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Joseph Pilsudski was born on December 6, 1867 not far from Vilan, that is in that corner of historic Poland, where Lithuanians, Poles and White Russians have lived together for centuries, combining to produce a stock of rare intellectual power and incomparably steady at the same time. The family was poor, but honourable and intensely patriotic. The mother must have been a remarkable woman indeed, like many Polish women of that sad time. Pilsudski revered her memory, and his dying wish was that his heart should be buried at her feet in his homeland.

Like thousands of other Polish children the future Marshal of a free Poland was obliged to pass through a Russian school and university as the only means to obtain an education. But the teaching was not able to compete with the influence of the family. So it was natural for the ardent youth to be drawn into the revolutionary circles, whose object was to liberate Poland from the foreigner. Like a great number of his contemporaries Pilsudski joined a secret organisation, working against Tsarism. The police, as usual, quickly found him out and the young conspirator passed through the customary cycle of expulsions from the university, arrests and finally of exile to distant Siberia. After a number of years Pilsudski's temperament of a ruthless fighter placed him at the head of the radical elements in the Polish national movement. He then described himself as a Socialist, and he acted as one, although it was the nationalist ideal, which predominated in him all the time. The Russian police considered him a dangerous opponent. They were glad to lock him up at last in the dreaded Xth pavilion of the citadel in Warsaw, from which, people said, no prisoner had ever come out alive. The iron will of the conspirator allowed him to achieve his escape nevertheless. For he was able to simulate madness consistently for months at a stretch, and faithful friends did the rest. Pilsudski walked out of the lunatic asylum in St. Petersburg to which he

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had been transferred for observation. It is characteristic of the steadiness of his nerves that Pilsudski, when he came out of the gateway of the hospital, with the suspicious guards capable of seeing through his disguise at any moment, he coolly looked round and commented to his companion upon the green of the trees, which he had not seen for so long. His rescuer - a young Polish doctor, who had obtained a post at the institution so as to be able to smuggle a civilian outfit in to the prisoner and had managed to send away his attendant for a few minutes, was pale with anxiety and in a hurry to disappear round the corner. The future Marshal, however, took his time unruffled to admire nature.

Then came the Russo-Japanese war, and Pilsudski, now the acknowledged leader of the Polish activists, went to Tokio to enlist the sympathy of the Government with the idea of a reconstituted Poland. Nothing came of the enterprise. Indeed prominent Poles were horrified by its rashness. Still it was a turning point in Pilsudski's career. His genius discovered an idea, the realisation of which finally was to secure their freedom to the Poles at a critical moment of European history. Pilsudski came to see that a Polish armed force must exist even before territorial sovereignty was reborn. The Partitions of the XVIIIth century by Russia, Prussia and Austria, according to him, were made possible only, because the army had been neglected in a criminal fashion by the dominant aristocracy. Since then, and especially after the abortive rising of 1863, the Poles had come to look upon military service as typical of a foreign tyranny. They concentrated upon the conservation of their spiritual forces and of their power of economic resistance. Revolutionary activities to undermine the foreign regime from within were familiar to them. Individual terrorism some of them admitted as a revolutionary weapon. But the thought did not come to them that they should be prepared to march into battle under the national banner, serving Poland alone, and owing allegiance to no foreign monarch. Pilsudski's genius

