

Princess Isabel and the Czartoryski Museum

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MORE than at any other time the 1970s is the decade of museums. But few can lay claim to such a distinguished genealogy, deliberate conception and diversity of valuable objects as the Czartoryski Museum which is now a department of the National Museum in Cracow. At the establishment of the Czartoryski Collection lay the idea of an 'ark', a simple method of rescuing as many national treasures as possible which were threatened by the grave disturbances suffered by Poland at the end of the eighteenth century. The final partition of Poland between three neighbouring powers – Russia, Prussia and Austria – caused a real danger for numerous art objects, symbols

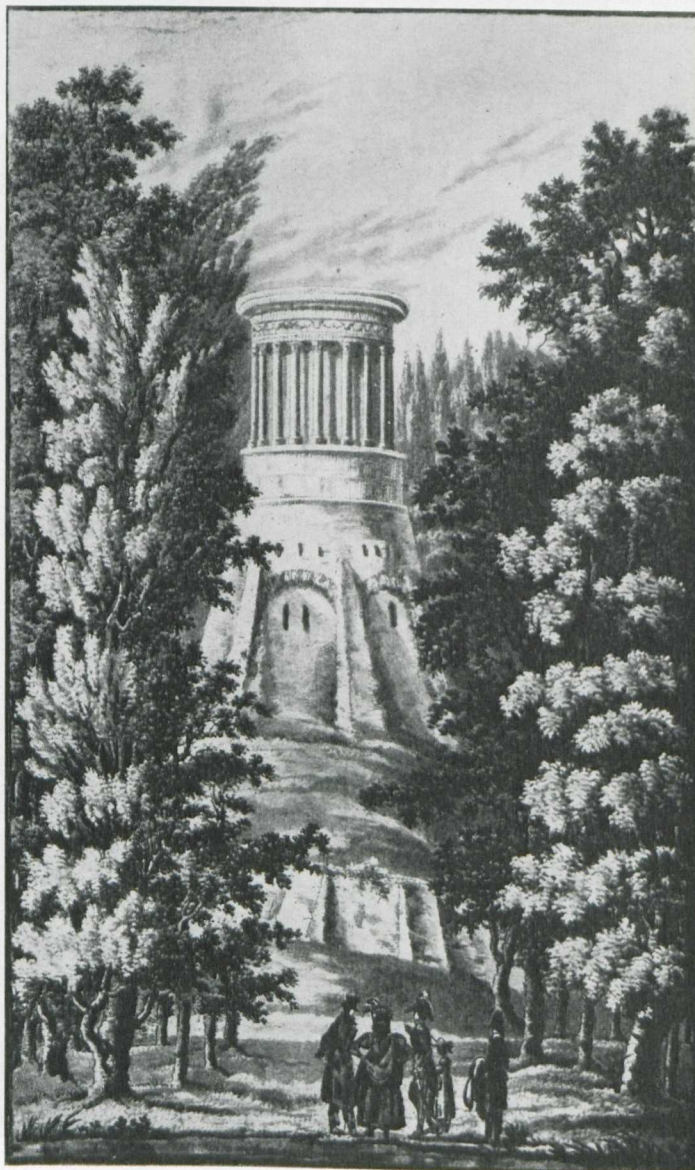
and signs of the fallen state which were carried away as trophies or even destroyed. Such was also the fate of the Polish crown jewels which consisted of insignia and ornaments used for official acts of sovereignty, particularly those used for coronation purposes. As state property they had been housed since the fourteenth century in the Royal Castle of Wawel in Cracow. They were captured by the Prussians in 1795 when they temporarily occupied the city before allowing it to pass into Austrian hands.

After King Stanislas Augustus Poniatowski's abdication and the abolition of the Polish official authorities a number of private



1. *Princess Isabel Czartoryska*. Mezzotint by Guiseppe Marchi, published in London, 1777.

