

# THE SUICIDE OF POLAND

ROBERT DELL

*POLAND can become a prosperous country if she will give up certain foolish ambitions and her passion for ancient history. Although the Poles know how their own national sentiment survived oppression, they imagine they can eradicate the national sentiment of others by similar oppression. The country cannot live unless the Poles decide to make friends with the Jews, says Mr. Dell, who also believes that in federalization, as opposed to centralization, lies the country's only hope of survival.*

**T**HE very failings of the Poles add to their charm. Their incurable romanticism and their sublime indifference to realities are serious disadvantages in practical life, but make them singularly attractive. Nevertheless, to one who like myself was for years devoted to the cause of Polish independence, — that was one of the grievances of the French Government against me during the war, — it is sad indeed to see

these people, now that they have recovered their independence, repeating all the mistakes that caused them to lose it. Poland came to grief before through over-centralization and over-expansion. The new Poland is over-centralized like the old and has repeated the mistake of so extending its frontiers that nearly half the population is not Polish. In a population of about twenty-seven millions there are about a million and a half Germans, three million Jews in the Ghetto, seven and a half million Ukrainians, White-Russians, and other races, and only fifteen million genuine Poles. The first time that Poland is at war, more than a third of the population will be on the side of the enemy, whoever the enemy may be. This inherent weakness must sooner or later, unless it be remedied, lead to the downfall of Poland. Had the Poles been content with their ethnological frontiers, Poland would have had no enemies and would have been in a strong position from the first. As it is, Poland is ethnologically and geographically unsound and is on bad terms with most of her neighbors. And this must always be so, since the two most important neighbors of Poland, Germany and Russia, will never accept the present Polish frontiers. That fact is recognized by a few Poles. A member of the Polish diplomatic service said to me that there would be another partition of Poland before twenty years were over, but he did not seem to realize that, if he was right, the Poles have them-

selves,—and France,—to thank. It is because I believe the existence of an independent Poland to be essential to Europe that I earnestly hope that my Polish friends will learn wisdom before it is too late.

Alas! more even than the Bourbons, the Poles have learned nothing and forgotten nothing. Especially have they forgotten nothing, and that is the worst of all. They cannot forget that the old kingdom of Poland at one time included territories, such as East Prussia, now outside the Polish frontiers, extended as those frontiers are. They search historical records, or some of them do, to discover what territories had at some remote period some remote connection with Poland, with the view of claiming them as Polish.

Persons with a sense of realities of course exist in Poland. Most of them are Jews, but not all. Among them is a man occupying an important official position with whom I had more than one conversation. He is not, by the way, a Jew. I could not but admire the way in which he received some very candid criticisms. He was surprisingly frank. Fresh from Danzig, which I had visited on my way to Warsaw, I told him what I thought about the system established there by the Peace Treaty. He agreed that it was very unsatisfactory, and when I said that Germany would never accept either it or the "Corridor", he replied, "Of course not. I shouldn't if I were the German Government."

Anti-Semitism is one of the greatest dangers that menaces Poland. The other racial minorities can be got rid of or greatly diminished by a judicious rectification of frontiers. But the Jews cannot be got rid of, for they are disseminated all over Poland and are concentrated in the towns, where they form a very large part of the population. Even if it were possible to get rid of the Jews, it would not be desirable, for Poland cannot get on without them. The Jews are a valuable asset to every country, not merely because they are on the whole the most intelligent race in the world, but even more because, unlike any other race, they can combine idealism or the artistic temperament with capacity in practical affairs. They are a particularly valuable asset to Slav countries in which, with the exception of Czecho-Slovakia, a sense of realities is usually sadly to seek. In my opinion, the future of the Eastern European countries depends to a large extent on

their capacity to assimilate their Jewish population, and the very existence of Poland depends on it. Poland cannot live unless the Poles make friends with the Jews.

I do not under-rate the difficulty of the Jewish problem in Poland. At present the Polish Jews are a race apart, with their own manners, customs, and even laws, and their own ruler, the Chief Rabbi. Two years ago I visited the Warsaw Ghetto with an acquaintance who speaks Yiddish. It is a strange experience. One feels that one is outside Europe. The squalor is indescribable. We penetrated into little courts swarming with inhabitants, horribly dirty and unsanitary, with two or three tiny synagogues, — just moderately sized rooms, — in each. The rabbis, with their long robes and little curls on either side of the face, looked as though they belonged to a past age. Indeed, the Polish Ghetto does belong to a past age and is on a very low level of civilization. The Jews in the Ghetto are entirely under the domination of their rabbis, and their religious fanaticism is intense. Their assimilation will be a long and difficult task, but it is essential that the Poles should tackle the problem in a spirit of friendship to the Jews.

