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NEW ERA FOR THE POLES.

Interesting Review of the Policy of Conciliation
Pursued by the Czar Nicholas.

From the time when Thaddeus Kosciusko fought for the independence of the United States as aid-de-camp and orderly officer to Washington, his services being commemorated by means of a monument on the banks of the Hudson at West Point, and by the Kosciusko School for colored people, which President Thomas Jefferson founded at Newark, the people of this country have always manifested a very marked interest in the fate of Poland. All oppressed and down-trodden nations struggling for freedom meet with generous and whole-hearted sympathy on this side of the Atlantic, no matter whether they be Armenians, Cretans, Irish or Jews. But somehow or another the case of Poland appealed more strongly than that of any of the unhappy people just mentioned, to the American heart. Their fight for liberty, which has continued almost without interruption for more than 100 years, has been signalized by so many romantic episodes, has furnished such unique examples of bravery, of patriotism and of chivalrous self-sacrifice, that anything which affects their welfare meets with a keener appreciation in North America than anywhere else in the world.

This being the case, attention should be drawn to a very remarkable feature of the new policy of conciliation, which young Emperor Nicholas from the very moment of his accession to the throne of Russia has inaugurated in the Polish provinces of his dominions. It is nothing more nor less than the repeal of that iniquitous law which prohibited every one professing any other than the orthodox Greek

faith from owning or occupying land in the former kingdom of Poland. Inasmuch as the Poles, in spite of the cruel persecutions to which they have been subjected on religious as well as on racial grounds, have remained fervent adherents of the Roman Catholic church, this was equivalent to debarring them from retaining possession of such of their ancestral estates as had been left to them after the wholesale confiscation which the Russian Government was in the habit of decreeing after every revolutionary movement, and even without any such cause, but on the most frivolous and trivial of pretexts. It is worthy of note that in spite of the reputation for tyranny enjoyed by the first Emperor Nicholas, and the renown for the possession of more enlightened and liberal principles accorded by history to his son, the ill-fated Alexander II, this law was enforced with far greater severity under the reign of the latter than during that of his parent. Indeed, there is no ruler of Russia beneath whose rule the Poles may be said to have suffered so much from persecution and oppression of every conceivable character as that of the so-called "Liberator" Czar.

The present Emperor has altered all this and has caused it to be made known that not only has the obnoxious law in connection with the tenure of land in the western provinces been repealed, but, moreover, that he would be glad to see the Polish nobility once again occupying their ancestral estates. Ever since this has been understood abroad there has been a steady flow eastward of the Polish aristocracy, and they are rapidly recovering, by means of purchase, all those castles and domains with which the names of their families have been identified since time immemorial. Among those who have already taken advantage of the Czar's new policy in this particular are the Counts Potocki, Zamoyski, Starzenski, Czartoriski, and about 100 more bearers of equally illustrious names, who will doubtless become in course of time quite as loyal to the Czar as their fellow-countrymen in the Austrian portion of Poland are to Emperor Francis Joseph. It is pleasant under the circumstances to

be able to state that these Polish Princesses and Counts are recovering their estates at a relatively small cost. The old proverb, according to which violence and persecution always end by inflicting more injury upon the people who make use thereof as an instrument than to those against whom it was directed, has proved true once more in this instance. For while the Russian nobles who obtained the Polish castles and estates either by grant from the Russian Government, which had confiscated them, or else merely at a nominal price at the compulsory sales are now in such a state of financial distress and bankruptcy that Nicholas has just been forced to appoint an imperial commission to devise some means for their relief, the Polish nobility have prospered to such a degree in exile that ere long they will constitute what is to every monarchical country a source of boundless strength, namely, a rich and affluent territorial aristocracy, possessed of sufficient means to develop the latent resources of the country, and above all to ameliorate the condition of the peasantry and masses for whose material welfare as their tenants they are morally responsible.

