

“TRUE TO A SINGLE OBJECT”: THE CHARACTER OF TADEUSZ KOŚCIUSZKO

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INTRODUCTION “Chłopek Roztropek”

Deep in the heart of Wawel Castle in Kraków, Poland, there is a tomb that, unlike those surrounding it, does not hold the remains of a Polish monarch. On its front, there are carvings of spears, flags, a sword and a hatchet: these are the trappings of a soldier. There is also a scythe: the symbol of a peasant. This tomb rests among those of the nation’s greatest kings and queens, yet the blood that once flowed in the veins of the man inside was hardly blue. He was born a member of the lower gentry; he never possessed great wealth or even a position in the royal government; and he died, far from his beloved Poland, in exile and defeat.

On the banks overlooking the Hudson River in the New York Highlands, a bronze soldier stands atop a pillar surveying the surrounding countryside. Nearby sits West Point Military Academy, the training grounds for American army officers for the last two centuries. The statue clasps maps and surveying tools in his hands. There are deep lines etched on his face despite his apparent youth. The soldier’s difficult-to-pronounce name stretches across the base of the monument and betrays his foreign origins.

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The tomb in Wawel Castle and the statue on the Hudson serve as reminders to the inhabitants of two nations to honor the memory of one man: Tadeusz Kościuszko. He fought for the independence of the United States and gave all but his life for the dream of a Polish republic. His endeavors made him a celebrity of the Revolutionary age along the lines of George Washington or the Marquis de Lafayette; unlike these men, his has not remained a household name into the twenty-first century. Kościuszko, despite the great monuments in his honor and the important role he played in both American and Polish history, has largely been forgotten. Yet there is a reason that this warrior lies buried with kings and stands guard over the fort he designed on the banks of the Hudson. The Pole’s personal qualities and uncompromising devotion to mankind’s happiness made him an exceptional model for imitation in his own time, and a study of his life should inform our thinking about *virtue* and *freedom* today. We must develop some understanding of the man whom Thomas Jefferson called “as pure a son of liberty as I have ever known”¹ if republicanism is to prosper. Though his name has faded from the historical record, Kościuszko’s principles retain the power to guide us as individuals and as a nation.

Tadeusz Kościuszko was a hero on both sides of the Atlantic. In order to fully comprehend and appreciate his character, we must see him through the eyes of three

¹ T. Jefferson to H. Gates, 21 February 1798. Boyd, Julian P., ed. *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1950: v. XXX, p.123

nations that claimed a love of liberty during the late eighteenth century. The most profound writings about Kościuszko come from the United States of America – particularly the letters chronicling his service in the Continental Army and his later correspondence with Thomas Jefferson; from Poland – including his proclamations during the uprising that bears his name; and from Great Britain, whose Romantic poets dedicated works to him in the aftermath of the Polish revolt. Though united in their praise of Kościuszko, these nations' understanding of "liberty" varied drastically: to Great Britain, liberty was rooted in the balance of an unwritten constitution; to Poland, it was freedom from foreign influence and the integrity of the monarchy and national legislature; and to the United States, it was a self-evident truth that formed the foundation of the American republic. These three perspectives shed light on the life of an extraordinary man – perhaps the most extraordinary of his time.

A full portrait of Kościuszko, built from the letters, poems, and speeches connected to him, reveals a pure heart and unshakable principles. The character illuminated by these documents explains why he was regarded as a great liberator and why the very name "Kościuszko" should still stand as a symbol of liberty for all mankind. He exemplified the republican virtue of the eighteenth century, providing a model of disinterested patriotism and selfless service in the cause of universal freedom and happiness.

Andrzej Tadeusz Bonawentura Kościuszko was born 12 February 1746 in Mereczowszczyzna, a small estate in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. He was the youngest of four children born to Colonel Ludwig Kościuszko, a member of the *szlachta*, or Poland's lower gentry. Though not especially wealthy, Kościu-

szko's manor was worked by over thirty peasant families held in serfdom. Feudalism had existed in Poland for centuries; the aristocracy relied upon serf labor to keep their estates afloat. Despite the rigid stratification of Mereczowszczyzna's inhabitants, Ludwig's youngest son, while still a child, began to challenge the traditional social boundaries. Kościuszko's mother, Tekla, permitted her children to "play with the peasant children and to roam freely about the village."² Nicknamed "chłopek roztropek," or "the lively little peasant,"³ Kościuszko experienced equality firsthand as he ran through the fields and house accompanied by children who, though destined to suffer under an oppressive system, were no different from himself in their capacity to grow and play. The serfs were bound to the manor and expected to work the land without wages and without opportunities for advancement. Childhood games, however, made the offspring of master and serf – for the time being equal. This intermixing was common on many estates, yet the notions of equality triggered by interaction with the peasant children remained with Tadeusz Kościuszko into adulthood and shaped his views of what "citizenship" *should* mean in Poland.

Kościuszko was educated at home until he was nine years old, at which point he was sent to a college run by the Piarist Fathers. His schooling deepened his empathy for the common people as he was exposed to Locke's theory of a social contract and, more importantly, to the story of the Greek general Timoleon. The tale of a soldier "who freed his fellow Corinthians and the Sicilians from the tyranny of Carthage"⁴ was meaningful to a young man

² Gronowicz, Antoni. *Gallant General: Tadeusz Kosciuszko*. Trans. Samuel Sorgenstein. New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1947. p.2

³ Gronowicz p.3

⁴ Storozynski, Alex. *The Peasant Prince: Thaddeus Kosciuszko and the Age of Revolution*. New York: Thomas Dunne, 2009. p.3

who witnessed Poland's suffering under the tyrannical Russian Protectorate of the eighteenth century. Kościuszko's idealization of the Greek sprung from the fact that this soldier-statesman "overthrew tyrants, set up republics and never demanded any power for himself."⁵ The history of Timoleon served as a lesson in national self-determination and individual liberty, developing Kościuszko's hopes for Poland while also molding his sense of social justice. In adopting Timoleon as his role model, the youth became increasingly aware that "Europe's unjust class structure and agrarian economy allowed the rich to get richer by exploiting the peasants."⁶ Kościuszko came to reject the feudal system early in life because it deprived fellow Poles of the ability to define the course of their own lives and it crippled the nation as a whole; in denying liberty and happiness to a large portion of society, Poland could never hope for a *popular* uprising strong enough to eliminate Russia's hold over the Polish government and military.

Kościuszko entered the Royal Knight School in 1765 under the patronage of Prince Adam Czartoryski, the head of one of Poland's greatest noble families. Poland's military heritage remained strong despite the efforts of Catherine the Great of Russia to bring the nation into submission. In becoming a part of this heritage – one of the last symbols of Polish sovereignty – the seeds of life-long patriotism were planted in Kościuszko and his fellow cadets. The Knight School was overseen by Czartoryski, an Enlightenment thinker and a supporter of educational reform. Czartoryski's message to the officers-in-training was clear: "He, whom the chance of birth and fortune has chosen for active civic duties, should strive to perfect himself in such knowledge... You, who now find your Homeland in the most lamentable state conceivable, should

populate it with citizens ardent for its glory, for increasing its internal vigor and its international prestige, [and] for improving its government."⁷ The cadets were taught that it was their *sacred duty* to fight for Poland's independence and to campaign for reform. Kościuszko embraced his patron's ideals whole-heartedly and was an extremely dedicated student. Specializing in military engineering and fortifications, he rose through the ranks of the school, earning the respect of his peers and instructors. An "unpretentious and likable"⁸ young man, he became the model for the kind of soldier that the Royal Knight School aimed to foster.

Upon graduating, Kościuszko was offered a scholarship to continue his training in France. In Paris, he was exposed to the revolutionary ideas of Rousseau, Montesquieu, Voltaire, and Diderot. The Polish cadet was greatly intrigued by the physiocrats, who presented an alternative system to feudalism by arguing that a *laissez-faire* approach to agricultural production was ultimately more beneficial than forced labor. In regard to his military education, Kościuszko hoped to further his training in order to return to Poland with "a complete store of the most up-to-date and exact knowledge of military science"⁹ that would enable him to help restructure and strengthen the Polish army. In 1772, however, the failure of the Bar Rebellion in Poland led to the first in a series of partitions that would eventually wipe Poland from the map of Europe. In this initial partition, his homeland lost one-third of its territory to Russia and her allies. The ideas and knowledge Kościuszko brought back with him from France proved useless as his opportunities to rise in the military vanished.

⁷ Quoted in Pula, James S. *Thaddeus Kościuszko: The Purest Son of Liberty*. New York: Hippocrene, 1999. p.25-26

⁸ Storozyński p.11

⁹ Gronowicz p.27

⁵ Quoted in Storozyński p.3

⁶ Storozyński p.3

The financial struggles of his family, combined with the lack of professional prospects, caused Kościuszko to turn to education to supplement his income. He became a tutor for the Sosnowski family, the head of which was a wealthy and influential member of the Sejm, or assembly of Polish nobles. Though the position of tutor to the Sosnowski children was a good fit for the gentle, charming Kościuszko, his circumstances took a turn for the worse when he fell in love with Ludwika Sosnowska, one of his employer's daughters. The couple's failed elopement is the material of legend, but the incident taught Kościuszko the "painful reality of class distinction."¹⁰ With a broken heart and little hope of advancement, Kościuszko once again decided to leave Poland. He returned to France, where foreigner officers were being recruited to assist the Americans in their quest for independence. Later joined by some of the Bar confederates – Polish rebels such as Casimir Pułaski, who were fugitives in the aftermath of the partition – Kościuszko sailed for America in June of 1776 to offer his services to the revolutionaries.

The narrative of Kościuszko's early life suggests a number of themes that emerge throughout the various writings surrounding the Pole. Before flushing out these themes in depth, it is important to gain some understanding of Kościuszko's personality and the influence of his Polish background. He was, first of all, a man of faith who was deeply concerned with morality. His faith, unlike deists such as Jefferson, was largely based in emotion; he believed that God's will was expressed in man's character, specifically in his unlimited capacity to love and his determination to be free. Kościuszko's "profound sense of morality"¹¹ informed his daily actions, ex-

plaining his remarkable compassion for others even in the midst of war. He was also a "firm believer in prayer,"¹² applying to the grace of Providence to save Poland and her patriotic sons. He composed a prayer late in life that testified to the nature of his belief:

Almighty God, who enlivens the world's millions with your spirit, Who has ordered me to live in this valley of tears for designs hidden from me, Grant that I may wend my way through it over roads pleasing to You... Let me come to know your genuine truth unmarred by any human error. Bless, O God, my country, my relatives, my friends, my benefactors, my countrymen – the whole human race. And when my last hour comes, when my soul takes leave of my body, grant that I may stand before Your countenance in the dwelling of the blessed and comprehend the mystery of the world which today is beyond my comprehension.¹³

The sorrow of Kościuszko the defeated patriot is apparent in these lines, but they also hint at the trust he had in God's design and the freedom promised to all humankind, in this world or the next. Despite the many heartbreaks of Kościuszko's life, from unluckiness in love to the constant grief he felt for Poland's plight, he never abandoned his belief in a higher moral power.

In light of his burdened heart, Kościuszko's sociability and humor are striking features of his persona. His friend Julian Niemcewicz, a Polish soldier and poet, described Kościuszko's appearance: "He had big eyes, a pleasant build, but a melancholy and pale face, with a black ribbon tying a thick braid of natural hair into

¹⁰ Storozynski p.15

¹¹ Storozynski p.274

¹² Storozynski p.273

¹³ Quoted in Storozynski p.273-274

a pony tail.”¹⁴ Not especially attractive, Kościuszko was admired for his charm and wit. He developed a real sense of camaraderie with his companions, often jesting with his fellow soldiers and teasing his female friends. Glimpses of his humor can be found in his correspondence: in a note to Nancy Elliott, who had married his friend Major Morris during the American Revolution, the Polish officer joked that he would readily take Morris’s place. “Tell her I propose to marry her when her husband dies,” but if he was still alive, Kościuszko added, “My best compliments to him.”¹⁵ Such lightheartedness undoubtedly endeared the Pole to his acquaintances and cemented his reputation as a good-natured soul. He genuinely sought the happiness of others, and took an active part in fostering cheerfulness. When a noblewoman refused to join a party in Paris, for instance, the Pole “returned with a few young men and threatened that if she did not join the party, his friends would carry her inside.”¹⁶ The disappointments of his life did not sour Kościuszko’s relationships; rather than focus exclusively on his personal hardships or Poland’s sufferings, he aimed to cultivate joy where he could through small gestures.

Men born into the ranks of the nobility did not necessarily have noble characters; the historical record can attest to the many shortcomings of the mighty. Tadeusz Kościuszko was among those rare noblemen who actually exercised the energy, generosity, and principles ideally associated with the educated, enlightened leaders of society. His high-mindedness extended beyond tolerance and charity to true disinterestedness; he devoted his life to bettering the lives of others, sacrificing his own comforts and expecting no reward. Even when he rose to power during the Polish insurrection,

Kościuszko refused a large salary as Commander-in-Chief and stated that “he would rather work as a gardener among the hedges of the sprawling Czartoryski Palace”¹⁷ than drain the treasury for his own purposes. Nor did Kościuszko possess the vices traditionally ascribed to aristocrats. Though he was attracted to various single and married women over the course of his life, there is no evidence of any transgressions or impropriety. It is also worth noting that Kościuszko rarely indulged in drinking. He admitted his one addiction in a letter to Dr. William Reed in 1781: “I cannot live without coffee.”¹⁸ It is difficult to find any shortcomings in regard to Kościuszko’s private character. Though he made a number of errors throughout his life, most notably during the Polish uprising, his personal failings were few and far between.

In addition to his childhood experiences and education, the national identity of Poland in the mid-eighteenth century influenced Kościuszko and shaped his principles. He was born into a Poland in decline, but remnants of the country’s golden age yet remained. The tradition of liberalism was relatively strong in Poland: “as Western Europe moved toward absolutism, Poland moved toward an elective monarchy and guaranteed gentry rights and privileges.”¹⁹ In conjunction with these liberal policies, religious toleration had been a legal requirement in Poland since 1573. The country became “a haven for minorities” in the seventeenth century, and Polish society “included many different national, religious, and cultural groups: Belorussians, Ukrainians, Ruthenians, Slovaks, Latvians, Germans, Moslem Tartars, Jews, Armenians, Greeks, Italians, Scots, Uniates, Orthodox, Protestants, and others who sought religious freedom and the right to practice their own

¹⁴ Quoted in Storozynski p.15

¹⁵ Quoted in Storozynski p.124

¹⁶ Storozynski p.254

¹⁷ Storozynski p.167

¹⁸ Quoted in Storozynski p.104

¹⁹ Pula p.18

native culture.”²⁰ Poland stood as an anomaly among her neighbors, welcoming those fleeing the persecution of absolutist regimes.

Brought up under this tradition of liberalism and multiculturalism, Kościuszko was, in many ways, a product of his country. He came to America in 1776 to put to use his military training and, more importantly, to fight for what he perceived as distinctly *Polish* values: his homeland’s struggle to fend off foreign intervention, to unify a diverse society, and to reform the national government were “the same values motivating the rebellion he was about to enter”²¹ against the British Empire. He identified with the aims of the American rebels and hoped that the Revolution would instruct the world in the merits of independence and self-government. To Kościuszko, happiness and liberty were fundamentally tied together, and the Americans appeared as “like-minded people whose rhetoric matched the ideals”²² of his Polish heritage. One month after the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the Pole landed on American soil. He was “a man whose historical traditions, cultural values, education, and personal experience forged a personality rich in patriotism, support for national self-government, advocacy for political liberty and personal freedom... and a genuine humanitarianism spanning all classes and varieties of people.”²³ The American Revolution presented an opportunity for Tadeusz Kościuszko to put his principles into action; it would be a test of his character as well as his military skill. The lively child who had played with peasants was about to transform into a lively soldier who fought alongside farmers.

²⁰ Pula p.17

²¹ Pula p.15

²² Storozyński p.16

²³ Pula p.36

CHAPTER ONE

“The brightest and completest of characters”: Kościuszko in the American Revolution

Tadeusz Kościuszko’s role in the Revolution is sadly forgotten by many Americans today; his name rarely appears in history books despite his impressive record. His service was remarkable for several reasons: his planning and the fortifications he designed in the Northern and Southern campaigns were instrumental in securing key victories for the Continental Army; his fort at West Point secured the Hudson River Valley and later became the home of the U.S. Military Academy; but most importantly, Kościuszko’s character, attitude, and commitment to the cause of independence set him apart from other foreign officers that crossed the Atlantic to join the rebels. While his engineering achievements are significant, Kościuszko commands attention due to the esteem he inspired in those he fought alongside of and because he epitomized the eighteenth-century ideal of republican virtue. In his pure, enlightened patriotism, Kościuszko was the very embodiment of the American Revolution and its noblest aspirations.

When Kościuszko arrived in Philadelphia in August 1776, the American situation was desperate. Little over a month after declaring independence, the colonies faced the invasion of New York by the British, and within a matter of weeks New York City would fall to the invaders. The Continental Army suffered from its lack of military genius and there was a great demand for engineers, yet delays in the Continental Congress stalled the Pole’s application for a commission. Not content to sit idle, Kościuszko joined the Pennsylvania Committee of Defense and helped to fortify the Delaware River until he was appointed a colonel of engineers on 18 October 1776 with a pay of

\$60 per month. In April 1777, he moved north with his commanding officer and friend Horatio Gates to examine defenses at Fort Ticonderoga. Upon Gates's departure, Kościuszko served under General St. Clair and encountered resistance to his suggested designs from the fort's chief engineer Colonel Baldwin. Too modest to push forward his own plan for the exposed Sugar Loaf Hill over that of Baldwin's, the Pole instead did everything in his power to fortify Mount Independence, though a fellow officer "detected under his placid silence more than a little anguish and mortification"²⁴ regarding the neglect of the fort's weakness.

When General Burgoyne's army of 7200 attacked and placed cannons on Sugar Loaf Hill, St. Clair ordered the 3000 Americans in the fort to retreat. The army – crossing a bridge that Kościuszko had designed and that a British engineer later described as doing "honor to [the] human mind"²⁵ – began its retreat on 5 July 1777 and reunited with General Schuyler's army as it moved south. Kościuszko, in charge of the rear guard, was responsible for delaying the British advance. This retreat was an extraordinary episode of the Revolution. Kościuszko's men felled trees every dozen yards and destroyed over forty bridges to stall Burgoyne. His highly effective use of natural obstructions nearly halted the British advance: it took Burgoyne's troops twenty days to cover twenty-three miles – seven of which were traversed by water. The British faced severe supply problems while the Continental Army gained almost a full month to recover. Due to Kościuszko's energetic efforts, Schuyler's army gained precious time that saved the Northern campaign from utter ruin.

The next critical moment in Kościuszko's American career came at Saratoga.

With General Gates back in command of the Northern department, Kościuszko selected a camp for the army at Bemis Heights, which he fortified using the natural contours of the earth. His design gave the Continentals flexibility to respond to a British assault and allowed for the quick movement of troops. Burgoyne's army – now restored to adequate fighting condition – hesitated to approach the strong American position as Kościuszko had left only one route of attack open to the British. Saratoga proved to be no repeat of Ticonderoga; this time, Burgoyne was defeated and surrendered his entire army. The victory marked a turning point in the Revolution as American confidence soared and France committed to an alliance with the United States. Despite Saratoga's importance to the course of the war, written histories often fail to tell that "to a significant extent it was Tadeusz Kościuszko who made Saratoga possible"²⁶ by delaying the British force in its advance after Ticonderoga, fortifying the American position at Bemis Heights, and allowing the American lines to make the rapid, offensive movements that secured them a much-needed victory.

Over these long months in the north, Kościuszko's friendship with Horatio Gates grew into an unbreakable attachment. The Pole's respect for Gates was so strong that he nearly fought a duel to defend the general's honor against a disgruntled officer in September 1778. Their friendship had earlier threatened Kościuszko's career during the infamous Conway Cabal, a controversial attempt by some in Congress and the army to replace George Washington with Gates. Kościuszko, nominated for promotion to brigadier general at this time, feared upsetting the precarious situation. His timidity hurt his chances for professional advancement but ultimately worked in his favor. Though Kościuszko was indirectly connected to the cabal through his well-known

²⁴ Quoted in Pula p.59

²⁵ Quoted in Pula p.64

²⁶ Pula p.100

friendship with Gates, his reputation did not suffer in General Washington's eyes. The Commander-in-Chief continued to comment favorably on Kościuszko's contributions in the remaining years of the war and, perhaps to the surprise of many, charged the Pole with the great responsibility of fortifying the Hudson River Valley.

