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Author(s): Alfred Bilmanis

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GRANDEUR AND DECLINE OF THE GERMAN BALTS

By ALFRED BILMANIS

1. *German Baltic Colonization and Its Aims*

WHEN THE Germans made their mass exodus from the Baltic States in 1939, they admitted thereby that their alleged cultural mission in the Baltic area, which had been conducted for several centuries, was a complete failure, and that they had not succeeded in their push to the northeastern Baltic, regarded in Germany since early medieval times as the land of milk and honey. Foodstuffs were available there in quantity, such as dried and smoked meats and fish, honey, vegetables, rye, oats, barley, and wheat, as well as raw materials (timber, tar, hemp, flax, rope, sailcloth, tallow, wool, hides, potash, wax, furs and amber). There was an increasing demand for these goods in Western Europe, the population of which had considerably grown since the early Middle Ages.

Searching for these goods, Germans as early as the tenth century started to colonize the lands of the Northern Slavs, who dwelt on the shores of the North Sea, in the basins of the rivers Elbe and Oder, and along the southeastern Baltic coast in Mecklenburg and Pomerania. Thence German merchants pushed farther northeast to the lands of the Poles and the Old Prussians, north of the Vistula river. They sailed on to the lands of the Latvians and Estonians farther up the Baltic Sea, following in the footsteps of the Eastern Vikings, particularly the Danes, who became the first complete masters of the Baltic in the eleventh century during the reign of Knut the Great. Soon thereafter the Danes concentrated their energies on England, and the German Hanseati profited by this Danish concentration to establish themselves as masters of the Baltic.

Balthasar Russow,¹ a chronicler of the sixteenth century, repeats an old story that in 1158 German merchants from Bremen ("Bremer Koeplude") driven by a storm to the Gulf of Riga, soon arrived at the mouth of the Daugava or Duna river, where they first met the sparsely-settled Liv fishermen belonging to a Finnish tribe dwelling on the Baltic outlets of Latvia. However, it seems not to have been an accident at all. As early as 1163, the Germans were full masters of the island of Gotland, called "Eystrasalts Auga" (the eye of the Baltic).² The wares they brought to old Latvia were broadcloth called "watemal," salt, soap, wines, dried grapes, figs, walnuts, raisins,

¹ Balthasar Russow, *Chronica der Provintz Lyfflandt* (1584), in *Scriptores Rerum Livonicarum* (Riga, 1853), II, 11.

² G. Bie Ravndal, *Stories on the East Vikings* (Minneapolis, 1938), p. 22.

pepper and other spices, miscellaneous dry goods and utensils, weapons, knives, axes, saws, etc. using the market places known already to the Vikings.

Gradually German merchants took over the Viking trade in the Baltic. The growth of their business culminated in the first part of the thirteenth century, after they had organized the powerful Hanseatic League or the Merchants' Company of the North German cities. The wealth of the Baltic markets in the goods so needed by Western Europe was no novelty for the Vikings, but it was an agreeable discovery for the German merchants. Being monopolistic by nature, the Germans spread the news that they had discovered — *aufgesehelt* — these Baltic countries and that consequently they were theirs.³ Actually it was by no means difficult to "discover" the Baltic lands, since the island of Gotland lies only about 80 nautical miles from the coast of Kurland. The moment their sailing vessels (at that time their draught was not great) entered the Gulf of Riga, it was likewise easy to "discover" the old Scandinavian trading port of Riga, the *locus Rige* or the *navium statio* (mentioned by the Chronicler Henricus de Lettis and situated upstream about 8 miles from the mouth of the Daugava river), or the adjacent port of the Semigallians, the Portus Semigallorum, on the left bank of the Daugava, and the Liv settlement of Ykescola, on the right bank of the Daugava, south of the big cataracts and directly opposite the port of the Semigallians.⁴