Had the until now brief reign of Nicholas II been signalized by no other event than the inauguration of this new and liberal policy toward the Poles it would in itself have been sufficient to render it notable in the history of Russia. The present Czar and his advisers have at length realized what has long been apparent to every unprejudiced student of statecraft, namely, that whereas an antagonistic Poland must necessarily be a cruel source of weakness and of acute danger to Russia, a loyal and contented Poland on the other hand constitutes a bulwark of defense to the huge empire against its most execrated and hereditary, as well as dreaded foe, namely, Germany. Poland can never be Russianized. The national sentiment, the national religion and the love for the national traditions are too deeply inrooted in the hearts of the people for that, and all attempts in that direction have lamentably failed, the only result having been to still further accentuate the difference between the two races by reducing the Poles to the condition of political pariahs, that is to say a caste apart, deprived of the

civic rights and privileges of the Russian-born subjects of the Czar. But while Poland cannot be Russianized it can be transformed into an invaluable ally; and if any doubt prevailed in the mind of the present Czar it must have been set at rest by the phenomenal success which has attended the policy in this direction pursued in Austrian Poland by Emperor Francis Joseph.

Austria's tactics toward her Polish provinces have been entirely different to those of Russia and of Prussia. Whereas the two latter have endeavored to crush the national sentiment, the Viennese authorities, on the contrary, have fostered it, and Francis Joseph has made a point of conceding as much autonomy as he possibly could toward his Polish lieges. The result is that to-day there are no more devoted adherents, no more chivalrously loyal supporters of the Hapsburg dynasty than the Polish aristocracy and the peasantry of Galicia. They hail Francis Joseph, not as their "Emperor," but as their "King," and are now engaged in raising, by popular subscription, a

national fund to be used in the restoration of the former glories of the palace of the old Polish kings on the Mount Wavel at Krakow, which is to be presented to Francis Joseph on the forthcoming fiftieth anniversary of his ascension to the throne. The Galician peasantry make magnificent cavalry soldiers and the Polish nobility the most dashing and brilliant cavalry officers. Moreover, the Polish aristocracy possess so much intuitive shrewdness and innate diplomacy that from their ranks have been recruited many of the most responsible and valuable servants of the Austro-Hungarian crown. Thus the Prime Minister of Austria at the present moment is a Polish noble of the name of Count Badeni, while Emperor Francis Joseph, on the occasion of his recent state visit to the court of St. Petersburg, was accompanied by another great dignitary of Polish nationality, Count Golouchowski, popularly known as "Golou," and who fills the office of Minister of Foreign Affairs for the dual empire, and performs likewise the duties of Minister and Chancellor of what is known as the "Imperial House" of Austria.

Without recommending the Czar to intrust the destinies of Russia to Polish nobles, as has been done in the case of Austria by the Emperor Francis Joseph, who has never made the mistake of attempting to Austrianize his Polish subjects, there is no reason whatsoever why Nicholas should not, if he continues in his present enlightened course of policy, con-

vert the Poles in his dominions into just as loyal and as devoted vassals and supporters of his throne as are the Galicians in connection with the crown of Austria-Hungary. And I may add that no happier time could have been chosen for the inauguration of a new policy of this kind in Russian Poland, for it coincides with a renewal of Emperor William's singularly ill-advised endeavors to Prussianize Posen—that is to say, that portion of the former kingdom of Poland, which at the time of the partition of the latter in the last century was awarded to Prussia. People in the past have been so much accustomed to look for despotism and tyranny on the part of Russia that nobody has paid much attention to Prussia's persecution of her Polish subjects. True, there have been times when the persecution has abated for a period. But the reasons for this have been of a nature to reflect no credit on the authorities at Berlin, for it has been invariably due not to any sense of justice nor to any considerations of statecraft but merely in consequence of the influence exercised at court by some Polish noblewoman possessed of the beauty and captivating charms of her race. As long as Bismarck remained at the head of affairs this served to intensify his hatred of the Poles, and the latter, looking upon him as one of the bitterest foes of their race, naturally took conspicuous part in every court cabal against him, for which it is true he lost no opportunity of revenging himself. When the old Emperor died and the influence which the princely house of Radziwill had exercised upon him came to an end, Bismarck had a free hand and oppressed the Poles, nobles as well as peasants, to his heart's content. This continued until his disgrace. Shortly afterward the young Emperor became subjugated by the grace and beauty of Baroness Kosciol Koscielski, wife of one of the leaders of the Polish party in the Prussian House of Lords, and perhaps the most popular among his countrymen of all their national poets and playwrights. The mastery which the Baroness obtained over the young Emperor was so great that it led to his Majesty's reversal of the Bismarckian policy toward the Poles, whereupon the ex-Chancellor, in the course of a public speech, declared that "the Polish influence augments to the detriment of Prussia always in the measure that some Polish family obtains more or less influence at court. I need not mention that of the Radziwills, and to-day we have exactly the same state of affairs." Bismarck's allusion to the Radziwills was a reference to the old Emperor's "grande passion" for that lovely Princess Elizabeth Radziwill, whom he was at one moment on the point of marrying, and to whom he remained devoted throughout her lifetime.