In March 1778, Washington sent the Polish engineer to the New York Highlands to aid in designing and constructing defenses on the banks of the Hudson. Despite the hostility of the French officers at West Point, Kościuszko gained the trust and support of General Alexander McDougall while devising a string of forts and redoubts along the river and placing a chain across the water in preparation for a British attack. A severe shortage of manpower made the work extremely difficult, but Kościuszko reinvigorated what troops he had and made noticeable progress after months of stagnation. Washington took note of the Pole's valuable service, writing to McDougall in February 1779 that Kościuszko "must of necessity have the chief direction"²⁷ of engineering works at West Point. The impregnability of the fortifications during the Revolution was a testament to his genius. General John Armstrong described the engineer's great contribution to the American cause: "he gave the fortifications such strength that they frightened the very enemy from all temptations of even trying to take the Highlands."²⁸ His achievement has been overshadowed by a less noble character connected with the fort. One Kościuszko biographer notes that while the tale of Benedict Arnold's treason is well-known, "the prize he was trying to sell to the British, Kościuszko's handiwork of two and a half

years in the Hudson Highlands, has been but a footnote in history books."²⁹

After completing the fortifications at West Point, Kościuszko wrote to Washington in July 1780 requesting an active command. Though hesitant to let Kościuszko leave New York, Washington sent the Pole to be reunited with Gates, who had been placed in command of the Southern department. After the defeat at Hillsboro, NC, Gates was replaced by Nathaniel Greene and Kościuszko joined the Southern army as Greene's chief engineer. The conditions of the Southern campaign were deplorable: Greene wrote to Governor Jefferson in December 1780 that "your troops may literally be said to be naked."³⁰ The supply shortage was devastating, and Kościuszko famously shared Greene's cloak with two other officers when the army ran out of blankets. The Pole's incredible energy and work ethic became doubly important as morale declined. Greene wrote to Kościuszko in January 1781 that the engineer's choice of camp sites and construction of boats to transport the army quickly were necessary to the campaign's survival, and as "the safety and support of the Army"³¹ depended upon these measures, Greene transferred as many men and resources as possible to the Pole's command. It was due to Kościuszko's efforts that the outnumbered Continentals won the "Race to the Dan River" against Cornwallis's advancing forces.

Despite the significant role Kościuszko played in preserving the Southern army, the disaster at Ninety Six in May 1781 brought out the Pole's critics as well as his strongest supporters. While Kościuszko's siege plans may have only needed time to bear fruit, the surprise British offensive resulted in a Continental defeat. In the

²⁷ G. Washington to A. McDougall, 9 February 1779. *George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress: 1741 - 1799*. Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, 16 Feb. 1999. Winter 2013.

<<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/gwhtml/gwhome.html>>.

²⁸ Quoted in Pula p.145

²⁹ Storozynski p.92

³⁰ N. Greene to T. Jefferson, 6 December 1780. *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, v. IV p.183

³¹ Pula p.160

aftermath of the failed siege, Washington maintained the Pole as Greene's chief engineer, dismissing the suggestion of Lafayette that he replace Kościuszko in the south. Greene agreed with Washington's decision; he referred to Kościuszko as a "Master of his Profession,"³² expressing great confidence in the Pole's abilities. The Polish officer remained with the Southern army through the siege of British-controlled Charleston, during which he was given the task of setting up a spy network of patriots – including African-Americans – at Ashley's Ferry in order to gather intelligence from within the city. His final field command took part in the skirmish at James Island in November 1782, where Kościuszko's coat was pierced by four musket balls and the engineer's life saved by a civilian volunteer. When the Americans finally entered Charleston in December, Kościuszko rode at Greene's side and helped Mrs. Greene plan the victory ball.

After the fighting came to a close, Kościuszko returned to Philadelphia in 1783, seeking a long-overdue promotion and the payment of his salary. He was instead assigned by the Continental Congress to prepare fireworks for the city's July 4th celebration. In November 1783, he entered New York City with General Washington and attended the famous farewell gathering of officers. Though reluctant to part from his American friends, Kościuszko was impatient to return to Poland. As soon as he had received a certificate of indebtedness for the \$12,280.49 owed him by Congress for his seven years of service, Kościuszko wrote letters of farewell to his friends and boarded a ship bound for Europe.

While still a young man in his thirties, the Polish engineer demonstrated a number of qualities during his time in

America that inspired the respect of his contemporaries and that would, one day, enable him to lead an uprising in his homeland. The letters and accounts of Kościuszko from the Revolution highlight some of the particular aspects of his personality that left a lasting impression and testify to his exceptional character. His reputation as a true "son of Liberty" initially stemmed from certain features of his service with the Continental Army as Kościuszko's relationships with fellow soldiers and his virtuous conduct throughout the war caused others to form a remarkably high opinion of him. "When I cease to love this young Man," Col. Robert Troup wrote to Gates in March 1778, "I must cease to love those Qualities which form the brightest and completest of characters."³³ The Pole was seen as the embodiment of all that was good, all that was noble, all that was worthy of admiration in a man of the eighteenth century who served the cause of liberty.

The great esteem for Kościuszko that developed among those he served with in the Continental Army was largely rooted in the Pole's capacity for human kindness. His compassion for all men – without regard to rank or race – surfaced throughout the war. Kościuszko continually sought the health and happiness of those under his command, even in the direst conditions; showing little concern for his own advancement and comfort, he was unwilling to sacrifice the well-being of his soldiers. Other foreign officers persistently wrote to Congress demanding promotion and pay; in stark contrast, "after four years of serving in the Continental Army, when Kościuszko finally wrote to Congress, it was to ask for clothes for his men."³⁴ His consideration for others even extended to British prisoners. It was recorded that Kościuszko shared his rations with starving British soldiers confined in the

³² Quoted in Pula p.186

³³ Quoted in Pula p. 120

³⁴ Storozynski p.85

stockades at West Point³⁵ despite the supply shortage faced by the Continentals. This care for prisoners appears to have been a reoccurring event in Kościuszko's career. It was rumored that the Pole interceded to save the lives of fifty British captives at Eutaw Springs in September 1781, refusing to let the Americans exact unnecessary revenge. Though this incident tends to be regarded as a legend by historians, it does appear to be "in keeping with Kościuszko's character."³⁶

In addition to his humanity, Kościuszko gained the admiration and friendship of his comrades by simply fulfilling the tasks assigned to him. Jestingly referred to as the "Count of Poland"³⁷ by his friends in the Southern campaign, Kościuszko appears to have earned his nickname by exhibiting uncommon integrity and energy before his men. Colonel Otho Holland Williams described Kościuszko in June 1781 as an able engineer and inspiring leader: "a young gentleman of distinction from Poland who left his native country to follow the banners of Liberty in America, superintended the operations, and by his Zeal, assiduity, perseverance and firmness promoted the business with expedition."³⁸ The Pole's energy was apparently infectious among his troops, keeping morale high during the darkest days of the war. From the devastating retreat at Ticonderoga to the perilous race in the south against Cornwallis, it was Kościuszko's constant activity and honesty that maintained order and hope among his men. His commitment to the cause is illuminated through an incident related to the engineer's sole addiction: coffee. Lacking items among his rations in his first days with Greene's army, Kościuszko procured some coffee from a hospital. When accused of stealing, the Pole rectified the misunderstanding by, according to an account by Dr. William

Reed, giving up *all* of his rations to the hospital.³⁹ The Polish officer aimed to do his best by the Americans in his service for the cause of liberty; his tireless military efforts coupled with his honest character left a favorable impression.

His compatriots also saw a less serious side of Kościuszko that further endeared him to American hearts. The Pole, always a charmer among women, aimed to lighten the scene for his soldiers with amusing tales of the female acquaintances he made throughout the war. Kościuszko wrote to Colonel Williams in 1782 of how "two days ago 5 or 6 pretty girls revenged themselves on him for an expression he had used; they had been urging him to draw their pictures and he said he could not make them handsome; they came at him with shovels and tongs and firehooks and chased him till he fainted; then he drew their pictures and they chased him with kisses."⁴⁰ The engineer's good humor added to his appeal and increased his popularity among the men. The strength of their affection made Kościuszko's presence absolutely necessary at the 4th of July celebrations in 1783. A fellow soldier wrote to Williams on July 2 that "Liberty is nothing without a Pole," and that the Polish engineer must have charge of the "illumination, rockets, and racket."⁴¹ The American soldiers genuinely embraced the lively Pole as a fellow patriot and friend.

The exceptional character of Kościuszko was also noted by the commanding officers under whom he served. Horatio Gates, Nathaniel Greene, and George Washington all recognized the Pole's qualities and outstanding service. In the case of General Gates, there existed an easy

³⁵ Pula p.140

³⁶ Pula p.188-189

³⁷ Pula p.199

³⁸ Quoted in Pula p.180

³⁹ Pula p.185

⁴⁰ Kościuszko to Otho Holland Williams, 1782. *Otho Holland Williams Papers, 1744-1839*. Maryland Historical Society, Mar. 1999. Web. Winter 2013. <<http://www.mdhs.org/findingaid/otho-holland-williams-papers-1744-1839-ms-908>>.

⁴¹ William Jackson to Otho Holland Williams, 2 July 1783. *Otho Holland Williams Papers*.

friendship between the commander and his engineer. Kościuszko preferred to serve under Gates more than any other officer while in the north, and when the two were separated, they frequently exchanged letters. Kościuszko managed to briefly visit Gates's home in New York, Traveler's Rest, during his time at West Point. When Gates was sent south in 1780, he wrote to General Washington asking that the Pole be allowed to follow him: "I could wish Your Excellency would somewhat Brighten the Scene by indulging me in my request to Obtain Colonel Kusciusco for my Chief Engineer. His services with me in the Campaign of 77 and the High Opinion I entertain of His Talents, and His Honour, induce me to be thus importunate."⁴² Gates's "importune" request that a specific man be placed under his command stemmed from a genuine desire for Kościuszko's companionship as well as his military expertise. His appeal that his friend be reassigned was granted, though Kościuszko's arrival in the south was darkened by the news that the Pole brought with him from New York of the death of Gates's son. It is worth noting that during his seven years of military service, Kościuszko took only a single leave of absence: "the brief time he spent at Traveler's Rest with General Gates's dying son"⁴³ in the summer of 1780.

When the grieving Gates returned home after the disaster at Hillsboro, Kościuszko remained under the command of General Greene, whom the Pole stayed in contact with as a personal friend until the general's death. For the remainder of the war, Kościuszko served under Greene in the difficult southern theatre of the Revolution. After the Continental Army triumphed over the British, the Pole relied on Greene's assistance as he sought the promotion and salary due to him from Congress. Greene

was not the only advocate for Kościuszko. General Washington himself had supported the engineer throughout the war against the political maneuverings of the French officers. When the Pole applied to the commander-in-chief for aid in the fall of 1783, Washington replied that he "heartily" wished for Kościuszko's "applications to meet with success"⁴⁴ and petitioned Congress to take up the Pole's case. Washington furthered revealed his appreciation to the architect of West Point with a personal tribute, presenting the engineer with a sword, a set of pistols, and the Society of Cincinnati ring from his own finger. Kościuszko was inducted into the society of Continental officers and present at Washington's farewell gathering.

The high regard his fellow officers and military superiors felt towards Tadeusz Kościuszko points to something inherent in his character that aligned with the values of the Revolutionary generation. The Pole embodied the ideal of classical republican virtue in the eighteenth-century American mind. While the Founders displayed a "down-to-earth acceptance of human nature,"⁴⁵ they hoped that a particular type of citizen would emerge following independence. They believed in the capacity of the people for self-government, but they also hoped that the people would elevate worthy men to positions of leadership. To thinkers like Thomas Jefferson, these men would display the quality of disinterestedness, a trait fostered by a regime dedicated to human liberty. "Only autonomous individuals free of interested ties and paid by no

⁴⁴ G. Washington to T. Kościuszko, 3 October 1783. *George Washington Papers*.

⁴⁵ Wood, Gordon S. "Interests and Disinterestedness in the Making of the Constitution." *Beyond Confederation: Origins of the Constitution and American National Identity*. Ed. Richard R. Beeman, Stephen Botein, and Edward Carlos Carter. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1987. p.82

⁴² Quoted in Pula p. 150

⁴³ Pula p.210

masters, were capable of such virtue";⁴⁶ Kościuszko's principles – his commitment to freedom for all humankind – as well as his determination to act according to those principles alone made him an example of this type of selflessness. Disinterestedness, or man's "independent understanding of his needs"⁴⁷ coupled with an understanding of what is good for mankind as a whole, was highly valued by America's republican statesmen. Kościuszko's denial of personal comforts and commitment to service was evident: he was a foreigner, halfway around the world from a homeland he loved, fighting and risking his life for a cause whose victory would mean little to the prospects of his own existence; at best, the Pole would walk away with a pension and a good rank. There was little to draw him to America except the *principles* being defended there. Yet Kościuszko, his disinterestedness apparent in his humility and his belief in the sacredness of the republican cause, proved to be just the kind of virtuous citizen the Revolutionaries hoped would direct the future of the United States.

While such a record in the cause of independence testifies to Kościuszko's incontestable place among the heroes of the American Revolution, there are aspects of his service that set him apart from American and foreign officers alike. While the importance of the Pole's engineering skills and military training could be matched by the charisma of Lafayette or the bravery of Pułaski, Kościuszko's virtuous character – evident in his own writings and in those of his comrades – differentiates him from the others. Among the traits that distinguish Kościuszko as a *purer* son of Liberty – as a *greater* living embodiment of classical republican virtue – than his contemporaries

was his uncommon sense of modesty. "In an era often afflicted by pompous pretension," one biographer notes, "Kościuszko shunned controversy and political maneuverings at a time when political connections often counted for more than ability as a criteria for promotion."⁴⁸ Rather than seeking professional advancement, the Pole focused on his responsibilities as an officer. He put the welfare of the American cause above his own pride, thereby exemplifying the eighteenth-century ideal of virtue.

Kościuszko was not insensitive to the honor that promotion conferred upon military men; he was as desirous of distinguishing himself as any other European officer. Yet while others such as the Frenchman La Radiere viewed promotion as their ultimate goal, the Pole was reluctant to push his own case before the Continental Congress. This humility was rooted in Kościuszko's personality: he valued harmony and goodwill among men above satisfying his own ambition. "I love peace and to be on good terms with all the world if possible," Kościuszko wrote to Gates in May 1777, "if my opinion or Ideas are adopted... I am convinced how much I ought to be on my Guard."⁴⁹ He was acutely aware of his status as a foreigner in America and respected the determination of the American citizens to govern themselves and run their war for independence as they saw fit. If his rise in the army would cause jealousies among the Continentals and their allies, "our world would not be better."⁵⁰ Explaining his position to Gates, Kościuszko wrote: "I declare sincerely that I am susceptible, and love peace. I would chuse rather to leave all, return home and plant cabbages"⁵¹ than cause unnecessary quarrels. He continually assured others that any selfish desires he had for advancement in the

⁴⁶ Wood p.84

⁴⁷ Banning, Lance. "Some Second Thoughts on Virtue and the Course of Revolutionary Thinking." *Conceptual Change and the Constitution*. Ed. Terence Ball and J. G. A. Pocock. Lawrence: University of Kansas, 1988. p.199

⁴⁸ Pula p.53

⁴⁹ Quoted in Pula p.53

⁵⁰ Quoted in Pula p.53

⁵¹ Quoted in Pula p.53

army were overwhelmed by his sincere wishes for an American victory: "I am not actuated by Interest," the Pole declared, "otherwise than the ambition of signaling myself in this War"⁵² through faithful service. As Kościuszko's incomparable modesty prevented him from pushing for any sort of formal recognition of his efforts, his friends often attempted to speak up for him. Both Gates and Greene wrote to Congress during the war asking for Kościuszko's promotion to the rank he deserved. The Pole, appreciative of his friends' loyalty, did not want them to ruffle any feathers for his sake. He begged Colonel Troup, Gates's aide-de-camp at Saratoga, that "if you see my promotion will make a great many Jealous, tell the General that I will not accept of one because I prefer peace more than the greatest Rank in the World."⁵³ Being on good standing with the Americans, both those in the army and those in Congress, was far more important to the Pole than military honors. It was not until the end of the war that he felt he could bother Congress with his case.

His fellow officers recognized and praised Kościuszko's humility throughout the war. Colonel Troup wrote of Kościuszko's "unassuming manners [and] grave temper,"⁵⁴ which suggests that the Pole's meekness and considerateness were easily discernible to those around him. Troup also commented upon the air of seriousness that clouded Kościuszko's countenance; though only thirty years old and capable of light-heartedness, the engineer was deeply concerned about the fate of the American struggle and the future of his own homeland. Rather than waste his energies petitioning for promotion, Kościuszko willingly endured professional neglect and whole-heartedly committed himself to the cause of freedom.

His compatriots took note of the great example he set, offering the highest praise of the engineer's devotion and work ethic. In a letter to General William Irvine in 1783, General Greene provided a portrait of the Pole's exceptional character:

Among the most useful and agreeable of my companions in arms was Colonel Kościuszko. Nothing could exceed his zeal for the public service, nor in the prosecution of various objects that presented themselves in our small but active warfare, could anything be more useful than his attention, vigilance and industry. In promoting my views to whatever department of the service directed, he was at all times, a ready and able assistant. One in a word whom no pleasure could seduce, no labor fatigue and no danger deter. What besides greatly distinguished him was an unparalleled modesty and entire unconsciousness of having done anything extraordinary. Never making a claim or pretension for himself and never omitting to distinguish and commend the merits of others.⁵⁵

The "unparalleled modesty and entire unconsciousness of having done anything extraordinary" Greene described speaks volumes about the type of soldier Kościuszko was; his selflessness, his inexhaustible energy, and his kindness were so impressive that his commanding officer dedicated a long portion of a military letter to sing his praises.

It was not until the end of the war that Kościuszko finally sought the promotion due to him, as well as the payment of the salary he had refused to accept while the fighting lasted. Now that the Revolution was

⁵²Quoted in Pula p.56

⁵³Quoted in Pula p.105-106

⁵⁴Quoted in Pula p.90

⁵⁵Quoted in Pula p.200

won, it was finally time to think of his own prospects, both financially and professionally. When the task of obtaining his promotion and salary proved more difficult than he imagined, Kościuszko turned hesitantly to his American friends. He wrote to General Greene in June 1783:

It gives me sensible pain that I am forced by unruly Chance of nature to write to you upon the subject, wich irritated even the disposition of thou[g]ht to the thing. Believe me Sir my feelings as they are they Struggle with wants Continually even while I write this the Commotion of my heart is very great. Should I know for certainty of going strait to my Country I would not trouble you nor nobody else, but perhaps I will be oblinded to ramble one or two years more and this is my misfortune.⁵⁶

The Pole's plea to Greene reveals not only his lack of pretension, but also a lasting tendency to act for a cause outside of himself. In his push for promotion and payment, Kościuszko was driven by a burning desire – one that caused great "Commotion" in his heart – to return to Poland, where conditions had considerably worsened in his absence. Nearly destitute, he required his army salary to fund his voyage home. Greene replied to Kościuszko that he must abandon his humility in order to get what was rightfully his: "unless you persist I am apprehensive nothing will be done in the matter. For once you must force nature... and urge your suit from the necessity of the case."⁵⁷ Greene encouraged his friend to be more forceful in his appeals to Congress,

even if such an approach was against the Pole's modest nature.

In the end, Kościuszko was, in part, successful. He was promoted to the rank of brigadier general, which his fellow officers believed he was "intitled to Long ago."⁵⁸ As the longest-serving foreign officer, he actually deserved a higher rank; and, in the opinion of General Washington, the Pole had been one of the most valuable soldiers for the American cause. Washington wrote to Congress in October 1783 on Kościuszko's behalf: "from my knowledge of his merit and services, and the concurrent testimony of all who know him, I cannot but recommend him as deserving the favor of Congress."⁵⁹ Washington was aware of Kościuszko's dedicated service and the professional trials he had faced. While the French officers had continually threatened to withdraw their support unless awarded promotions, the Pole had served without complaint. He ultimately settled for a small promotion and a certificate of credit for the 500 acres and \$12,000 plus interest owed to him by the Continental Congress. He carried his title as an American officer home with him, but left the bulk of his officer's estate in America in trust.