According to some German historians,⁵ the Finnish Livs migrated to Latvia, already inhabited by the Latvians, in search of better fishing grounds, which they found at the Latvian Baltic outlet — the mouth of the Daugava and Gauja rivers, rich in salmon, lampreys, flounder, eels, and other fish. They settled also on the shores of the Gulf of Riga, also rich in fish, particularly sardines, small herrings, etc. The Livs naturally tried to emancipate themselves from the overlordship of the Latvian tribes, the original masters of the land, and looked for help first from the Slavs and later from the Germans. The names of these indigenous Latvian tribes are mentioned by the chronicler Henricus de Lettis and they are: the Kuronians, the Semigallians, and the Selonians living south of the Daugava river, and the Talavians and Latgallians to the north of the river.⁶

³ Russow, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

⁴ Henricus de Lettis (Heinrich der Lette), *Origines Livoniae Sacrae et Civilis, 1180–1227*, ed. J. Gruber (Frankfort, 1740), reprinted in *Scriptores Rerum Livonicarum*, I, 52 (1198, 1200, 1201).

⁵ Dr. A. Bielenstein, *Die Holzbauten und Holzgeräte der Letten* (St. Petersburg, 1907), II, 640.

⁶ Henricus d. L., *loc. cit.*, *passim*, annis 1185–1209. The Russian Primary Chronicle also mentions the Kuronians, Semigallians, Latgallians and Livonians (*PSRL*², Leningrad, 1926, vol. 4: *Kors'*, *Zimëgola*, *Lët'gola*, *Liv'*, corrupted to *Ljub'*, *Lib'* in various texts).

The German merchant-explorers took stock of this situation and used it to their profit and to foster their purposes and aims. The master-mind of the Hanseatic League, the high Council of Bremen, had also discovered that the Kuronians, the Semigallians, and the Selonians would resist fiercely, being favored by their geographic position, since they had the Gulf of Riga and the river Daugava as a natural border to the north, and the Baltic Sea on the west, while to the south they bordered on their friendly kinsfolk, the Samogitians, a Lithuanian tribe. But quite different was the position of the Latgallians and the Talavians, whose neighbors to the north were the Estonians and to the east the Slavs. They were in constant feud with the Livs dwelling at the mouth and along the right bank of the Daugava river, thus separating the Latgallians and Talavians from the Kuronians and Semigallians. The northern Latvian tribes were often ravaged by the Estonians, by the Slavs of Pskov and by the Lithuanians, and so the Germans offered them their help, which was accepted, just as "baptism" was also accepted as a condition for German protection.⁷

It is worth while mentioning that the German missionaries did not arrive in a completely pagan country. As early as the eleventh century Hiltuin, a missionary from Scandinavia, had preached among the Balts. In 1048 a church was built by the Danes in Kurland.⁸ In the twelfth century a part of the Latgallians and the Talavians already knew the Greek Orthodox religion. In 1209 there were several Greek Orthodox churches in Guerceke (from Guersk — Viking trader), on the right bank of the middle Daugava, the residence of King Vissewald of Lettia.⁹ King Talivald of Talava (bordering on Estonia and Pleskau — Pskov), as well as his sons, belonged to the Greek Orthodox religion, and was converted to the Roman Catholic faith in 1214, a year before his death.¹⁰

The German trick was to pose as friends and allies of the Latgallians and the Talavians after using the same method with the Livs, whose lands at the mouth of the Daugava and on the estuary of the Gauja they already had transformed in 1207 into the German principality of Livonia. This tiny Livonian principality was systematically enlarged by the time-honored processes of diplomacy and force as conditions required.

⁷ Henricus d. L., pp. 133–136.

⁸ Bishop Adam of Bremen, *Hamburgische Kirchengeschichte*, ca. 1075, ed. H. B. Schmeidler (Hannover, 1917), p. 244.

⁹ Henricus d. L., *loc. cit.*; Prof. A. Švābe, "Jersikas Karal valsts" (The Kingdom of Jersike), *Senatne un Māksla* (Antiquity and Art), 1 (1936), 15.

¹⁰ Henricus d. L., *op. cit.*, p. 180.

