

## HENRYK SIENKIEWICZ.

Sketch of the Great Polish Novelist.

There are bad novels just as there are bad poems and plays, nay, even bad theological books. But some works of fiction stand out foremost among literary creations, and to Catholics it is gratifying that among authors of such in these latter days one of the novelists whose works are rapidly gaining universal recognition, is not only a Catholic, but the representative, the mouthpiece, so to speak, of a whole nation, whose greatest claim to glory is and has ever been its unswerving fidelity to the Church. I am speaking of Henry Sienkiewicz, the great novelist of the Poles.

The avowed purpose of the Russian Government is to crush out every trace of a national life in Poland. In this it has not succeeded, and it is safe to say, will never succeed, for two reasons. First, the Polish people possess a radical individuality, unusually strong and indomitable, and secondly, the denationalizing influences have been brought to bear upon them too late. Before the Poles lost their independence, they had attained a high degree of culture, in some respects as high as that of any other European nation, and far superior in every way to that of the Russians. Thanks to this, the Poles have been able to produce during the nineteenth century a literature, unsurpassed in modern Europe for originality, exuberant imagination, and profound religious sentiment.

No wonder, then, that when "With Fire and Sword" and its two sequels appeared, they were greeted with an outburst of popular enthusiasm anything similar to which we should look for in vain in the literary life of any other people in this century and the publication of these romances became a national event.

The period Sienkiewicz treats of is the second half of the seventeenth century. Long before his heroes were born had the Jesuit Peter Skarga—the Demosthenes of Poland in his immortal sermon with prophetic spirit warned his countrymen that ruin was impending, were they to keep up their intestine quarrels and dissensions. In Poland the kings were elected, and could not, as in other countries, leave the throne to their nearest heir. Americans justly rejoice in their free institutions—howbeit different epochs require different forms of government, and obviously it was the greatest misfortune for Poland that at a time when its neighbors, Brandenburg and Russia, nay, even the distant Sweden, were threatening its very existence, no single strong hand guided its destiny. The very fact of the king's being, as it were, the creature of the nobles, deprived him of all effective authority, each individual prince or baron (general) considered himself as possessed of the right to sever his allegiance to the crown on any plausible occasion, in order to join fortunes with the king of Sweden or Czar of Russia. We all know that the ultimate result was Poland's destruction and subjugation under the three neighboring powers, Russia, Austria and Prussia, each of whom is now the possessor of provinces of that ancient kingdom.

Sienkiewicz does not conduct his readers so far, and when he makes us, as it were, foresee the final disaster, he does this only indirectly, by the inevitable logic of the events related by him. For although it may be safely asserted that no novelist ever possessed a sounder or taught more important lessons to the intelligent reader, yet Sienkiewicz is nowhere plainly didactic, nor moralizing.

The thing is, he is before anything else a poet and a painter. A poet who while writing in prose knows how to invest it with all enticing charm and commanding power of superbly wrought verse; a painter whose easel contains

lines as brilliant as sunbeams, as soft and soothing as moonlight. And of what infinite variety and never failing force are the scenes he unrolls on his vast canvas.

Already in "With Fire and Sword" the deep and far reaching influence of the Church is distinctly accentuated, at times with stirring pathos as where the priest makes the young lieutenant repeat "Thy will be done!" at the moment when, as he believes, all he counted it worth living for has been forever lost—at times with that touch of humor which indicates infallibly a spirit truly Catholic—such a spirit as ventures ever to play and smile before its Eternal Mother.

As a matter of fact, no greater misapprehension could be entertained in regard to Sienkiewicz than that his books were permeated by a gloom and pessimistic spirit, on the contrary, although he depicts his scenery in their true colors, always vivid, at times repulsive, no enlivens them constantly by a vein of wit, as irresistible as that of any American humorist. The irrepressible Zagloba—by an enthusiastic American critic aptly styled, a combination of Ulysses and Falstaff—has become so far, perhaps, the most popular of all his characters.

I doubt, however, whether in the long run Zagloba will be able to maintain himself as undisputed favorite by the side of Kmita (the Kmita of the Polish original) the leading character of the sequel to "Fire and sword:—The Deluge." We know of few as fascinating creations in modern literature as this young nobleman, who at the outset appears almost a brute, and winds up a truly Christian hero, who has conquered not only countless Swedes, but what is far more astounding, his own nature, so long deemed indomitable.

And this leads me back to what I deviated from: the Catholicity in these Polish novels. If "Fire and Sword" has episodes as edifying as any sermon, "The Deluge" may be said to form itself into a hymn in honor of the Church, and more particularly of the Blessed Virgin.

The deluge that gives name to the book is the invasion of the Swedes, under their king, Carolus Gustavus, an invasion that was greatly furthered by the treason of several Polish princes, foremost among whom stood the Calvinist Radziwill. At a certain time the complete annihilation of Polish independence seemed to be a question of merely a few days more or less; the country was flooded by enemies, treason reigned supreme, the king himself had fled in despair.

Then, all of a sudden, something passing strange occurred—Carolus Gustavus sent one of his most famous Generals to occupy the monastery of Chenstohova, where a famous image of our Lady is venerated. Chenstohova is situated on a mountain and surrounded by walls; yet for a house occupied only by priests and a small band of nobles and soldiers to defy the Swedish General and his regiments would obviously seem sheer madness. Nevertheless, they did undertake it. How it was carried out, how thereby courage and hope were awakened all through the country, how Kmita with all but fabulous daring, had his share in the glorious outcome, and how the noble prior, equally great as a priest and as a leader of men, had, towering above everything else, stood out for the profound faith of the people within the sacred precincts, their fervent devotion to our Lady, their Christian self-sacrifice and childlike trust—all of this must be read in the book itself, no magazine article being able to do justice to the unique pathos of these chapters.