2. *Sibyl's Temple at Pulawy*. Aquatint by F. Ch. Dietrich, 1807.



persons started a movement for salvaging works of national and historic importance. The idea of creating a museum was taken up by Princess Isabel Czartoryska, a lady of wit, charm and passion (No. 1). In 1761, at the age of 15, she married Prince Adam Casimir Czartoryski, a descendent of a powerful aristocratic family, members of which fought for reforms and reconstruction of a corrupted political system. Adam Casimir put up by his ambitious father, Augustus Czartoryski, as a candidate to the Polish throne resigned this in 1764 in favour of his first cousin Stanislas Augustus Poniatowski, backed by Catherine the Great. Czartoryski disappointed in a great career turned to his beloved scientific and bibliophilic preoccupations, gathering in a considerably short time an enormous library of books, manuscripts, prints and maps.

Princess Isabel spent her young days mostly in travelling, visiting firstly European courts where she indulged in the alluring world of gallantry, but being always sensitive to art and poetry, fascinated by philosophers of Enlightenment, attracted by deistic and masonic creeds. She took the opportunity of meeting Madame Geoffrin and Jean Jacques Rousseau, and, being acquainted with Johann Caspar Lavater, kept up an extensive correspondence with him. In 1790 Isabel, accompanied by her son Adam Georg, made a tour through England and Scotland, stopping in London, Windsor, Oxford, Salisbury (with an excursion to Stonehenge), and Edinburgh. As a devoted admirer of Shakespeare she saw the house where he was born at

Stratford-on-Avon, and bought there for the sum of 20 guineas an oak chair traditionally said to be connected with the poet. This was to be one of the first exhibits for the future museum. The results of the Princess's awakening passion for collecting were amazingly rich. From a member of the Hamilton family she purchased a portrait of Mary Stuart attributed to François Quesnel; at the William Rawle sale in London she acquired a powder-horn which had originally belonged to King Henry VIII; and relics connected with Oliver Cromwell. From Captain Cook's sister she bought the sword of the famous explorer. The Princess was enchanted by the early Romantic Movement which she encountered at every step. Reading the Ossianic ballads she could confront them immediately with the real charms of the English and Scottish countries, their parks, castles and cathedrals, all with venerable relics. This journey, more than any other, inspired her imagination and determined her life mission. The true metamorphosis of her personality came some years later, after the shock of Poland's fall. A lady for whom enjoying life was the only purpose changed into an ardent patriot obsessed by the idea of rescuing her fatherland's past glories embodied in material documents and relics.

One of the Czartoryski residences was at Pulawy, a town between Warsaw and Lublin in the heart of Poland. A magnificent palace erected there in the late seventeenth century contained one part of the family treasures and also the library, referred to above, collected by the Prince Adam Casimir. In Pulawy park,



3. The 'Augury Shield' of King John III Sobieski, Italian c. 1590.

4. Hetman M. H. Sieniawski's scale armour from the time of the Vienna expedition, 1683.



close to the palace, on the high bank of the Vistula river, a place was chosen by Isabel to found the first Polish national museum, a Sibyl's Temple (No. 2). The court architect, Piotr Aigner, was ordered to create a structure which faithfully copied in form the ancient Roman temple preserved in part ruins at Tivoli, but on a larger scale. It was a rotunda with eighteen Corinthian-Composite columns, having one large room lighted from the top through a crystal window set in the dome. There was also a subterranean crypt in the building. In front of the Temple, above its portal, the laconic motto *Przeszłość Przyszłości* ('Past for the Future') instructed the visitor about the principal task of the museum. The idea of Sibyl had an antique origin. She had always been

respected as a good prophetess taking care of the state, and was especially popular in the old Poland after modelling herself on the creeds and customs as practised by the Romans. The Temple itself, with one large round hall, ensured the classic rule of the three unities: of place, time and action. The visitor entering the hall was arrested by the view of gorgeous objects surrounding him on all sides. Motionless he could admire the exhibition, receiving intensified impressions.

The still existing Sibyl's Temple at Puławy and the objects preserved in Cracow along with detailed topographic catalogues and descriptions, make it easy to reconstruct mentally the first Polish museum. It was really arranged as the museum-sanctuary



5 a, b and c. Left to right. Silver South German cup c. 1600. Silver nef, by Esaias zur Linden, Nürnberg early seventeenth century. Silver Ostrich cup, by Georg Hoffman of Wrocław c. 1600 (from the Ostrogski Treasury).

