

Adam Mickiewicz and Margaret Fuller

Margaret Fuller was the second American whom Mickiewicz met and with whom he was united by a closer friendship than that with James Fenimore Cooper. They met for the first time in February, 1847, in Paris. It seems that this American writer and fighter for women's rights, beautiful, sensitive, very intelligent, and somewhat extravagant, made a deep impression on Mickiewicz. She was at that time the author of several books (*Summer on the Lakes, Papers on Literature and Art*) and of articles in the *Dial*, the organ of the "Circle of Transcendentalists" (headed by R. W. Emerson) and in the *New York Daily Tribune*. She was interested in philosophical, social, literary, and moral problems and distinguished herself by a kind of enthusiasm and faith akin to Mickiewicz's. Their first meeting must have had a very unusual character: what Mickiewicz said to her must have been extremely touching and exciting, since—according to some

35. "The Books of the Polish Nation," *Konrad Wallenrod and Other Writings*, p. 127.

36. Words in quotation marks are from Cooper's appeal to the American people; see *supra*, note 27.

sources—she "fainted away on the sofa." Equally extraordinary is Mickiewicz's letter written to her in French after this first meeting. It begins with very lofty general statements and continues by defining her spirit as "linked with the history of Poland, of France and America" and her "mission" to contribute "to the deliverance of Polish, French and American womanhood."¹

The uninitiated reader should realize that Mickiewicz was at that time deeply absorbed in mysticism and in activity among "brothers" of a mystic Circle. The character and tone of Mickiewicz's letter to Margaret Fuller reflects precisely the method of those mystics in approaching people and "converting" them to their faith; they tried to convince them that they had a special and important "mission" to fulfill, in this way awakening their faith in themselves and in the sacred "cause."

Margaret Fuller's account of this meeting is much simpler in expression (see below), but her later letters approached—according to Wellisz—to some extent the tone of Mickiewicz. They probably met more than one time in Paris, but Margaret Fuller left shortly for Italy (in February, 1847) and further relations were confined to correspondence. What is interesting is that Mickiewicz's letters of that time are different in mood, limited rather to personal affairs, full of tenderness and worry about her health, although from time to time the "mystic" tone manifests itself. One is tempted to speculate whether Mickiewicz had not a more "earthly" interest in the attractive American than to convert her to his faith and to help her in carrying out her "mission"; the more so since at the time Emerson was preparing Margaret Fuller's *Memoirs* "a story was being told of how the poet Mickiewicz had wanted a divorce to marry Margaret and how Mazzini had offered to marry her."²

Be that as it may, the friendship and correspondence between them continued, and Margaret Fuller did not lose interest in the "Cause" and her possible role in it. When Mickiewicz arrived in Rome in

1. See Leopold Wellisz, *The Friendship of Margaret Fuller d'Ossoli and Adam Mickiewicz* (Polish Book Imp. Comp., New York, 1947), whence all these details are taken.

2. Ralph L. Rusk, *The Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949), p. 378.

February, 1848, to organize the Polish Legion, "they met often" (Wellisz, p. 28). Margaret Fuller's letters from Rome (see below, Nos. 3, 4, 5) pertain to this period of their relationship. She was also further informed by him about his trip to Milan and followed with interest reports in newspapers on his expedition and the attitude of the Italian people (see No. 5). Then she herself took part in the Italian revolutionary movement and directed an army hospital throughout the siege of Rome by the French (Wellisz, p. 36). She received one more letter from Mickiewicz in 1849, proposing that she write articles for the *Tribune des Peuples* published by him in Paris. Almost a year later, in July, 1850, Margaret Fuller d'Ossoli met her death in the Atlantic together with her husband and child.

The following excerpts from her letters illustrate her sentiments toward Mickiewicz and Poland.

