of springs, the angels moved their wings, Herod's head came off, Death swayed his scythe, and the Devil his pitchfork. As the centuries passed, more and more figures were added, representing characteristic types of the population, the nobility, the city people and the peasants. How such *Jaselka* looked in the 18th century is shown by one in the possession of the National Museum in Cracow which came from the Abbey of Tyniec, near Cracow. Along with the Three Magi adoring the Infant we see two noblemen in their picturesque costumes. The National Museum of Cracow also owns a number of figures which formed part of the Bethlehem Stable in St. An-

(Please turn to page 14)

THE POLISH "WIGILIA" IN HAPPIER DAYS

by BETTY CONSIDINE

HOME is the right place for one to be at Christmas time. But when in 1938 I found myself 3,000 miles away from home, in Switzerland—I discovered the best Christmas abroad I could ever imagine: Christmas in Poland.

I had been lucky enough to sprain my ankle and that frustrated all my Swiss skiing plans for Christmas. I was quite upset about it, but my Polish roommate, Marta, who had been looking for an excuse to go home for Christmas, welcomed my sprained ankle enthusiastically.

"O, you poor thing," she said. "How wonderful! Now we can go home for Christmas. You must come with me."

So I packed up whatever there was to pack and, not without misgiving, took a train for Poland.

Polish Christmas is seen at its best in the country, where one has to go miles to a small wooden church to hear Midnight Mass, to sing Christmas carols centuries old and to watch people waving like wheat, kneeling on the bare floor, confessing loudly for their "most grievous faults" and rejoicing that *Dzisiaj w Bethlehem radosna nowina*—"Good tidings of great joy have come to us from Bethlehem . . ."

Christmas in Poland began for me as soon as we got off the train and Sever, the coachman, helped us to wrap up in huge, warm *burkas* and furs for a long sleigh ride. I protested mildly at first, but soon realized it was necessary to be swathed to the chin like Lucca Della Robbia's Italian "bambino."

"It's funny to think I'm bringing an American home for *Wigilia*," Marta said, "and that you've never eaten a *wigilia* dinner before."

"Surely it can't differ much from other dinners, can it?"

Marta turned as far as her huge fur collar would let her and smiled indulgently.

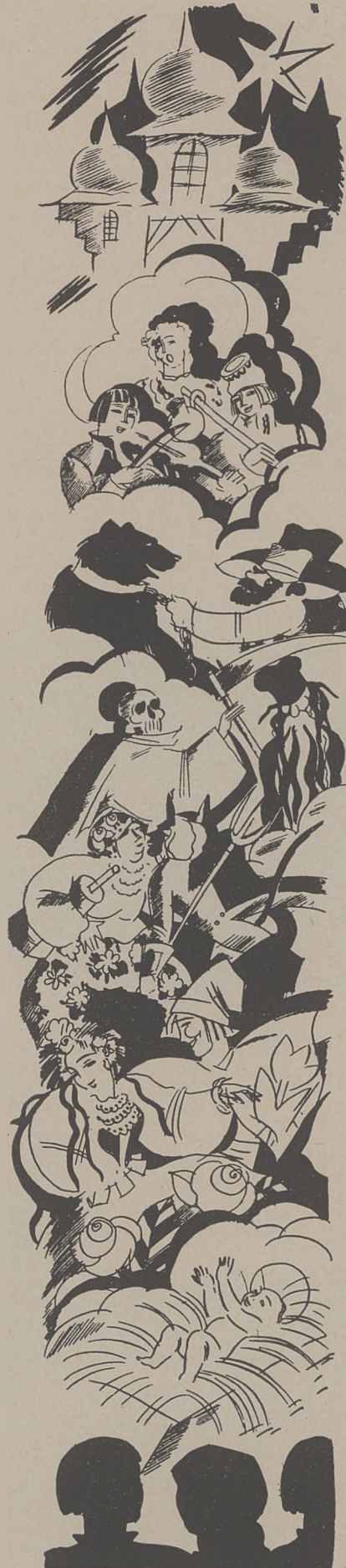
"It does," she said.

