

JAN ALOJSIUS MATEJKO.

1838-1893.

BY POLONIUS.

THE great Polish historical painter, Matejko, was born in Cracow, Austrian Galicia, whether on the twenty-eighth of July, or the thirtieth of June, 1838, is apparently not quite clear. His father, a teacher of music, was from the Bohemian town Hradec, while his mother, Joanna Karolina, daughter of the merchant and citizen of Cracow Johan Peter Rossberg, seems to have added a German strain to the Czecho-Polish blood of the artist. The boy attended first the St. Barbara school and later St. Anna's gymnasium, which he left at the age of fourteen, much against his father's wishes, in order to enter the School of Fine Arts in his native city. His instruction in the art of painting he received from Adalbert Stattler and Ladislaus Lunakiewicz. During the hours when he was free from his professional studies he devoted himself with great interest to the study of Polish history, from which he drew the subjects for the works of his apprentice years, such as *Szujski before Zygmunt III*, *The Entry of Henri de Valois into Cracow*, *Jagiello Praying before the Battle of Tannenberg*, *Karl Gustav and Starowolski Before the Grave of Ladislaus Lokietek* and *Zygmunt I Confers Academic Privileges on the University of Cracow*.

After these labors Matejko received in 1858 a stipend to enable him to defray the cost of further studies which he pursued at Munich for ten months under the supervision of Anschütz, when an unfortunate illness compelled him to return to Cracow. But during this short period he had completed his *Poisoning of Queen Bona*, which represents the contemporary explanation for the mysterious death in 1557 of this princess of the House of Sforza, wife of the Polish King Zygmunt I, and mother of King Zygmunt August and three princesses. For this work the Academy distinguished its pupil with a bronze medal. On the completion of his recovery in 1860 Matejko next sought Vienna where he remained for two months as a pupil of the historical painter Christian Ruben, famous for his painting *Columbus Discovering America*.

The next years of labor in his native Cracow saw the com-

pletion in 1864 of the splendid *Skarga's Sermon*, in which the Polish Jeremiah foretells to the king and the Polish Court the impending ruin of his beloved country. This work when exhibited at the Paris Exposition of 1865 rewarded the artist with a gold medal and made him a European celebrity. In November of 1864 he



MATEJKO'S WIFE (1865).

married Theodora Gielbutowska, whom he has immortalized in the strong, sweet *Portrait of My Wife* of the following year. The next years were years of study spent in Germany and France, whence he made a trip to Constantinople in 1872. In 1866 he com-

pleted another of the powerful works on which his fame will rest, *Rejtan at the Diet of 1773*, which was exhibited at the Paris Exhibition of 1867, where it was bought for 50,000 crowns by the Emperor Franz Joseph, who also conferred the cross of the order of Franz Joseph on the artist. This picture represents an episode drawn from the darkest days of Polish history when the disgraceful Diet confirmed the dismemberment of its country on April 21, 1773, with the exception of one brave heart, Tadeus Rejtan, who tore apart the clothing from his breast, threw himself before the door of the building and cried: "Kill me first, for as long as I live I will



THADDEUS REJTAN, from REJTAN AT THE DIET OF 1773.
(Hofgalerie at Vienna.)

never consent to this deed." However, the greater part of the Polish deputies stepped over his body and left him lying there for thirty-eight hours. Rejtan became ill from grief at this disgrace, lost his reason and committed suicide on August 8, 1780.

Among the great works of Matejko we mention ten. As a foil to the depressing Skarga and Rejtan pictures stands out the *Union of Lublin*, commemorating the union of Lithuania and Poland under Zygmunt August in 1569, one of the bright spots in Polish history. The defeat of Russia and the capture of Livonian Polotsk by King Stephen Bathori are commemorated in a canvas of the year 1871, which received a bronze medal at the Vienna Exposition of 1873.

The four-hundredth anniversary of the astronomer of Thorn, who is claimed by both Poles and Germans, was illustrated by *Kopernikus*, 1873. *The Battle of Grünwald* (Tannenberg) received the gold medal of the first class at the Paris Exposition of 1878. This picture



KOPERNIKUS (1873).

recalls the conquest of that portion of German territory which the Poles succeeded in holding from 1410 until 1772. *Sobieski Before Vienna*, in commemoration of the Polish king's great service to Christendom in the defeat of the Turks before Vienna in 1683, was presented by the artist to His Holiness the Pope Leo XIII, who

gave it an honored place in the Vatican and its author the order of Pius IX. *The Maid of Orleans*, 1886; *Albrecht of Brandenburg Doing Homage to Zygmunt I in Cracow*, 1881; *Kosciuszko Before Raclawice*, 1888; *The Constitution of the Third of May*, 1891; and *The Vow of Jan Kasimir*, 1892, complete the list of his best works.