The problem of the other racial minorities cannot be solved by assimilation, for, whatever the Poles may say, most of those minorities will never be assimilated. The only solution is the abandonment of territory that should never have been annexed. At the last general election two Polish provinces, Volhynia and Polesia, did not return a single Polish deputy. That fact is enough to show that these provinces ought never to have been included in Poland. Eastern Galicia has been given autonomy. In fact it is under martial law. Conscription has been introduced and the Ukrainians will be forced in the event of war to fight for a government that they detest. I doubt whether this will be a source of strength to Poland. The experience of the old Austrian Empire suggests the contrary.

Even some Polish officials admit that the treatment of the other Ukrainian provinces of Poland has been, to say the least, unwise. In Polish White-Russia and Ukraine the Polish Government confiscated all the estates of the Russian Crown, of the Orthodox Church, and of public institutions, and about 300,000 hectares (nearly 700,000 acres) were allotted to Polish officers

and soldiers and other Polish emigrants. Furthermore the German inhabitants of Poland complain bitterly and with reason of their treatment by the Polish Government. At the time of the constitution of the Polish Kingdom they numbered about three millions, but they are now, as has been said, not more than about half that number. The leader of the German group in the Polish Parliament told me that perhaps nearly two and a half million German inhabitants had gone away from Posen and Polish Pomerania, but the loss has been to some extent compensated by the annexation to Poland of part of Upper Silesia, and there are a good many Germans in Congress-Poland, notably at Lodz which returns three German deputies to Parliament. Of the other fourteen German deputies four come from Posen, six from Pomerania, and four from Upper Silesia. At the time of its annexation only a third of the population of Posen was German, but the Germans were about half the population of Polish Pomerania. This being so, the whole of Pomerania might well have been left to Germany, since the economic arguments against its annexation to Poland were as strong as in the case of Upper Silesia. One cannot travel in Central Europe without being impressed by the disastrous economic consequences of many of the transfers of territory. It is not perhaps sufficiently realized that one of the reasons of the present economic ills of Europe is that the peace treaties have transferred so much European territory from capable to incapable hands. Although the ethnological reasons for giving Posen to Poland were so strong that it was difficult to ignore them, there can be no doubt that from the economic point of view Posen too has suffered severely from the change. The evil has been aggravated by the policy of driving away the German inhabitants of the annexed territories by making their lives intolerable.

This was a deliberate policy. The Polish Government interpreted the Peace Treaty in such a way as to reduce to a minimum the number of Germans with a right to claim Polish citizenship. For example this right is given by the treaty to Germans born of German parents living in Poland. This was interpreted by the Polish Government as meaning that the parents must be still alive, so that no German, one of whose parents was dead at the time of the signature of the treaty, was allowed to claim Polish

citizenship under this category. The German inhabitants appealed to the League of Nations, which referred the matter, and certain others concerning the German inhabitants of Poland, to the Permanent Court of International Justice. The Court decided against the interpretation of the Polish Government, and the status of the German inhabitants of Poland is now much improved in consequence, but a great deal of harm was done before the decision was given.

A high official of the Polish Foreign Office said to me quite frankly, "Of course we shall get rid of the minorities treaty as soon as we can." In fact that treaty has been got rid of already in Poland, for it is not observed. The contrast between the treatment of the racial minorities in Poland and their treatment in Czecho-Slovakia is striking. No doubt in the latter country the racial minorities have still some legitimate grievances, but they are allowed to use their own language in the Czecho-Slovak Parliament and, wherever they amount to at least twenty per cent of the population, they have their own schools, and their language is used in law courts. The Polish minorities have no such privileges.

It seems impossible to convince Poles of the folly of this policy from their own point of view. One Pole to whom I spoke about it cited the English treatment of Ireland as a justification. I suggested to him that, where an old and strong country like England had failed and been obliged to admit the failure and change the policy, it was unlikely that a new and weak country like Poland would succeed, and that the example was a warning rather than a justification. He didn't see it. It is astonishing that, although the Poles know how their own national sentiment survived oppression, they imagine that they will eradicate the national sentiment of others by the methods that failed in their own case. They cannot resist the temptation of doing to others what was done to them, and seem incapable of even considering the practical question whether they will gain anything by it.