Darkness fell slowly and had grown thick by the time we passed the gates and drove up to the house. At the jingling of our horses' bells, the housekeeper opened the door and stood waiting on the threshold, holding a kerosene lamp in both hands. Marta jumped off the sleighs, tripping on the long hem of her heavy *burka*, ran up the steps and kissed the housekeeper soundly on both cheeks. I entered the house more demurely and stood uncertainly for a short moment. They welcomed me cordially and made me feel at home.

Paniusia, the housekeeper, talked in Polish to Marta. I looked up wonderingly. It sounded terribly important. Marta smiled.

"Paniusia says that dinner is ready, and that we'll have to hurry. We cannot be late with *Wigilia*. You know that we have to sit down to our Christmas Eve dinner when the first star appears. It's one of our traditions."

Drawing by Tadeusz Gronowski



We went into the dining room. There was a long table covered with a white table-cloth. In the corner stood a big sheaf of wheat, and I recall Marta's telling me it symbolized fertility and God's blessing on the house and land. Hay was spread on the table under the cloth to remind us that Jesus was born in a stable and lay in a manger. We stood around the table, obviously waiting for something. Marta's mother held in her hand a white, thin, host-like wafer.

"It's *oplatek*," Marta whispered. "Your American papers sometimes call it 'Polish Christmas cake.' But it's nothing of the sort. When mother comes to you, break a little piece of *oplatek* and exchange Christmas wishes with her. If you can't think of anything else just say *Wesolych Swiat*, which means 'Merry Christmas.'"

I did, though I'm quite sure I muffed up the words.

We sat down and immediately an empty place at the table attracted my attention. Why didn't we wait for this late-comer? Marta was positively psychic.

"This place won't be occupied by anyone," she said. "It's another of our Christmas customs. On Christmas Eve, when with the first star everybody sits down to dinner, at every table in every home, throughout the country a vacant place is left, unoccupied, but all set. We call it the place of a 'guest from afar.' The idea is that no one who knocks at your door on Christmas Eve can be turned away. He is sure to find his place at the table. It is for all those who have no *wigilia* tonight."

The first course entered. I looked suspiciously.

"It's *barszcz*," Marta smiled. "Clear red beet soup with tiny dumplings. Christmas Eve dinner is composed entirely of traditional Polish dishes, so brace yourself. They are really good."

They really were, too. But it took some courage to taste them all.

"It's time to tell fortunes," Marta said. "Reach under the table-cloth and pull a straw."

I did, and everybody laughed.

"A very long life and six children," Marta announced.

The fish had some superb sauce with it.

"How do you make it?" I asked, hoping to bring mother a new recipe for our next Christmas in Philadelphia.

"I don't know much about cooking and can't tell you exactly," Marta answered. "But it's Paniusia's specialty. She will be terribly pleased if you tell her you like it."

The dessert struck me as queerly simple after the long string of unfamiliar courses: just a compote of dried fruit.

"Let's go to our Christmas tree," Marta said, watching her mother at the far end of the table. "We've all finished."

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POLISH BETHLEHEM . . . By Lucyan Rydel

“**B**ETLEEM POLSKIE” (Polish Bethlehem), a Nativity play in verse with songs and dancing that used folk motifs in a symbolic representation of national themes close to Polish hearts, was published in 1906 by Lucyan Rydel in Cracow. Uniting the traditional interpretation of the Nativity with a story of Poland’s glorious history and tragic crucifixion, Rydel closed his powerful drama with an impassioned prayer of the whole Polish nation for the speedy liberation of their land. The illustrations for Rydel’s fine work were done by Włodzimierz Tetmajer, a well-known Polish artist.



Shepherds’ Chorus (preparing to visit the Manger):

*We shall hasten thither,
Let all sadness wither,
We shall raise our voices
To sing the new born Christ.*



Workers’ Chorus:

*We, the poor of Poland
Before the Savior stand—
Cobblers, tailors, bakers,
Drapers, and rope-makers,
Carpenters and blacksmiths.*

King Herod (symbol of the three powers that partitioned Poland):

*Pronounce a stern decree
That in school and cottage
To speak their native tongue
Poles are no longer free.*



Polish Soldiers from the Liberation of Vienna in 1683 to the Uprising of 1853 make their one request of the Savior:

*Grant that with fire and sword
We may for Poland win
What the foe has stol’en.*



Polish Kings symbolizing Polish-Lithuanian Union: Queen Jadwiga, Kings Jagiello, Zygmunt I, and Zygmunt-August (carrying the Act of the Union of Lublin).