Kościuszko's virtue also included a sense of duty that demanded personal sacrifice for the cause of liberty and self-determination. In the simple fact that the Pole declined to accept his salary during the Revolution – leaving the money in the coffers of Congress to finance the war effort – it is evident that he placed the triumph of American independence above personal gain. His dedication was firm from the beginning: Kościuszko wrote to Gates as early as May 1777 of "the Sacred Duty which has engaged us to Defend this

⁵⁶ T. Kościuszko to Nathaniel Greene, 18 June 1783. Parks, Roger N., ed. *The Papers of Nathaniel Greene: May 1783 - June 1786*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2005. Vol. XIII. p. 39

⁵⁷ N. Greene to T. Kościuszko. *The Papers of Nathaniel Greene*, p.54

⁵⁸ T. Kościuszko to G. Washington, 26 September 1783. *George Washington Papers*.

⁵⁹ G. Washington to the Continental Congress, 2 October 1783. *George Washington Papers*.

Country.”⁶⁰ This *sacred duty* moved a young man to fight on foreign soil for an adopted cause that benefitted strangers. His faith in republicanism and the equality of men mirrored that of the revolutionaries, reinforcing his commitment to American independence. Kościuszko placed himself in the line of fire, was wounded on at least two occasions, and came close to losing his life while out scouting a location for Greene’s army to camp. This sacrifice drew the attention of those he fought alongside of in the war. Samuel Richards observed that the soldiers “soon discovered in him an elevation of mind which gave fair promise of those high achievements to which he attained.”⁶¹ Kościuszko’s idealism and “elevated mind” struck a chord in the hearts and minds of the American patriots who acknowledged the same “sacred duty” as the Pole. The generals he served under observed how naturally the Polish officer fit in with his men. Replying to a request of General McDougall in April 1778, Washington mandated that Kościuszko remain as chief engineer at West Point instead of the Frenchman La Radiere. He found that “as Colo. La Radiere and Colo. Kosiusko will never agree, I think it will be best to order La Radiere to return, especially as you say Kosiusko is better adapted to the genius and temper of the People.”⁶² The Polish patriot – a man “better adapted to the genius and temper” of the American people, and the longest-serving foreign officer in the Continental Army – displayed the same devotion to freedom and republicanism that the Americans themselves did as they fought to eradicate themselves from the most powerful empire in the world.

The *sacred duty* that drew Tadeusz Kościuszko to America in 1776 redirected

his attention to the miseries of Poland at the Revolution’s conclusion. He hoped that his own countrymen might be inspired by the example of the Americans and their rebellion in the name of liberty. Knowing that he could not aid such a cause from the comfort of what he now considered as his second homeland, Kościuszko bid farewell to his American friends. The Pole informed a fellow officer of his plans should Poland fail to regain her sovereignty: “If the state of my Country remains always the same I will say to my countrymen, ‘Come, pass over the seas, and insure your children liberty and property.’ If my countrymen do not listen to me... I will go by myself and die free with you.”⁶³ This was not, however, the conclusion that Kościuszko intended when he returned to Poland in 1784. He believed that the Poles would fight against the growing tyranny of Russia and win their freedom. This optimism was based in Kościuszko’s sense of responsibility towards mankind and his conviction that right would triumph. Writing to Otho Holland Williams in 1783, the engineer declared “O! how happy we think our Self when Conscious of our deeds, that were started from principle of rectitude, from conviction of the goodness of the thing itself, from motive of the good that will come to Human Kind.”⁶⁴ This same enthusiastic spirit, this faith in “the goodness” of a fight for independence and equality, was present in the hearts of the Polish people, according to Kościuszko. It simply needed to be brought out by the appeals of patriots and channeled into the establishment of a republican regime.

Kościuszko’s biographers often discuss how the Pole’s time in America influenced him. Some assert that he was “enlightened by the great minds of people like Jefferson, Adams, Washington, Franklin,

⁶⁰ Quoted in Storozyński p.26

⁶¹ Quoted in Pula p.141

⁶² G. Washington to A. McDougall, 22 April 1778. *George Washington Papers*.

⁶³ Quoted in Pula p.209

⁶⁴ Quoted in Pula p.206

and the other Founding Fathers.”⁶⁵ In many ways, however, the principles those Founders expounded were present in Kościuszko even before he set foot upon American soil. They were what motivated him to join the revolutionaries in the first place, why he risked his life in active combat and spent his energies designing defenses for the triumph of American independence. While his love of liberty and equality were undoubtedly strengthened by his experiences in the Continental Army, Kościuszko more importantly learned some valuable lessons about the character of national uprisings. He saw “the revolution of farmers and citizen-soldiers”⁶⁶ as a perfect model for a Polish insurrection. In the coming decade, his views would be put to the test as Poland’s “People’s Army” faced the might of its despotic neighbors in a fight for national sovereignty and human liberty.

CHAPTER TWO

“To entomb ourselves in the ruins of our country, or to deliver the land of our fathers”: Kościuszko and the Polish Insurrection

In a letter to John Jay in November 1788, Thomas Jefferson observed that Poland was “likely to be thrown into great convulsions”⁶⁷ as efforts to reform the government created tension between the Sejm, or national assembly, and Poland’s meddling neighbors, Russia, Prussia, and Austria. When Kościuszko returned to his homeland in 1784, he found himself in the midst of a quarrel between King Stanisław-Augustus and Prince Czartoryski over political reforms and the consequences that such reforms would have upon the country’s for-

tunes. Due to his connection with Czartoryski, Kościuszko was denied a position in the Polish army and forced into semi-retirement on his family estate, Siechnowice. Though troubled by financial hardships and another failed love affair, Kościuszko’s attention turned to the dire situation of his country and its peasant inhabitants. Determined to be useful, he became a political activist, joining the Reverend Kołontay and others who aimed to spread republican ideals and push for a more liberal constitution in order to save the collapsing nation. Kościuszko wrote to his neighbor Michał Zaleski that “on ourselves, on our morals, depends the improvement of the government. And if we are base, covetous, selfish, careless of our country, it will be just that we shall have chains on our necks, and we shall be worthy of them.”⁶⁸ The fate of Poland, Kościuszko maintained, rested on the republican virtue of its people. The obstacles reformers faced, however, were formidable; the ancient divisions in Polish society needed to be overcome before a republic could be fostered.

After 1700, the Polish state decayed politically, and in its weakness Poland was brought under the Russian Protectorate. Numerous problems – including the *liberum veto* (which mandated that a single negative vote in the Sejm barred a bill’s passage), the corruption of the justice system, the shrinking of the military, and the presence of serfdom – crippled Poland from within and exposed the country to foreign interference. In 1772, the failed revolt of the Bar Confederates against Russia led to the First Partition of Poland by her absolutist neighbors. Conditions in Kościuszko’s homeland after the partition were deplorable: nine-tenths of the population were serfs, the army was all but demobilized, and the government was run by Russian agents and Catherine’s

⁶⁵ Storozyński p.117

⁶⁶ Storozyński p.117

⁶⁷ T. Jefferson to J. Jay, 29 November 1788. *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, v.XIV, p.305

⁶⁸ Quoted in Pula p.216

“puppet,”⁶⁹ King Stanisław Poniatowski. In addition to these obstacles to independence and reform, the Partition of 1772 established a precedent of forcing Poland into submission through the annexation of her territories.

In 1788, the state of affairs in Poland began to change when “the Great Sejm” convened and, at the request of the unexpectedly-patriotic Stanisław, began to amend Poland’s constitution and expand the army. With Russia distracted by a war against the Turks, the nobles in the Sejm sensed a golden opportunity to shake off Catherine’s grip. They enacted the first income tax on the nobility in Poland in order to pay for a legitimate army to defend the nation’s sovereignty. Democratic reformers began to advocate for the abolition of serfdom and inspired the burghers to march on Warsaw to demand civil rights. Such activity in Poland attracted the attention of Russia, Prussia, and Austria – all ruled by absolute monarchs and economically dependent on feudalism – and sparked increasing hostility to the Sejm’s notions of self-determination and liberalism. The eastern monarchs began to form an alliance against the threat of a strong Polish nation.

As these circumstances developed, Tadeusz Kościuszko was drawn away from his gardening at Siechnowice. He was appointed by the Sejm as one of five major generals in October 1789 and charged with reorganizing the Polish army. Viewing Poland’s push for reform as “a continuation of the American Revolution” and hoping “that it would not stop until all slaves, serfs, and oppressed peoples were treated as equals,”⁷⁰ Kościuszko sought to arm peasants, burghers, and religious minorities in addition to aristocrats. The Polish army, weakened by the sale of commissions to inept

officers, possessed little combat experience and would face the larger, battle-hardened armies of Russia when war broke out. Kościuszko petitioned the Sejm to grant equal rights to all Poles in order to encourage the entire population to supply resources and men to a national militia. His plan proved “unrealistic,”⁷¹ but his observations on human nature were correct: the people would not fight for a nation that bound them in near-slavery.

Kościuszko was one of the few Polish generals with any fighting experience. He was ordered to train the new recruits, starting with the fundamentals of combat. Joseph Poniatowski, Stanisław’s nephew, was appointed commander of the army, and Kościuszko advised the prince to build up an American-style militia with reserves. The veteran wrote that “the American Revolution serves as an example for how to fight a war for eight years without any money. If only the government has the care to supply uniforms and boots to its soldiers,”⁷² hoping to convert the nation’s leaders to a better way of thinking about a national uprising. Kościuszko’s efforts to prepare and organize the army for the inevitable war with Russia were motivated by the same sense of sacred duty that had drawn him to the American cause. His republican virtue, his selfless devotion to independence and equality, remained the defining feature of his character. In a moving letter to Zaleski, Kościuszko described his vision for his homeland:

We need to unite with the same goal, to free our fatherland from foreign powers that want to enslave and even ruin the name of Poles. Believe me, that I always think the same, I always breathe the soul of a free Republican citizen, and when our government will be on par with

⁶⁹ Davies, Norman. *God's Playground: A History of Poland*. Vol. I. New York: Columbia UP, 1982. p.513

⁷⁰ Storożynski p.136

⁷¹ Storożynski p.139

⁷² Quoted in Pula p.219

the English government, the bells will ring and our citizens will stand at attention... No one has a more tolerant soul than I, with aspirations for universal harmony, unity, and friendship good wishes for our country.⁷³

This vision – calling temporarily for a constitutional monarchy – was not necessarily shared among all the reformers, yet the Sejm adopted the Third of May Constitution in 1791, putting Poland on the path to republicanism in a dramatic effort to alter the nation's fate.

The Third of May Constitution was the first of its kind in central and eastern Europe. Drafted by King Stanisław, the constitution extended rights to the burghers, offered peasants and Jews the protection of the law, guaranteed religious toleration, and established a hereditary monarchy that the Poles hoped would bring stability and vitality to the regime. Though it secured the continued dominance of the nobility in government, Poland was transforming into a constitutional monarchy along the lines of the English system. While there is a temptation to credit Kościuszko's connection with the American revolutionaries as a major influence upon the reformers, he actually had very little to do with the constitution's adoption. In April 1791, liberal nobles in the Sejm granted the burghers the right to elect their own representatives to the assembly, thereby securing their support for the reforms. Stanisław, in addition to drafting the document, moved up the vote to adopt the new constitution in order to deceive Russian spies who sought to prevent it. Though it fell far short of the American republic Kościuszko so revered, the Third of May Constitution altered Poland's trajectory.

The glory of the Third of May was short-lived, but the effort had lasting repercussions. To the Polish memory, it served as "a monument to the nation's will to live in freedom, [and] a permanent reproach to the tyranny of the partitioning powers."⁷⁴ It was a source of national pride and international inspiration. To Great Britain, the Third of May Constitution was, in the words of Edmund Burke, "a masterpiece of political wisdom" and did "glory to humanity."⁷⁵ In comparison with the mob violence of the French Revolution, the Polish Revolution of 1791 was a peaceful and enlightened transformation of a feudal European nation. Poland's neighbors and many Polish land magnates, however, reacted with aggressive resentment. In promising refuge for runaway serfs and civil rights for city-dwellers and religious minorities, the constitution was viewed as an instrument that would undermine the traditional feudal system of the region and the influence of foreign ministers at the Polish court. Russia and Prussia therefore joined forces in 1792 to protect the balance of power and to preserve feudalism in Eastern Europe.

The invasion of Poland began on 18 May 1792 when a Russian force nearly triple the size of Poland's entire army crossed into the country. The Poles faced severe supply problems as they retreated from the Russian border; a nobleman who lent his house to the commanders was shocked to see that even General Kościuszko's boots were worn through.⁷⁶ The armed defense of the Third of May Constitution began with a demoralizing defeat at the Battle of Zielence, but it was the Battle of Dubienka that proved the most memorable action of the war. At Dubienka, Kościuszko's name became the symbol of the Polish independence movement. His 5,300 troops bravely faced 25,000 Russians,

⁷³ Quoted in Storozyński p.145

⁷⁴ Davies p.535

⁷⁵ Quoted in Storozyński p.150

⁷⁶ Storozyński p.159

and though Kościuszko was forced to lead an orderly retreat, there were more Russians killed at Dubienka than at any other battle in the war.⁷⁷ Kościuszko was awarded the *Virtuti Militari* medal by King Stanisław in commendation of his service.

By July 1792, the Poles' defenses had deteriorated. Stanisław, facing a war he believed the Poles could not win, joined the pro-Russia Targowica confederates and ordered a cease-fire. Poland fell under Russian occupation and the army was disbanded. A distraught Kościuszko resigned, unwilling to serve in a Polish military controlled by Catherine of Russia. His sense of disappointment was acute; shortly after the failure of the Poles, he wrote to the wife of Prince Czartoryski, "how easy it would be to beat [the Russians], if our country had the energy and sense of its own freedom and the real enthusiasm of its citizenry."⁷⁸ Kościuszko, who had argued from the beginning of the reform movement that the energy of the entire population would be required to defend the nation, still believed that Poland's strength remained untapped. Along with other Polish patriots, he fled to France hoping to enlist the revolutionaries in Paris to aid Poland by starting a war against their common enemy, Prussia. The appeals of the Polish officers to the National Convention were unsuccessful and the outbreak of the Reign of Terror demolished any lingering hopes Kościuszko harbored for French assistance.

By 1793, reformers in Poland were preparing once more to throw off the yoke of foreign interference. All they needed was a "chivalrous figure behind whom the nation could rally",⁷⁹ in other words, they needed Kościuszko. He was the most experienced of the Polish commanders, he was beloved by his countrymen for his courage at Dubienka,

and, most importantly, Kościuszko possessed a strong vision for the nation's future as a free and independent state. If there was going to be another attempt to rescue Poland from the clutches of Catherine and her allies, Kościuszko was *the only one* who could inspire a great popular uprising. Kołłantay, leader of the underground reformers, wrote to Kościuszko in July 1793 that "the truth cannot be destroyed by oppression, hide wherever you want, but the nation will not forget you... The nation still trusts you."⁸⁰ Just as his men and commanding officers had relied upon Kościuszko's energy, skill, and character during the American Revolution, the Pole's own countrymen now charged him with the impossible task of uniting a weak, feudal nation against her powerful enemies. In March 1794, after learning that all preparations had been made by the underground revolutionaries, the forty-eight-year-old Kościuszko returned to Kraków. On 24 March, the Kościuszko Uprising began.

The Third of May Constitution was not Kościuszko's handiwork. While the document was no doubt a step in the right direction in the general's mind, it did not fully capture his vision for the Polish nation. Rather than a regime resembling the English model, he ultimately hoped for something more akin to the American constitution and its institutions. The reformers on 3 May 1791 did not go far enough, according to Kościuszko, because they did not declare the equality of all Poles nor did they endeavor to give the people true self-government. Whether this was possible in feudal Poland is up for debate. However unrealistic Kościuszko's hopes may have been, it was certain that no change could be affected while Poland remained under Russian control. He "had no faith in the lasting qualities

⁷⁷ Storozyński p.163

⁷⁸ Quoted in Storozyński p.165

⁷⁹ Storozyński p.169

⁸⁰ Quoted in Storozyński p.174

of the most liberal laws, while the country had no political independence,”⁸¹ thus independence became the first item on the general’s agenda. The character of its regime would be decided once Poland was free from all foreign interference.

The Poles issued an Act of Insurrection – their own Declaration of Independence – on 24 March 1794. The Act, drafted by Polish patriots, included a list of grievances, a declaration of war, and a plan for the emergency government. They charged Catherine of Russia and Frederick William of Prussia with “iniquitous designs”⁸² against the Polish people and referred to the Partition of 1772 as a disgraceful violation of Polish sovereignty that reduced the Polish people “to a state of slavery, by imposing on them the most grievous burthen, and acknowledging no law but their arbitrary wills.”⁸³ The insurrectionists condemned the undermining of sacred natural rights and the Third of May Constitution by foreign despots as unlawful interference in the affairs of a sovereign nation.

The Act of Insurrection declared that Poland had been “vanquished by treachery, rather than by foreign enemies”;⁸⁴ its framers believed that the nation, if called upon, could silence the corrupt land magnates in Poland and defeat foreign armies on the battlefield. The rebels issued a powerful, poetic declaration of war against the powers that had oppressed Poland for decades. With a firm reliance on Kościuszko’s leadership and inspired by his republican virtue, the Poles proclaimed:

We citizens... by sacrificing to our country our lives, the only good which tyranny has not condescended to wrest from us, will avail ourselves of all the extreme and violent mea-

asures, that civic despair suggests to us. Having formed a determined resolution to perish and entomb ourselves in the ruins of our country, or to deliver the land of our fathers from a ferocious oppression, and the galling yoke of the ignominious bondage, we declare in the face of Heaven and before all the human race, and especially before all the nations that know how to value liberty above all the blessings of the universe, that to make use of the incontestable right of defending ourselves against tyranny and armed oppression, we do unite, in the spirit of Patriotism, of civism and of fraternity, all our forces; and persuaded that a fortunate issue of our arduous enterprise depends principally on our strict union, we renounce all the prejudices of opinion, which have divided or may still divide the citizens, inhabitants of the same territory, and children of one common country; and we pledge ourselves to each other to spare no sacrifices whatever, but on the other hand to use all the means which the sacred love of Freedom can inspire in the breast of man; all that despair can suggest for his defence.⁸⁵

The Act then clearly outlined the “sacred objects” of the insurrection: to preserve the natural rights of Polish citizens, to expel foreign troops and agents, to extirpate all internal and external oppression, and to re-establish “the national liberties and the independence of the Republic.”⁸⁶ To achieve these ends, the rebels found it “necessary to resort to extreme and decisive measures; to wit, those of naming a commander in chief of the armed force of the nation, to establish

⁸¹ Gronowicz p.97

⁸² Act of Insurrection, Pula p.301

⁸³ Act of Insurrection, Pula p.302

⁸⁴ Act of Insurrection, Pula p.302

⁸⁵ Act of Insurrection, Pula p.303

⁸⁶ Act of Insurrection, Pula p.302-303

a temporary Supreme National Council, a Commission of Good Order, a Supreme Criminal Court of Appeals, and a subordinate Criminal Court.”⁸⁷

Kościuszko, as the elected commander-in-chief, appealed to the hearts of his countrymen to rise up in support of the insurrection. There was, from the beginning, an expectation of great patriotism from the Polish people: “Our despair is at its height; and the love of our country knows no bounds. The most cruel misfortunes, and the most insurmountable difficulties shall neither enfeeble nor discourage our virtue and civic valor.”⁸⁸ Kościuszko knew that great sacrifice would be necessary for the campaign to succeed, and hoped – perhaps against hope – that the common people would fight to win independence for their country, especially if that nation granted liberties and rights previously denied them. The general also prayed that the Polish cause would gain support on the world stage. He encouraged other nations to “join your hearts with the Poles, who defend our freedom and yours.”⁸⁹ Copies of the Act of Insurrection were sent to foreign newspapers and to the governments of prospective allies such as France, England, Sweden, Denmark, and Turkey. The Polish revolt, Kościuszko believed, would become a catalyst for change in Europe and a signal of the progress of republicanism in the world.

The insurrection’s foundation was undoubtedly the trust that the Poles placed in Tadeusz Kościuszko. He was unequivocally the campaign’s leader, its visionary, and its staunchest supporter. The very first measure in the organization of the emergency government was the election of Kościuszko as the head of the military and civil government. The Poles would “confide

to his civic zeal the choice of the members”⁹⁰ of the National Council, the establishment of a council of war, and control of the Commission of Good Order. Unlike King Stanisław, Kościuszko was “elected by the free will of the nation”⁹¹ to serve as their guide; he became “the symbol of this great national aspiration”⁹² and was called *Naczelnik* – Commander-in-Chief. Like George Washington during the American Revolution, Kościuszko was similarly “thrown into prominence in spite of himself,”⁹³ rising to power solely because the people needed him to lead. He was Poland’s Cincinnatus, worthy of the epitaph *Omnia reliquit servare rem publicam* [“He gave up everything to save the state”]. Kościuszko’s republican virtue placed him among the great men of history who were given supreme power with the understanding that they would relinquish that power when they were no longer needed to secure the rights of the people.