The chief aim of the first German Bishops Meinhard, Berthold, and particularly Albert (1199–1229), beside “baptizing” was to develop trade between the Hanseatic cities and the baptized lands. In order to foster the trade of his new residence (Riga), Albert obtained in 1201 from Pope Innocent III an interdict on the *Portus Semigalorum*. This forced German and other merchants to trade only with Riga.¹¹ To the crusaders he ceded one-third of the land which he had obtained for use from the local tribes as compensation for the promised protection (usually two-thirds of their holdings) and later simply annexed.¹² In 1211 Albert granted the German burghers of Riga and the merchants from the island of Gotland (also Germans) exemption from taxes.¹³

The obvious aim of the German colonizers and crusaders was to exploit to the highest possible degree the newly converted Baltic peoples, and they pursued this aim so brutally that Frederick II, Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, issued in March, 1224 at Catania a manifesto,¹⁴ by the terms of which he took under his high protection the converted inhabitants of Prussia, Samlandia (north of Königsberg in East Prussia), Semigallia, Livonia, Estonia and other Baltic provinces.

After asserting that he had obtained reliable information about what was going on in the Baltic, the Emperor proclaimed:

Universos et singulos eorum cum omnibus bonis eorum sub nostra et imperii protectione et speciali defensione suscipimus . . . eis et heredibus eorum . . . confirmamus perpetuo libertatem et omnes immunitates. Eximimus eos eciam a servitute et jurisdictione regum, ducum et principum, comitatum et ceterorum magnatum . . . ut non nisi sacrosancte matri ecclesie ac Romano imperio, quemadmodum alii liberi homines imperii teneatur parere . . . nullusque eos . . . impetere, mollestare, offendere vel eorum quietem perturbare presumat . . .

This sounds like the Four Freedoms of the thirteenth century. Furthermore, even before Emperor Frederick II, the Popes also tried to persuade the crusaders to abstain from harming the converted Baltic peoples, e.g., Pope Innocent III in 1208,¹⁵ in 1211,¹⁶ and in 1215,¹⁷ and Pope Honorius III in 1219.¹⁸ In 1225 Pope Honorius almost repeated Frederick’s manifesto in his Bull issued on January 3 in Rome. It declared: “Sub beati Petri et nostra protectione sus-

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 112 (1207).

¹³ *Les Sources de l’Histoire de Lettonie*, II (Riga, 1937), 43.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 78–79.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 61

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

cipimus, ut in libertate vestra manentes nulli alii quam soli Christo . . . et ecclesiae Romanae sitis subiecti.”¹⁹

But the arrogant German colonizers, blinded by their greed, disregarded the Emperor's manifesto and likewise ignored the admonitions of the Holy See, which excommunicated the Livonian Order and laid interdicts on it. They continued on their road of bloody conquest. The wars with the Semigallians and Kuronians, which began in 1219, ended with the subjugation of these Latvian tribes also at the end of the thirteenth century.²⁰ Thus bondage and servitude became the destiny of the Latvians converted to Christianity, and they were made peons of the knights and of the vassals of the Livonian Order.

The new principality of Livonia or the Terra Mariana, which on February 2, 1207 the German Emperor Philip II had recognized as a part of the Holy Empire,²¹ soon became an outpost of the German *Drang nach Osten*. On the other hand, the “baptized” lands of the Baltic peoples became a good source of income for the masters of the area: the burghers of Riga, Reval, and other Hanseatic cities, the vassals of the Archbishop and of the Livonian Order, the ministerials of the Archbishop and the Knights of the Order — all Germans. But simultaneously a grim feud over supremacy arose between the city of Riga and the Livonian Order (1297–1491). This of course weakened the new Baltic principality, and when, in the sixteenth century, during the wars with Muscovy, it came to a supreme test of solidarity, patriotism, and sacrifice, the principality of Livonia appeared to be a degenerate state. Neither the burghers, the knights, nor the vassals of the Order were ready to give up even a part of their accumulated wealth for the organization of a military force sufficient to oppose the menacing enemy from the east. As no more crusaders were available, mercenary soldiers had to be hired from Germany. When these were not paid on time, they sold out to the enemy and delivered the castles of the Livonian Order to Muscovy. Subsequently, in order to preserve their status, privileges, and wealth acquired by devious processes, the German nobles agreed to the partition of Livonia. Although the responsible rulers, they were unable to preserve the unity of their adopted land. Thus in 1561, by agreement with the German nobles,²² Livonia was partitioned between Poland and Sweden,

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

²⁰ “Latvijas Vēsture” (Latvian History), *Latviešu Konversācijas Vārdnīca* (Latvian Encyclopaedia), Riga, 1935, xi, pp. 22297–22299.

