

Cowles, John

"Journeyings of the Grand Commander : Part V"

Ars Regia 2/1 (2), 68-73

1993

Artykuł został zdigitalizowany i opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez **Muzeum Historii Polski** w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

John Cowles – Journeyings of the Grand Commander. Part V.

Wednesday, October 10, was rather bad weather and a good day to travel, so leaving Berlin at 8:40 a.m., I arrived in Warsaw at 8:40 p.m., a trip of just twelve hours.²⁵ I spent most of the day lying down, as I had contracted a cold in Berlin and was trying to conquer it. The railroad ran through about the same kind of country of which I had seen so much, and I noted nothing of prime interest. The „Pullman”, however, was a constant source of investigation. It appeared to be a combination of contrivances and esoterics, and there were lots of little „doodads” for the traveler’s convenience. One in particular: suspended from a hook was a round brass frame in which was a pad of plush, and above it a concealed electric light. This was just above the head of the traveler when in bed, so that at any time he could switch on the light and see the time (that is, if he had hung his watch on the hook with the pad) without moving. Now that’s luxury. There were several other contrivances, but I could not determine what they were for; hence esoterics, as. I cannot write of them, indite or inscribe them in a way that might be understood by anyone. These cars, all called *de luxe*, have at least one advantage for me. The seats run crosswise of the car and I can lie down, full length in ease and comfort, when a nap is needed. It is quite expensive to ride in them, as fare for the day’s ride was \$8 extra.

A Cordial Welcome

Upon arriving in Warsaw, Brothers Strug, Iwanowski, Lubczyński²⁶, and some eight or more other brethren gave me a cordial welcome at the station and, considering the small number of Masons in Poland,²⁷ it surpassed the most optimistic expectations. Then went to hotel, where a most gorgeous suite was put at my disposal.²⁸ The salon was about 20 by 22 feet, with a hardwood floor of intricate pattern; furniture, gold with upholstery and curtains of red damask and lace. The bedroom, about 16 by 18 feet, was in harmony with the salon, and the bathroom was of tile and marble. After discussing the program arranged for my visit, „good-nights” were said and I proceeded to doctor my cold.

Martial Display

Thursday morning I was awakened by the sound of a band of music and the tramp of soldiers. Peeping out of the window I saw in the square the assembling of troops – cavalry, artillery, infantry. It was the 10 anniversary of the cavalry regiment organisation, and a review in celebration

was carried out with precision and pep. The band was mounted on gray horses, and the marches it played were spirited ones.²⁹

Brother Lubczynski called for me and took care of the transportation and visas for next leg of the journey.³⁰ It is extremely difficult to get accurate information about railroad trains, and to figure out the time tables is a task beyond me. He also showed me about the city, for an American is lost if he cannot speak one or two languages. Yet I was surprised to find so many who can speak English in this far-away country.

The opera house³¹ is an attractive one and the Town Hall and office buildings are very good indeed for such a young republic. The old castle, home of royalty some four or five hundred years ago, overlooks the Vistul River, the largest river in Poland. Not much traffic on the river, for though quite wide, it is not very deep. A new bridge of concrete and steel has been built across it to a flourishing suburb which contains a large and beautiful public garden and park.³² Drove over this bridge and back by the old bridge, which brought us into the older part of the city.

Catholic Majority

Churches are numerous and mostly Roman Catholic, for Poland is about 90 per cent of that faith. In Warsaw the population is about 1,000,000, and the Jewish people are well represented, as nearly one-third of the people are of that race. Not many Protestants, with only a few small churches or chapels.³⁴ I am told though that the more intelligent and cultured portion of the citizens, while christened in the Catholic Church, are not practical Catholics and pay no attention to excommunication;³⁵ therefore, the Church has no influence over them. From these come some of the most active and influential Masons. Considering the small number of Masons in Poland, it is to their great credit that so many of them occupy prominent government positions, as well as civic and military, and they have quite an influence in the life of the country as a whole. Hence, little has been heard in the past three or four years of anti-Semitism, or the persecution of anyone because of religion or race. This is fine, and is no doubt responsible for the improved conditions in the whole country.

There is a good deal of building going on.³⁶ All whom I met said that the situation has steadily improved since the country became a republic. They spoke with evident pride of their accomplishment and look brightly to the future. It is true that newspaper articles, coming from Catholic sources, are more or less frequently directed against the Masonic Fraternity, but no reply is ever made to the Charges. This incident was related to me: a certain prominent citizen as official was attacked for being a Mason, he having the same name as one of the Masons. He replied to the attack

by saying that he was not a Mason, but would esteem it a great honor if he were.³⁷ This was a compliment to the Craft and a brave thing for him to say.

