

Address before
National Conference of Polish Arts Clubs
New York, New York
August 12, 1939

BRIDGING THE GAP

The National Conference of Polish Arts Clubs has honored me with an invitation to speak here. I was pleased to accept.

I remember the early days of the Polish Arts Club of Chicago. The purposes and the aims of that organization were then and are now laudable since they were purely cultural - in the interest of all. The objective, as I knew it then, and as I see it now, was and is in the broad interest of the people of the United States and certainly not, so far as I understand it, limited by any narrow conception of arts and their benefits to society. Thus do you make a contribution to American culture which has been forming for generations, for it is to be expected that we all should not only take from American culture, but also give to this culture which is different from that of any other nation, as it combines in itself the cultures of many nations with a life and a history that makes this culture different from that of any other nation. American life and history is replete with adjustments.

Just as there is always some difficulty encountered by the individual in making adjustments so there have been and will be, more or less, the same difficulties in the adjustments to be made by generations and elements of people living in the United States. Education and broad vision, with a thorough and unselfish understanding of the problems of individuals as well as the problems of generations, are a great aid in bridging gaps. Having bridged these gaps we proceed forward. It is only when we fail to construct that necessary link that we stand still - not knowing where to go. Certainly no one with average intelligence can conscientiously be in favor of a program of standing still. If we are to help ourselves we must continuously move forward irrespective of the obstacles that arise.

With a zest for knowledge and with a definite aim, we adopt a program of progress, and stand by that program irrespective of the obstacles and difficulties that we are certain to encounter. To be successful, however, we must be tolerant. We must have a full knowledge and appreciation of the causes, reasons, and principles that lead to a misunderstanding of what we aim to do, since, after all, the purpose of what we may be doing is not selfish, but rather for the general good. From that comes complete satisfaction. Our problem, after all, is one that has been vital for many generations to persons of Polish extraction.

It is the problem of adapting the traditions of past generations to the needs and interests of new generations. In a sense it is a universal problem, for even in the same country and amid unchanged surroundings a gap exists between generations which it is not easy to bridge. When the older generation belongs to one country and the younger to another, the difficulty is far greater.

But as friends of the arts, we have, it seems to me, the inspiring example of a great number of Polish artists whose achievements have been

a victory over similar conditions in the past. For Polish history has been such that a long list of her sons have made their name outside of Poland, some through necessity and some through choice, some through fortune and some through misfortune. Either they were forced into exile by political conditions or their talents were so great that the world at large demanded to share them.

In the field of music this last has been the case. The two outstanding Polish names in this field are those of Chopin and Paderewski, both of whom have had the world for audience and concert room. The same thing is true of the great Polish novelists, Henryk Sienkiewicz, the author of *Quo Vadis* and *Pan Michael*, and Ladislas Reymont, Nobel prize winner and author of *The Peasants*. The writings of these men and the compositions and performances of Chopin and Paderewski, have captured the attention not merely of Polish readers, but of the whole world.

These four that I have just mentioned exemplify perhaps the perfect method of bridging the gap between one culture and another, between one generation and another. Their achievements have risen above the limitations of any one race or time and have become universal in their appeal - and they have not been attended by forced alienation from their native land.

In contrast to them are the Polish artists whose achievements owe much to exile. The first of these that I think of is the poet, Adam Mickiewicz. He was forced to spend the greater part of his life outside his own land and yet in his work, especially in the great poem, *Pan Tadeusz*, he succeeded in being, in the words of Professor Dyboski of the University of Cracow, "the great voice of Poland appealing to the nations in her agony".

Another exile whose career is of extraordinary interest and inspiration is the great English writer, Joseph Conrad, whose family name was Korzeniowski and whose father was an important Polish writer of the early 19th century. The family were the object of political persecution and lived at various times in exile. Joseph Conrad himself, however, went into his exile voluntarily, as so many others have done who found conditions in their native land too oppressive to be borne. Conrad was a youth of extraordinary imagination and sensitiveness. He had read great works of literature and had been impressed by what he read. He was only 17 years old when he left Poland and made his way to France, and thence to sea. After two years of service in the French merchant marine, during which he made voyages to Africa and South America, he went to England and obtained employment as mate on an English ship. Four years later he was a captain. He had learned the English language and mastered the requirements of the British merchant marine. For years thereafter he led successfully a career as master of British ships. During those years he endured such sufferings and privations as the sea can impose and through it all was a leader of men and a victor over difficulties and emergencies.