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discerned, however, that the way to independence would be by military action. With a handful of friends, destined later to become the chiefs of the army of Poland, he set about militarising the spirit of the Polish youth. The Austrian Government let itself be persuaded that some day, in the inevitable clash with Russia, these activities would be of advantage to it. It permitted Pilsudski to establish his conspiratory headquarters in Polish Galicia. Cells of young men in public schools and universities were created gradually in Austria and in France, in Germany and even in Russia itself. Military science and the use of arms were taught by itinerant instructors. Established Polish parties viewed Pilsudski's activities with distrust. They did not share his obstinate fight in the inevitable approach of freedom conquered by the force of arms. Still the movement grew. An impetus was given to it by the success of the Balkan States in their war of liberation against the Turks in 1912. The number of Pilsudski's "sharpshooters" increased by thousands. At the outbreak of the World War he was able to invade Russian territory with what later became his famous First Brigade. Under his command the Polish Legion in the Austrian army achieved fame on the Russian front. The military spirit of the legionaries was good. German experts inclined to consider them the best soldiers at the disposal of Austria. Pilsudski himself was given the possibility of developing the talents, which made of him afterwards the fighting leader of a Poland reborn. Still he was not happy. The object of his organisation had not been to provide material for Austrian generals, but to strike a blow for Polish independence. Yet at first the armies of the Tsar, in whom he always had seen the chief enemy of his people, were marching from victory to victory in Galicia. A change occurred in 1915, when the Russian front broke before Mackensen and, after months of hard fighting, was pressed eastwards out of the territory of ancient Poland. Germany needed all the support she

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could get from the Western front. Berlin and Vienna, therefore, assumed a favourable attitude towards the idea of a measure of autonomy for a reconstituted Poland. Pilsudski had high hopes. Yet it did not take him long to discover that the almighty High Command merely was anxious to obtain half-a-million of Polish recruits. Pilsudski expected to use his prestige to that end. He refused outright. He finally found himself under arrest in the German fortress of Magdeburg, and his legions were removed from the front. Still the Germans were unable to obtain more than a few hundred men and Pilsudski's partisans, on the other hand, laid the foundation of a powerful military organisation by covering the land with a network of secret fighting cells - the Polska Organizacja Wojskowa, commonly known as the P.O.W. These activities were facilitated by the fact that on November 5, 1916 the German and the Austrian Governments had proclaimed a sort of independence for a part of the ancient Polish territory with a Regency in Warsaw.

From the summer of 1917, until revolution broke out in a defeated Germany in November of the next year, Pilsudski remained in the military prison in Magdeburg. But his idea stalked through Poland and the P.O.W. was active to an extent, which at the critical moment made it possible for its leaders to step in and disarm the demoralised German soldiery. As a last hope, at the last moment, the Germans set Pilsudski free and tried to come to some agreement with him. It was too late however. Pilsudski returned to Warsaw in triumph, the Council of the Regency surrendered all power into his hands. He became the virtual head of the restored State, which soon was consolidated by a reunion with the ancient provinces in the West, liberated from the German yoke by the spontaneous action of their Polish population. Pilsudski had won through. Poland was free. From the time of his return from Magdeburg to the end of 1922, when the new Constitution was promulgated, Pilsudski remained the

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"Naczelnik Panstwa" (Head of the State), uniting the functions of President of the Republic with those of Commander-in-Chief of the army. The latter proclaimed him Marshal of Poland after his victory over the Bolshevik armies in 1920. For, instead of being able to devote their time to the work of internal consolidation, the Poles found themselves obliged to fight for their very lives against the invading Red armies, then at the height of their revolutionary enthusiasm. The Red tide burst through the desperate opposition set up by Pilsudski and his new troops. Line after line had to be given up. Warsaw was under the direct menace of the enemy. Foreign observers thought the fate of Poland sealed. The French alone gave effective aid by sending General Weygand and several hundred officers to stiffen the Polish army still in the making. But Poland was saved by the high moral qualities of her soldiers and by the genius and iron will of Pilsudski himself. The inception of the bold flanking move, which suddenly cut through the enemy forces, like a knife passes through butter, was his own. Its execution was due entirely to his personal energy, and it was possible only because of his influence over officers and men alike. Pilsudski saved Poland, and he no doubt saved Europe by his victory from the fate of being overrun by the hordes of a militant Communism.