King Jagiello:
*Nations joined by God’s scepter above,
We stand united in brotherly love.*

POLISH MODERN CHRISTMAS TOYS



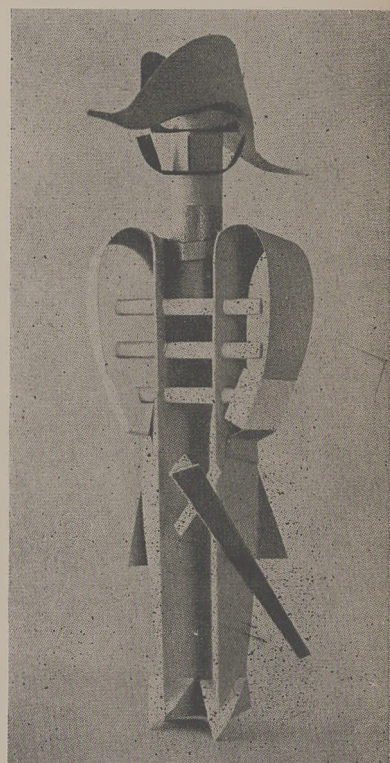
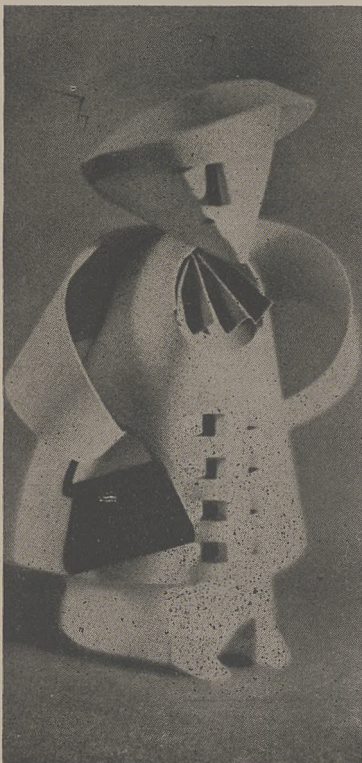
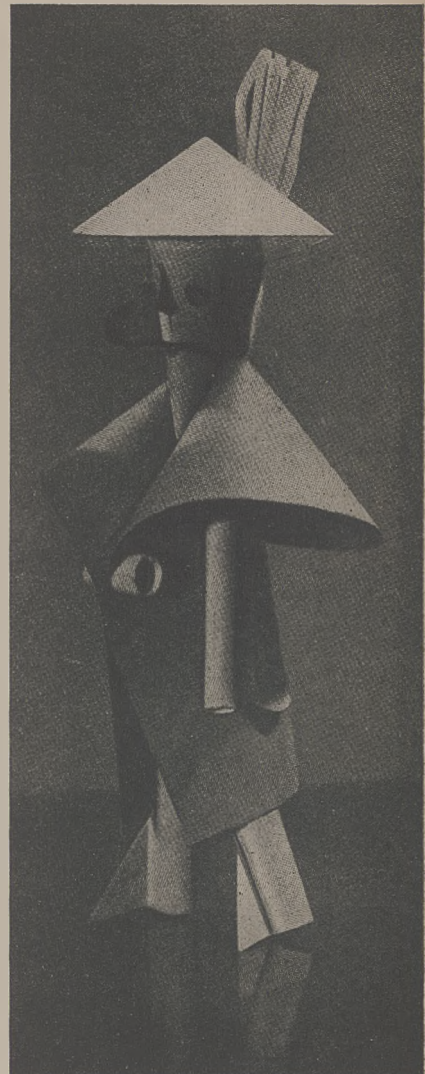
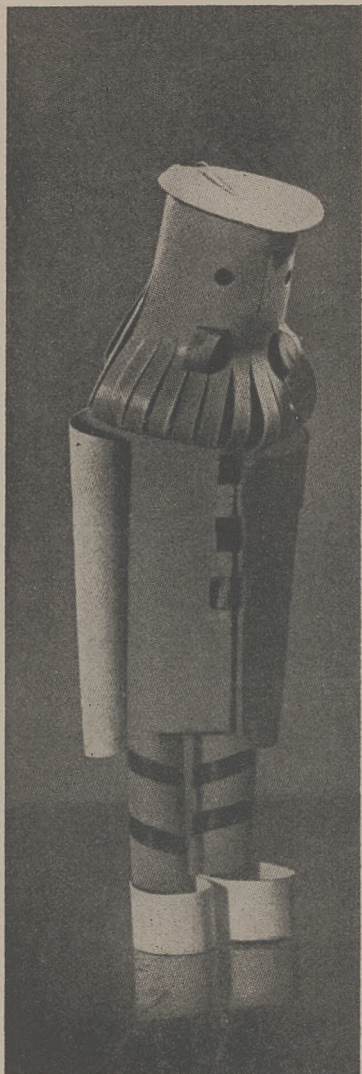
POLISH Christmas would be incomplete without a Christmas tree. And a Christmas tree without a riot of color and a profusion of sweets and ornaments would not be a traditional symbol of the Yuletide spirit to Poles.