This however did not stay young Emperor

This, however, did not stay young Emperor William. On the contrary, it served merely to cause him to show more and more favor to the Kosciols, and he not only re-established in deference to their entreaties the Polish language in the schools and churches of Posen and nominated a Polish ecclesiastic to the archbishopric of that province, but likewise appointed a number of Polish nobles to important offices at court and in the army.

All things come to an end, even the reign of

All things come to an end, even the reign of a beautiful and clever woman. If court gossip at Berlin is to be believed both the Empress Victoria Augusta and her mother-in-law, Empress Frederick, showed themselves aggrieved by the amount of talk created both at home and abroad through the attentions of the Kaiser to the fair Pole. Moreover, during the grand army maneuvers that took place in the province of Posen some of the Polish nobles in whose castles Bavarian, Saxon and other princes of the Confederation known as the German empire had been quartered were emboldened by what they looked upon as the Emperor's favor toward their race to adopt a spirit of independence which took the form in several cases of a refusal to hoist the flag of their royal guests on the ground that no colors could be permitted to fly except those of Poland. The climax, however, came when Baron Kosciol-Kosciolski, on meeting the Austrian Emperor at the opening of the exhibition at Lemberg, in Austrian Poland, hailed not Emperor William but his Austrian Majesty as the real and only "King of Poland," the "only King" to whom alone all Poles were willing to accord allegiance. This speech was immediately communicated to Emperor William, and as it happened to reach his ears simultaneously with angry protests from the King of Saxony, who complained of the slights to which his brother, Prince George, had been subjected as above described by the Polish noblemen in whose castles he had been quartered during the army maneuvers, he determined in his usual impulsive fashion to cut adrift from influences that had become a matter of public gossip and popular ill will. So he intimated to the Baron and Baroness that their absence from court was preferred to their presence, and when the Baron traveled to Potsdam to try to explain matters the Emperor sternly refused to receive him and suggested in a manner that allowed no misunderstanding that the Baron should leave the city at once and remain on his estates.

That ended Polish influence at the court of Berlin, and as if to atone for his infatuation, which while it lasted served to estrange many of his Prussian nobles and his South German allies, William is now manifesting as much

bitterness and ill will toward the Poles as he formerly showed favor. He has as far as possible removed all the Polish nobles from the positions of dignity and trust to which he had appointed them while subject to the thralldom of the Baroness, and loses no opportunity of saying harsh things about the Poles in general, denouncing them as ungrateful and disloyal, threatening them with the fullest measure of his wrath in the event of his discovering them engaged in any practices that can possibly be construed as treasonable. Naturally his subordinates take their cue from him, and the result is that at no moment have there been so many instances of persecution, oppression and downright brutality on the part of the Prussian authorities toward the Poles as have been recorded of late.

Of course, this only serves to accentuate the conciliatory course pursued by the Czar on the eastern shores of the Vistula, and one of the effects thereof has been to lead many great landed proprietors in Prussian Poland to migrate across the frontier and to transfer to the Czar the allegiance hitherto accorded to Emperor William, at the same time placing at the disposal of Russia the valuable knowledge — strategic, economic, politic, administrative and military—which they have obtained while still subject to the German Emperor. Numbers of them are being naturalized as Russians, and among the most recent instances thereof is that of Prince George Radziwill, son of old Emperor William's principal aid-de-camp

and formerly one of the most brilliant figures of the court of Berlin.

Poland has so many friends in this country that widespread satisfaction cannot fail to be created in the United States by the Czar's inauguration of a policy which, while just to the chivalrous and gallant Poles, is likewise certain to prove a source of strength to his immense empire.

EX-ATTACHE.

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