I doubt, as I have said, whether in any conditions the present territorial limits of Poland can be permanent, but at least the Poles might try to give them some chance of being so. The one chance of making the present Poland capable of living, if there be a chance at all, would be federalization. Switzerland, with three races speaking three different languages in a population

less than one sixth of that of Poland, has held together because of its federal system. Had Switzerland been centralized as Poland is, it would long ago have fallen to pieces. Had the Austrian Empire followed the example of Switzerland, it might still be in existence. In a country with a population composed of different races a federal system would seem to be the only means of preserving unity. Yet I have not met a single Pole willing even to entertain the idea of making Poland a federal state. The trend of Polish opinion is so strong towards centralization that even the autonomy promised to Eastern Galicia is unlikely ever to be realized.

Even with a competent administration, centralization would be a failure in Poland, but the Polish administration is incapable and to a great extent corrupt. I know, of course, that the Poles have had immense difficulties in this respect. Only in Austrian Poland were there any Polish officials before the recovery of independence. In the rest of the country the officials were either Russians or Germans who naturally had to go when Poland became an independent state. Round the small nucleus of Austrian-Polish officials an entirely new administration had to be created, one might say improvised. Judges, magistrates, civil servants, post-office officials, and even policemen had to be found at a moment's notice, and had to be chosen from people for the most part without training or experience. Nevertheless, the selection might have been better than it was, and above all, the number selected might have been smaller. A swarm of young men belonging to the upper and middle classes settled on all the soft jobs, the supply of which was adapted to the demand. The result was that Poland was saddled with a number of officials out of all proportion to its population and needs, most of whom had been chosen without any regard to their qualifications.

The economic situation in Poland is fairly satisfactory, and undoubtedly great progress has been made in this respect. Poland is a country rich in natural resources, with great possibilities. Polish industry, however, is hampered by shortness of capital, which two years ago was such that some manufacturers were borrowing money at the rate of ten per cent a day to pay their wage bill. Things have now improved, but capital is still required, and it can be got only from abroad. Nothing stands in the way



of Poland becoming a wealthy and prosperous country except the foolish policy into which the Poles have been led by their ambitions and their passion for ancient history.

The heroic efforts of Mr. Grabski, who is a man of great ability, have brought the national finances into something like order. He succeeded in stabilizing the currency for a time, but the new Polish "zloty", equivalent to a gold or Swiss franc, is now nearly ten per cent below par. Polish finances can never be really in a satisfactory state so long as the present enormous military expenditure continues. The cost of the army is more than two-fifths of the whole national expenditure. Poland is compelled by her secret military convention with France to maintain a huge army and to adopt conscription.

It is only just to the Poles to say that they have been egged on by the French Nationalists to commit the blunders that they have committed. France has been the evil genius of Poland ever since the end of the war. The Poles have allowed themselves to be exploited by France from the moment when, — thanks to the Russian revolution and to that alone, — they recovered their independence. They must be naïve indeed if they think that French policy has been disinterested. What the "traditional friendship" of France for Poland is worth was shown in February, 1917, when M. Poincaré and M. Briand made a secret treaty with the Russian Czarist Government, which was negotiated in Russia by M. Doumergue, now President of the French Republic, and by which France agreed to hand over the whole of Poland to the Czar and to insist that the Polish question should be considered, when a peace conference came to be held, as one of "Russian internal politics". M. Clemenceau, to do him justice, frankly proclaimed that the aim of French post-war policy in regard to Poland was to use that country as a French catspaw against Bolshevik Russia. Poland was to be part of the famous *cordon sanitaire*.

The French exploitation of Poland began during the Paris peace conference, with the aid of the Polish National Committee in Paris, which has been the curse of Poland. The Poles were at first moderate in their pretensions, and Marshal Pilsudski was quite willing to accept the German proposal for giving Poland access to the sea, which I have already mentioned. It was at the

instigation of the French Government, backed by the Polish National Committee, that the Polish representatives demanded Danzig, West and East Prussia, and Upper Silesia. Marshal Pilsudski said to a friend of mine at the time: "When we are offered more than we asked, how can I refuse?" But for Mr. Lloyd George's opposition, West and East Prussia, or at least Danzig and a large slice of German territory, would have been annexed to Poland. It is understood that Mr. Wilson suggested the compromise by which Danzig was made a Free City, in which Poland has certain rights, and Poland was given the "Corridor" cutting Germany in two, — surely the maddest territorial arrangement of history.