In the peaceful days before German bombs fell on Polish towns and cities, the stores would be filled early in December with mountains of special toys used in the decorating of Christmas trees. They were typically Polish in character, and executed by folk artists or by professional artists who turned for inspiration to the lovely motifs of folk legend and old customs. The materials were inexpensive leftovers from other fields of production—bits of tin, cardboard, pieces of cloth—and yet the result was an original and attractive toy that charmed children and grown-ups alike.

Characteristic of folk toys is the extreme simplification of design. The peasant concerns himself very little with an exact reproduction of reality. He prefers to use his imagination in outlining his silhouettes and to be guided by certain traditional shapes handed down from generation to generation. Thus, a Polish peasant can certainly not be accused of being unfamiliar with the anatomy of a horse, yet he invariably portrays him with an amusing duck's tail.

Childlike in his love of the comic and his sincerity of feeling, the peasant can be depended upon to create toys that meet the approval of small fry. Toys, firmly entrenched in the affections of young and old, are those perennial favorites—the doll and the horse. And justly so. For the doll is a dressed up symbol of beauty, maternity and femininity; the horse, a carry over from the concept of a rider, warrior or knight, is the symbol of conquering masculinity. With amazing ingenuity, the folk artist takes a piece of clay, a sliver of wood, a lump of dough or of moss, or even a simple eggshell and turns it into a colorful Christmas bauble.

Paper was a popular medium for Christmas tree decoration, and was used by both folk and professional artists. Jan Kurzatkowski, a young Polish artist whose works are reproduced here, was quick to see the advantages of paper for this type of toy. His delightful horses, fishes and figurines are not only interesting interpretations of animal and human forms in paper, but the author's own form of plastic expression. Kurzatkowski's example prompted the general use of paper and just before the war, many young people in schools and recreation clubs fashioned simple but effective paper ornaments for Polish Christmas trees.



(Continued from page 10)

drew's Church in Cracow. They represent characteristic types of Cracovians. Such life-like representations of the *Nativity* and *Adoration* undoubtedly had great influence, if one may judge by paintings. They encouraged the artists to add a local flavor to the holy scenes they painted.

So did the Christmas mysteries played in the churches themselves during the middle ages, but which became more and more secular in character and were finally forbidden in churches and played in towns by students and by peasants in the country.

By the 18th century, under the influence of puppet shows spreading throughout Europe from France, these Nativity mystery plays were transformed into puppet shows. Small theaters were built, which imitated churches. The living people were replaced by marionettes. As in the Nativity plays, besides the Holy Family, the Angels, The Three Kings, the shepherds, Herod, Death, and the Devil, Polish peasants in Cracow costumes, Polish highlanders, and during the early 19th century even Polish soldiers appear. In partitioned Poland the *szopka* received a patriotic color, and was forbidden in Warsaw by the Russians. But it remained and flourished in Cracow. Beautiful figures, dating from the middle of the 19th century are preserved in the Ethnographic Museum of that city.