²¹ *Les Sources*, II, p. 28.

²² A. Švābe, “Sigismunda Augusta Livonijas Politika” (The Livonian Policy of Sigismund-August), *Latvijas Vēstures Instituta Žurnāls* (Journal of the Institute of Latvian History), II (Riga, 1937), 507–509.

and partly sold to Denmark. (The German Bishop von Muenchhausen sold in 1559 his Bishopric of Pilten and Oesel to the King of Denmark.²³)

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Livonian nobles residing on the part ceded to the Poles went over to Sweden after Poland, under the young King Sigismund III, had begun to question their titles to the land by the *Ordinatio Livoniae I* of 1589 and the *Ordinatio Livoniae II* of 1598. Taking advantage of Polish-Swedish differences at the time, the Livonian nobles tried in 1599 to obtain the legalization of their privileges and of the institute of serfdom in the form of a code prepared by David von Hilchen, a newly created Livonian nobleman, who was supposed to have influence among the members of the Polish Sejm in Warsaw. But the Hilchen code was rejected.²⁴ Having failed to secure from Poland what they wanted, the German nobles of Livonia now turned to Sweden, which was then in the ascendancy. Through this action Sweden became the master of almost all of Livonia proper by the beginning of the seventeenth century. But bitter disappointment awaited the Livonian nobles. When a certain Engelbert von Mengden prepared for the Swedish Crown a Livonian code (largely based on the Hilchen code), which would have practically legalized serfdom and confirmed the illegally held landed possessions, it was rejected by the Swedish Government.²⁵ Undaunted, the German squires now turned to local authorities to achieve their end. Consequently in 1671 a Swedish Governor-General of Riga promulgated on his own authority a so-called *Landesordnung* or Police Ordinance by which serfdom was actually legalized. But news of this measure eventually reached Stockholm, and the Swedish Government soon revoked this *Landesordnung*.²⁶ Simultaneously the Swedish Crown introduced far-reaching reforms. The peasants obtained the right of appeal to courts and even of direct complaint to Stockholm. But the biggest blow to the German noblemen's prestige was the reform of the local courts under which peasants could serve as jurors side by side with the landlords. At the same time the Swedish Government ordered the courts to investigate the land titles of the German squires.²⁷

Having failed in their attempts to obtain satisfaction from the

²³ "Latvijas Vēsture," p. 22305; J. Meuvret, *Histoire des Pays Baltiques* (Paris, 1934), p. 96.

²⁴ R. Vipper, "Lifljandskie barony v roli teoretikov krepostničestva," *Istoričeskii Žurnal*, 1943, 11-12, p. 44.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

Swedish Crown, the Livonian nobles now turned to Muscovy under Peter the Great, who invaded Estonia in 1699, four years after the disbanding of the oligarchic Livonian diet. Tsar Peter promised the German nobles what was not his to give, i.e., the legalization of all of their privileges. Consequently, after Livonia was annexed to Russia in 1721, the most gruesome state of bondage and serfdom was established there, to the complete satisfaction of the German overlords.²⁸ A century later, the Kuronian German squires, seeking to legalize the results of their land-grabbing in Kurland — the core of present-day Latvia — betrayed this land to Russia in 1795.²⁹ Finally when, in 1917, the democratic Provisional Government of Russia granted to the Latvian and Estonian nations self-government in the form of territorial autonomy, the German nobles faced the prospect of losing everything. Therefore they approached the German Kaiser in 1918, begging him to annex Kurland, Livonia, and Estonia.³⁰ These facts speak for themselves.