I

To Ralph Waldo Emerson

Naples, March 15, 1847

Mickiewicz, the Polish poet, first introduced the *Essays*³ to acquaintance in Paris. I did not meet him anywhere, and, as I heard a great deal of him which charmed me, I sent him your poems, and asked him to come and see me. He came, and I found in him the man I had long wished to see, with the intellect and passions in due proportion for a full and healthy human being, with a soul constantly inspiring. Unhappily, it was a very short time before I came away. How much time had I wasted on others which I might have given to this real and important relation.⁴

2

To E.H. [Elizabeth Hoar]

Paris, January 18, 1847, and Naples, March 17, 1847

. . . Afterwards I saw Chopin, not with her [George Sand], although he lives with her, and has for the last twelve years. I went to see him in his room with one of his friends. He is always ill, and as frail as a

3. *Essays* of R. W. Emerson (1841). The latest biographer of Emerson, Professor Ralph L. Rusk, seems to confirm this statement in writing: "Mickiewicz, presumably the first to make Emerson known in France . . ." (p. 350).

4. *Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli*, by R. W. Emerson, W. H. Channing, and J. F. Clarke (Boston, Roberts Brothers, 1874), II, 207.

snow-drop, but an exquisite genius. He played to me, and I liked his talking scarcely less. Madame S[and] loved Liszt before him; she has thus been intimate with the two opposite sides of the musical world. Mickiewicz says: "Chopin talks with spirit and gives us the Ariel view of the universe. Liszt is the eloquent *tribune* to the world of men, a little vulgar and showy certainly, but I like the tribune best."⁵

3

To Ralph Waldo Emerson

Rome, March 14, 1848

Mickiewicz is with me here, and will remain some time; it was he I wanted to see, more than any other person, in going back to Paris, and I have him much better here. France itself I should like to see, but remain undecided, on account of my health which has suffered so much, this winter, that I must make it the first object in moving for the summer. One physician thinks it will of itself revive, when once the rains have passed, which have now lasted from 16th December to this day. At present, I am not able to leave the fire, or exert myself at all.⁶

4

Letter XXIII to the *New York Daily Tribune*

Rome, March 29, 1848

I have seen the Austrian arms dragged through the streets of Rome and burned in the Piazza del Popolo. The Italians embraced one another and cried, *Miracolol Providenza!* The modern Tribune Ciceronacchio fed the flame with fagots; Adam Mickiewicz, the great poet of Poland, long exiled from his country or the hopes of a country, looked on, while Polish women, exiled too, or who perhaps, like one nun who is here, had been daily scourged by the orders of a tyrant, brought little pieces that had been scattered in the street and threw them into the flames—an offering received by the Italians with loud plaudits. It was a transport of the people, who found no way to vent their joy, but the symbol, the poesy, natural to the Italian mind. The ever-too-wise "upper classes" regret it, and the Germans choose to resent it as an insult to Germany; but it was nothing of the kind; the insult was to the prisons of Spielberg, to those who commanded the massacres of Milan—a base tyranny little congenial to the native German

5. *Ibid.*, p. 198.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 234.

heart, as the true Germans of Germany are at this moment showing by their resolves, by their struggles.⁷

5

Letter XXIV to the *New York Daily Tribune*

Rome, April 19, 1848

The Poles have also made noble manifestations. Their great poet, Adam Mickiewicz, has been here to enroll the Italian Poles, publish the declaration of faith in which they hope to re-enter and re-establish their country, and receive the Pope's benediction on their banner. In their declaration of faith are found these three articles:

"Every one of the nation a citizen—every citizen equal in rights and before authorities.

"To the Jew, our elder brother, respect, brotherhood, aid on the way to his eternal and terrestrial good, entire equality in political and civil rights.

"To the companion of life, woman, citizenship, entire equality of rights."

This last expression of just thought the Poles ought to initiate, for what other nations has had such truly heroic women? Women indeed—not children, servants, or playthings.

Mickiewicz, with the squadron that accompanied him from Rome, was received with the greatest enthusiasm at Florence. Deputations from the clubs and journals went to his hotel and escorted him to the Piazza del Gran Duca, where amid an immense concourse of people some good speeches were made. A Florentine, with a generous forgetfulness of national vanity, addressed him as the Dante of Poland who, more fortunate than the great bard and seer of Italy, was likely to return to his country to reap the harvest of the seed he had sown.