The Act of Insurrection essentially named Kościuszko Poland’s temporary military dictator. Though the people trusted him to be fair and honest in his management of the uprising, it was the general himself who was most concerned with doing right. In a letter to General Franciszek Sapieha, Kościuszko made clear his feelings on his election:

Let no virtuous man desire power, it was placed in my hands for this critical moment, I do not know whether I have deserved this trust, but I know that to me this power is only an instrument for the efficacious defense of my country and I confess that I desire its end as

⁸⁷ Act of Insurrection, Pula p.303

⁸⁸ Act of Insurrection, Pula p.306

⁸⁹ Quoted in Storozyński p.191

⁹⁰ Act of Insurrection, Pula p.303

⁹¹ Act of Insurrection, Pula p.304

⁹² Gronowicz p.99

⁹³ Davies p.533

sincerely as the salvation of the nation itself.⁹⁴

The humility and self-doubt in Kościuszko's words emphasized his understanding of civic virtue, of sacrifice for the good of the state. Acknowledging that his role was temporary, he desired that the people constitute a government for themselves once the fighting was over. Let Poland "establish a government such as will suit it best," declared the general; after the revolution, "I shall throw away my sword in the Diet Chamber."⁹⁵ Power is often safest in the hands least desirous of holding it, and Kościuszko's lack of personal ambition and preference for universal peace made him the ideal man to lead the nation to freedom.

In taking charge of the Polish military, Kościuszko hoped to organize the army along the lines of the American model, with local militias supplementing a trained corps of troops. Russia and Prussia had demobilized nearly half of Poland's army before the insurrection even began, which meant that his first task was recruitment. Upon entering Kraków on 24 March, 1794, Kościuszko addressed "a crowd of thousands, including soldiers, noblemen, townspeople, Jews, and peasants,"⁹⁶ calling for unity and aiming to convince the crowd that instead of vengeance, the uprising sought freedom and equality. The Polish Cincinnatus made an oath before his countrymen that the revolution would have the character its leader promised:

I Thaddeus Kościuszko, swear before God to the whole Polish nation that I will not use the power vested in me to oppress anyone, but only for the defense of the integrity of the borders, to regain the nation's sovereignty, and the solid establish-

ment of universal freedom. So help me God and the innocent passion of His Son.⁹⁷

He next sent out letters to all classes of citizens seeking their aid: "I will not be able to break this outrageous yoke of slavery if I do not receive the speediest and most courageous support from you,"⁹⁸ explained the commander-in-chief. Though Kościuszko moved the hearts of his countrymen, he could not control time; within a week, Russian troops were entering Polish territory.

Even in the face of such bleak news, the Polish soldiers placed great confidence in their commander. According to one officer who served under him, Kościuszko "taught soldiers and peasants that they are his brothers... he aroused in them love, unbounded enthusiasm and strength."⁹⁹ This strong emotional and spiritual attachment to Kościuszko defined the Polish cause; it was this affection and profound faith in his leadership that held the campaign together. Kościuszko's compassion for the well-being of all men placed him in a class of his own among the leaders of the Revolutionary era. "Even George Washington executed traitors and deserters during the American Revolution, but [Kościuszko] was soft on civilians, and even prisoners of war";¹⁰⁰ while the Pole was always hoping to win allies in fight the difficult battle for liberty in feudal Europe, he also believed in the inherent goodness of man. His character left a deep impression upon those who witnessed his deeds. Even Polish nobles who opposed Kościuszko's republican ambitions could see that he was a powerful symbol and able leader: in a letter to the Austrian minister of foreign affairs in April 1794, a Polish nobleman described the general as

⁹⁴ Quoted in Pula p.225-226

⁹⁵ Quoted in Pula p.225

⁹⁶ Storozyński p.181

⁹⁷ Quoted in Pula p.224

⁹⁸ Quoted in Storozyński p.183

⁹⁹ Quoted in Pula p.218

¹⁰⁰ Storozyński p.201

a simple man, quite modest in his speech, manners and dress. The utmost firmness and enthusiasm for the chosen cause is coupled with a coolness and sensibility... Especially in the details, nothing is left to chance everything is calculated and planned. Maybe he's not the most transcendental mind, or even nimble in politics. But he has enough of a natural common sense to assess the situation and make the best choice from the first glance.¹⁰¹

Unlike Machiavelli's ideal prince, Kościuszko combined good planning with unusual modesty and the genuine loyalty and *love* of the common people to bring about a popular movement. James Monroe wrote to Thomas Jefferson in September 1794 of how "in Poland, under the direction of [Kościuszko] who acted with us in America, a formidable hand has been raised against Prussia and Russia."¹⁰² This formidable hand was Kościuszko's "People's Army," a militia of socially diverse men fighting for independence under the guidance of their benevolent commander.

While the American Revolutionaries once faced the imposing task of uniting thirteen separate colonies, Kościuszko's call to the people of the Polish Commonwealth was an even more improbable objective. In 1794, Poland's 8.7 million people were hardly in a position to join together for a national cause. The divisions in Polish society rendered allegiance to a national movement elusive; seventy-three percent of the population were peasants held in serfdom, ten percent were Jews living in their own isolated communities, eight per-

cent were members of the nobility, six percent were burghers, two percent were various religious and ethnic minorities (including Eastern Orthodox and Muslims), and one percent were Catholic clergy.¹⁰³ Yet in the 17 September 1794 issue of the *Official Gazette*, Kościuszko stated that "there must not be a single citizen on Polish soil who, seeing in this uprising of the people his own freedom and happiness, would not contribute all he could to its success."¹⁰⁴ The old loyalties and hostilities would have to be discarded in the face of a threat to Poland's sovereignty. The general was very clear about his intentions: "I want freedom for the entire nation, and only for them will I risk my life."¹⁰⁵ The *whole* nation was called to fight and Kościuszko aimed to make it known that *all* those who fought would see the benefits of victory. He began with the army, promoting soldiers based on merit rather than status; he hoped his example of treating all men as equals would be taken up by his countrymen and would arouse a genuine patriotic spirit among the Poles. Writing to Prince Sapieha, Kościuszko explained how "our war has a specific character which must be understood properly. Its success depends above all on spreading a universal fervor in all our inhabitants and arming everyone in our land."¹⁰⁶ To gain the support of the peasants, Jews, and other minorities, some changes would need to be made for the sake of Poland's future.

In planning the Polish uprising, Kościuszko knew that the love and commitment of the peasantry needed to be inspired and channeled correctly to keep up Poland's defenses and prevent Jacobinism. Serfdom had existed in Poland for centuries. The *corvée*, or days of unpaid labor, was

¹⁰¹ Quoted in Storozyński p.187

¹⁰² J. Monroe to T. Jefferson, 7 September 1794. *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, v. XXVIII, p.147

¹⁰³ Storozyński p.136

¹⁰⁴ Quoted in Gronowicz p.108

¹⁰⁵ Quoted in Pula p.225

¹⁰⁶ Quoted in Storozyński p.191

demanding of peasants who worked the land of nobles; serfs could not leave the estate they were bound to; and there were harsh punishments for unruliness. Even as a young man, Kościuszko "could not get used to the fact that the people on his land were his vassals"¹⁰⁷ and he had hoped that the Third of May's reforms would eventually end feudalism. When the constitution failed in 1792, he wrote to his sister Anna to begin reform at home, relieving the burdens for serfs on their private estate:

If this were another country where the government could ensure my will, I would free them entirely, but in this country, we must do what ...we can to relieve humanity in any way, and always remember that by nature, we are all equals, that riches and education constitute the only difference.¹⁰⁸

Kościuszko did all he could to make his serfs as free and prosperous as possible, loosening the corvée to two days a week for men and completely abolishing forced labor for women. He believed that "serfdom is a word that must be cursed by all enlightened nations"¹⁰⁹ and sought to lead by example. When the uprising began in 1794, Kościuszko saw an opportunity for change; after all, the armies of Russia and Prussia could not be held at bay without the help of the common people of Poland. He "believed that the peasants, who were the majority and who were the most patriotic and unselfish group, should be at the forefront of all such activities and movements."¹¹⁰ The commander-in-chief was determined to win the allegiance of the serfs in the defense and rebuilding of the state.

From the early days of the Kościuszko Insurrection, peasant volunteers were welcomed into the army. Wielding the scythes they used in the fields as weapons, the peasant infantry soon came to be called "scythemmen." On 4 April 1794, the scythemmen, led by Kościuszko, held the vital center position at the Battle of Raclawice. The outnumbered serfs defeated the professional Russian soldiers and gave hope to the Polish cause. Raclawice proved a unique moment in Polish history: the nation was indebted to those it held in quasi-slavery. Kościuszko was thrilled that the common people had not only secured such an important victory, but they had also shown that the patriotism necessary to the revolution's success *did* exist. To show his appreciation, Kościuszko honored the Polish military tradition of wearing the uniform of the greatest combat unit: "To the delight of the serfs Kościuszko ripped off his general's uniform and put on a *sukmana*, a peasant robe made from woven sheep's wool"¹¹¹ in order to acknowledge the unparalleled service of the common people. The "peasant prince" proclaimed the scythemmen an official branch of the Polish army and established the *sukmana* as a uniform of honor.¹¹² In the aftermath of Raclawice, Kościuszko attempted to convince the Commission for Order to abolish the corvée completely for the good of the campaign. Despite this proof that the peasant masses were an essential resource to the army, the Commission ignored the general's recommendation.

By 7 May 1794, the commander-in-chief decided to make use of his emergency powers in order to turn the tide of the war and move forward his vision of a free Poland. Kościuszko issued the Połaniec Manifesto, a radical proclamation granting civil rights to the Polish peasants and

¹⁰⁷ Storozyński p.123

¹⁰⁸ Quoted in Storozyński p.168

¹⁰⁹ Quoted in Storozyński p.124

¹¹⁰ Gronowicz p.96

¹¹¹ Storozyński p.186

¹¹² Storozyński p.186-187

thereby giving them a stake in the outcome of the uprising. Poland became the first feudal state to grant such freedom to its serfs. The grand language of manifesto's preamble testified to Kościuszko's republican virtue and the ideals he sought to impart to his countrymen: "Never have Poles been in dread of the weapons of their enemies," Kościuszko declared, "as long as they were united among themselves and were able to use all their strength."¹¹³ Poland's great weaknesses were the misleading of her citizens by Russian intrigue and the self-interest of the land magnates. "The unfortunate Poles are divided by views regarding government and opinions about the law, upon which freedom and national organization must be based," the general explained, "and to innocent differences of opinion the criminal spirit of self love and selfish prospects added mixed obstinacy, delay, and the tendency to comport with outsiders, ending in craven submission to them."¹¹⁴ Such a state of affairs promised only tragedy; unity and disinterested sacrifice for the good of the state were required if Poland's patriots were to secure her independence. Kościuszko's analysis of the situation was remarkably clear-sighted: if the justice of the Polish cause was not embraced by *all* citizens, her enemies would so severely outnumber the insurrectionists that the campaign would be rendered hopeless. Determined that the form of government should be left to the people's representatives in a time of peace, Kościuszko reiterated that the uprising's goal was to "return freedom unity and independence to Poland, and leave to freer times and the nation's will to determine under what sort of government it wishes to live."¹¹⁵ There could be no quarrel among Poland's diverse population on this front: Poland's claim to

sovereignty must stir all virtuous citizens to action.

Kościuszko understood that certain rights needed to be acknowledged in order for Poland's strength – its peasant population – to act with republican virtue. Against the "host of frightened would-be slaves" and "loathsome Machiavellian product" of her neighbors, the Polish commander hoped to bring "the massed force of free citizens"¹¹⁶ to oppose them in the campaign for Poland's independence. He believed that the People's Army, fighting for their freedom and happiness, would ultimately be victorious. At Połaniec, he put such happiness on the table for the majority of Poland's people. For the sake of "humanity, justice, and the good of the Fatherland," Kościuszko issued fourteen measures that aimed to "join the common people to the public cause."¹¹⁷ The manifesto granted equal protection of the law to Poland's peasants; acknowledged their right to move freely across the land; relieved labor obligations and cut the corvée completely for those families who had men serving in the army; offered protection of peasants' property rights and fair wages; and provided an adequate system of justice for peasants to appeal to against the oppressions of their landlords. While Połaniec did not abolish serfdom – Kościuszko could not risk completely alienating Polish land magnates – it took unprecedented steps in acknowledging the liberties and rights of the majority of Poland's people.

Kościuszko, careful not to be seen as merely a popular leader but as the *national* leader, then sought the support of the clergy and the nobility. He optimistically asked that the clergy of all denominations "enlighten the people"¹¹⁸ to the work that lay ahead and sent out letters to the nobility pleading with

¹¹³ Połaniec Manifesto, Pula p.307

¹¹⁴ Połaniec Manifesto, Pula p.307-308

¹¹⁵ Połaniec Manifesto, Pula p.308

¹¹⁶ Połaniec Manifesto, Pula p.308

¹¹⁷ Połaniec Manifesto, Pula p.309

¹¹⁸ Połaniec Manifesto, Pula p.311

them to ease the burdens of their peasants. Kościuszko’s Połaniec Manifesto aimed to inspire the Poles to defend their country and alerted the people to their commander’s vision for the nation’s future. One biographer notes that the general’s decree was “the death knell for feudalism”¹¹⁹ in Poland: Kościuszko’s plans for liberty and equality were spelled out clearly before his countrymen. Unfortunately, they were also clear to the nation’s enemies. Russia, Prussia, and Austria became determined to end the revolt for the sake of protecting feudalism within their own borders.

In addition to bringing the peasantry into the People’s Army, Kościuszko’s character and manner of leadership brought other oppressed portions of the population into the insurrection. The most remarkable example of his influence was the effectiveness of his entreaties in Poland’s Jewish communities. Since 1264, Jews had enjoyed “the freedom to worship, conduct business, and travel, and run their own autonomous government”¹²⁰ in Poland. This tradition of tolerance was nearly discarded in the late eighteenth century when Jews living in Poland became subject to the same corvée as other peasants and faced additional taxes on things like voting, chimneys, and meat.¹²¹ They were denied the right to hold office in the national government and were confined to their own legislative bodies in the *kahal* communes. A debate over forced assimilation, sparked by differences between the burghers and Jewish merchants, was stalled when the Sejm looked to reforming the nation’s constitution.

During the first days of insurrection, Kościuszko entered Kraków’s Old Synagogue in the Jewish quarter of the city to ask the congregation to support the uprising. The commander hoped to convince the Jewish community that Poland was their country too, and that the nation’s future

would be brighter than its past. His republican virtue – that disinterestedness that moved the hearts of so many others – was effective: “the citizens of the Jewish faith helped not only financially, but also by taking an active part in the armed struggle for the liberation of their country.”¹²² When fighting broke out in Warsaw after the Battle of Raclawice, the Jews joined the battle and the *kahal* in Vilnius raised money and men to send to the general’s aid. During the siege of Warsaw, the busy Kościuszko took time to meet with Jewish leaders, agreeing to abolish the poll tax and promising equal justice for all Poles. This “willingness to take up any issue for the people, and his modesty and good nature did wonders to keep morale high”¹²³ during the bleakest days of Kościuszko’s campaign. Jews flooded into the Polish army; by the summer of 1794, some divisions were nearly twenty percent Jewish.

In the 17 September issue of the *Government Gazette* in 1794, Kościuszko announced the formation of a wholly Jewish cavalry brigade under the leadership of Berek Joselewicz. Kościuszko believed that “nothing will convince the other nations of the sanctity of our cause and the justness of our revolution than the fact that we set aside the different religions and traditions of those who support our uprising, and that, of their own free will, they offer to lay down their lives.”¹²⁴ The announcement testified to the commander’s great faith in humanity and the awesome power that loyalty and kindness possessed over the human spirit. The Jewish regiment fought for Poland’s future because they saw themselves as a part of that future – all because of Kościuszko. Joselewicz raised volunteers, and within weeks had five hundred Jewish dragoons in his unit. His was the first “wholly Jewish brigade since

¹¹⁹ Storozynski p.191

¹²⁰ Storozynski p.137

¹²¹ Storozynski p.138

¹²² Gronowicz p.109

¹²³ Storozynski p.199

¹²⁴ Quoted in Storozynski p.201-202

Biblical times.”¹²⁵ Kościuszko’s “People’s Army” performed admirably; the Jewish cavalry, units of scythemen, and Polish regulars won over sixty battles in a war on two fronts in 1794.

Though General Kościuszko proved an inspiring leader and talented officer, the circumstances of the insurrection eventually overpowered Poland’s ability to defend herself. The general had overestimated the support of the nobility and clergy for the uprising; after the proclamation at Połaniec, many of the aristocrats and priests who relied on serf labor for their incomes turned against the national movement. One historian described the manifesto as “an act of abolition, akin to the issue of the Declaration of Independence, the Bill of Rights, and the yet-unwritten Emancipation Proclamation all at once”;¹²⁶ it ultimately tried to do too much, and Kościuszko lost the vital support of many members of Poland’s upper classes. Voices of dissent were further enraged by the formation of a Jacobin club in Warsaw. While the commander-in-chief protected the life of King Stanisław, the very presence of the group and its intentions for vengeance destroyed the unity of the Poles and discouraged prospective allies.

As early as June 1794, the war took a turn for the worse. 12,000 Poles were killed at the Battle of Szczekociny; Kościuszko, looking over the field, told one of his generals, “I want to die here”¹²⁷ as he watched his countrymen fall. The Polish army miraculously rallied later in the summer as Kościuszko defended Warsaw against 41,000 Russians for two months. The general showed the same energy and optimism he had during the American Revolution, and his combined forces of regulars,

burghers, and peasants valiantly kept the enemy at bay until the Russians withdrew in early September. The relief was short-lived as Russian reinforcements were observed advancing into Poland. Kościuszko took his men to challenge the retreating enemy before they could meet with fresh troops. The Battle of Maciejowice, however, proved to be “the most disastrous miscalculation of Kościuszko’s life.”¹²⁸ The general led his 7,000 men against 14,000 Russians instead of ordering the retrieval of additional Polish troops. Foreseeing that retreat or delay would mean the collapse of the insurrection, Kościuszko told an aide-de-camp that “this is the place to be buried or be victorious.”¹²⁹ The Poles soon ran out of ammunition and over 4,000 of the People’s Army were slaughtered in three hours. Accounts of the battle stated that Kościuszko fought “as if he wanted to die”;¹³⁰ three horses were shot out from beneath him and he finally fell, wounded by the blow of a Russian sword across his brow. While on the ground, he was stabbed in the back and hip by the pikes of passing Cossacks.

Kościuszko was believed dead until someone recognized the blood-spattered general and he was taken prisoner by the Russians. King Stanisław declared that the Poles would continue to fight on, but the massacre of civilians in the Warsaw suburb of Praga on 4 November 1794 ended the revolt. Three days later, the king surrendered and the surviving Polish patriots fled the country. Without Kościuszko, the rebellion lacked spirit and vision, but its failure was sealed by the unmatched numbers of the allied powers and the insurmountable class divisions in Poland. Some historians lay blame on the commander-in-chief for the internal strife, stating that “while Kościuszko may have been a brilliant strategist on

¹²⁵ Storozyński p.139

¹²⁶ Storozyński p.191

¹²⁷ Quoted in Storozyński p.194

¹²⁸ Storozyński p.205

¹²⁹ Quoted in Storozyński p.207

¹³⁰ Storozyński p.208

the battlefield, which allowed him to challenge much larger armies, his political tactics and unwillingness to compromise got in the way of his goals.”¹³¹ The reality was that such strict divisions existed in Polish society before the uprising that only Kościuszko’s measures to weaken feudalism and his strong example of personal patriotism had any hope of drawing the people into a unified effort.