Not long ago it was publicly asserted that every Catholic priest felt glad to receive a set of Scott's novels for the parish library, and certainly Scott was a noble novelist, and far less pro-

judiced against the Church than most Protestant writers. Sienkiewicz, though not presenting such a variety of well-drawn female characters as does the creator of Jeanie Deans, Rebecca and Julia Manning, equals him in the delineation of masculine nature, and excels him by far in general literary art and finish; he renders the spirit of bygone ages with greater correctness; he is to crown it all, a devout and fearless Catholic—all strong reasons why we should be a guest more welcome among Catholics than ever the author of Ivanhoe.

Sienkiewicz was born in 1815, studied at the University of Warsaw, went abroad, spent years in the United States, studied African natives and Catholic missions at Zanzibar, walked over the boulevards of Paris and along the Pacific slope. But he has found, as every great writer does find, that his chief work should be at home, and from Cracow, where he resides, he has sent forth those romances which have gone all over the world, arousing sympathy and admiration for the Polish heroes fought in our War of Independence—the names of Kosziusko and Pulaski shall never be forgotten by citizens of the United States. Catholic Americans, moreover, are united to Sienkiewicz and his people by yet another tie—that of the common religion. And when our author on a certain occasion quotes the text "They sowed in tears and reaped in joy," the reader feels like applying it to the entire Polish people—that people who at times have seemed well nigh submerged in streams of their own blood and tears.

It only seemed so. The day of resurrection is sure to come—the day of a harvest as rich in joy and glory as the past has been abundant in tears and in sorrow.—Joseph Alexander in the *Rosary Magazine*.

## When to Save and When to Spend.

Many years ago a venerable priest was making collections to repair his church. He called on a lady who passed for being very rich and generous. As it was already late in the day the lady called for a light. The servant took one of those long matches dipped in brimstone, which were then in use, touched it to the fire, lighted a candle in a silver candlestick, and threw the rest of the match in the fire. The lady sharply scolded the girl on her extravagance. "That match," she said, "could have been used at least eight times." The priest thought that he had got into the wrong pew, and that he might as well have saved himself the trouble of calling. What, then, was his surprise when the lady opening her bureau, counted out to him two hundred dollars. The priest, to make up for his unjust suspicion, grew warm in his thanks. "This is not much for such a good work. But perhaps you are not expecting that much after my severe lecture to the servant; but if we want to have anything to give to God and to the poor we must let nothing go to waste, it is absolutely necessary to train servants to economy in the smallest details. As the girl has been in my service only a short time, I made it a point to give her that lesson in your presence that she might better remember it."

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When women vote it is to be hoped that they won't be allowed to bet bouquets on the election. Otherwise their husbands would certainly be ruined when the time to pay up came.

## Mgr. Satoll Comments.

When Archbishop Satoll visited New York city to take part in the celebration of the Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul at the Church of St. Paul the Apostle he manifested much gratification on hearing the music of the Church as rendered by the great sanctuary choir, consisting of 100 male voices. Last Saturday the Rev. Father Alfred Young, the director of the choir, received from the Delegate the following letter of congratulation, written in English, from the house of the delegation in Washington:

"*Rev. and Dear Father Young:* One of the most grateful impressions I retain of my last visit to New York on the occasion of the Feast of St. Paul's Conversion is that made upon me by the plain chant which I had the pleasure of hearing in your church. The grave and solemn character of the composition, the harmony of the voices of the adult choir mingled with the clear voices of the boys, and the smooth execution of the singing produced such an effect upon the hearers as to cause the soul to realize that the house where these sounds are heard is the house of the Lord.

That such were the impressions of all the people at the ceremonies could have been easily inferred, not only from the grand silence maintained all over the sacred building during the services, but also from the feelings of holy devotion created by that singing. May it please Almighty God that such edifying singing could be heard in all the churches of the country. Any effort made for this purpose would certainly meet with the pleasure of the Holy Father, who has always taken so much interest in the use of the Gregorian Music, and it would bring down the blessings of God, to whose house the plain chant is so truly becoming.

However, I do not mean by this to blame altogether the use of figured music, which by its serious and grave harmony is also becoming, although in a different way, to the dignity of the Catholic worship, as used in the basilicas of Rome, and as I have heard it in many churches of this country."

The Gregorian chant, as rendered by the choir of the church of the Paulist Fathers, was introduced into that church by Father Young in 1872. It was then that the gallery choir was dispensed with. The innovation caused much discussion, but the example thus set has been followed to greater or less degree in nearly every Catholic church of importance in the land.

Mgr. Satoll's letter of commendation to Father Young was preceded nearly sixteen years ago by one from Cardinal Martinelli, of similar import, under date from Rome, Aug. 25th, 1878.

White Baron Alphonse de Rothschild was driving to the Bois de Boulogne (Paris) on Tuesday, one of the wheels of his carriage gave way and the horses bolted. The Baron managed to escape from the vehicle without being hurt.

A large can containing a gallon of petroleum, a quantity of gunpowder and other explosives and bits of iron nails, etc., with a lighted fuse attached was found outside the main entrance to the house of Abbe Garnier, editor of *Le Peuple Français*, Paris.

In the House of Commons, on Monday, Mr. Sydney Buxton, Under Colonial Secretary, announced that the Earl of Jersey had been appointed Imperial delegate to the intercolonial conference at Ottawa. The Earl of Jersey was Governor of New South Wales from 1890 to 1893.

The great lung healer is found in that excellent medicine sold as Bickel's Anti-Consumptive Syrup. It soothes and diminishes the sensibility of the membrane of the throat and air passages, and is a sovereign remedy for all coughs, colds, hoarseness, pain or soreness in the chest, bronchitis, etc. It has cured many when supposed to be far advanced in consumption.