2. *Propaganda and Reality about German Culture in the Baltic*

Foreign diplomats, newspapermen, businessmen and others, whether travelling to and from Russia and passing through Latvia and Estonia or whether filling assignments there, often were astonished at the picture of high civilization and culture presented by the Baltic States. They could see good roads, bridges, neat farmhouses, well-fenced gardens, rich forests and reforestation on a large scale, well-cultivated fields and green meadows, sleek cattle, European cities, well-dressed people, good hotels and restaurants, rich markets filled with abundant products, Gothic churches full of worshippers on Sundays, as well as modern theatres, opera houses, concert halls, clean trolley and railway cars, busy depots and stations, asphalt-covered streets etc., etc. Upon inquiring about this phenomenon, they were advised by their informers, usually the local titled Germans who knew how to approach important foreigners and generally spoke fluent English, that this was all the result of German cultural and civilizing activities in Latvia. The German Balts allegedly built up these landscapes, created prosperous agriculture, etc., but the ungrateful Latvians and Estonians had robbed them of their big estates and were now squandering all this wealth. Thus a legend was soon created in Western Europe about the brutal behavior of the Latvians

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Latvian-Russian Relations. Documents* (Washington, 1944), p. 38.

³⁰ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1918, Russia*, II (Washington, 1932), pp. 838-835.

and Estonians toward the German minority, particularly the titled landed nobility.

Actually all this wealth was created by the hard toil of the Latvians and Estonians themselves, who formed more than an absolute majority of the population and have inhabited their countries at least for two millenniums or more.³¹ They were known as fine agriculturists, cattle-breeders, seed-cultivators, seafarers, and forest-clearers long before a German had set foot on the Baltic shores. The Roman historian Tacitus of the first century A.D. praised the Baltic peoples as fine agriculturists who were better than the lazy Germans.³² The Balts, whom he calls *Aestylorum gentes* — people living on the shores of the Gulf, the estuary of the *mare Suevicum*, as he calls the Baltic Sea — lived and wore clothes similar to those of the Germans (Suevi), and spoke a language more akin to that spoken in the British Isles (Britanniae propior). They possessed amber, a great Roman luxury. This testimony of Tacitus and similar evidence from Bishop Rimberty of the ninth century,³³ from the Icelandic Viking Scalagrimmson of the tenth,³⁴ and from Bishop Adam of Bremen of the eleventh century,³⁵ destroy the legend of early German cultural preponderance.

Archaeological excavations also testify to the great wealth and advanced civilization of the Baltic peoples. The results of these excavations have been described in a recent work by the Latvian archaeologist Professor F. Balodis.³⁶ Bronze utensils, gold and silver jewelry, iron weapons and instruments, leather shoes and saddles, and many other artifacts have been uncovered. Many Roman, Greek, and Oriental coins have been found, proving the existence of early trade relations. This wealth was the main reason why the Germans invaded the country. The above mentioned Bishop Adam of Bremen, in his chronicle written in 1075, mentions especially that the Kuronians had *aurum plurimum* (lots of gold), thus giving a valuable hint to the merchants of Bremen.

As further testimony, the chronicler Henricus de Lettis (Heinrich der Lette) describes the wealth of the Latvian city of Guerceke, the residence of King Vissewald of Lettia, which the Knights of the Order ransacked and burnt in 1209.³⁷ The Latvians, according to

³¹ Bielenstein, *op. cit.*, I, 4; "Latvju Aizvēsture" (Latvian pre-history), *Latviešu Konversācijas Vārdnīca*, XI, 21425-21427.

³² Tacitus, *De Origine et Situ Germanorum (Germania)*, ed. R. P. Robinson (Middletown, Conn., 1935), p. 322.

³³ *Les Sources*, II, p. 3.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 8-10.

³⁵ Bishop Adam, *op. cit.*, p. 190.

³⁶ Prof. Fr. Balodis, *Det äldsta Lettland* (Stockholm, 1940).

³⁷ Henricus d. L., pp. 133-136, *op. cit.*, par. 4, 1209.

Henricus, had their castles well supplied with foodstuffs, kept in cellars in order to withstand sieges. Describing the murder of King Talivald (1215), Henricus states that the King had a treasure of high value. But with all this wealth and wellbeing, the Latvians were politically disunited. This disunity helped the Germans to achieve the subjugation of the country in the thirteenth century and to destroy the native princely dynasties: in Semigallia the family of King Viesturs,³⁸ in Lettia—King Vissewald,³⁹ in Talava King Talivald⁴⁰ with numerous sons, and in Kurzeme—King Lamikis.⁴¹