Severely wounded, Kościuszko was transported to St. Petersburg for interrogation and imprisonment in Petropavlovsk Fortress. As the general lay physically ruined in his Russian jail, Poland’s enemies divided up the conquered nation and wiped Poland off the map. The Treaty of 1795, known as the Third Partition, sought to eradicate the very *memory* of Poland:

In view of the necessity to abolish everything which could revive the memory of the existence of the Kingdom of Poland, now that the annulment of this body politic has been effected... the high contracting parties are agreed and undertake never to include in their titles... the name or designation of the Kingdom of Poland, which shall remain suppressed as from the present and forever...¹³²

The Kościuszko Uprising had been “a reflection of the will and resiliency of the Polish people”,¹³³ drastic measures were required to silence the spirit of liberty and kill notions of self-determination that existed among the defeated Poles. The death of Catherine in 1796 did little to alter Poland’s fate, but Czar Paul I showed mercy to Kościuszko, offering the warrior freedom in exchange for an oath of allegiance. Paul respected the commander and sought to

comfort him by telling the patriot that he would be remembered. Kościuszko replied that he “would rather be forgotten”¹³⁴ than for Poland to fall back under Russian oppression and refused to accept the czar’s generosity until thousands of Polish prisoners were released from prisons in Russia and Siberia. Physically broken and in deep emotional anguish, Kościuszko finally agreed to the czar’s terms. Paul gave the revered general money for his travels, but the Pole refused to use it. In December 1796, Kościuszko and his fellow officer Julian Niemcewicz left St. Petersburg; in May 1797, they set sail for England and then onwards to Kościuszko’s adopted second homeland, the United States of America.

Though a failure, Tadeusz Kościuszko’s noble endeavor to free Poland from its shackles earned a place of honor in Poland’s history. The uprising eventually bore his name because “it was through Kościuszko’s personality, prestige, and untiring efforts... that thousands of largely untrained and ill-equipped men took up arms and were able to hold out for more than a year and a half against the combined forces of Russia, Prussia, and Austria.”¹³⁵ His errors – the overestimation of the commitment of Poland’s wealthier classes, the miscalculation at Maciejowice, the reliance of the entire campaign upon the fortitude of its leader – are evident to modern eyes, but so are his exceptional character and the endurance of his ideals. His powerful example of republican virtue, though it could not save Poland, gave the country its best possible chance for liberation in the 1790s and provided future generations with a symbol it could cling to as the struggle for independence continued. One historian described Kościuszko as “a great and wise man by virtue of intellect and heart, faultlessly

¹³¹ Storozyński p.xiv

¹³² Quoted in Davies p.542

¹³³ Pula p.234

¹³⁴ Quoted in Storozyński p.214

¹³⁵ Pula p.234

noble, the most genuine of the Poles, the purest of patriots, the noblest of democrats, with whom no one else can be placed on the same level in his love of and friendship for the common man.”¹³⁶ Kościuszko had given all for the dream of a prosperous Polish republic of free citizens; unlike Cincinnatus or Washington, however, there was no triumph and no peaceful farm waiting for him.

CHAPTER THREE “And Freedom shrieked”: The Defeat of Kościuszko in British Verse

Though Poland was lost, Tadeusz Kościuszko – “the purest of the patriots” – was famous. The general became a celebrity on both sides of the Atlantic, his actions were chronicled in the international press, and he became a subject for works of art and literature. In the years following the Polish Uprising, a number of British writers sought to honor Kościuszko’s memory and capture the larger meaning of what had occurred in Poland. Their motives for representing the general varied according to the personal views of each writer and the state of European politics at the time of their writing. While authors such as Jane Porter provided a conservative version of the Polish revolutionary, the poets of the age were drawn to his personal virtue and understanding of individual freedom. The sonnets to Kościuszko, composed by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Leigh Hunt, and John Keats, and the epic *The Pleasures of Hope* by Thomas Campbell attached the Pole’s name to mankind’s immemorial struggle for liberty.

None of the famous British poems about Kościuszko were written by someone who actually met him. The “Kosciusko”

captured by Coleridge, Campbell, Hunt, and Keats can hardly be termed an accurate portrait of the man when compared to the descriptions offered by Nathaniel Greene or Thomas Jefferson. The poems, unlike the proclamations of the Polish insurrection, were not necessarily representative of Kościuszko’s vision or his true character. Yet despite the distance between these literary men and the object of their verse, the sonnets and the section of Campbell’s epic dealing with Kościuszko contributed to the reputation of the Pole; these works offered a view of the patriot and his principles that shaped his image in the minds of their contemporaries. The British poets also suggested some larger ramifications of Kościuszko’s republican virtue and projected the survival of the general’s values in a world that, at the time, seemed to have little place for them.

Britons were aware of the events in Poland in the 1790s, and, though largely sympathetic to the Polish cause, Parliament had failed to act in order to prevent further partitions. Russia was Great Britain’s ally against the threat of French Jacobinism and a major trading partner; consequently, “what might have been a clear political and moral issue to the British public – the empire-building of Russia at the cost of weaker neighbors – became hopelessly clouded by Britain’s own imperial efforts and the immediate military and social threat from France.”¹³⁷ The Whig party raised some money for Kościuszko’s campaign, but the uprising failed before any aid reached the Polish leader. Practical concerns ultimately outweighed ideological allegiances. After the Third Partition, some Britons came to realize the grave error they had made in letting Poland fall before the tyranny of the

¹³⁶ Pula p.235

¹³⁷ McLean, Thomas. *The Other East and Nineteenth-Century British Literature: Imagining Poland and the Russian Empire*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. p.15-16

Eastern despots. Edmund Burke famously observed that “the Empress of Russia has breakfasted. Where will she dine?”¹³⁸ radical writers published critical portraits of Catherine and began to look upon the defeated Kościuszko as “the public personification of Poland.”¹³⁹ A sense of national guilt appeared in essays and poems from the closing years of the eighteenth century as more news flooded in from the east.

When General Kościuszko briefly visited England before his return to America in 1797, he was greeted by a somewhat ironic outpouring of public sympathy and affection. He was “the toast of London,”¹⁴⁰ enduring visits from the English elite, a ceremony in his honor by the Whig Club, and the unwelcome efforts of various artists to paint his portrait. Robert Southey, a member of the Romantics’ circle, wrote that “to have seen Kosciusko would have been something to talk of all the rest of one’s life.”¹⁴¹ Though the nation had declined to help the Pole save his country, they now welcomed him with open arms. The manner in which the British press and Romantic poets referred to the general similarly fell short of honoring the Pole’s true character. Instead of depicting Kościuszko as a living revolutionary and still-charismatic patriot, they often portrayed “the freedom fighter as a defeated dreamer, a conservative supporter of monarchical rule, or as a weak, rather effeminate figure who failed to achieve his life’s work.”¹⁴² These misrepresentations of the Pole in the years following the Third Partition are important to keep in mind when analyzing the poems that are the focus of this chapter.

The image of Kościuszko in verse was, however, more truthful than the characterization of the leader in Jane Porter’s 1803

novel *Thaddeus of Warsaw*. Porter’s fictional chronicle of Thaddeus Sobieski, a young soldier serving under Kościuszko, manipulated events in Poland to appeal to the conservative element of the British public. Though Porter writes of the virtuous Kościuszko as “one of the brightest models of patriotic and martial virtue that ever was presented to mankind,”¹⁴³ she also gives a highly favorable portrait of King Stanisław rather than acknowledging the king’s failure to lead Poland to independence. Casimir Pułaski, the Bar confederate and American revolutionary, lived the “wretched life of an outlaw and an exile”¹⁴⁴ in Porter’s work instead of being honored as a hero of Poland’s quest for self-determination. The novel focuses on General Kościuszko’s military skill and loyalty to the king rather than his republican virtue and idealism, suggesting that many Britons misunderstood the aims of the insurrection and the principles of its leader. Kościuszko, in reality fighting for an independent Polish republic, is described in monarchical terms: his “natural royalty of soul needed no visible diadem.”¹⁴⁵ This portrait rejects the “peasant prince” of the uprising and discredits his aspirations for the rise of the common people. Porter’s work, despite its flawed interpretation of Polish history, does make a frank acknowledgment of Great Britain’s guilt. The tale’s hero meets an Englishman on the battlefield fighting with the Russians and this foreigner quickly learns that he was duped into the service of the czarina. One passage poetically describes how “nations will weep over [Poland’s] wrongs; whilst the burning blush of shame, that their fathers witnessed such wrongs unmoved, shall cause the tears to blister as they fall.”¹⁴⁶ Porter’s views – the righteousness of the Polish campaign for

¹³⁸ Quoted in Davies p.524

¹³⁹ McLean p.25

¹⁴⁰ Storozyński p.219

¹⁴¹ Quoted in McLean p.41

¹⁴² McLean p.44

¹⁴³ Porter, Jane. *Thaddeus of Warsaw*. Elibron Classics. 2007. p.21

¹⁴⁴ Porter p.35

¹⁴⁵ Porter p.587

¹⁴⁶ Porter p.85-86

self-determination (but not republicanism), the failure of Poland's allies to stop Russia's greed – echoed the popular mindset. In contrast to this conservative representation were the works of the Romantic poets, whose understanding of liberty was more closely aligned with Kościuszko's own vision.

The connection that the Romantic poets felt towards Tadeusz Kościuszko is somewhat remarkable; rarely did men like Coleridge and Keats praise famous contemporaries in verse, let alone figures of the Enlightenment generation of the eighteenth century. There were, however, similarities between Kościuszko and the British Romantics in their politics, specifically in their understanding of liberty and the "brotherhood of peoples."¹⁴⁷ Kościuszko's Enlightenment conception of the nation as a political body based in republican principles blended with Romanticism's notion of the nation as a community united in spirit; he envisioned an independent Poland rooted in liberal laws while also hoping to foster a spiritual attachment among the Poles to the sacred values of individual liberty, equality, and national self-determination. In Kościuszko's understanding, "membership of a nation was a matter of political loyalty and not of language, ethnic origins, or religion";¹⁴⁸ like those of the Romantic school of thought, he was dedicated to the notion that nationality was rooted in something other than blood and that social mobility should be possible because of the natural equality of mankind. These similarities shaped the British poets' view of the Polish uprising, transforming the revolt into a "generalized struggle against tyrants."¹⁴⁹

They proclaimed Britain's guilt in regard to Poland's fate by writing poems dedicated to Kościuszko, for "no single figure embodied the tragedy of Poland more powerfully than did the scarred, exiled Polish general."¹⁵⁰ For decades, a number of the Romantic writers employed Kościuszko's name to send a particular message to the people of Europe regarding universal principles and the threat posed to them by the political maneuverings of rival statesmen and regimes.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "To Kosciusko" was written in 1794 when the poet, like the rest of the Western world, believed that Poland's commander-in-chief had been slain at the Battle of Maciejowice. An early member of the Romantic Movement in England, Coleridge received a classical education at Christ's Hospital and Cambridge, was a member of the 15th Light Dragoons for a brief time in 1793, and was drawn to the liberal reforms attempted by the French and Polish revolutions. Influenced by the psychology of David Hartley, Coleridge believed that mankind was progressively evolving from "primitive responses" to "moral values of disinterested purity,"¹⁵¹ and he saw the Kościuszko Uprising's blow against monarchical tyranny as a positive step. In 1793, while on a walking tour with friends, Coleridge had "constructed a plan for an ideal republican community" in America called a "'pantisocracy' – equal government by all."¹⁵² The commonalities between the poet's model nation of equals and the republic Kościuszko dreamt of explain why the Englishman expressed such despair upon the Pole's failure. Sympathetic to the Polish revolt, Coleridge wrote to Southey in June 1794,

¹⁴⁷ Walicki, Andrzej. "The Legacy of the Enlightenment and Some New Dilemmas in the Political Thought of Tadeusz Kosciuszko." *The Enlightenment and the Birth of Modern Nationhood: Polish Political Thought from Noble Republicanism to Tadeusz Kosciuszko*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1989. p.125-126

¹⁴⁸ Walicki p.98

¹⁴⁹ Walicki p.105

¹⁵⁰ McLean p.44

¹⁵¹ Bate, Walter J. *Coleridge*. New York: Macmillan, 1968.

p.12

¹⁵² Bate, *Coleridge* p.15-16

“Poor Poland! ... They go on sadly there”;¹⁵³ in December, when the insurrection had been smothered, he composed a sonnet that captured the terrible conclusion of the Polish campaign.

Coleridge’s “To Kosciusko,” written on 16 December 1794, appeared in the collection *Sonnets on Eminent Characters*. The poem is a moving description of the general’s defeat and paints the Pole as the fallen defender of great universal principles. A “loud and fearful shriek”¹⁵⁴ issues forth from all lovers of liberty at the moment of his failure; the audible despair and urgency of the earth’s “death-groan”¹⁵⁵ is emphasized throughout the lines by frequent exclamations and stormy imagery. Kościuszko’s death profoundly affects the entire world as personified Hope and Freedom perish with him “beneath a Hireling’s sword.”¹⁵⁶ Though Coleridge is writing of an event in the recent past, he captures Hope dying in the present moment and Freedom bending “o’er her destin’d bier”¹⁵⁷ directly before her end. The reader is forced to imagine these sad proceedings, which elevates Kościuszko’s fall to an “apocalyptic”¹⁵⁸ event whose consequences are only just beginning. *Freedom itself* is shortly to vanish from the earth. Coleridge views the failure of the Polish uprising as “the deathblow prophesied ‘from eldest time’”¹⁵⁹ against man’s quest for liberty; the “bowl”¹⁶⁰ of the tears of patriots has been tipped, unleashing a destructive torrent upon the world. The poem implies that, while the tragedy was perhaps inevitable, the failure of Poland’s campaign for independence and the death of

her defender alters the trajectory of history for the worse. Kościuszko becomes the last “Patriot”¹⁶¹ to cry for the loss of Hope and Freedom; the line of true idealists, according to Coleridge, has come to a desperate end.

The syntax of Coleridge’s sonnet, in addition to portraying Kościuszko’s defeat as a tragedy of the highest order, offers some commentary on the state of European affairs. The intricacy of the wording imitates “the complexities of contemporary European politics.”¹⁶² The shifts in tense, the hard consonant sounds, and abrupt transition from the battlefield to philosophical reflection seem to mirror the instability of Europe in general as nations rise and fall. Analyses of the poem suggest that the jolting use of a parenthetical statement and the difficult grammar of the lines hint at the “madness of men slogging their way through a drenched field of battle.”¹⁶³ Warfare is a costly means by which to solve the problems of rival regimes and territorial conquest by force darkens the very air of Europe. The similarity of Coleridge’s opening line to Hamlet’s soliloquy – “O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!” – has also been interpreted as a statement on Britain’s failure to aid Poland; in echoing *Hamlet*, Coleridge seems to parallel the “tacit permission”¹⁶⁴ of Great Britain that allowed for the invasion of Poland with Denmark’s inaction as Fortinbras seized Poland and then Denmark itself. The fall of Kościuszko becomes a tool for Coleridge to comment on the political machinations of Great Britain and the doom that its betrayal of Poland portends to mankind. The “dirge of murder’d Hope”¹⁶⁵ sounds, thousands of miles away, as the man who dreamt of a constitutional republic in the east falls beneath the sword of tyranny. In recalling such ideas to mind, Coleridge

¹⁵³ McLean p.46

¹⁵⁴ Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *The Poems of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Ed. Ernest H. Coleridge. London: Humphrey Milford, Oxford UP, 1912. “To Kosciusko” 1.1 (See appendix for full text of poems.)

¹⁵⁵ Coleridge 1.2

¹⁵⁶ Coleridge 1.3

¹⁵⁷ Coleridge 1.9

¹⁵⁸ McLean p.49

¹⁵⁹ McLean p.49

¹⁶⁰ Coleridge 1.13

¹⁶¹ Coleridge 1.12

¹⁶² McLean p.10

¹⁶³ McLean p.49

¹⁶⁴ McLean p.48

¹⁶⁵ Coleridge 1.8

expresses a profound sense of unease at the turn that Europe has taken.

The next major poetic work concerning Kościuszko appeared in 1799. The epic *The Pleasures of Hope* by the Scotsman Thomas Campbell picked up on some themes explored by Coleridge while adding a degree of reflection and the power of a Scottish perspective in capturing Poland's fall. For five years, the Kościuszko Uprising had been a popular subject in British politics. In March 1795, Charles James Fox proclaimed that "the overthrow of Kosciuszko – who by his character gave credit to the cause of liberty"¹⁶⁶ should be a warning to Britain not to deal with tyrants. Yet while Fox condemned the "absurd and vicious principles"¹⁶⁷ of ministers who abandoned Poland to its fate, others observed the hypocrisy of such a condemnation. Campbell, thinking of his own national heritage, recognized certain affinities between the conquest of Poland and that of Scotland over a century before. Oppression of weaker nations had long been a feature of European politics and Campbell, though not directly charging Great Britain with destroying Scottish independence, took up the cause of Poland, Africa, and India in his epic to make a bold political statement about human freedom. While Fox and Coleridge pointed to the grave error of the British leaders in abandoning Poland to face the full wrath of Russia, Campbell "reminded the British public of the hypocrisy of the British government, which honored revolutions as long as they did not succeed."¹⁶⁸ Coleridge's sonnet looks back with regret upon Britain's betrayal of Kościuszko; Campbell, however, condemns the British policy of supporting "liberty" only when it is in the empire's

interest to do so and issues a powerful call to battle tyranny in all its manifestations.

The Pleasures of Hope, Campbell's first published poem, explores the relationship of hope and human suffering by looking at what he perceives as the three greatest injustices of the late eighteenth century: African slavery, the colonization of India, and the partitioning of Poland. In the stanzas recording the events of the Kościuszko Uprising, the poet recalls the fall of General Kościuszko and the massacre at Praga that brought the revolution to its bloody end. The same perishing Hope and Freedom and the audible despair of Coleridge's sonnet reappear in Campbell's verse: "Hope, for a season, bade the world farewell, / And Freedom shriek'd – as KOSCIUSKO fell!"¹⁶⁹ Like Coleridge, Campbell also connects the doom of Poland to the fate of mankind; he chronicles how "leagu'd Oppression" led to a series of wars "presaging wrath to Poland – and to man!"¹⁷⁰ Nature itself "shudder'd"¹⁷¹ at the prospect of tyranny triumphing over the virtuous warriors and their leader in Poland; the poet implies that earth's human inhabitants should experience a similar sense of terror. Unlike the sonnets by the English poets, Campbell gives Kościuszko his own speech in *The Pleasures of Hope*. Though the Scotsman uses poetic license, the lines echo Kościuszko's Act of Insurrection:

Yet, though destruction sweep these
lovely plains,
Rise, fellow men! our country yet
remains!
By that dread name we wave the
sword on high,

¹⁶⁶ Quoted in McLean p.50

¹⁶⁷ Quoted in McLean p.50

¹⁶⁸ McLean p.64

¹⁶⁹ Campbell, Thomas. *The Complete Poetical Works of Thomas Campbell*. Ed. J. Logie Robertson. New York: Haskell House, 1968. *The Pleasures of Hope*. 1.381-382

¹⁷⁰ Campbell 1.351-356

¹⁷¹ Campbell 1.392

And swear for her to live! — with
her to die!¹⁷²

Campbell's epic captures the Pole in action; "Kosciusko" is not simply the cry of despair at his demise, but a powerful voice imploring his men to fight on. He is flesh and blood, a *living* soul in the midst of battle in these lines rather than the crushed symbol of Coleridge's imagination.

This representation of Kościuszko adds a certain power to the poet's message that is lacking in the other poems. In giving the general lifeblood and the ability to speak, Campbell refuses to accept the collapse of Kościuszko's ideals. Though some critics argue that the poet "distances the fate of Poland by associating it with the African slave trade and the colonization of India,"¹⁷³ making Poland "more distant and exotic"¹⁷⁴ in comparison to the rest of Europe, the association actually adds depth to the nation's suffering that aims to strike a stronger chord in British hearts. Campbell also connects the events in Poland to Europe's past, naming Kościuszko alongside of William Tell, and more significantly, Robert the Bruce. In relating the current oppressions in the world to recognized symbols of liberty and courage, Campbell captures the age-old struggle against tyranny. His epic serves as a call to arms, hoping to spark a renewal of the fight for human freedom and national self-determination:

Restore your swords to man,
Fight in his sacred cause, and lead
the van!
Yet for Sarmatia's tears of blood
atone,
And make her arm puissant as your
own!
Oh! once again to Freedom's cause
return

The patriot Tell — the Bruce of
Bannockburn!¹⁷⁵

The conquest of Scotland, Africa, India, and now Poland reveals the greed, ambition, and despotism at the heart of European affairs. Campbell vividly presents the tragedy and consequences of the dominating spirit of the times. *The Pleasures of Hope* appears as a plea to those who value their freedom to reverse the fortunes of the failed patriots, to aid those seeking to secure the integrity of their nations and happiness of man.