These popular Nativity puppet shows had great influence on modern Polish art. First of all, out of these marionette theaters grew the small box *szopkas*, built by the Polish peasants out of card-board and all kinds of colored paper, sometimes crudely, sometimes with great talent, to imitate churches. The figures have flexible legs and hands which

are moved by means of sticks inserted in the stage floors. The less elaborate *szopkas* have figures simply pasted on the ground. The best come from the Cracow district. Their quaintness, decorative quality, and vivid colors give them peculiar charm! In reborn Poland, real puppet shows, built on a larger scale, were flourishing anew, having become fashionable in urban literary circles. Beautiful Christmas miniature theaters were built by art schools' students, who also fashioned the dolls. Such a miniature theater constructed by the State School of Industrial Art in Poznan illustrated in *The Polish Review* of December 24, 1942; one constructed by the pupils of the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw in 1925 is shown in this number. They vividly reflect the peasant style, but the professional skill of their makers is clearly discernible.

This same style has been introduced in stage settings for the Nativity mystery plays revived by the modern Polish theater. A most beautiful stage setting was designed by Wincenty Drabik (1881-1933) for the Boguslawski Theater in Warsaw. A less elaborate, but nonetheless fascinating stage setting was prepared last year by Irena Lorentowicz for the Polish Theater in New York.

Finally the folk Christmas puppet shows have not remained without influence on Polish modern painting. Like the *jaselka* in past centuries, so the *szopka* of more recent times has inspired Polish painters, wood engravers, and illustrators in their representations of the *Adoration of the Magi*, or the *Adoration of the Shepherds*. Several beautiful paintings devoted to these subjects created by Kazimierz Sichulski (1879-1943) bear witness to these influences, as do works by Zofia Stryjenska, Wladyslaw Roguski, Stefan Mrozewski, and many others.

THE POLISH 'WIGILIA' IN HAPPIER DAYS

(Continued from page 11)

In the drawing room Krystyna, Marta's sister, was lighting the candles on a huge Christmas tree. On the tables, coffee and sweets, candies, apples and oranges, tangerines, figs, dates, raisins, almonds and nuts. I eyed the Christmas tree anxiously.

"Won't it catch fire?"

"No, it won't," Marta laughed. "We've done it for years and years. Everybody does. You can't expect us to put electric bulbs on our tree in a house with no electricity, can you?"

It did look much prettier than electric bulbs, with all the fluttering little flames that twinkled above the tiny colored candles. Atop the tree was a huge angel in pink robes, with white wings; long chains of colored paper, in most intricate patterns, all of them glittering with gold and silver, and red and green and yellow wound in and out the branches around the tree. Angel hair, in silver and gold, hung from the green spikes, as on my own tree back home, and little pendants looking like icicles and sparkling in the flame of the candles. On the branches hung large round nuts painted in gold and silver, blown egg-shells most beautifully painted, colorful paper ornaments, toys galore and miniature baskets filled with raisins and candy.

"The proper Christmas tree should have lots of things to eat on it," Marta explained.

Under the tree was the crib, all spread around with gifts for each member of the family and for the guests. A package was handed to me. It contained a coarse linen peasant towel from Eastern Poland, beautifully embroidered. Before opening the tempting packages with the gifts, we stood around

the Christmas tree, singing carols. Marta's mother began one of the oldest Polish *kolendas*, in which I was able to join, for Marta had taught me the words in Switzerland. They recalled that first Christmas night: *Aniol pasterzom mowil: Chrystus nam sie narodzil*—"The Angel to the shepherds said: 'Christ was born to us this day . . .'" Then came others I did not know. Marta translated for me a highlanders' carol about the child Jesus not yet grown up, who sat by the fire smoking his little pipe, while Mary was singing, Peter and Paul dancing, and the Holy Ghost yawning: "Awoooo . . ."