Colour plates

Above. Rembrandt. *Landscape with the Good Samaritan.*

Below left. Turkish saddle captured at Vienna in 1683 by Hetman M. H. Sieniawski.

Below right. Leonardo da Vinci. *Lady with the Ermine.*

combining some pagan and some Christian traditions. The central part was occupied by an 'altar' of granite block on which the 'Royal Casket' was laid. It contained many relics belonging to the kings, chiefly jewels but also portrait miniatures, fragments of costumes and various attributes, some of them removed from the royal tombs in Cracow. The apse in front of the altar was filled with panoplies and trophies, among others two swords commemorating the battle of Grunwald of 1410 and the banners captured by Polish kings and hetmans in wars against the Germans, Austrians, Muscovites and Turks. A place of honour was given to the famous shield of chiselled iron representing the victory of Constantine the Great over Maxentius, a work of Italian armourers of the late sixteenth century, donated to the King John III Sobieski before his Vienna expedition 1683 as a sign of good omen (No. 3). After the victory it has been called the 'Augury Shield'. A very considerable part of 'Vienna bounty' fell to the share of hetman M. H. Sieniawski (No. 4), and then by the right of succession came into Czartoryski hands (see colour plate). Finally it found the way to Sibyl's Temple. Turkish arms, armour and equipment were displayed on the walls or in large semicircular cupboards. They were not the ordinary military arms but were items of craftsmanship of the highest value, undoubtedly products of the imperial workshops of Istanbul. Among them was a saddle covered with purple velvet embroidered with gold, mounted in chiselled and gilded silver set with jades, rubies and turquoises. Innumerable goldsmith's works from the family treasury and from the treasuries of related aristocrats were transferred to the Temple. There was also a superb cup in the shape of an ostrich, made in Wrocław in the late sixteenth century, preserved in the Ostrogski family (No. 5c).

Along with the foregoing were deposited sets of parchment documents relating to mediaeval and Renaissance Poland, seals, coins, military insignia, decorations, arms, and, what is most significant, original relics taken from the tombs of the kings,

dukes, and great hetmans. There were also relics of people who deserved the highest esteem in the field of science and literature – those of Copernicus from his supposed grave at the Frombork Cathedral and those of Kochanowski, the most eminent poet of the sixteenth century. Small urns carrying commemorating inscriptions were designed for the relics. The subterranean crypt was decorated with shields of honour made of gilded bronze dedicated to Polish soldiers and military leaders. After 1813 there was also erected a monument of black marble for Prince Joseph Poniatowski, commander-in-chief of the Polish Army fighting for independence under the banners of Napoleon I. Poniatowski met his heroic death in the battle of Leipzig. In the time of the great Napoleonic wars, when the hope of freedom roused the Polish people to action, Sibyl's Temple became a rich source of inspiration and a natural place where trophies were deposited. It is hard to find another example of such a strong influence of a museum on the current life and political conscience of a nation.

Unusually proud of the success of the Temple, Princess Isabel was still unsatisfied in her ambition. She had acquired a lot of objects from abroad which could not be enclosed in the pantheon of Polish history. There were not only the souvenirs of her extensive travels but also considerable acquisitions made at her request by friends and agents in various parts of Europe and outside Europe, as well as donations of the people who had heard about the Puławy Museum and wished to contribute to the collection.

Close to Sibyl's Temple a new museum building, designed by Aigner, was opened in 1809. It was given the name 'Gothic House' on account of its form and decoration (No. 6). This may be considered as a complete victory of romanticism: the classic canon was replaced by eclecticism, unity by complexity, and clarity by a confusion of forms. The House was intended as a grand reliquary of souvenirs of world history, but the choice of subjects in moral, didactic and political sense often referred to the Polish question. The examples of heroism, chivalry, struggle