In honor of his illustrious services to his country, Matejko received the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, *honoris causa*, from the "Polish University of the Jagiellons" of his native city and he was also made a member of the French Legion of Honor for his picture *The Union of Lublin*. He was a member of the academies of fine arts at Paris, Vienna and Berlin. The *Akademie der schönen Künste* at Prague elected him in 1873 to be their director, but he



SOBIESKI BEFORE VIENNA (1883).
(In the Vatican.)

declined the honor and accepted later on in the year the emperor's nomination to a similar position at the head of the newly organized school of fine arts in Cracow. He died on the first of November in the same house in which he first saw the light of day and which is universally known to-day as the "Matejko House." It contains many memorials of the artist and a Matejko Museum and is situated in the Ulica Floryanska or Florian Street. He was buried on the eighth of November and his ashes rest in the Cracow cemetery.

Magnificence of coloring and passionate movement are the distinguishing characteristics of this true representative of a passionate, proud and excitable people. His critic and biographer Stanislaus Witkiewicz says in his characterization of the artist that Matejko

had by nature a soul filled with sadness. "This appeared not alone as a result of his pessimistic view of history, and in his first pictures he borrowed from history only what was saddest and most tragic, but he was in fact absolutely incapable of reproducing simply and sincerely the bright and happy sides of life."

He is like his subjects who "are to a high degree passionate



SOBIESKI AND DENHOF. (Detail from Sobieski Before Vienna.)

natures, filled to overflowing with deep feeling, gripped to the very depths of their souls by an abnormally strong psychic energy, which is keyed up to the highest pitch and leaves its stamp on the finely moulded features of faces distinguished by clearness and strength, even amid their wrinkles and seams; faces on which seems to rest the burden of whole layers of culture, that has arisen under the highest possible pressure of the tragedy of life." Of all cities,



ASSUMPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN (1875).

Cracow, where all the monuments of a glorious Poland are, seems best chosen to realize this confusion and distraction in a Polish soul. This can be discerned even in Matejko's portrait of himself, painted at the age of fifty-four, as well as in the face of the striking



STANCZYK, THE COURT FOOL OF SIGISMUND AUGUSTUS (1862).

painting of the court fool of Zygmunt I, Stanczyk, who was celebrated for the biting truths which he occasionally told to the Polish magnates and even to the king himself.

The representative painter of a nation so fervidly Roman

Catholic as is the Polish could not leave the field of Christian art untouched and we conclude this sketch with the magnificent *Assumption of the Blessed Virgin*, from the year 1875.

A SERMON OF SKARGA'S.

Our frontispiece is an idealistic representation of Peter Skarga Pawenski preaching one of his famous sermons before the King of Poland and the Polish diet, as painted in 1864 by the great Polish painter of national subjects, Jan Matejko, just after the unsuccessful revolution of 1863, which apparently gave Polish liberty its death blow. We may suppose that Skarga is just predicting the sad fate of Poland as directly ascribable to the "sins" of his countrymen, their strife, contentiousness, lack of union, and absolute disregard for national needs, although the picture professedly commemorates a scene from the year 1597.

The *Presbyterium* of the Wawel, the cathedral of Cracow, forms the background of the picture, for it was long erroneously supposed that the diet met here for divine service on the Sundays and holidays from February 10 to March 24, 1597. Our Polish friend explains the position of Skarga (11) as near the coffin of St. Stanislaus, that bishop of Cracow who was murdered in 1079 by King Boleslaus the Bold at the altar of St. Michael's Church before the gates of Cracow. Matejko did not then know that St. John's Cathedral in Warsaw was the real location, nor does this injure the picture. The subject of Skarga's sermon "seems to be the thought of Jeremiah xix: Then I shall utterly destroy you, saith the Lord God."

It must be admitted that some of the figures of the painting were really dead in 1597, but their employment in the picture at least reproduced the spirit of Poland in the last half of the sixteenth century. The king (5) strikes one as absolutely apathetic and weak. Behind him stands his awe-struck son Ladislaus (4) who later succeeded him.