When Kościuszko's name was taken up by the next generation of poets, it was for a very different purpose than responding to the failure of the Polish insurrection. Kościuszko, who had returned to America for a short time in order to recover from his injuries and imprisonment, secretly returned to Europe in the second half of 1798. He headed to Paris with hopes of reuniting with exiled Polish officers, securing the allegiance of the French Directory, encouraging America's interests in France, and fomenting another attempt at Polish independence. The Pole returned the money given him by Czar Paul to show that resistance was once again beginning; unfortunately, his efforts in France bore little fruit. Then came the coup d'état of Napoleon Bonaparte. In the years to come, many in Britain came to view Kościuszko as a foil to Napoleon: the republican virtue of the Pole sharply contrasted with the ambition and tyranny of the emperor.

When appealing to the French Republic during the 1794 uprising, "Kościuszko preferred to take refuge in rigid adherence to principle"¹⁷⁶ rather than betray his values for tactical purposes. His dealings six years later with Napoleon — whom the Pole

¹⁷² Campbell l.361-364

¹⁷³ McLean p.10

¹⁷⁴ McLean p.59

¹⁷⁵ Campbell l.405-410

¹⁷⁶ Walicki p.100

called “the gravedigger of the republic”¹⁷⁷ – followed a similar pattern. While many of his former comrades joined the Polish legions of Napoleon’s army, the general stubbornly refused to work with a dictator who cared little for Polish independence except as a political tool. Kościuszko warned fellow Poles against loyalty to the emperor: “Do not think that he will restore Poland; he thinks only of himself. He hates every great nationality and still more the spirit of independence. He is a tyrant, and his only aim is to satisfy his own ambition. I am sure he will create nothing durable.”¹⁷⁸ The general’s suspicions proved correct. In the 1801 Treaty of Lunéville, Napoleon ignored the aspirations of his Polish allies; in the disastrous campaign against Russia years later, only one-fifth of the 90,000 Poles who followed Napoleon survived; and the emperor created a puppet state – the Duchy of Warsaw – instead of restoring Poland. Kościuszko was a firm anti-Bonapartist, and while “Napoleon became the Machiavellian prince whom everyone feared... Kościuszko tried to be the peasant prince whom people loved.”¹⁷⁹ The differences in their character were clear to the world.

Kościuszko eventually removed to the French countryside in the early nineteenth century, despite encouragement from President Jefferson to return to America. Hoping for a reversal of Poland’s fortunes, the general stayed in Europe and focused his efforts on pamphlets calling for the emancipation of the peasantry and the establishment of an independent Polish congress. Though visited by illustrious men such as the Marquis de Lafayette and James Monroe, the Pole lingered in the shadow of European politics until Napoleon’s fall from power. Kościuszko then sensed an oppor-

tunity to push Poland’s cause as the Allied statesmen began to reorganize Europe. He wrote to Czar Alexander in April 1814:

I request three favours of you: the first is to grant a general amnesty to the Poles without any restriction, and that the serfs scattered in foreign countries may be regarded as free if they return to their homes; the second, that Your Majesty will proclaim yourself King of Poland, with a free constitution approaching that of England, and that you cause schools to be established there for the instruction of the serfs; that their servitude be abolished at the end of ten years, and that they may enjoy the full possession of their property.¹⁸⁰

The new czar revered the Polish warrior in much the same way that his father Paul I had, and initially seemed willing to negotiate on the question of Kościuszko’s homeland. In May 1815, Kościuszko was summoned to attend the Congress of Vienna by Alexander, who made a number of guarantees regarding the restoration of Poland. When Alexander and Kościuszko came to an impasse on the issues of Poland’s independence and the integrity of its frontiers, the czar fell back on his word and the Congress of Vienna “rolled over Poland’s ambitions for independence.”¹⁸¹ The statesmen at Vienna named a small territory the “Kingdom of Poland,” but, as Kościuszko wrote to Prince Czartoryski, “a name alone does not constitute a nation.”¹⁸²

In this political climate, a new generation of Romantic poets took up Kościuszko’s name and the fall of Poland.

¹⁷⁷ Quoted in Storozyński p.247

¹⁷⁸ Quoted in Pula p.264

¹⁷⁹ Storozyński p.249

¹⁸⁰ Pula p.267-268

¹⁸¹ Storozyński p.269

¹⁸² Quoted in Pula p.269

Leigh Hunt was largely responsible for reviving the interest of the British public through his essays on Kościuszko and the Polish question in the *Examiner*. Hunt's work "scattered sparks across literary London",¹⁸³ he represented the Pole as a "model of liberal individualism"¹⁸⁴ that informed later depictions of the hero. While some critics claim that Hunt and his ilk "used an aged and almost forgotten foreign revolutionary to advance their own political agendas,"¹⁸⁵ Kościuszko was not yet a "forgotten" figure lacking in importance on the international stage, nor were the Romantics using his name solely for political ends, as evidenced by John Keats's sonnet. Hunt, however, did create a specific image of Kościuszko for a political purpose. In the 3 July 1814 *Examiner*, the writer described Kościuszko's place in European affairs:

In presenting to our minds the truly gallant and patriotic men who have appeared in modern times, his image always rose upon us, as it appears in pictures in this country, - a man reduced to helplessness, and reclining on a couch with that pale and painful countenance, the eagerness of his noble character still looked out... The very mention of the name KOSCIUSKO, after having been compelled to ring the changes so often upon the BONAPARTES and the FERDINANDS, - the mighty tyrants and the mean, - is like a new music...¹⁸⁶

Instead of reviving the flesh and blood revolutionary of Campbell's epic, Hunt fostered a different Kościuszko – the defeated dreamer crushed under the heels of Europe's great oppressors.

This image of the Polish general later appeared in Hunt's poetry. In the 19 November 1815 issue of the *Examiner*, Hunt published his sonnet "To Kosciusko" in honor of the retired leader. With the epigraph "Who took part neither with Bonaparte in the height of his power, nor with the Allies in the height of theirs," the sonnet describes Kościuszko's constant, "patient valour" and "never-yielding right to a calm sleep"¹⁸⁷ in the face of present conflicts. The Pole is painted cultivating his private farm rather than cultivating Poland's happiness in public life. The Polish Cincinnatus is shown at the end of his life - "thou earnest with thy blade, / Transformed, not inly altered to the spade"¹⁸⁸ – but the victory of a Cincinnatus was not achieved for the last member of his line. As in the earlier poems, Freedom is personified, though this time it is a jewel continually fought over and "made / Pretence for old aggression"¹⁸⁹ instead of a living thing that perishes with Kościuszko. Hunt suggests that Kościuszko's way of life is "the only acceptable response to those who saw freedom as something to be bartered – a response to the realpolitik practiced by all parties at the Congress of Vienna."¹⁹⁰ With such hopeless prospects, only retirement offers some semblance of peace. The former general is portrayed as an apolitical figure with only his private principles left to him, "a liberal model of honorable behavior in a world where such characteristics are lacking."¹⁹¹

Hunt's interpretation of Kościuszko is erroneous in many ways. While there is a certain goodness in this portrait of a man so noble he is above the petty politics of European statesmen, Kościuszko was not sitting idly by in semi-peace. Hunt wrote of

¹⁸³ McLean p.11

¹⁸⁴ McLean p.89

¹⁸⁵ McLean p.89

¹⁸⁶ McLean p.95

¹⁸⁷ Hunt, Leigh. *The Poetical Works of Leigh Hunt*. Ed. Humphrey S. Milford. London: Oxford UP, 1923. "To Kosciusko." l.1, 8

¹⁸⁸ Hunt l.6-7

¹⁸⁹ Hunt l.3-4

¹⁹⁰ McLean p.99

¹⁹¹ McLean p.98

how “tis fit, / Thou, and thy country old, be still the same,”¹⁹² yet Kościuszko had urgently pressed the Congress of Vienna to restore Poland; he was in contact with exiled Polish rebels until the end of his life, hoping to keep the movement for independence alive; he had met with Europe’s most powerful rulers and only failed in his suit due to the complexities of European politics and the greed of those rulers. The British public, by the late 1790s, began “to read Poland and Kościuszko as symbols of bravery that led not to freedom but to defeat, exile, and colonization.”¹⁹³ There was a great danger inherent in this train of thought: Poland’s loss was gradually accepted as something irreversible and Kościuszko was figuratively left to his “calm sleep”¹⁹⁴ instead of serving as a living representative of liberty and republicanism. Kościuszko’s rejection of positions offered to him by Napoleon and Alexander and his continued determination to make Poland’s situation less helpless reveal a strength of character that Hunt’s poem fails to acknowledge. Though in the twilight of life, the Polish general was as passionately devoted to the cause freedom as ever. Hunt disregards this obvious sign to the world that mankind’s republican virtue could not be so easily be quenched.

Jules Michelet, a historian of the French Revolution, wrote of Tadeusz Kościuszko that “it was precisely his kindness, kindness of a high order, which brought such countless, endlessly beneficial results for the future of his fatherland... and many became convinced that absolute human kindness was to be found in this Pole... that he was Poland itself.”¹⁹⁵ Perhaps the greatest impression Kościuszko left upon

his contemporaries was a sense of sweeping goodness and faith in humanity. He was viewed as a winner of hearts, a symbol of hope, and a model of integrity for all generations to emulate. Some critics read the sonnets of Leigh Hunt and John Keats as “either nostalgic mementos or as celebrations of a forgotten hero whose philosophy of life still had value in the particular historical moment.”¹⁹⁶ Though this may be true of Hunt’s work, the representation of Kościuszko provided by Keats transcends the historical moment. Though writing only a year after Hunt, Keats sent a different message than his friend and publisher, focusing on Kościuszko’s character and the promise that his name gave to the world.

Keats died before his twenty-fifth birthday and thus did not leave behind a wealth of writings on his political views, but it is clear that he took interest in political and social affairs. Though he did not focus on specific events in his work, Keats was drawn to history and great stories. His poems often use a historical or mythical figure to comment on a larger theme, such as individual liberty or the power of dreams. Possessed of a “ready empathy and instinctive capacity to get outside himself,”¹⁹⁷ Keats drew largely from the world around him and from classical stories. His ideal of disinterestedness – or “humility and the capability of submission”¹⁹⁸ to a larger purpose – appeared in his December 1816 sonnet “To Kosciusko.” Acquainted with Hunt since October 1816 and familiar with Hunt’s essays on Poland and sonnet to Kościuszko, Keats found inspiration for his third published poem. Unlike Hunt’s portrait of quiet life for the good general, Keats’s version focuses on a power yet to be

¹⁹² Hunt l.14

¹⁹³ McLean p.63

¹⁹⁴ Hunt l.8

¹⁹⁵ Quoted in Walicki p.111

¹⁹⁶ McLean p.89

¹⁹⁷ Bate, Walter J. *John Keats*. Cambridge: Belknap of Harvard UP, 1963. p.228

¹⁹⁸ Bate, *Keats* p.237

revealed – a “tremendous birth”¹⁹⁹ of liberty yet to come. The poet expresses hope that the memory of men like Kościuszko will ensure the survival of humanity’s greatest ideals and inspire future change.

Published in the *Examiner* in February 1817, “To Kosciuszko” is often critiqued as a “tepid performance”²⁰⁰ in Keats’s volume of work. In comparison to the sonnets by Coleridge and Hunt, however, the moderate tone of Keats suggests a sort of honesty about his subject that Coleridge’s exclamations and Hunt’s political commentary fail to achieve. According to Keats, Kościuszko’s “name alone”²⁰¹ is significant; it is a prophecy, an “everlasting tone”²⁰² that rings out like “a loud hymn”²⁰³ in the annals of history. Like the earlier poems by Coleridge and Campbell, there are sounds connected with Kościuszko, but rather than the groans and shrieks of despair, Keats captures an uplifting harmony “for ever stealing / Through cloudless blue.”²⁰⁴ The dramatic change in the nature of the sounds and in the earth imagery contributes to Keats’s theme of future promises. He believes that “when some good spirit walks upon the earth,”²⁰⁵ the truth of Kościuszko – his republican virtue, his vision of a land rooted in liberty and equality, his faith in human goodness – will be realized at last. Though the poem does not directly mention Kościuszko’s actions as a defender of freedom, it places him among a great line of liberators. Keats reaches far back in British history to find a name equal to the Pole’s, citing Alfred the Great as Kościuszko’s predecessor in freedom. Keats’s sonnet emphasizes the “timelessness of such

heroes,”²⁰⁶ referencing eternity and the heavenly realms with remarkable consistency in his short poem. Though the lines may be termed less enthusiastic than some of the earlier verses written about the Polish general, a profound sense of hope is subtly woven by Keats’s words.

These poetic works, along with additional pieces by Byron and Wordsworth, made “Kościuszko” a household name in Great Britain and inspired a nation-wide sympathy for the plight of Poland. It has been suggested that Kościuszko’s failure to secure Poland’s independence, “his inability to go further in the race,”²⁰⁷ made him an attractive figure for followers of Romanticism. Here was a man who, despite every personal virtue, had been defeated by the world he had aimed to better. He became, like the Romantic poets, a man with a vision who lacked the means to make that vision a reality. After the failure of Polish aspirations at Vienna, “Kosciuszko” was, more than ever, “a name or an image emptied of their content [that] could still ‘reap high feeling,’ but not political change.”²⁰⁸ Coleridge’s “pantisocracy,” Campbell’s notions of liberty and self-determination, Hunt’s alternative to real-politick, and Keats’s disinterestedness – all were ideals that fell short of reality; Kościuszko’s defeat seemed to offer an outlet for their exasperated hopes.

In the later poems, Kościuszko himself became more of an ideal than a living man. While Coleridge mourned the physical death of the general and Campbell gave him the power of speech, the younger Romantics did not allow Kościuszko to speak and almost separated him from the physical world. “His body, his human suffering, so central to earlier representations, disappears, replaced by a powerful, ghostly, and guilt-

¹⁹⁹ Keats, John. *The Complete Poetical Works and Letters of John Keats*. Ed. Horace E. Scudder. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1899. “To Kosciuszko.” 1.12

²⁰⁰ Bate, *Keats* p.120

²⁰¹ Keats 1.1

²⁰² Keats 1.4

²⁰³ Keats 1.13

²⁰⁴ Keats 1.7-8

²⁰⁵ Keats 1.10

²⁰⁶ McLean p.102

²⁰⁷ McLean p.64-65

²⁰⁸ McLean p.58

creating name”²⁰⁹ that is alternatively hopeful and haunting. Like the nation of Poland, its former leader became more a memory of something good and noble than a living, breathing entity. This change speaks to a larger disillusionment in the early nineteenth century; though the American Revolution had given birth to a prospering republic across the ocean, the French and Polish revolutions had caused one country to fall back into the clutches of monarchical rule and the other to be wiped from the map of Europe completely. The frustration of the liberal-minded is evident in the poems, and though literary works could nudge the public consciousness, they could not alter the state of Poland or of the quest for freedom. Unfortunately, neither could Tadeusz Kościuszko. This unhappy pattern – “the rarity of words transformed into action”²¹⁰ – would characterize his remaining years.

CHAPTER FOUR

“The Sole Hope of all Humanity”: Tadeusz Kościuszko, Thomas Jefferson, and the Future of the American Republic

The Romantic poets transformed the name “Kosciusko” into an ideal for future generations to aspire to, a symbol of defeated liberty in need of resuscitation. Yet their words are not the most powerful testimony to the Pole and his republican virtue, nor were these poems the final statement on Kościuszko’s life. The general ultimately cemented his own legacy through a twenty-year correspondence with Thomas Jefferson that captured the general’s remarkable effort to ensure the well-being of the American republic. Kościuszko’s letters

to the author of the Declaration of Independence in the final years of his life display a truly noble heart that took unparalleled interest in the successes and sufferings of others. Though the British literary men captured a fallen hero and ghostly “hymn”²¹¹ of liberty, the correspondence between the Pole and his American friend reveals an energetic and passionate man whose determination to secure freedom for mankind was unquenchable.

When Kościuszko returned to the United States of America in 1798, the still-ailing Pole was greeted with enthusiasm by the inhabitants of his adopted country. Those he had served with during the American Revolution recalled his zealous efforts to achieve independence and now offered their commiseration for the loss of Poland. General Washington, in retirement after serving two terms as president, wrote to his former engineer from Mount Vernon: “no one has a higher respect... for your character than I have and no one more sincerely wished, during your arduous struggle in the cause of liberty and your country, that it might be crowned with Success... I pray you to believe, that at all times, and under any circumstances, it would make me happy to see you at my last retreat.”²¹² Kościuszko declined the illustrious man’s invitation; it is likely that his health and a quickly-inspired distrust of the Federalists surrounding his former commander made the journey to Virginia an unattractive prospect. He discerned a change for the worst in the Federalist-controlled regime; the designs of men like Alexander Hamilton to gradually transform the republic into something resembling the British system dismayed the staunchly republican Pole. He ultimately settled in Philadelphia, receiving his friends

²⁰⁹ McLean p.113

²¹⁰ McLean p.113

²¹¹ Keats l.13

²¹² G. Washington to T. Kościuszko, 31 August 1797. *George Washington Papers*.

in his modest rooms at the corner of 3rd and Pine Street.

Among Kościuszko’s most frequent visitors was Thomas Jefferson. The two lovers of liberty had first met in September 1780, when Kościuszko was journeying south to join General Greene’s army. While no record of this initial encounter exists, the Pole apparently made an impression upon then-Governor Jefferson. One historian concludes that “the lasting and cordial nature of their friendship was chiefly influenced by the wide area of agreement in their views and convictions... the same doctrines of English and French liberalism, proclaiming the right of the individual to liberty, equality, and happiness, show through very clearly”²¹³ in the public and private documents of the pair. The next two decades would see those doctrines spelled out in the letters they exchanged. During Kościuszko’s visit to America, however, the men conversed in person after their acquaintance was renewed by Horatio Gates. Gates had written to Jefferson in February 1798 asking him to deliver a letter to Kościuszko and suggesting that “perhaps you may like to call upon him with it” because “Men, who so Sincerely seek the Happiness of Man, must be Intimate with each Other.”²¹⁴ Jefferson gladly fulfilled Gates’s commission, bringing the letter to the Pole and striking up a friendship with him that would ultimately rival the close relationship of the two former officers. “I see him often,” Jefferson replied to Gates just six days later, “and with great pleasure mixed with commiseration. He is as pure a son of liberty as I have ever known, and of that liberty which is to go to all, and not to the few or the rich alone.”²¹⁵ It appears that Kościuszko

– the “pure” defender of freedom – felt an equally strong connection to Jefferson; within the year, he would rely upon the Virginian to help organize his return to Europe and would place his entire American estate in Jefferson’s keeping.

Kościuszko’s decision to leave the United States so soon after his arrival in 1798 has been attributed to a variety of causes. One historian argued that “it was neither the Polish question nor the desire to form a Polish Legion that was the decisive cause of his sudden and secret departure, but a desire to act as mediator in smoothing over the conflict between the United States and France, an attempt undertaken on Jefferson’s initiative.”²¹⁶ While it is true that Kościuszko was appointed by Jefferson as a sort of emissary to Paris on the Americans’ behalf and successfully smoothed relations between the two nations, this view does not factor in the effect of the Alien and Sedition Acts – which violated the civil liberties of foreigners and aimed to silence Republican opposition – enacted by the Federalist-controlled government in response to the Quasi-War with France. Most importantly, this view does not account for Kościuszko’s deliberate effort to hide the extent of his recovery while in America. When Kościuszko landed in France, he surprised his friends as well as the European press by walking ashore on his own, without the assistance of a cane. The fact that the general concealed his returned strength and ability to walk suggests that he harbored aspirations to renew the campaign for Polish independence. Whatever the cause of his return, his friend Thomas Jefferson was instrumental in planning Kościuszko’s voyage and securing his finances. The Pole made Jefferson the executor of his American estate, including charging him with the keeping of a remarkable will. And from 1798 until Kościuszko’s death in 1817, the two patriots would exchange letters –

²¹³ Grzelonski, Bogdan, ed. *Jefferson/Kościuszko Correspondence*. Warsaw: Interpress, 1978. p.32

²¹⁴ H. Gates to T. Jefferson, 15 February 1798. *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, v. 30 p.110

²¹⁵ T. Jefferson to H. Gates, 21 February 1798. *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, v. 30 p.123

²¹⁶ Grzelonski p.34

approximately one missive per year from each man – that offered advice and support in both national and personal affairs.