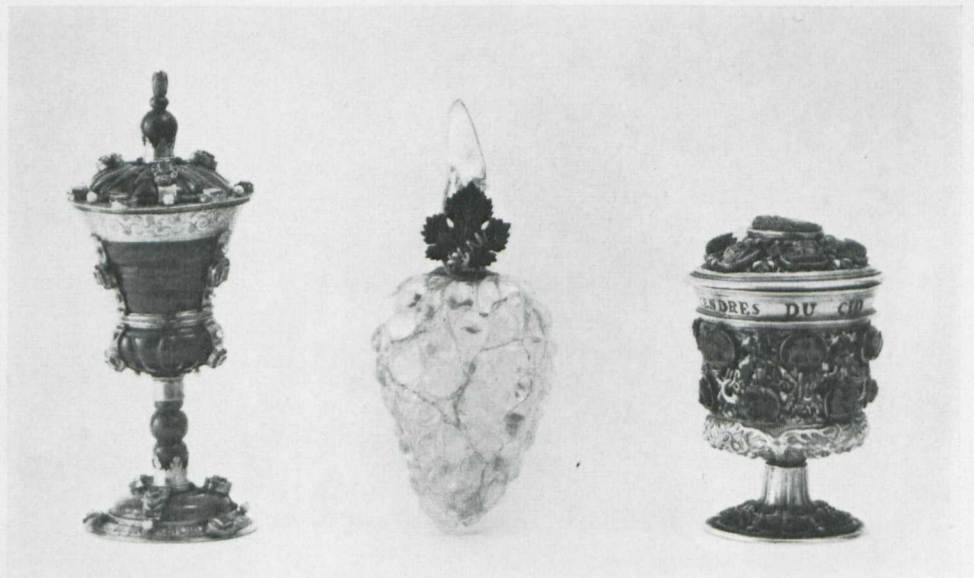


6. *The Gothic House at Pulawy*. Watercolour drawing by W. Richter, after 1830.

for freedom were given prominence. The existence of the museum building and of the original collection permits, as in the case of Sibyl's Temple, a reconstruction of the exhibition in style and mood. There was an anteroom and a big hall in Gothic style on the ground floor and three other rooms upstairs, among them a gallery called The Green Room adapted for the display of paintings. The exhibits were of a varied nature, mostly of applied art, but there were also quite sentimental souvenirs like 'grass from the Fingal grave', 'twigs from the place where Troy was', or 'a nail from Pompeii', were put everywhere – on walls, in showcases and cupboards, in special frames, in boxes, on stands. There were also illuminated manuscripts, illustrated rare books, engravings, and albums of authographs of innumerable outstanding personages from all parts of the world. Even the outer walls of the Gothic House were encrusted with mementoes: fragments of monumental sculptures and even pieces of stone or brick taken from important castles, palaces, churches and chapels, as well as from simple houses noted for historic events.

The exhibition of the Gothic House, which could have appeared cumbrous and chaotic, on closer examination revealed its true character. Everything was subordinated to a definite historiosophical idea. Each object, whether of great or of minor importance in value, provided that it had originated from a definite place of interest, was highly appreciated as a stepping-stone for extensive reflections of political, moral, anecdotic or even gallant events. Those reflections were steadily repeated at the guided tours and were recorded in the museum catalogues. Out of this fundamental source we can pick some favourite themes of the Gothic House illustrated by the 'souvenirs'.

Firstly the 'royal' motif must be mentioned. This concerned not only the kings and queens, but also the emperors, dukes, princes and princesses, everybody of royal blood – even the better-known royal bastards, as for instance Don Juan d'Austria. A great number of original royal objects came into Isabel's hands through the French Revolution. Through her friends and agents she was able to acquire some relics from the coffins of French kings despoliated by the revolutionary mob. Some



7 a, b and c. Left to right. Amber goblet connected with the Emperor Charles V. Rock crystal hunting flask of François I. Reliquary containing the ashes of Cid and Chimène.