"O Dante of Poland, who like our Alighieri has received from Heaven sovereign genius, divine song, but from earth sufferings and exile—more happy than our Alighieri, thou hast reacquired a country; already thou art meditating on the sacred harp the patriotic hymn of restoration and of victory. The pilgrims of Poland have become the warriors of their nation. Long live Poland, and the brotherhood of nations!"

When this address was finished, the great poet appeared on the balcony to answer. The people received him with a tumult of applause, fol-

7. *The Writings of Margaret Fuller*, selected and edited by Mason Wade (New York, The Viking Press, 1941), pp. 452-453.

lowed by a profound silence as they anxiously awaited his voice. Those who are acquainted with the powerful eloquence, the magnetism of Mickiewicz as an orator, will not be surprised at the effect produced by this speech, though delivered in a foreign language. It is the force of truth, the great vitality of his presence, that loads his words with such electric power. He spoke as follows:

"People of Tuscany! Friends! Brothers! We receive your shouts of sympathy in the name of Poland; not for us, but for our country. Our country, though distant, claims from you this sympathy by its long martyrdom. The glory of Poland, its only glory truly Christian, is to have suffered more than all the nations. In other countries the goodness, the generosity of heart of some sovereigns protected the people; as yours has enjoyed the dawn of the era now coming, under the protection of your excellent prince. (Viva Leopold II!) But conquered Poland, slave and victim of sovereigns who were her sworn enemies and executioners—Poland, abandoned by the governments and the nations, lay in agony on her solitary Golgotha. She was believed slain, dead, buried. 'We have slain her,' shouted the despots; 'she is dead!' (No, no! Long live Poland!) 'The dead cannot rise again,' replied the diplomatists; 'we may now be tranquil.' (A universal shudder of feeling in the crowd.) There came a moment in which the world doubted of the mercy and justice of the Omnipotent. There was a moment in which the nations thought that the earth might be forever abandoned by God, and condemned to the rule of the demon, its ancient lord. The nations forgot that Jesus Christ came down from heaven to give liberty and peace to the earth. The nations had forgotten all this. But God is just. The voice of Pius IX roused Italy. (Long live Pius IX!) The people of Paris have driven out the great traitor against the cause of the nations. (Bravo! Viva the people of Paris!) Very soon will be heard the voice of Poland. Poland will rise again! (Yes, yes! Poland will rise again!) Poland will call to life all the Slavonic races—the Croats, the Dalmatians, the Bohemians, the Moravians, the Illyrians. These will form the bulwark against the tyrant of the North. (Great applause.) They will close forever the way against the barbarians of the North—destroyers of liberty and of civilization. Poland is called to do more yet: Poland, as crucified nation, is risen again, and called to serve her sister nations. The will of God is that Christianity should become in Poland, and through Poland elsewhere, no more a dead letter of the law, but the living law of states and civil associations (Great applause); that Christianity should be manifested by acts, the sacrifices of generosity and liberality. This

Christianity is not new to you, Florentines: your ancient republic knew and has acted upon it; it is time that the same spirit should make to itself a larger sphere. The will of God is that the nations should act towards one another as neighbors, as brothers. (A tumult of applause.) And you, Tuscans, have today done an act of Christian brotherhood. Receiving thus foreign unknown pilgrims, who go to defy the greatest powers of the earth, you have in us saluted only what is in us of spiritual and immortal—our faith and our patriotism. (Applause.) We thank you; and we will now go into the church to thank God.”

All the people then followed the Poles to the church of Santa Croce, where was sung the *Benedictus Dominus*, and amid the memorials of the greatness of Italy collected in that temple was forged more strongly the chain of sympathy and of union between two nations, sisters in misfortune and in glory.

This speech and its reception, literally translated from the journal of the day [*Patria*, April 17, 1848, No. 233], show how pleasant it is on great occasions to be brought in contact with this people so full of natural eloquence and of lively sensibility to what is great and beautiful.

It is a glorious time too for the exiles who return and reap even a momentary fruit of their long sorrows. Mazzini has been able to return from his seventeen years' exile, during which there was no hour night or day that the thought of Italy was banished from his heart—no possible effort that he did not make to achieve the emancipation of his people, and with it the progress of mankind.⁸