The Baltic people also had a cosmogony and Sun-mythology, similar to the Indo-European, as reflected in their rich folklore (the Latvians alone produced more than 240,000 Dainas or folksongs); numerous folk-tunes were collected; the Latvians possessed their own musical instruments, beautiful national costumes, decorative folk-arts: in brief — they possessed all the qualifications of a civilized people long before the Germans first arrived. And this civilization was not only brutally interrupted by the invading Germans, but also prevented from developing in the ensuing centuries. After all, it was not the Germans but the Polish Jesuit Fathers who published in 1585 the first Latvian book — the catechism of St. Peter Canisius.⁴² It was not the Germans but the Swedes who in 1622 opened the first college in Riga, who established the parish organizations in 1630, who opened courts and who in 1681 liberated the peasants from bondage.⁴³ In 1686 the Swedish Government also financed the translation of the Bible into Latvian.⁴⁴ It was not the Germans but the Moravian Brethren who in 1738 opened the first normal school in Livonia.⁴⁵

It was not a German, but the Irish count G. Brown who, as Russian Governor-General in 1765, insisted on the establishment of compulsory primary education in Latvia, on the alleviation of corvées, and on the end to the sale of serfs.⁴⁶

It was not a German, but a pastor of Flemish origin, G. Stender, who in 1765 published the first Latvian primer.⁴⁷ It was not a German, but a pastor of Irish extraction, K. Watson, who in 1882 began

³⁸ *Les Sources*, II, p. 26.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, II, p. 36.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, II, p. 62.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, II, pp. 141–142.

⁴² "Latvju Baznīcas Vēsture" (Latvian Church History), *Latviešu Konversācijas Vārdnīca*, XI, p. 21547.

⁴³ "Latvju Vēsture," p. 22332.

⁴⁴ "Latvju Baznīcas Vēsture," p. 21567.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 21586.

⁴⁶ "Latvju Vēsture," p. 22344.

⁴⁷ *Es Vīnu Pazīstu* (Latvian Who's Who), Riga, 1939, p. 458.

to publish the first Latvian newspaper⁴⁸ in a printing office established at Mitau in 1769 by J. Steffenhagen, an immigrant from Holland.⁴⁹ And so forth.

3. *German-Balt Landmarks in Riga*

After fostering so-called German *Kultur* in Latvia over a period of several hundred years, the German-Balts nevertheless have left no notable monument to their rule. The only medieval sculptural monument in the town of Riga is the statue of Roland the Swordbearer, erected on the square before the old City Hall. The statue merely symbolized the rights of the Council of Riga to pronounce death sentences within the city's territory. It is interesting to note that the Council of Riga was composed of Councillors designated by the Merchants' and Artisans' Guilds, which held supreme mastery of Riga not only during medieval times but until the middle of the nineteenth century. But where are the monuments of the German noblemen's rule? In the suburbs of Riga there was another medieval monument, if one can classify it as such. It was a wooden statue of St. Christopher bearing the Christ-child on his shoulder, erected at the pier of the old ferry-boat which crossed the Daugava river, outside the City walls, near the so-called "Red Warehouses." This statue was actually erected by the proceeds from the donations of pious travelers. In modern times it was defaced by the Bolsheviks, but its remnants were later saved by the Latvian State Council for the Preservation of Antiquities and placed in the Historical Museum in the Castle of Riga.

The Castle of Riga itself, which was alternately the seat of the Archbishop and of the Masters of the Livonian Order, is a primitive building of no architectural value whatever. Its original staircases were built of brick. In modern times, during Latvia's independence, it was reconstructed and embellished and served as residence for the President of State. At the same time the State Archives, the State Printing Office, and the Historical and Ethnographical Museums were also located in the spacious castle. An additional tower, the Tower of the Three Stars of Latvia, was erected to replace one which had been destroyed in a war several centuries ago.

The second German monument of Riga to be mentioned is the bust of J. G. Herder on a pedestal placed in the square before the Dome. But this bust was erected at the end of the nineteenth century by a group of enlightened German burghers to honor the memory of the

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 515.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 457.