At about 11 o'clock we left for Midnight Mass.

"I hope you're not too tired because we have quite a sleighride ahead," said Marta. "Of course, you can sleep in the sleighs. But try not to. It's a beautiful ride."

As midnight approached, our sleighs crunched through the gate out onto the flat and fresh snow. The shadows around us were bluish, the sky a very dark blue, and twinkling with stars like our own Christmas tree a mile away. We passed through the dark village, then by an old cemetery, after that the road was empty and deserted in its whiteness.

The church was on a hill. Its windows shone bright and yellow. Half a mile away we could see it well, some horses and sleighs in front of the gate, and the coachmen warming themselves up. Our sleigh bells tinkled in the icy air and we caught a glimpse of people kneeling on the bare floor of the church.

And though none of us knew it then, that this was to be the last happy Christmas in Poland for years to come, the spell cast over us by those old Polish customs born of the happy fertility of peace, remains with me today as real and timeless as a Polish Christmas itself.



CHRISTMAS CAROL

by MARJAN HEMAR



The Manger—sculpture in faience by H. Kernerowna.

On the day of Christ Child's birth
All creation sings with mirth.
Only Poles shed tears.
Though their faces seem to smile,
Yet their hearts are all the while
Filled with dread and fears.

O, Paradise lost,
O, country forsaken.
The three golden crowns
From the Magi are taken.

Birds are flying way up high,
Singing praises to the sky:
"Glory to the Child!"
Oxen bellow, jesters play
And the little donkeys brey:
"Smile, O Virgin mild!"

Through the blizzards bleak they came
The Three Kings, so tired and lame,
Hands stiff from the bitter cold.
Oh, they're sad these beggar-kings,
Their hearts mute, as nature sings
Praise to God a thousand fold.

"Holy Child in manger lying
Please forgive our mournful crying.
Look, we smile though worn and broken
Shamed no longer by our tears,
Blind eyes see that freedom nears.
Share this bread, our Yuletide token."

Translated from the Polish by
CHRISTINA SWINIARSKA.

P O L A N D ' S M O R A L V I C T O R Y !

(Continued from page 5)

heard their National Anthem in the streets of Warsaw for nearly four years, wept with joy and emotion. Warsaw was still unconquered.

... Polish men, women and children are all playing their part. Women are fighting equally with men and receiving equal punishment. No considerations of chivalry prevent the Germans from hanging women or sending them to concentration camps. Polish women, too, are bringing up their children in the Polish spirit, they are educating them and combating, in every way, the German attempt to reduce the Poles to a nation of degenerate slaves, without education, without

religion and without morals. Polish children, thanks to their excellent spirit, are fighting against the Germans, though their lot is hard. Many children have died, martyred for their patriotism.

... Poland will not be found unprepared to play her part in the reconstruction of Europe. The Poles in Poland rely on themselves, conscious of the contribution which they are making to the common cause and knowing that only those nations who are confident of their own strength and have sound bases for such confidence can contribute to world cooperation. Their view can be summarized thus: "We rely on ourselves, the rest of the world can rely on Poland."

CHRISTMAS IN BLOOD AND TEARS

(Continued from page 7)

"Let's go in boys," Walek said. "I got an 'oplatek' from London, we can break one piece among us and leave the other for them."

It was a solemn gathering that surrounded the Christmas tree in our mess. Walek spoke again.

"No sense to make speeches. We all know what lies closest to our hearts. All I can say, God grant that they return and God return our country to us."

The unleavened bread tasted salty on my tongue. It was an effort to swallow back the tears.

Antek looked at me from under his beetle brows, swallowed hard and winked.

Time passed slowly as we waited. There would be lulls

in our conversation and we would catch ourselves listening. After what seemed like ages our trained ears picked up the faint hum of motors.

"They're coming." We rushed out. Breathlessly we counted them as they landed.

The Intelligence Officer checked his chart: Operation complete, all returned safely, four enemy planes shot down.

"Good work," he said. "Merry Christmas and God bless you all!"

Cover: Reproduction of painting "Hope" by Witold Gordon-Jurgielewicz, prominent Polish artist living in the United States.