Forty-one of the Jefferson-Kościuszko letters have survived. Before delving into the larger, political themes of their correspondence, notice should be paid to the strong personal affection behind their writing. In the early years of their exchange, Jefferson's letters offered the enthusiastic praise and deep sympathy that the Virginian expressed only to his closest friends. While Kościuszko was still in the States in the heyday of the Federalists' administration, Jefferson wrote that though "the times do not permit an indulgence in political disquisitions," they could not forbid "the effusion of friendship... which no time will alter. Your principles and dispositions were made to be honored, revered and loved. True to a single object, the freedom and happiness of man, they have not veered about with the changelings and apostates of our acquaintance."²¹⁷ Kościuszko's integrity and character, his *unwavering* devotion to liberty and humanity's happiness, were recognized by Jefferson early in their acquaintance and provided an unshakable foundation for their friendship. While his fellow Americans seemed to have lost their sense of republican virtue, Jefferson found in Kościuszko a model for true republicans to emulate. Over the years, he seemed to make a study of the Pole's personal conduct, later writing to Kościuszko that his letters were "too barren of what I wish most to hear, of things relating to yourself."²¹⁸ Having experienced first-hand Kościuszko's profound disappointment in the aftermath of Poland's defeat, Jefferson sought to break through the cloud of his friend's depression through

constant reminders of the love the general inspired in those who knew him. Jefferson often closed his letters with warm wishes for the Pole's personal happiness: "God bless you my Dear General," wrote the Virginian in February 1809, "and give you happiness as long as you have life and life as long as you wish it."²¹⁹ Kościuszko's letters, though somewhat cooler in tone than Jefferson's in the beginning of their exchange, offered similar expressions of affection. The general assured his friend that he occupied a place in his heart and that "my esteem has always been the same, for I have never ceased to be convinced that no one but you combines natural and acquired qualities, nor possesses a more perfect disinterestedness or more personal qualifications generally suitable for consolidating the republic and making the State more flourishing."²²⁰ Kościuszko's praise of Jefferson's character suggested a sense of potential, the possibility that Jefferson could succeed where Kościuszko had failed in furthering republicanism in the world and securing the well-being of mankind in doing so.

In addition to messages of personal praise and support, the correspondence between the two patriots often included commentary on the state of politics in America and in Europe. Kościuszko took great interest in the fate of his adopted country and unhesitatingly offered his opinion on American affairs. As Alexander Hamilton and the Federalists sought to determine the course of the country at the end of the eighteenth century, Kościuszko supported Jefferson's view that the interests of the United States were best served in working with France rather than playing into the hands of Great Britain. In October 1798, the Pole observed that "it is a duty of every

²¹⁷ T. Jefferson to T. Kościuszko, 1 June 1798, Grzelonski p.45-46

²¹⁸ T. Jefferson to T. Kościuszko, 14 March 1801, Grzelonski p.60

²¹⁹ T. Jefferson to T. Kościuszko, February 1809, Grzelonski p.73-74

²²⁰ T. Kościuszko to T. Jefferson, 1 March 1811, Grzelonski p.80

true American as you, to publishe and propagate their friendship, and to Compele your Gouvernement by the Opinion of the Nation to the pacifique Mesures with Republique of France, otherwise you cannot but to loose every thing even your Liberty by a conexion so intimet wyth England."²²¹ Though the XYZ affair and the Quasi-War with France the following year showed how fruitless such advice was, it is significant that Kościuszko proactively sought the advancement of America's interests through Jefferson. These events prevented the two from writing extensively on politics, and the Virginian warned that their letters might fall into unfriendly hands. When circumstances altered, however, Kościuszko resumed offering advice, even if it ran counter to what Jefferson himself proposed; in 1813, for example, the Pole advised his friend that America should "not be too ambitious to acquire the whole of Canada" at the conclusion of the War of 1812 because "too much security will make you soft,"²²² putting republicanism – which depended upon the vigilance of citizens – in peril.

The freedom of correspondence valued by the two men was limited in the months following Kościuszko's departure, but Jefferson's election to the presidency in 1800 brought sighs of relief to both in the wake of the Federalists' defeat. Kościuszko whole-heartedly rejoiced at his friend's election, writing in August 1800 from France that that he hoped Jefferson would "be the same in that new station always good, true Americane a Philosopher and my Friend" and that "it may happen under your helme I shall returne to America, but not otherwise."²²³ He viewed Jefferson's victory as a victory for republican virtue in a world that

sought to suppress and devalue it. The Revolution of 1800 *confirmed* that man was capable of self-government; Jefferson's leadership, according to Kościuszko, would show that republicanism "must be inseparable from honesty, probity and strict justice, and that a man should be more honored for his virtues and his knowledge than for his riches."²²⁴ The Pole, while sincerely glad that the new president held principles that would restore those of the American Revolution, made a point to remind his friend that power often changed men for the worst, corrupting their personal character *and* the character of the regime they were entrusted with leading. Kościuszko's congratulatory letters were filled with good wishes, support, and warnings:

At last Virtue has triumphed, if not yet in the Old then at least in the New World. The people with its principle and sound judgment, saw that it had to elect you in order to be happy and independent, and it was not mistaken. I add my wishes to the general voice. Remember however that the first post in the state which is always surrounded by flatterers, intriguers, hypocrites and ill-intentioned people, be surrounded by people of character with honest talents and of strict probity, it is necessary that posts in the fields of internal and external affairs be occupied by people of principle and irreproachable conduct combined with knowledge and energy... do not forget in your new post to be always a virtuous republican of justice and probity, without ostentation or ambition, in a word be Jefferson and my friend.²²⁵

²²¹ T. Kościuszko to T. Jefferson, 2 October 1798, Grzelonski p.49

²²² T. Kościuszko to T. Jefferson, 30 May 1813, Grzelonski p.93

²²³ T. Kościuszko to T. Jefferson, 14 August 1800, Grzelonski p.58

²²⁴ T. Kościuszko to T. Jefferson, 1801?, Grzelonski p.62

²²⁵ T. Kościuszko to T. Jefferson, 10 October 1800, Grzelonski p.59

Kościuszko's experience as Commander-in-Chief during the Polish uprising no doubt shaped the advice he sent to Jefferson. Passionately dedicated to the success of at least one of the republics he sought to help establish, the general urged Jefferson, as president, to "decide promptly, act with celerity and great vigor, and when others see you act with firmness of character, they will prefer to seek alliance with you, I assure you. Make no mistake, it is pusillanimity and indecision which are the ruin of states, not valor and fervor."²²⁶

After reiterating principles that he hoped would shape Jefferson's style of governance, Kościuszko made a number of particular recommendations to his friend that he believed would help preserve the American republic. The Polish general emphasized the importance of civic education and military academies in fostering an educated citizenry able to defend, through words and through arms, their nation. He also demanded that Jefferson reflect upon the precedents his leadership would set and the effect it would have upon the reputation of republican government in the world. Kościuszko's 1805 letter to the president is the most powerful statement of the Pole's deep-vested interest in the future of the United States:

I know that you have very great influence in your country by reason of your character, your talents, your enlightenment, and your office, but you are the sole beneficiary of this, your country derives no advantage from it, if you do not exert yourself in order to make a solid and durable good for the entire nation during your period in power. You want always to have your republican government, but where are the

materials to sustain the same opinion after your death? If you do not give your youth a proper education, if you do not watch over all civil schools, if you do not prescribe uniform principles which conform to modern government, if you do not establish in each province a military school whose alumni on graduating to be officers of the militia will through their knowledge & enlightenment add even more peace to the lofty idea of being a virtuous republican, then I cannot answer for the consequences. A statesman like you, above all one with your aptitudes and enlightenment, ought to give his nation unity of action and establish a respectable and puissant character such as we have not seen so far, and you can do it if you act with firmness in the circumstances of today when all is in your favor... For goodness' sake do not be undecided, act with an energy and firmness befitting a great man you ought to be.²²⁷

To conclude his friendly but stern lesson, Kościuszko asked Jefferson for forgiveness "for writing with excessive liberty"²²⁸ then explained how his concerns were motivated by sincere affection and confidence in Jefferson's ability to affect great change. The points of this letter had apparently been topics of conversation between the two during Kościuszko's time in America because, prior to receiving the Pole's urgent entreaty, President Jefferson had overseen the establishment of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point in 1802, where Kościuszko's "Manoeuvres of Horse Artillery" served as a textbook for American

²²⁶ T. Kościuszko to T. Jefferson, 1807?, Grzelonski p.70-71

²²⁷ T. Kościuszko to T. Jefferson, 1805?, Grzelonski p.66-67

²²⁸ T. Kościuszko to T. Jefferson, 1805?, Grzelonski p.66-67

officers. Long an advocate of education as a means to impart principles of liberty and republicanism to the serfs of Poland, the general turned his attention to the education of youth in America so that his second homeland would not suffer the same fate. He believed that if President Jefferson – the future founder of the University of Virginia – could set the United States upon a firm republican footing, the American experiment would alter the course of human history.

After Jefferson's retirement from public office, his correspondence with Kościuszko refocused to personal affairs for a time. Both men had their fair share of disappointments as private citizens, and their letters were filled with common frustrations and worries. Jefferson, writing in February 1810, commiserated with Kościuszko's "anxieties... on seeing exposed to the justlings of a warring world, a country to which in early life you devoted your sword & services"²²⁹ as America struggled to find her balance on the international stage. Following this larger view of affairs, Jefferson divulged his own trials. Perpetually in debt, the Virginian had been forced to borrow \$4,500 from Kościuszko's American estate: "the affliction is a sore one," he wrote to the Pole, "& needs the solace of your approbation."²³⁰ Kościuszko readily approved Jefferson's loan but requested that interest be paid in a timely manner for "I am not a rich man."²³¹ The presumption of Jefferson to borrow the money and trust that his friend would approve of such an act highlights the understanding and confidence that existed

between the two; their friendship ran deeper than similar political views.

As his American friend shared his financial struggles, Kościuszko communicated the profound sense of disappointment he felt in regard to his own life and the course of European affairs. The Pole was challenged to find hope outside of that which he placed in the American republic. After the rise of Napoleon and his Machiavellian approach to politics, Kościuszko became rather cynical about the character of men: "let us admit frankly a sad and hard truth:" he wrote to Jefferson in 1811, "nearly all men can be corrupted; we love so passionately to be distinguished from others that we seize upon the slightest favor of fortune to raise ourselves above them."²³² The Virginian tried to cheer his friend with news of Simón Bolívar and the revolutions in South America, but the outlook for republicanism in Europe grew bleaker. Jefferson prayed that his friend would "live to see more of the liberty you love than present appearances promise,"²³³ but Napoleon's empire-building in the early years of the nineteenth century offered little hope to the Polish general. As the French Emperor crushed aspirations for the resurrection of Poland, Kościuszko deplored his helpless position: "As for me, I am doing nothing," he reported to Jefferson in 1813, "far from my country, for reasons undoubtedly known to you, [I] remain inactive and am of no service to humanity."²³⁴ Energetic and determined even late in life, the Pole's spirit suffered immensely as Europe descended into warfare because of a few power-hungry men.

A sliver of hope briefly appeared in 1815, when the Congress of Vienna gather-

²²⁹ T. Jefferson to T. Kościuszko, 26 February 1810, Grzelonski p.75

²³⁰ T. Jefferson to T. Kościuszko, 26 February 1810, Grzelonski p.78-79

²³¹ T. Kościuszko to T. Jefferson, 1 March 1811, Grzelonski p.81

²³² T. Kościuszko to T. Jefferson, 1 March 1811, Grzelonski p.80-81

²³³ T. Jefferson to T. Kościuszko, 16 April 1811, Grzelonski p.84

²³⁴ T. Kościuszko to T. Jefferson, 30 May 1813, Grzelonski p.93-94

ed in the aftermath of Napoleon's defeat. The emptiness of Czar Alexander's promises, however, meant that Poland would not regain her sovereignty. The disenchanted Kościuszko then refused to re-enter public life. Retiring to Switzerland, Europe's last republic, with the Zeltner family, the general aimed to live out his days in quiet despair. He described European politics as "nothing but the art of being better at deception"²³⁵ and wrote to Jefferson that his hopes for Poland "dissipated like smoke"²³⁶ after Vienna. He explained that even though the name "Poland" once again appeared on the map of Europe, a name "does not make a nation"²³⁷ and he refused to return to his homeland "until it is reestablished in its entirety with a liberal constitution."²³⁸ This impossible dream pushed the general into a self-imposed exile for the rest of his days. "I am the only veritable Pole in Europe," Kościuszko informed Jefferson, "all the others have been rendered by circumstances the subjects of other powers. You will tell me perhaps that this is the most miserable of situations";²³⁹ had the Pole not seen the effects of serfdom in Europe and slavery in America, he would have agreed with such a sentiment. Though Poland's fate was sealed, Kościuszko's efforts to combat slavery in the United States had yet to issue a definitive result. The will Kościuszko created for his American estate had the potential to make a powerful statement in favor of emancipation because the responsibility to carry out his wishes belonged to Thomas Jefferson.

²³⁵ T. Kościuszko to T. Jefferson, 14 March 1815, Grzelonski p.103

²³⁶ T. Kościuszko to T. Jefferson, April 1816, Grzelonski p.104-105

²³⁷ T. Kościuszko to T. Jefferson, April 1816, Grzelonski p.104-105

²³⁸ T. Kościuszko to T. Jefferson, 14 March 1815, Grzelonski p.103

²³⁹ T. Kościuszko to T. Jefferson, 15 September 1817, Grzelonski p.111

Tadeusz Kościuszko had witnessed the effects of feudalism upon the peasant population in his native Poland. During the American Revolution, he was brought face-to-face with a different kind of oppressive system, one based on racial prejudice rather than centuries of traditional social hierarchy. Just as he condemned the institution of serfdom in Poland, Kościuszko strongly opposed African slavery in North America. For the Pole, the fight for independence and self-government meant freedom for *all* people, not simply one section of society. He was puzzled that white Americans could possess such passion for "liberty" while at the same time denying freedom to a portion of the population simply because of their race. Kościuszko subscribed to greater ideals than many of his contemporaries during the Revolution, fighting not only for republicanism but for equal rights and liberties for every man abiding on American soil.

Kościuszko's strong repulsion to the institution of slavery was rooted in his long-held principles and his experiences during the American Revolution. When a fellow officer bequeathed his enslaved aide, Agrippa Hull, to Kościuszko, the Pole immediately freed the man and the two became friends. Hull's intelligence, talents, and genuine human feeling further convinced Kościuszko that blacks and whites possessed equal capabilities and should naturally possess equal rights. Hull, a slave from Massachusetts who claimed to be the descendant of an African prince and was affectionately known as "Grippy," served as Kościuszko's confidante and aide-de-camp for the remainder of the war, even following the colonel into the heart of the south when he was transferred there by General Washington. Though Grippy was, to outsiders, Kościuszko's inferior, the unconventional relationship between the two occasionally surfaced in their public conduct. In a famous

anecdote of the Revolution, Grippy threw a party in the Pole’s cabin while Kościuszko was out on a scouting mission. Returning early, Kościuszko found Hull dressed in his Polish dress uniform and sharing his wine with other servants. Grippy reportedly fell at Kościuszko’s feet expecting punishment, but the Pole told him to rise: “It is beneath the dignity of an African prince to prostrate himself at the feet of anyone.”²⁴⁰ A former slave could hardly anticipate good treatment from a superior officer who witnessed such presumptuous activity, but Kościuszko, ever humane and faithful to his friends, merely laughed at Grippy’s antics. The Pole escorted Hull around to the other white officers, introducing him as a prince from Africa come to join the rebels; Kościuszko’s story was, according to his comrades, “convincing.”²⁴¹ While this colorful tale may be in part a soldier’s legend, it reveals something exceptional in Kościuszko’s character: he applied his principles, his belief in equality, in practical, public ways. Rather than whipping Hull for unruliness, he treated him as an equal and comrade-in-arms. At the end of the war, Kościuszko presented Grippy with one of his Polish Cadet flintlock pistols; the gift symbolized the Pole’s deep respect for Hull and demonstrated Kościuszko’s conviction that African-Americans should enjoy the fruits of the Revolution. He believed that a former slave had as much of a right as he himself did to bear arms in defense of his freedom.

In the south with Greene’s army, Kościuszko “came face to face with the worst situations of human bondage, conditions he was not averse to criticizing”²⁴² before his fellow officers. The Pole even petitioned General Greene in the interest of the African-Americans serving in the Continental Army. On 2 September 1782, the engineer wrote to Greene pleading

for clothing for two black men: “they are naked they want shirts and jackets and breeches and their skin can bear as well as ours good things.”²⁴³ The entire Southern army experienced demoralizing supply shortages during the war, yet Kościuszko reminded the general that the slaves and servants accompanying the army were suffering alongside of the soldiers. He spoke up for their welfare, asserting that they were as deserving of Greene’s concern as the white troops. The Pole’s correspondence with the commander reveals the extent to which he sought to alter the views of American officers concerning equality. Kościuszko wrote to Greene in January 1786 asking, “Are we ought to like only our Compatriots, [with] no allowance to be made for one sort of Strangers” rather than “enlarging the limits of our affection contracted by prejudice and superstition towards the rest of mankind, and more so for whom we have a Sincier Esteem, let him be Turck or Polander, American or Japon[?]”²⁴⁴ “Enlarging the limits of our affection” was intended to apply to African-Americans; though racial prejudices held great sway over many American minds, the Polish engineer hoped that the service of blacks in the fight for independence would lead to their acquiring an equal place in the new republic. The “sincere esteem” he felt for Agrippa Hull convinced him that full citizenship for African-Americans was possible. However, Kościuszko’s efforts to convert his American friends to his own understanding of human liberty and equality proved to be a life-long project.

When Kościuszko returned to America in 1798 – the failure of the Polish Insurrection, and with it the Połaniec Manifesto emancipating Poland’s serfs behind him – his abolitionism was unmistakably “defiant in character.”²⁴⁵ After receiv-

²⁴⁰ Quoted in Storozynski p.73

²⁴¹ Storozynski p.73

²⁴² Pula p.193

²⁴³ Quoted in Pula p.193

²⁴⁴ Quoted in Storozynski p.119

²⁴⁵ Walicki p.96

ing the salary and interest due to him for his services in the Continental Army from the United States Congress, the Pole's estate in America totaled \$18,915.03. Before leaving the country later that year, the general placed the funds in Jefferson's trust and drafted a will that left absolutely no room for doubt regarding Kościuszko's view of slavery:

I beg Mr. Jefferson that in case I should die without will or testament he should by out of my money so many Negroes and free them, that the restant Sum should be Sufficent to give them education and provide for their maintenance. That is to say each should know before, the duty of a Cytyzen in the free Government, that he must defend his Country against foreign as well as internal Enemis who would wish to change the Constitution for the worst to inslave them by degree afterwards, to have good and human heart Sensible for the Sufferings of others...²⁴⁶

This document is the most powerful testimony of Kościuszko's principles that he ever penned. He aimed to provide for the emancipation of African slaves and for their moral and civic education because he believed that they were capable of fulfilling the duties and enjoying the benefits of citizens in the new American republic. The near-destitution of Kościuszko's later years may have prevented him from freeing slaves himself in 1798, but he also may have had a larger purpose in mind. It is important to note the full extent of Kościuszko's bold statement: he willed his *entire* salary from *eight years* of service in the army of a country not his own for the freeing of slaves and made one of that country's most famous

slave-owners the *executor* of his will. Kościuszko must have known that this would garner some attention; for Jefferson to use the money to free slaves could potentially be a powerful blow against the institution of slavery in America. In its final form, the will of May 1798 ordained the following:

I, Thaddeus Kościuszko, being just in my departure from America, do hereby declare and direct that should I make no other testamentary disposition of my property in the United States thereby authorize my friend Thomas Jefferson to employ the whole thereof in purchasing negroes from among his own as any others and giving them liberty in my name in giving them an education in trades and otherwise, and in having them instructed in their new condition in the duties of morality which may make them good neighbors, good fathers and mothers, husbands or wives and in their duties as citizens, teaching them to be defenders of their liberty and country and of the good order of society and in whatsoever may make them happy and useful, and I make the said Thomas Jefferson my executor of this.²⁴⁷

In providing for the manumission of as many of Jefferson's slaves as the estate could afford, Kościuszko attempted to correct one of the greatest hypocrisies of the American Revolution: he aimed to free the slaves of the man who had written that "all men are created equal." Such an act, had it succeeded, might have had great consequences in the years to come.