There are some nice monuments and fountains in the city. One monument is to Copernicus, the only one I have seen anywhere to that famous wise man of centuries ago.³⁸ Two government buildings face each other which a colonnade of stone uniting them and passageways through this colonnade. On the right and on the left are the ingress and egress to a fine public park and garden. Between these passageways and between the columns of the colonnade is the tomb of the Unknown Soldier.³⁹ Outside the columns are four huge bronze vases on stone, about 15 feet high and forming a square, and within the columns are five small bronze vases, three at the head forming a triangle, the apex pointing to head of the Unknown, and two at the foot, all nine of these vases in flame and presenting a silent and impressive scene.

Beautiful Scenery

On the trees in the parks the leaves were turning yellow and brown, but on that late day, October 11, the parks were full of flowers of gorgeous coloring, making, in their rich, fresh dress, a pleasing of the trees. One end of this park fronts the home of General Pilsudski,⁴⁰ Poland's hero of the World War, and for a time President. He was also premier, which he recently relinquished and has now only a cabinet position.⁴¹ The streets are pretty well crowded; the people appear happy and good natured. There is a commingling of the old and new both as to clothing and vehicles. There are autos and wagons, and carts drawn by horses with big hoops over their backs. Two funerals passed us; the man who led was dressed in black and carried aloft a cross with the figure of the crucified Christ thereon; then came the hearse, painted the blackest black I have ever seen. Following on foot were a few men, women and children. It was a sorrowful procession and calculated to make sad all who witnessed it.

In the evening I attended a called meeting of the Supreme Council, was welcomed officially, and the great distinction of being made an Honorary Member was bestowed upon me. Then the meeting was opened in a lower degree and all Scottish Rite Masons invited to participate.⁴² I met here two brethren who in the past had called on me at the House of Temple in Washington, one whom I last had seen in Bucharest two years ago.⁴³ This meeting was held in a private home, for Masonry here is constantly being attacked; very few may let their membership be known without being made to suffer, so that at present it is best to have no permanent meeting place. They are optimistic, however, and hope that by the influence of their lives, conduct and deeds time will change things; therefore, each is contributing monthly some amount to a fund with which they may

build a temple.⁴⁴ To be a Mason in Poland means constant sacrifice, and the Fraternity there deserves the good will and support of Masons wheresoever dispersed.

Points of Interest

Friday, October 12, two of the brethren showed me the city. Very interesting was the Ghetto where most of the Jewish people reside and carry on business, and I saw many patriarchs with long, white beards and wearing little caps, just as can be seen today in New York City. The market place is an open square with business houses fronting on it. Some of these houses have the entire front painted in vivid designs, which gives the place quite a bizarre look but is attractive⁴⁵. Had a look at the parliament buildings, old churches, parks, of which there are many, and the palace. This was the home of Poland's kings and is now the residence of the President of the Republic. The interior is much more splendid than the exterior would indicate. Repairs were being made and the palace temporarily closed, but my friends secured permission for me to enter. Much of the furniture and valuable possessions were taken to Russia when Poland was under the Czar's rule, but enough was left to indicate how royalty in this country, as well as in others in Europe, leved luxury, comfort and ease. The room that Napoleon occupied (the throne room) when he captured Warsaw in the war with Russia, the tapestries, the elaborate designs of the hardwood floors and the exquisite leather upholstery, were noted, but what interessed me most was the private chapel of king, now used for the President to attend mass, which he does seemingly with two attendants as there are two stools, one on each side of the President's chair. In this chapel, entombed in a vase, is the heart of Kosciuszko, the national hero, who aided the Colonies in America. The brethren here are very anxious to get authentic evidence of Kosciuszko having been a Mason, as they know it would be of vast benefit to them in many ways. They have a legend that he was made a mason in Indiana.⁴⁶ If there are any proofs extant of his having been of the Craft, I shall be exceedingly pleased to have them.

Visits Public School

Next we went to a public school for boys, modern in every respect; heard the boys'band play; saw the swimming pool, gymnasium, vocational training, chemistry, and other departments, including the assembly room with a small stage which is converted on occasions into a chapel,⁴⁷ for although the school is public the state religion is Roman Catholic; hence that religion is taught and the catechism is a part of the lessons.