After the victory the Marshal was able to give his attention more to the great work of creating a disciplined state. His life-long sympathies had always been with the masses, and not with the upper classes, which he accused of having lost Poland through incompetence and the pursuit of class interests. The new Constitution was one of the most democratic in Europe. It was accepted by a freely elected Parliament in March 1921 and, in December 1922, as we have said, a new President was elected an old friend of Pilsudski, Narutowicz. The Marshal himself, physically weary from years of dangerous and soul-devastating work, was content to go into temporary retirement. But a week later Narutowicz was assassinated by a member of a reactionary party. This started a period of political instability, which really came to an end only in 1926. At first Pilsudski thought of reentering politics;

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but the hostility of consecutive administrations, and especially that of Witos, leader of the so-called party, persuaded him in 1923 that the best thing for him to do for the moment was to go into retirement. For two years the Marshal kept in the background, watching events, but keeping in contact with his numerous partisans all over the country. He took advantage of the comparative leisure to do some literary work, mostly of a military nature. For by now, after his victories, it was this side which decidedly had become uppermost in him. The kernel of his belief was still that to remain free Poland's duty is to have a good army.

In 1925 the political situation became extremely entangled. The democratic Constitution could not be made to work properly. This not because it was bad, but as a result of the incapacity of the politicians. The nation looked towards Pilsudski, and his little house near Warsaw received a stream of visitors. On May 12 1926 things came to a head. For three days battle was joined between the regiments led by Pilsudski and the supporters of the established Government. Finally President Wojciechowski and the Witos Cabinet were overthrown. An attempt in Poznan, in Western Poland, to march to the rescue fizzled out. Pilsudski again was master of Poland and the majority of the nation, tired by the endless wrangling, approved. The National Assembly was formed to choose a new President. A large majority voted for Pilsudski, but he refused and his friend, Professor Moscicki, the well-known chemist, was elected instead. Pilsudski took the portfolio of the War Ministry and became Inspector-General of the army, that is its commander-in-chief in wartime. Henceforward and until his death his was the paramount power in the land. To the extent he liked to use that power Pilsudski was dictator. The machine of Government was tightened up. Laxity in the ranks of the bureaucracy was treated as a crime. The business of the State was transacted with greater efficiency. This discipline, however, was achieved by sacrificing a measure of the constitutional rights of individuals and parties. For Pilsudski, as organiser of the Republic, wanted to stand above individual and party considerations.

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Here we have come to the last period in the life of Pilsudski. It is no less important from the national point of view than that of his fight with the external enemy. To critics of his régime it certainly supplies some material. But, in judging the event of 1926 and what came after, we must remember always that Pilsudski placed the national ideal above all others. By inclination, and by his past connections, the man was attached to democratic principles. Yet Poland came first always. When forced, as it seemed to him, to choose between the good of his country and academic democracy, Pilsudski did not hesitate. He chose the former. For he knew that the position of Poland between two dangerous monsters - Germany and Russia - was and would be full of peril. Poland can survive only by remaining physically powerful and morally united. To the attainment of this patriotic aim other considerations must be subordinated. With all his iron will Pilsudski drove the Poles towards this goal. History will say that he acted as a dictator. But it will admit the fact that the people themselves expected the national hero to act in this manner. History will say also that at heart Pilsudski was no dictator at all. In this connection some day it will be worth while to establish a just proportion between Pilsudski's political directives and the method of their carrying out by over-zealous partisans. Then again it is interesting to note that of all dictators in Europe, real or alleged, Pilsudski was the only one, who could afford to move about without a guard and even to leave Poland sometimes for months at a stretch. In any case this indicates an exceptionally strong moral position.