8. Raphael. *Portrait of a Young Man*. This disappeared from Cracow during the war and has not yet been recovered.

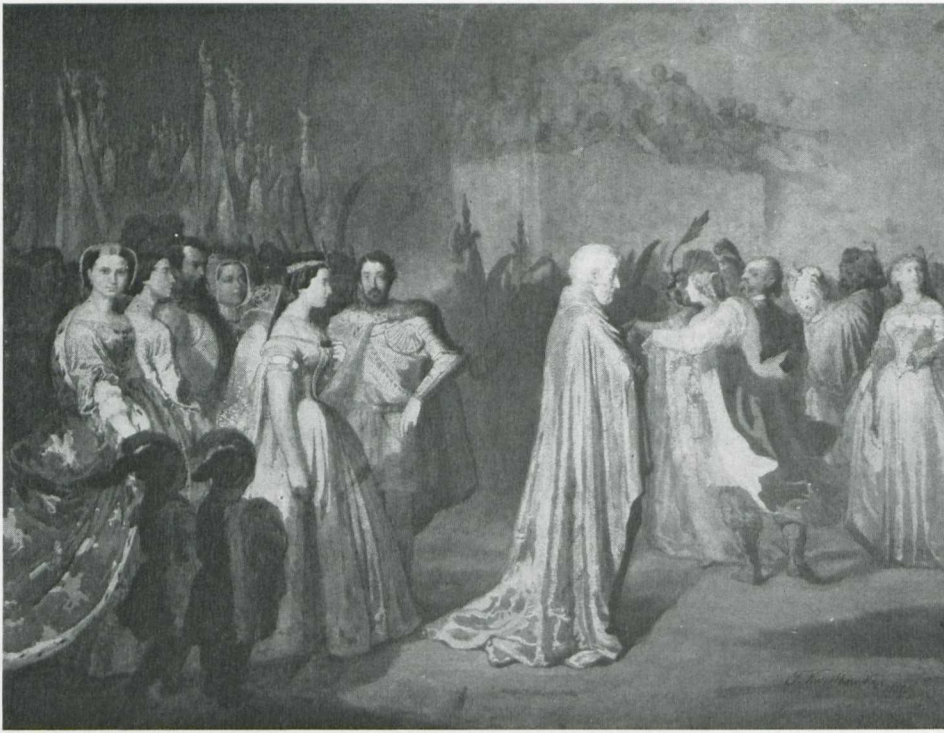


splendid objects from the royal Garde Meuble entered the collection of the Gothic House, as for example a hunting flask of rock crystal, gold and green enamel, attributed to Francis I (No. 7b). Particularly rich were the mementoes of the Dukes of Burgundy given by the last chancellor of the Order of Golden Fleece and the guardian of the Order's treasury, M. Beydaels da Zittaert. Threatened by the French revolutionary army he decided to evacuate the Treasury from Brussels to Vienna. From there he donated several objects of arms, armour and trophies to the newly created pantheon of history at Pulawy. From a great many people who contributed to the Pulawy Museum at least one man should be here remembered: General Michał Sokolnicki, an active collector of art, an art-historian and also a poet. During a prolonged stay in Belgium in 1811 he made some major acquisitions for Pulawy, among them of a set of mediaeval stained glass and several Flemish and Franco-Flemish illuminated manuscripts. He also bought an amber goblet with silver-gilt mounts set with precious stones, attributed to the Emperor Charles V (No. 7a).

Opposed to the historiosophy of the Enlightenment the museum programme of the Gothic House also glorified feudal chivalry. Objects of that nature, coming chiefly from western arsenals in Brussels and Vienna, provided suitable material for

display. Stories of romantic love were shown by means of relics removed from the authentic or conjectural tombs of such famous lovers as Cid and Chimène, Abélard and Héloïse, Romeo and Juliet, Petrarch and Laura. To ensure authenticity Princess Isabel always tried to get a certificate of provenance. Two thick volumes of such documents, sealed and signed by various authorities, are preserved in the Czartoryski Library. The relics of Cid and Chimène, placed in a silver-gilt and enamelled cup ornamented with cameos were presented to the Princess by the Baron Vivant Denon, a minister and director of the Napoleon Museum in Paris (No. 7c). It was known that the French soldiers during the Spanish campaign opened Cid's tomb at Burgos and removed his relics to France.