Next, visited the Grande Lodge Library, which though small is very good and has a few rare volumes and manuscripts. This library is in the possession of a member, who owns a block of buildings and he has set aside one room for it. He carries the keys and sees to it that everything is securely kept.⁴⁸

In the evening I had the very great pleasury of dining in the home of one of the leading bankers of the city, an authority on the subject, as shown by the fact that his treatise is to be published by an American company. He and his charming wife and beautiful daughter all speak English exceptionally well. This insight into the home life of a Polish family was to me a very happy occasion. They know how to entertain.⁴⁹

After dinner, I attend a meeting of the Grand Lodge, called for the purpose of allowing me to meet the members. The Grand Master welcomed me and the honors given were the same as in the Grand Lodges of the United States,⁵⁰ and they are the only Grand Honors over there, so far as I have seen, that are like our own. There were about sixty present and they filled the room. With a few exceptions none were there who were present at the meeting the evening before, for they were requested to stay away so that the room might accomodate those whom I had no met. Looking into the faces of those brethren, I saw in every feature the determination to go and to follow their convictions. They know full well that masonry is inopular with the masses, who are continually incited against it by the clerge. They know what the word sacrifice means to maintain a cause they love, and they excited my strongest sympathy and admiration. The Grand Master⁵¹ and others spoke, and within five minutes after the meeting closed every vestige of everything Masonic had disappeared and the room had returned to its normal condition of a reception room with its polished harwood floors, like hundreds of others. They had no columns or pedestals; used tables and had no altar in the center of the room but, following the English system, had a table in front of the Master where lay the open Bible with the other Great Lights properly arranged after the First Degree, as all business is conducted on the First.⁵² I enjoyed every minute of the session. Considering the situation there in its entirety, I believe those Masons have as fine a conception of the Institution⁵³ as can be found anywhere, and in the art of hospitality they can not be expelled.

The street car fare is quite cheap in Warsaw – about two and a third cents – and there are other reasonable charges, but some things are very dear and the cost of living is much beyond that of pre-war days. Unskilled labor can be had for fifty to sixty cents per day.

Left Warsaw Saturday at 2:30 p.m.⁵⁴ The Grand Master, the Grand Commander and about a dozen of the brethren came to the station to wish me *bon voyage*. I was surprised, and felt the compliment deeply. These men are among the leading citizens of Warsaw, men of business and high social standing who, I know, did this courteous act at some

sacrifice. They said that I was the first American Mason to pay them a visit and they appreciated it.⁵⁶ I can testify that they showed their appreciation, for never have I experienced a finer exhibition of true spirit of brotherhood. Indeed the whole time I passed in Warsaw was filled with their kindly deeds. The Polish language is entirely unfamiliar; these Masons knew it and never once was there transportation to secure, telegrams to be sent, money to be charged or any service whatever but that one of them was there to do it for me. It was a great help.

John Cowles – Podróże Wielkiego Komandora. Część V.

We środę, 10 października [1928 r.], pogoda była raczej brzydka a dzień zatem dobry dla podróży. Wyjechawszy więc z Berlina o godzinie 8.40 rano, przybyłem do Warszawy o 8.40 wieczorem, podróż trwała więc dokładnie dwanaście godzin.²⁵ Większość dnia spędziłem leżąc, ponieważ w Berlinie nabawiłem się przeziębienia i trudno mi było je przezwyciężyć. Pociąg przejeżdżał przez okolice o prawie jednostajnym wyglądzie, których wiele widziałem; nie dostrzegałem też niczego szczególnie ciekawego. Zatem sam wagon typu „Pullman” był dla mnie niezmiennie obiektem obserwacji. Wydawał się być połączeniem pomysłowości i ezoteryki, było tu mnóstwo małych „sztuczek” służących wygodzie podróżnego. Jeden szczegół: z haka zwisała w okrągłej mosiężnej ramce pluszowa poduszeczka, a ponad nią ukryte było światło elektryczne. Znajdowało się wprost nad głową leżącego pasażera, tak że o każdej porze mógł włączyć światło i – nie ruszając się – zobaczyć, która jest godzina (to jest, jeśli powiesił swój zegarek na haczyku przy owej poduszeczce). Obecnie jest to zbytekiem. Było tam również jeszcze kilka innych pomyslowych urządzeń, nie potrafiłbym jednak określić do czego służą. Stąd się bierze owa ezoteryka, nie umiem bowiem o nich, w sposób dla kogokolwiek zrozumiały, ani napisać, ani wysłowić się, ani też naszkicować. Wagony te, powszechnie nazywane *de luxe*, mają dla mnie przynajmniej jedną zaletę. Siedzenia są w nich ustawione w poprzek wagonu, dzięki czemu mogłem wygodnie i z komfortem wyciągnąć się na całą długość kiedy zachciało mi się zdrzemnąć. Podróż takim wagonem jest bardzo kosztowna, za każdy dzień płaci się dodatkowo 8\$.

Serdeczne powitanie

Kiedy przyjechałem do Warszawy, serdecznie przywitani mnie na dworcu bracia Strug, Iwanowski, Lubczyński²⁶ oraz około ośmiu lub więcej innych braci, co – biorąc pod uwagę niewielką liczbę wolnomularzy w Polsce²⁷ – prześcignęło moje najśmielsze oczekiwania. Następnie pojechałem do