I wish it were possible to think that the Poles were becoming more reasonable, but the case is rather the contrary. The outburst of Chauvinist frenzy about the affair of the Danzig letter-boxes and the claims put forward on that occasion by leading members of the Polish Government revealed an intensely aggressive spirit. It can hardly be doubted that at one moment the Polish Government seriously contemplated a repetition of the Vilna exploit by a military occupation of Danzig. Semi-official organs of the Polish Government took the opportunity of declaring that Poland must be "completed" by the annexation of the whole of East Prussia and, when I was last in Danzig early this year, the Polish diplomatic representative there, M. Strassburger, calmly told me that the only solution of the Danzig problem was the annexation of the Free City to Poland. He has since denied having made this statement, but I am sure that he well remembers making it and also remembers my vigorous and, I fear, somewhat impolite reply. I told him that a race that had suffered for more than a century from foreign domination ought to be ashamed of desiring to dominate others.

Polish relations with Germany are strained. The failure to arrive at a commercial agreement has led to a tariff war between the two countries, and the wholesale expulsion of Germans from Poland has naturally made bad blood. By the Vienna Convention between Germany and Poland, the latter country was authorized to return to Germany at a certain date German inhabitants of Poland who had opted for German nationality, and Germany was authorized to treat in a similar way Polish inhabitants of



Germany who had opted for Poland. The German Government vainly tried to induce the Polish Government to agree to a mutual abstention from using the power given by the convention. The Polish Government refused to abandon its rights and sent several thousand Germans over the frontier in very harsh conditions.

The Poles are alarmed because they have not sufficient guarantees of their "security". It is impossible to guarantee the security of the present Polish frontiers. If they are not changed by peaceful means they will sooner or later be changed by war, in spite of all possible protocols and pacts. One cannot bottle up the organic forces, and the attempt to do it can lead only to an explosion. Any "security" that is given to the present Polish frontiers can only be illusory, and it is desirable that the Poles should know that they are insecure. Then perhaps they may eventually become reasonable. They would be unwise to count too much on France. If Germany attacked Poland, as of course is impossible for many years to come, perhaps the French people would consent to fulfil the obligations of the Franco-Polish alliance. But, in the event of a war between Poland and Russia, any French Government that ordered a general mobilization to go to the help of Poland would not last twenty-four hours.

The Poles are in a vicious circle, from which they can escape only by surrendering territory to which they have no right and which they should never have annexed. The army is sucking the life-blood out of the country, but the Poles say that a strong army is necessary for defense, because they have enemies on every side. If they have enemies on every side, it is because they have made territorial arrangements that prevent them from ever being on friendly terms with their greatest neighbors. Poland is committing suicide to escape death. She can yet live and become a strong, happy, and prosperous country, if she will consent to become a smaller one by restricting herself to her true ethnological frontiers, and will renounce ambition to dominate other races and be a great military Power. They are no friends of Poland who urge her on a course leading to destruction. It is the duty of the true friends of Poland, — of those who, like myself, fought for Polish independence in the days when it was an unpopular and seemed a hopeless cause, — to do their utmost to induce the Poles to face realities.

# THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL AND CITIZENSHIP

PATRICK JOSEPH SHELLY

*THE Catholic school considers the immortal soul as of supreme importance, and while it does not disparage the ambition for material success, it seeks to inculcate in its pupils an ideal which is of necessity ignored by the State school, according to a Catholic father who here sets forth his reasons for sending his children to a Parochial school. It is difficult, he affirms, to understand how any fair-minded American can question the loyalty of any citizens whose education has been entrusted to these secular institutions.*

I AM aware that most non-Catholics have a prejudice complex against Catholic schools,—a prejudice for the most part based entirely on rumor without knowledge. Charged with the responsibility for the nurture, care, and education of my children, and exercising my right under the Constitution I am permitted to select the school which, as a citizen and parent, I consider will best equip these children to be good

American citizens and to be worthy of the spiritual destiny for which they were created. I send my children to Catholic schools. The Editor of THE FORUM has asked me to state the reasons for my choice,—a discussion of the value of parochial schools fitting into this magazine's attempt to arrive at the truth in the controversy "Is Roman Catholicism Un-American?" I am not presuming to represent officially the Catholic Church in this article, nor is it my intention to enter into any controversy as to the relative merits of the public schools and those conducted under Catholic auspices. I am writing as a Catholic layman, as a father of children, and as an American deeply appreciative of the blessings and opportunities which have come to me through citizenship.

I send my children to Catholic schools because I am convinced of the absolute necessity for religious training, particularly in the formative years of life; and because I further believe that the secular standards of the Catholic schools instil into the minds of my children the highest ideals of practical patriotism.

The argument is often set forth that the secular standard of the Catholic school system falls below that of the public schools. As I understand it, children in both cases must meet the requirements of the Regents of the State of New York. (I am, of course, speaking only for the Catholic schools of my own State.) Again,