Heroes fighting for freedom, like William Tell, Joan of Arc, Egmond and Horn, Tippoo Sahib and George Washington were commemorated in the Gothic House through objects known to have been connected with them, or at least by legendary material – as for example 'William Tell's arrow' brought from Switzerland. There were also motifs connected with exploratory voyages like those of Columbus, Magellan, Cook, and typical romantic items associated with well-known prisoners like Richard the Lionheart, Torquato Tasso, Tsars Szujski, J. R. Paul, and F. Trenck. We can also trace some oriental, antique or totally exotic



9. *Polonaise in the Hôtel Lambert*. Drawing by T. Kwiatkowski, 1857.

subjects as well as associations taken from science, literature, religion and art. It was an ambitious, unique museum conception at that time and without precedent. Paintings were also assembled on the particular theme of the 'personal qualities' of artists, or known attributes of heroes in case of portraits. Three outstanding paintings were exhibited in the Gothic House: Leonardo's *Lady with the Ermine* (colour plate), Raphael's *Portrait of a Young Man* (No. 8) and Rembrandt's *Landscape with the Good Samaritan* (colour plate). The two former masterpieces were bought in Italy about 1800 by Adam George and Constantine Czartoryski as a gift for their mother Isabel. At the time *Lady with the Ermine* was identified with *La Belle Ferronnière* in the Louvre, reputed to be

the mistress of the François I. The Raphael work was considered to be a self-portrait. In the commentaries of the Puławy catalogues Raphael was prized above all. Rembrandt's work was appreciated but not fully understood.

The Czartoryski Museum at Puławy flourished until 1830. It attracted people from all parts of the country and from abroad. Several inventories and catalogues, both of Sibil's Temple and of the Gothic House, were made by Princess Isabel and by her daughter Maria, a talented poetess. The catalogue of the Gothic House was printed in Warsaw in 1829. The entrance to the Museum was always free, the visitors being guided by special officials. Guests of honour were accompanied by Isabel herself.



10. *Tristan and Isolda*. A fragment of an Italian cassone of the fifteenth century.

11. Polish noblemen in Meissen porcelain, first half of the eighteenth century.



The exhibits carried explanatory labels the descriptions being added to as necessary. The library was also enlarged even after Adam Casimir died in 1823. Pulawy, as a magnificent centre of art and science, well deserved the proud name of the 'Polish Athens'.

The outbreak and fall of the November Insurrection of 1830/31 caused a catastrophe for the place. It was soon overtaken by the fighting. After the collapse of the movement Adam Georg Czartoryski, leader of the family and President of the National Government, was forced to emigrate. In his absence he was sentenced to death by Tsar Nicholas I and all his properties were confiscated. Fortunately, whilst the fighting was still going on most of the museum and library collections were removed and hidden in a number of safe places: in the country houses of related families, in monasteries and churches. The circumstances of that evacuation were difficult and hazardous, particularly as museum curators and other related officials were serving in the Polish army in the uprising. Through their efforts only a small part of the museum objects fell into enemy hands. The majority of them were taken across the border to Great Poland and to Galicia. Later the collection was taken to Paris, where Adam Georg Czartoryski acquired a town house, Hôtel Lambert, situated on the Isle of Saint Louis. It soon became a new headquarters of the extensive political movement known as the Polish Great Emigration of which Czartoryski was one of the most active leaders (No. 9). All the treasures housed in Hôtel Lambert added to the splendour and authority of the interior and were visual examples of Polish cultural achievement as well as demonstrating the unvanquished Polish spirit. On numerous occasions they were loaned to Paris exhibitions and published in art periodicals.

A substantial growth of the collection was started by the action of Władysław Czartoryski, son of Adam Georg and his heir in properties and political leadership since 1861. An outstanding art connoisseur, he personally and his agents watched the art market and attended some major sales, among others that of Spitzer. He purchased a remarkable collection of Egyptian objects (chiefly from the dealer, Shenuda). In Florence he bought Greek vases and Etruscan sarcophagi (from the Borroni brothers). In Naples he found a magnificent marble statue of Venus Pudica, a second-century copy of Praxiteles, in Ostia – a very precious Roman mosaic. Several pieces of Oriental art, especially a

