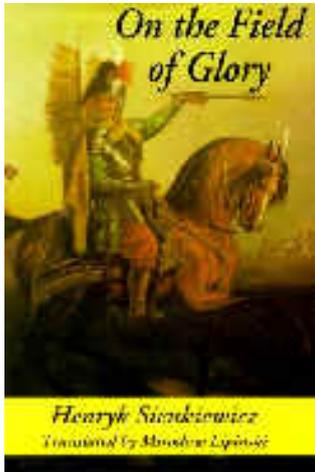

On the Field of Glory by Henryk Sienkiewicz, translated by Mirosław Lipiński (2000), 255 pages.



This is the 25th publication by Hippocrene Books that we have had the pleasure of reviewing during recent years. The end pages of this book list them all. This spring, by coincidence, two books were published in English that bear a certain relationship to each other. The *Modrzejewska* story is discussed separately, but in that book Sienkiewicz appears as "Ryszard." His visit to America in 1876 was really the beginning of the writer's illustrious literary career. In 1916, while he lived in Switzerland, his last book was published. He intended to write another trilogy, based on the Battle of Vienna, but lacked the stamina and perhaps the inspiration to complete the plan. He wrote only this first volume, modest in size, that has little connection with the battle except at its very end. The writer died in 1916.

Basically, this is vintage Sienkiewicz, so characteristic of his style. Even the very first sentence offers similarities, The Trilogy begins with the sentence: "The year 1647 abounded in omens, strange signs and portents of terrible disasters"; this novel states: "The winter of 1682-83 was so severe that even the oldest people could not remember one like it." Our writer knows how to catch the reader's attention right from the start. The story itself is newer, moves at a good pace, is crystal clear, and compels us to keenly anticipate the next of short 34 chapters.

It begins with an adventure as a party rides through deep snow at night east of Radom, in the heart of Poland, and is suddenly confronted by wild boars and hungry wolves ready to devour people and horses! A dramatic rescue follows, and we are introduced to Sienkiewicz's typical nobles. In the *Kozienice Wilderness* (in Polish: *puszcza*), we meet Pan Pagowski, an insufferable snob; and the *Bukojemski* brothers, a bunch of rascals. Aniulka Sininska is a typical Polish young beauty, always helpless in Sienkiewicz's writings, and Jacek Taczewski is her hero.

The writer knew how to combine truth with fiction, and thus we encounter purely fictional names along with those of the real Kochanowski, Lubomirski, and others. The same is true of towns and villages, none of which are far from Oglęborek where Sienkiewicz used to live. The nobles are constantly imbibing wine served from demijohns (in Polish: *gąsior*); those less fortunate are described as starvelings.

The novel ends rather abruptly as the Polish army moves towards Vienna. A helpful Epilogue by contemporary historians provides a summary of the actual Battle of Vienna, which many believe stopped the advance of the Ottoman Empire into the heart of Europe once and for all.

George E. Suboczewski