Dowager Queen Ann, (6) of the house of Jagiellon, the wife of King Stephen Bathori, 1576-1586, is deep in prayer. Next to her is the famous Polish beauty, Halszka Ostrogo (7) who married the slayer of her first husband and was then compelled by the king, Zygmunt August, to marry the Wojewod Lukas Gorka of Posen. She and her mother then took refuge in a convent in Lemberg, where she was married to Simeon Olelkowicz, who was introduced within the walls of the cloister as a beggar. In spite of this union, the royal starost captured her and turned her over to husband

number three who threw her into prison when she persisted in her opposition to her unwelcome consort; there she lost her reason and died. She has been made the heroine of many tales and dramas. Stanislaus Stadnicki, (10) called "the Devil of Lancut" by the people because of his robber-knight crimes for which he was not less famous than for his acts of chivalry. Prince Zanusz Radziwill (8) and Nicolaus Zebrzydowski (9) rebelled against the king, nine years later, but were beaten, the last named being pardoned but excluded from participation in public affairs. The other dominant and foil to Skarga is the Chancellor and Fieldmarshall, John Zamojski, (1) to whom the king owed his throne, and Poland much, some say as much as Germany did to Bismarck. In front of him stands his predecessor in office, Peter Dunin Wolski, (3) Bishop of Plock, although he was dead in 1590. The Primate of Poland and Archbishop of Gnesen, Stanislaus Karnkowski, (2) is on the left and Cardinal Stanislaus Hozysz, (12) Bishop of Ermeland, who died in 1579, is kneeling near Skarga.

Quoting Marjan Sokolowski, professor of the history of art at the University of Cracow, Ferdinand Hoesik tells in an article of September 29, 1912, written for the *Jednodniówka*, the story of the origin of Matejko's conception of Skarga's head and especially of his face. The main facts are as follows:

When Jan Matjko had almost finished his picture of Skarga he had trouble in working out the portrait of the hero of the scene, but one day while walking through the streets of Cracow he met a man who possessed a certain resemblance to the famous pulpit orator, and he took pains to gain a lasting impression of the stranger's features, but the man seemed displeased with the attention thus received from an ordinary passer-by, and he tried to escape from this unwelcome attention. The truth was that he was Bronislaus Szwarc, a Polish fugitive from the fortress prison of Schlüsselburg, where Czaristic Russia confined its political prisoners on a rocky isle of the Neva, near St. Petersburg, and he had barely escaped his pursuers. His features were strangely attractive to our artist, and showed that he had passed through great trials in his life. While the object of Matejko's attention tried to escape, the painter was bent on making his acquaintance for the sake of using his portrait for his picture. Thinking that he was discovered by a representative of the Russian secret service, even though he was on Austrian soil, the stranger tried to elude his pursuer and had scarcely escaped to his lodgings when a knock at the door frightened him to the utmost. He said to himself, "here come the

police to arrest me and transport me to Siberia," but how relieved he was when the stranger came in, excused himself for the intrusion, and explained that he was Jan Matejko, well known to every Pole as their great national artist. Szwarcze gladly acceded to his request to sit for his portrait as a model for Skarga, the great Polish reformer, in fact he acknowledged it as an honor to be thought a fit subject for this noble purpose.

PETRUS SKARGA PAWENSKI S. J.

A PROPHET OF POLAND.

BY A FRIEND OF FREE POLAND.

NOTHING in this world is perfect, no thing nor person possesses that fulness of every good which really could and should be possessed. All creation is working unceasingly toward the realization of all its latent potentialities, toward the actualization of a better and nobler reality. No rational being casts a doubt on this fact to-day, nor is he in any position to doubt it, since no creature gives such eloquent testimony to this fact as man himself. The recognition of a true, vital evolution in the cosmic universe is accepted to-day, and with full justice too, as the most important conquest of our science. Man himself assumes an odd position in the process of universal evolution, for we may truly call him the lord of creation. Man it is who, to be sure, succumbs to the laws of nature and must reckon with them, but who in spite of this can command these laws and all the forces of evolution and exploit them for the realization of his wishes and ideals: the creation of a better reality lies within the power of man. It is the most sacred duty not alone of every individual but also of the whole of human society to create more and better being and living.

This task is not at all easy and for that reason it is no wonder that the leaders of human society along with peoples and states generally put forth vigorous efforts for anything else than the realization of that which we all accept as most sacred. Nor can we even blame these people for their choice of action, for: Do not temporal possessions, material treasures, position, power and physical force make man, and especially peoples, safe from all enemies? Are not economically strong peoples always victors? Thus it seems in reality, but this is only a superficial impression, for history teaches us that those peoples which do not strive for the realization of the