fine set of Persian and Turkish illuminated manuscripts, he acquired in Istanbul, where he had large political influences through the agents of Hôtel Lambert. Babylonian glyptic Egyptian mummies, papyri and tombs objects, Greek and Roman coins, cameos and intaglios, Etruscan bronzes, Tanagra terracottas, Roman and Syrian glass, Coptic textiles and Fayum portraits, Persian rugs and velvets, early Limoges enamels and Paris ivories, early Italian paintings (No. 10), Flemish and Dutch painting, Italian and Spanish majolicas, South-German silver (No. 5a & b), German glass and porcelain (No. 11) and splendid pieces of the Louis XIV and following periods. With all these the old Pulawy Collection was enriched. Rare books, prints, drawings and early maps found in well-known antiquarian bookshops of the western world completed the library.

It should be mentioned that Władysław's sister, Isabel Czartoryski Dzialynska, taking after her grandmother, also became a keen collector, co-operating with and sometimes even rivalling her brother. After the partition of the family treasures a large part of them were taken to the country by Isabel, where, at Goluchow, in a country house in Great Poland, a fine private museum was established.

After the Franco-Prussian War of 1870/71, in which the collections of Hotel Lambert were threatened, Władysław Czartoryski decided to take them back to Poland, selecting Cracow, which at the time of Galicia's liberation became a stronghold for the patriotic movement, since it was the main centre for art and science.

The City Board of Cracow made over to the Czartoryski Museum a group of buildings comprising an old monastery in the old quarter close to the mediaeval walls and fortification towers. In addition Czartoryski acquired several houses in the same area. All these were reconstructed by the architect Gabriel Ouradou who was a pupil and follower of the outstanding French architect E. Viollet le Duc. Palace-residence, museum galleries and library were maintained in the neo-Gothic French style allied with some features of Italian Renaissance taste (No. 12). The collections were brought from Paris and the Czartoryski Museum in Cracow was inaugurated in 1876. It soon became a new, active centre for the study of art history and was an attraction for visitors. In the arrangement of the museum rooms some of the concepts of the original Pulawy Museum were maintained and set in the wall of one of the halls is the

inscription from Sibyl's Temple 'Past for the Future'. Along with a considerable number of exhibits dating from the time of Princess Isabel an equal number of those which were collected by her grandson, Władysław, were displayed. Generally speaking the Museum maintained its historical-artistic character and the variety of its collections, from those of ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia to the second half of the nineteenth century.

Always open, free to visitors, constantly enlarging its possessions by important purchases and developing its scientific activities, the Czartoryski Museum and Library was very active until 1939. The war proved a disaster for the collections, particularly for its master works. As early as September, 1939, the Germans removed from the Museum a quantity of jewellery and gold coins as well as the 'Royal Casket' originating from Sibyl's Temple. The finest objects were selected and carried away by so-called German dignitaries. The three important paintings – the Leonardo, the Raphael and the Rembrandt – were a matter for disagreement among them. Should they grace the Adolf Hitler Museum at Linz or the Hermann Goering Museum in Berlin? Finally they were seized by the infamous Frank 'governor' of occupied Poland. From his villa at Neuhaus near Nürnberg

they were fortunately recovered by the Polish-American Mission in 1945. In this operation Professor Karol Estreicher played a leading part. But only the Leonardo and the Rembrandt have been recovered. Raphael's *Portrait of a Young Man* (No. 8) disappeared during the war and has still not been recovered. This is not only one of the biggest losses to Polish artistic property but is a loss in a general sense. The Czartoryski Museum was robbed of many fine objects, but the main part was saved.

In 1950 the Czartoryski Museum was taken under the special care of the State, becoming a department of the National Museum in Cracow. Major reconstructions and renovations were necessary as everything suffered terribly during the war. A new building for the library and archives was erected in 1961. Galleries have been reconstituted, innumerable works of art restored, new catalogues and monographs have been published. The work is still not yet completed. One thing is certain. The particular atmosphere of Poland's oldest museum must be preserved. If this is done it will admirably serve not only present and future generations of Poles but also visitors from other countries, thereby fulfilling the wise intentions laid down by its founders, particularly the Princess Isabel.

12. Czartoryski Museum building in Cracow, 1960.