Pilsudski was an educator rather than a dictator. He knew the defects of his countrymen. He abhorred their politics and castigated them without reserve. When he believed that persuasion was useless, he used violence. For Poland to him was more precious than any Pole. He saw that the people resented discipline and were ungrateful to their leaders. So he let them feel the scorpions of his anger to teach them order and discipline and to honour merit. Pilsudski deliberately aspired to train as large a number of men as possible for the highest posts in the State, so that after his



death there should be no lack of steersmen. Innumerable reshuffles of men in high positions seemed to indicate an anxious search for the right place for each man. Two important departments Pilsudski controlled closely himself - the army and foreign affairs. The rest he left to the initiative of the official Government, as if he desired Ministers to learn independent action by experience. In practice this arrangement did not work satisfactorily always. For Pilsudski had to manage with the men under his hand, and these often were not prepared for the work entrusted to them and sometimes incapable of understanding the high motive of their leaders political action. Also years began to tell. Years of imprisonment and of adventure of many kinds had left their mark upon the great frame of the national hero. He had never been tolerant of the company of fools. In old age he withdrew into an inner circle, into which even trusted friends found it difficult to penetrate at times. On occasions, when the world was surprised by the reticence of Polish Ministers and ascribed their silence to a craftily conceived plan, the true reason was in the fact that Pilsudski had either not received them yet, or had delayed giving precise instructions. It also cannot be disputed that, as the malady, which finally destroyed him, progressed, the temper of the great man became soured and even vindictive. To this physiological source can be traced certain decisions, which Pilsudski himself in the full development of his powers could not have approved, for example, the treatment meted out to some of the Opposition leaders after the so-called Brest-Litewsk trial. Personally we believe that Pilsudski, with his positively amazing intuition and prescience of events, saw the shadow of death approaching long before the people round him could perceive its approach. A faithful servant of the national ideal from his early years, the patriot severed gradually his connection with topical events, concentrating upon his main object: the creation and consolidation of a great and strong Poland. This made him intolerant of the small things in life, with which smaller men continued to pester his attention. The verdict of history shall be that Pilsudski, if he sinned, did so in the service of a great ideal.

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The foreign policy of Pilsudski was impregnated with the national ideal. To be strong and independent - this was his constant aim. He insisted upon the greatest sacrifices being made to maintain the armed forces of the Republic upon a high level of efficiency. This he did, not because he was enamoured of war, but because he was convinced that a good army is the best diplomatic instrument for peace. This view was vindicated by his success in obtaining from Hitler a respectful attitude towards Poland. For it is no secret that the understanding with Berlin was preceded by an ultimatum by Pilsudski on the subject of Nazi intrigues in Danzig. "Is it war, or peace" asked Pilsudski, whilst his well trained and well equipped divisions were on the move. Hitler preferred peace, and Polish policy proceeded to extract all the profit it could from this friendliness. Again with Russia, although Pilsudski never could rid himself of his old dislike for the neighbour in the East, relations gradually became quite tolerable. Yet for Pilsudski both Russia and Germany were only pawns in the game of maintaining a balance between two potential enemies. This was tactics. The great aim of his strategy lay in a different direction. His ambition was to ~~create~~ crown his service to Poland by achieving better and closer relations with Lithuania. After the world war for a number of years this aim was defeated by the bitterness caused in the smaller country by the Polish occupation of Vilna. But the chief obstacle was the support given to the Lithuanians alternatively by Russia and Germany. Pilsudski's policy towards Berlin and Mosco aimed at putting an end to this support. In this he was successful. He then set out to woo the Lithuanians in earnest, and it was clear that he was ready to go to very great lengths indeed to reestablish better relations as a prelude to a more intimate union. Pilsudski would never have permitted a German attack on Lithuania. When a Nazi Putsch was planned in Memel, he let his objection to the move be known in Berlin in an unmistakable fashion. Death came before success could be achieved. But, if Pilsudski's will and memory mean anything to the Poles, they must continue to seek an understanding with the Lithuanians, protecting them meanwhile, even against their will, from any foreign intervention. It may well be that Pilsudski, who

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knew the situation in his own part of Europe perfectly, never quite understood the trend of affairs in the West. It may be also that he was not always well served with information. But his conception of the true and permanent interests of his country was granite-like in its solidity. He marked out the course, which Poland will follow whatever happens. His political opponents could not act differently, and the actions of his successors shall be measured by the standard he has set them. His body lies in Krakow, but his spirit walks through the land still.

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