In naming Jefferson the executor of his American will, Kościuszko was confi-

²⁴⁶ Draft of T. Kościuszko's Will, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, v.30 p.332

²⁴⁷ Final Version of T. Kościuszko's Will, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, v.30 p.332-333

dent that his friend would fulfill his legal promises. He believed that the Virginian was “the sole hope of all humanity” because of the republican principles they shared, and he desired that Jefferson would be “an example to future ages.”²⁴⁸ Kościuszko sought to influence Jefferson’s “example” by removing one of the darkest marks on his record. The evidence supports that Jefferson acknowledged his friend’s great act; upon learning of Kościuszko’s death in 1817, Jefferson wrote how he had enjoyed the Pole’s “intimate friendship and confidence for the last twenty years, and during the portion of that time which he past in this country, I had daily opportunities of observing personally the purity of his virtue, the benevolence of his heart, and his sincere devotion to the cause of liberty.”²⁴⁹ Jefferson also recorded how Kościuszko “left in my hands an instrument, giving, after his death, all his property in our funds, the price of his military labors here, to the charitable purposes of educating and emancipating as many of the children of bondage in this country as it should be adequate to... I am therefore taking measures to have it placed in such hands as will ensure a faithful discharge of his philanthropic views.”²⁵⁰ It is clear that Jefferson possessed good intentions in regards to carrying out his friend’s wishes; however, legal complications – the confusion caused by Kościuszko’s multiple European wills and his American one, and the various claims of the Pole’s family members and godchildren – prevented the fulfillment of his obligation. The case remained in the U.S. judicial system until the will was declared invalid by the Supreme Court in 1852, nearly three decades after Jefferson’s death.

Whether Jefferson is to blame for the failure of Kościuszko’s funds to free a single

slave is debatable. Many of the Pole’s modern biographers argue that it was Jefferson’s fear of possible financial ruin if he used the money to emancipate his slaves that caused him to let the will be lost in a legal quagmire. They conclude that Jefferson’s selfishness “dimmed Kościuszko’s legacy” in America because “none of the money that Kościuszko had set aside to free and educate slaves went for its intended purpose.”²⁵¹ While such an interpretation of the circumstances may be unfair to Jefferson, it is more important to look at the virtues of the will itself instead of placing blame for the failure to enact it. The “rarity of words transformed into action”²⁵² once again proved a theme of Kościuszko’s story, but the *words* possessed a power of their own. The clerk of the Albemarle County Court in 1819 wrote upon his encounter with Kościuszko’s will that “nothing exhibits, more graphically or beautifully, the character of the man, than the short and simple paper... disinterestedness, universal philanthropy, and a heart bursting with desire for liberty, freedom and happiness to all mankind are pictured as in a mirror.”²⁵³ The character of Kościuszko himself shone forth from these few lines of his will; what was clear to the clerk in 1819 about the Pole’s virtue and purity of heart should still strike a chord with those who love liberty today.

Though Jefferson is cast in an unfavorable light by the unfortunate fate of Kościuszko’s American will, the Pole’s correspondence with the Virginian reveals that the two men were bound in friendship by great personal attachment and shared principles. As early as 1801, Jefferson began looking for land near Monticello in hopes that he could persuade the unhappy general to settle in America. “You talked once of

²⁴⁸ T. Kościuszko to T. Jefferson, 1805?, Grzelonski p.66-67

²⁴⁹ Quoted in Grzelonski p.36

²⁵⁰ Quoted in Grzelonski p.36

²⁵¹ Storozyński p.281-282

²⁵² McLean p.113

²⁵³ Quoted in Storozyński p.280

becoming a neighbor,” Jefferson recalled to Kościuszko in 1809; “it would add more to my happiness than I believe to yours.”²⁵⁴ His persistent attempts to convince the general to return says more about the affection Jefferson felt for Kościuszko than any praise he wrote in the Pole’s favor. It was through invitations to settle near Monticello that Jefferson expressed his love for his friends; James Madison and James Monroe received similar entreaties. In what would be the final year of the Pole’s life, Jefferson once more pleaded with him to return to his adopted country. It is arguably one of the most moving passages in all of Jefferson’s private correspondence:

I would say come to Monticello, and be one of our family ...come and build a house... think seriously of this, my dear friend, close a life of liberty in a land of liberty, come and lay your bones with mine in the Cementary of Monticello. This too will be best way of placing your funds and yourself together: and will enable me to give in person those assurances of affectionate friendship and respect which must now be committed to the hazard of this letter.²⁵⁵

Kościuszko’s reply reveals that his republican virtue endured until the last. The Pole declined the offer of a comfortable home in America in order to stay in Europe to advise any Poles who were willing to take up the campaign for independence once more:

I really do appreciate greatly your kind invitation, but the fate of my

country is very close to my heart, and then there are my friends and acquaintances, to whom it is pleasant for me to give advice occasionally... One can, my dear and respected friend, be independent everywhere, as long as one thinks properly, reasons well, is of good heart, has humane sentiments and a firm, upright and open character, which will always confound the most Astute Diplomat and the most deceitful, cunning and base being.²⁵⁶

He closed his final letter to Jefferson with an emotional farewell: “I embrace you a thousand times, not in the French manner, but from the bottom of my heart.”²⁵⁷ One month later, Kościuszko fell ill with typhoid fever after a horse-riding accident. The Polish patriot died on 15 October 1817, in exile, at the age of seventy-one.

Upon hearing of Kościuszko’s death, the Virginian mourned that “to no country could that event be more afflicting nor to any individual more than to myself.”²⁵⁸ Such deep grief attests to the depth of their friendship. Jefferson believed that the Pole would hold a special place in the memory of all Americans for his life of service in the cause of liberty. He had stated as much to Kościuszko twenty years earlier, writing:

May heaven have in store for your country a restoration of these blessings, and you be destined as the instrument it will use for that purpose. But if this be forbidden by fate, I hope we shall be able to preserve here an asylum where your love of liberty and disinterested patriotism will be forever protected and

²⁵⁴ T. Jefferson to T. Kościuszko, 25 February 1809, Grzelonski p.73-74

²⁵⁵ T. Jefferson to T. Kościuszko, 15 June 1817, Grzelonski p.109-110

²⁵⁶ T. Kościuszko to T. Jefferson, 15 September 1817, Grzelonski p.111

²⁵⁷ T. Kościuszko to T. Jefferson, 15 September 1817, Grzelonski p.112

²⁵⁸ Quoted in Grzelonski p.36

honored, and where you will find, in the hearts of the American people, a good portion of that esteem and affection which glow in the bosom of the friend who writes this.²⁵⁹

The Polish revolutionary would, Jefferson hoped, be a part of the collective American memory, a figure revered for his republican virtue. Unfortunately, the people indebted to Kościuszko for their independence and republic have since forgotten him.

Thomas Jefferson’s letters provide the final color in the portrait of Tadeusz Kościuszko’s “life of liberty.” The Virginian’s words capture a man who - from the testimony of his comrades in the American Revolution, the integrity of his actions during the uprising that bore his name, the image propagated by the poets who revered him, and the devoted patriotism encapsulated in his private letters to a beloved friend - was the purest son of liberty of his generation. Jefferson’s own love for the Pole - and the gratitude he believed that mankind owed him - inspired beautiful, heartfelt passages in his correspondence with Kościuszko:

...from one man we can have but one life, and you gave us the most valuable and active part of yours, and we are now enjoying and improving its effects. Every sound American, every sincere votary of freedom, loves and honors you... God bless you under every circumstance, whether still reserved for the good of your native country or destined to leave us in the fullness of time with the consciousness of successful efforts for the establishment of freedom in one country and

of all which man could have done for its success in another. The lively sense I entertain of all you have done and deserved from both countries, can be extinguished only with the lamp of life...²⁶⁰

Tadeusz Kościuszko once referred to Thomas Jefferson as “the sole hope of all humanity.” Perhaps Jefferson felt likewise about his friend.

CONCLUSION

The Legacy of Tadeusz Kościuszko

The name “Kościuszko” became synonymous with “freedom” throughout Europe in the early nineteenth century. The British poets presented the Pole to the literary audiences of the Romantic generation and beyond while nations such as France paid homage to him through honorary citizenship. After the general’s death, the Marquis de Lafayette declared that Kościuszko’s

...name belongs to the entire civilized world and his virtues belong to all mankind. America ranks him among her most illustrious defenders. Poland mourns him as the best of patriots whose entire life was sacrificed for her liberty and sovereignty. France and Switzerland stand in awe over his ashes, honoring them as a relic of a superior man, a Christian and a friend of mankind. Russia respects in him the undaunted champion whom even misfortune could not vanquish.²⁶¹

²⁵⁹ T. Jefferson to T. Kościuszko, 21 February 1799, Grzelonski p.53

²⁶⁰ T. Jefferson to T. Kościuszko, 30 November 1813, Grzelonski p.98

²⁶¹ Quoted in Pula p.275

Yet just as Kościuszko wrote that a name does not make a nation, a name standing for freedom did not make the freedom he fought for a reality. The Pole's spirit has been revived, now and then, over the centuries as the timeless struggle for liberty rages on.

Poland, its boundaries and sovereignty restored, did not reappear on the map of Europe until after World War I nor was serfdom officially abolished there until the mid-nineteenth century. The Kościuszko Insurrection, despite its ultimate failure, "contributed in the future to the liberation of man, to human progress, and to the realization by Poles that by relying on their own strength they could win independence";²⁶² it also gave Poland a figure that came to symbolize the nation's quest for freedom and self-government. Even after the rebellion was vanquished, Kościuszko continued to campaign for a Polish republic. His 1800 pamphlet *Can the Poles Win Independence?* sought to inspire a new generation to rise up: "The Poles, whenever they want, and want with unshakable determination, to win freedom, can raise revolution (if all Citizens take an equal interest in doing so) and defeat their enemies."²⁶³ Though the British poets recorded "Freedom's shriek" and likened Kościuszko's memory to a "hymn" or song fading in the distance, the Poles heard a true cry for freedom. Kołłontay was right when he wrote to the general in 1793 that "the nation will not forget you."²⁶⁴ Fueled by Kościuszko's example, uprisings took place in Poland throughout the following century. Though unsuccessful, these revolts were proof of the Poles' commitment to Kościuszko's principles.

In his final European will, the former commander-in-chief left the sword of King Jan Sobieski, who halted the Ottoman inva-

sion of Europe in the late seventeenth century, to the Polish nation as a symbol of national pride and hope. Little did he know that his name would become a greater symbol than Sobieski's sword by the twentieth century: the Polish fighter pilots who fought to liberate their nation in both World Wars called themselves the Kościuszko Squadron and the statue of Kościuszko in front of Wawel Castle was targeted by the occupying Nazis because the general, even a century and a half later, was still the most prominent sign of Polish independence.

In addition to sending the sword of Sobieski to his homeland, Kościuszko's last will aimed to strike a blow against feudalism in Europe. He abolished serfdom once and for all on his Polish estate on 2 April 1817:

I deeply feel that serfdom is against the law of nature and the well-being of nations, I declare that I abolish it completely and forever at my estate in Siechnowicze in the Brest-Litovsk, on my behalf and that of its future owners. I recognize residents of the village that belong to this estate as free countrymen, unlimited by anything, as owners of the land they live on... I only appeal to them, for their own and their country's sake, to try to establish schools and spread education.²⁶⁵

Though unable to preserve the liberties and rights of the Połaniec Manifesto for the peasants after the insurrection, Kościuszko made a final effort to secure the happiness of those that he could. The Polish people would not forget this last proclamation of freedom made by their leader.

After Kościuszko's death, his body was moved to Wawel Castle to be laid alongside the remains of Poland's kings. It

²⁶² Grzelonski p.13

²⁶³ Quoted in Grzelonski p.15

²⁶⁴ Quoted in Storozyński p.174

²⁶⁵ Quoted in Storozyński p.275

was the highest honor his country could give him while under Russian and Prussian rule. Construction of the Kościuszko Mound near Kraków began in 1820 as Poles began gathering soil from all of the battlefields on which their beloved general had fought for their liberty. In later years, soil from the battlefields upon which he had seen action in America was added to the memorial. According to Kościuszko's wishes, his heart was to be returned to Poland only when his country was free and independent once more; this request was fulfilled in 1927. The care his countrymen took in honoring their hero after his death testifies to the lasting reverence and gratitude of the Polish nation.

In his second homeland, Tadeusz Kościuszko's character and principles have been sporadically remembered. While Jefferson believed that the Pole would be honored for his remarkable service in the Revolution, Americans were not as reverent as Jefferson would have hoped nor were they as aware of what Kościuszko had done for Poland. The general once remarked in the aftermath of the Polish insurrection that "Washington and I had similar roles; his was blessed with happy results, mine failed."²⁶⁶ Perhaps it is a tendency of humankind to forget noble efforts when they meet with unhappy results. The United States publically mourned Kościuszko's death – the January 1818 eulogy delivered by General William Henry Harrison declared that "Kościuszko, the martyr of liberty, is no more! ... His fame will last as long as liberty remains upon the earth"²⁶⁷ – but the following decades witnessed numerous challenges to the principles that Kościuszko and his generation had fought to make a reality in the republic.

Though the Pole's name gradually faded into obscurity, it was periodically

revived at key moments when the principles of liberty and equality were being debated on the national stage. Kościuszko's American will, while it did not actually free a single African slave, re-emerged during the 1854 Kansas-Nebraska debate. As Congress argued whether to allow the extension of slavery into the Nebraska territory, Representative Gerrit Smith resuscitated Kościuszko's memory in order to show how Americans were considering violating the principles set forth by one of the great patriots who had fought for their independence:

There was Kościuszko, at whose fall "Freedom shrieked," and who provided by his will, written by himself, that his property in America should be used by his anti-slavery friend, Thomas Jefferson, in liberating and [educating] African slaves. Surely, he would not, with his eyes open, have fought to create a power that should be wielded on behalf of African slavery!²⁶⁸

While the mention of Kościuszko's name in the House of Representatives did not prevent the national crisis over slavery and civil war that followed, this occurrence reveals that there were some in the Pole's adopted country who still celebrated his virtuous character, discovered a power in his name, and defended the republic he helped to establish in North America. Not all Americans ignored his example nor did all forget the precedent of emancipation he had attempted to create. In the fall of 1910, for example, Booker T. Washington, while on a European tour, traveled to Kraków in order to visit Kościuszko's tomb in an act of homage to the Polish patriot. American military officers have consistently honored the engineer behind West Point for over two

²⁶⁶ Quoted in Storożynski p.240

²⁶⁷ Quoted in Grzelonski p.17

²⁶⁸ Quoted in Storożynski p.282

centuries. During the months the Pole worked on the defenses of the Hudson, he spent his few off-duty hours at a secluded spot facing the river tending a small garden. The garden, a symbol of Kościuszko's patience and devotion, is to this day maintained by the Corps of Cadets at the military academy that the Polish general had urged President Jefferson to establish.

Today, when the American republic that Kościuszko had hoped would materialize is a reality, his words and example still offer guidance to us as citizens aiming to preserve that republic. In a letter to Jefferson in 1812, Kościuszko emphasized the immeasurable importance of education: "For who can say positively that your republican government will long last if the education of youth is not established on the fixed basis of republican principles, on morals and on justice... It is from this education that you must expect to have the greatest defenders of your country and the underpinnings of republican government."²⁶⁹ A vigilant, educated population is essential to the survival of liberty in this nation. Kościuszko's warning two hundred years ago is as applicable today as it was then. We must study his life, along with the work of our Founders, in order to fully appreciate the freedom they intended to secure for us. In learning about his character and deeds, we honor Tadeusz Kościuszko and become capable of emulating his republican virtue. This nation was taught its sacred duty to the cause of liberty and mankind's happiness by a Pole: it is time that we remember it.

²⁶⁹ T. Kościuszko to T. Jefferson, 1 February 1812, Grzelonski p.88

Appendix: The Poems

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "To Kosciusko"

O what a loud and fearful shriek was there,
As though a thousand souls one death-groan pour'd!
Ah me! they saw beneath a Hireling's sword
Their KOSKIUSKO fall! Through the swart air
(As pauses the tir'd Cossac's barbarous yell
Of Triumph) on the chill and midnight gale
Rises with frantic burst or sadder swell
The dirge of murder'd Hope! while Freedom pale
Bends in such anguish o'er her destin'd bier,
As if from eldest time some Spirit meek
Had gather'd in a mystic urn each tear
That ever on a Patriot's furrow'd cheek
Fit channel found; and she had drain'd the bowl
In the mere willfulness, and sick despair of soul!

Thomas Campbell, *The Pleasures of Hope* (lines 349 – 392, 403 - 410)

...Oh! sacred Truth! thy triumph ceas'd awhile,
And Hope, thy sister, ceas'd with thee to smile,
When leagu'd Oppression pour'd to Northern wars
Her whisker'd pandoors and her fierce hussars,
Wav'd her dread standard to the breeze of morn,
Peal'd her loud drum, and twang'd her trumpet horn;
Tumultuous horror brooded o'er her van,
Presaging wrath to Poland — and to man!

Warsaw's last champion from her height survey'd
Wide o'er the fields, a waste of ruin laid,—
"Oh! Heav'n!" he cried, "my bleeding country save!—
Is there no hand on high to shield the brave?—
Yet, though destruction sweep these lovely plains,
Rise, fellow men! our country yet remains!
By that dread name we wave the sword on high,
And swear for her to live! — with her to die!"

He said, and on the rampart-heights, array'd
His trusty warriors, few but undismay'd;
Firm-pac'd and slow, a horrid front they form,
Still as the breeze, but dreadful as the storm;
Low murm'ring sounds along their banners fly,
Revenge, or death, — the watch-word and reply;
Then peal'd the notes, omnipotent to charm,
And the loud tocsin toll'd their last alarm!—

In vain, alas! in vain, ye gallant few!

From rank to rank your volley'd thunder flew:—
Oh! bloodiest picture in the book of Time,
Sarmatia fell, unwept, without a crime;
Found not a generous friend, a pitying foe,
Strength in her arms, nor mercy in her woe!
Dropt from her nerveless grasp the shatter'd spear,
Clos'd her bright eye, and curb'd her high career;—
Hope, for a season, bade the world farewell,
And Freedom shriek'd — as KOSCIUSKO fell!

The sun went down, nor ceas'd the carnage there.
Tumultuous murder shook the midnight air—
On Prague's proud arch the fires of ruin glow,
His blood-dy'd waters murm'ring far below;—
The storm prevails, the rampart yields a way;
Bursts the wide cry of horror and dismay!—
Hark! as the smouldering piles with thunder fall,
A thousand shrieks for hopeless mercy call!
Earth shook — red meteors flash'd along the sky,
And conscious Nature shudder'd at the cry!

...Departed spirits of the mighty dead!
Ye that at Marathan and Leuctra bled!
Friends of the world! Restore your swords to man,
Fight in his sacred cause, and lead the van!
Yet for Sarmatia's tears of blood atone,
And make her arm puissant as your own!
Oh! once again to Freedom's cause return
The patriot Tell – the Bruce of Bannockburn!"

Leigh Hunt, "To Kosciusko"

WHO TOOK PART NEITHER WITH BONAPARTE IN THE HEIGHT OF HIS POWER,
NOR WITH THE ALLIES IN THE HEIGHT OF THEIRS.

'Tis like thy patient valour thus to keep,
Great KOSCIUSKO, to thy rural shade,
While Freedom's ill-found amulet still is made
Pretence for old aggression, and a heap
Of selfish mockeries. There, as in the sweep
Of stormier fields, thou earnest with thy blade,
Transformed, not inly altered, to the spade,
Thy never-yielding right to a calm sleep.
Nature, 'twould seem, would leave to man's worse wit,
The small and noisier parts of the this world's frame,
And keep the calm green amplitudes of it
Sacred from the fopperies and inconstant blame.
Cities may change, and sovereigns; but 'tis fit,
Thou, and thy country old, be still the same.

John Keats, "To Kosciusko"

GOOD KOSCIUSKO, thy great name alone
Is a full harvest whence to reap high feeling;
It comes upon us like the glorious pealing
Of the wide spheres – an everlasting tone.
And now it tells me, that in worlds unknown,
The names of Heroes, burst from clouds concealing,
Are changed to harmonies, for ever stealing
Through cloudless blue, and round each silver throne.
It tells me too, that on a happy day,
When some good spirit walks upon the earth,
Thy name with ALFRED'S, and the great of yore,
Gently commingling, gives tremendous birth
To a loud hymn, that sounds far, far away
To where the great GOD lives for evermore.

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