But this attainment was not enough. The imagination which had led him from the heart of Poland out upon the seven seas, now impelled him to seek achievement in the field of creative literature. In such leisure as he had on long voyages and between them he worked for years

on his first novel, *Almayer's Folly*. It was published and by a critical few was recognized at once as an outstanding literary achievement. He turned then from the sea and gave himself wholly to the task of writing, but though he produced several books which subsequently brought him fame and fortune - *Youth*, and *Lord Jim*, and *the Nigger of the Narcissus* - his efforts at the time seemed in vain. His readers were few and though they were enthusiastic he could not live upon their praise. He was so greatly discouraged that he considered abandoning literature and returning to the sea, but fortunately his luck changed and for the succeeding years of his life he enjoyed the fame and comfort which the products of his genius won for him.

Today, after his death, he is recognized as one of the most distinguished modern writers of English. So far as we can foretell the future of such things, his literary work is of permanent value. Yet he was a man who spoke no English until he was fully grown. Although his style is remarkable for its beauty, the fact that he wrote in a tongue that was not native to him meant that his expression was achieved only with extreme labor and application. Sometimes in a whole day he would be unable to get more than a few sentences that would satisfy him.

Here then is an outstanding example of how successfully the gap between two cultures can be bridged. Conrad did not turn his back upon the language of his youth when he took up the writing of English but throughout his life he profited from his linguistic inheritance. He was able from his knowledge of Polish and of French to write English such as no native writer of English could write.

We could mention the names of hundreds of artists from past and present history in the United States and in Poland, as well as other parts of the world, illustrating our point in each instance about painters, poets, musicians, artists of the stage and pen, and artists in any and every branch of Polish art, but the occasion does not call for numbers, for you know these men and women, but rather the occasion calls merely for the illustration of the point of universal culture - old and new - past and present, as an aid to bridging the gap.

The same sort of inheritance in one way or another belongs to all of us. We have a tradition and a culture behind us which is our unique possession. That culture is to our advantage, but we do not live in the past alone - we live in the present and in the future and our accomplishments as artists, or rather I should say, your accomplishments as artists, whether you are in the field of music, painting, or writing, should benefit from your background. You have the advantage that comes from transplantation into new settings. You know how often, those of you who are gardeners, a plant that is moved into a new location is invigorated by being transplanted. In us an old and noble culture is finding its way in a new environment. What we need is adaptability, courage, and diligence. And I repeat tolerance. Tolerance especially is necessary to bridge the gap between the new and the old. Without it antagonism is inevitable. The two generations are apt to look at one another with distrust and exasperation. Yet in doing so, each fails to see the value of the other. For the new generation would be lost without the old, and the old would be hopeless without the new. Each has its good, and tolerance enables us to see that good.

And it is not between generations only that tolerance is required. Everywhere in the world we need it. It was only a few years ago that tolerance seemed to be one of the things we were most sure we possessed. We prided ourselves that the present was more tolerant than the past. I can not believe that we have lost ground permanently. Sooner or later the world will come to its senses. But that will happen only because we individually adopt toward others the attitude we should wish them to adopt toward us.

Today, perhaps more than ever before, do we face problems - social, economic and political, the solution of which to a large extent rests with a full appreciation of the value of culture. Since culture helps to make all men one, it is a means by which the American people - whatever their origin - become a single unit - strong and indissoluble. Men may differ in their views on social, economic and political questions. They may even differ in their attitudes toward certain works of art; whether it be in music, literature, painting, or any other form of art, but it is certainly true that the works of men and women who gave of their hearts and minds with a view to the elevation of thought and feeling are a ground upon which men can gather in the common pursuit of their lives with the hope of making and leaving behind them a contribution that will, in a degree, help "Make lives sublime".

Economic problems often consume much of our time and energy, since the primary requisite of life is to obtain the means by which to live; therefore, individuals, groups and even nations may often, for a time, have but little opportunity to give of themselves to the cultural, and yet it is frequently by way of the cultural that we arrive at the solution of the fundamental economic problems, for in order to solve such a problem we must first have a common ground upon which to solve it, and the cultural affords such a common ground.

Whatever difference may exist between individuals, between generations, between groups, and between nations, may easily disappear with the proper pursuit of cultural understanding and appreciation. Culture expresses itself in various ways, but always to the same end, because a development of the mind and the heart brings forth from the inner soul of the human being the best that is in him in consonance with nature and its expressions. By studying the development of culture in the United States we can understand better the history of the people in this country from the earliest days of its pioneers up to the present time. This country, after all, is representative of a true democracy which affords every individual and every element an opportunity to take from it that which will help in his or their daily life by physical, mental and moral development, and at the same time to give to others the things that will assist them. In other words, we are not tied down to any particular point of view, or to one particular school of thought or feeling. Our culture is free and we are free to accept whatever we consider best and whatever we think will do the most good. It was aptly written that

QUOTE In the art of design, color
is to form what verse is to prose, a
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thought END QUOTE

Therefore, since this is true in the art of design, it must likewise be true of all arts - that we proceed through them to a more harmonious base upon which we can think and solve the everyday problems of men, of generations, of groups, and of nations.