German philosopher who from 1764 to 1769 taught in Riga. He was not particularly popular at that time because of his “radical” views and the interest he showed in Latvian folklore, of which he made the first collection and with which he also acquainted Goethe and Schiller. Feeling uneasy in Riga, J. G. Herder left that city for good.⁵⁰

During Latvia’s independence, the Germans, profiting by the statutory law of cultural autonomy, opened in Riga a Teachers’ College dedicated to the name of Herder and called it the “Herder Institute.”⁵¹ It is curious to note, however, that the director of the Institute, Dr. V. Klumberg, was a germanized Latvian, his cousins still being good Latvian farmers.

During the German occupation of Riga in the last war, after September 3, 1917, the local German Bálts erected on the square before the Court of Appeals a wooden statue of a German *Landeswehrmann*. The site chosen was to illustrate that German might goes before right. All German Balts were allowed to buy (though only for gold and silver payments) a special iron nail to be driven into this statue until it would be completely iron-clad and the German treasury accordingly richer in precious metal. When the Latvians reoccupied Riga, the patriotic youths of Latvia dragged the statue down from its pedestal, paraded it through the streets, and finally threw it into the Daugava river, so that the *Landeswehrmann* might appropriately float back home to the “Fatherland” whence he had come.

With regard to treasures of art, the City of Riga, one of the medieval strongholds of the Hanseatic League (since 1227) on the Baltic, was a veritable orphan as compared with Bremen, Stettin, Lübeck, — cities which the Germans considered their home, and therefore embellished. Riga was only a place to obtain wealth.

The so-called Dom Museum, the only one in Riga dating from German times, was established in the house of the Dom Chapter, which adjoined the Cathedral, and looked more like a storehouse of miscellaneous objects from unclaimed estates, including pieces of furniture from liquidated city offices and portraits of venerable burghers. True, there was exhibited a small collection of objects collected from old Livonian tombs, but this section was not classified and contained no objects of gold or silver whatever. They usually were melted down! The Dom Museum possessed no printed catalog. A similar so-called “museum” was in Jelgava (Mitau). A collection of objects produced by local artisans was exhibited at the residence of the Little or Artisans’ Guild in Riga. It is known that a great number

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

⁵¹ *Valdības Vēstnesis* (Latvian Government Gazette) No. 119, May 31, 1927.

of these artisans, however, were of Latvian origin.⁵² Since the seventeenth century Latvians had excelled as skilled workers, of that period, P. Einhorn, states that Latvian artisans outdid the German ones.⁵³

The Riga City Library, also a German creation, was housed in the old City Hall, where the city archives were preserved. The City Library possessed no really rare books or manuscripts. It was also created from casual donations. The Library of Latvian books (28,000 volumes) belonging to the City of Riga, was donated in 1925 by the bibliophile J. Missiņš.⁵⁴

The chief building representing medieval Riga, the Cathedral of St. Mary (the Dom) and the churches of St. Peter, St. John, and St. James, were built entirely by the rulers of Latvia in medieval times, that is to say, by the Catholic Prince-Archbishops. Only a handful of buildings erected by Hanseatic merchants on the quarter known as Old Riga remind one of the Gothic of the Middle-Ages.

An interesting old landmark of Riga was the club of the "Black Heads," the ministerials of the Archbishop, so named for their black hats. The club-house was rebuilt after a fire in Dutch renaissance style. In the sixteenth century it became strictly a bachelor club for German merchants, particularly of importers of colonial wares.

Foreign ship-captains had free access to the club, but not Latvians. The patron of the club was St. Maurice, a Moor of Africa, to symbolize the name of the "black-heads" and to indicate the character of the merchant members. The rich collection of silver (more than 3,000 pieces) donated by prominent visitors (kings, dukes, etc.) was evacuated by the board of the club to Russia at the beginning of the first World War, but was never returned as it could not be located.

The most beautiful modern buildings of Riga, such as the seat of the Diet or Parliament, the Conservatory, the previously mentioned Court of Appeals, and others, some 75 in number, were erected in the second half of the nineteenth century under the Russian regime by the Latvian architects J. Baumanis (1834–91), his pupils K. Morbergs (1844–1926) and K. Pekšens (1859–1928), and others.⁵⁵ During the period of Latvia's independence, other beautiful buildings were built, notably the Club House of the Latvian Social and Literary Society, the Palace of Justice, various ministries, etc.

⁵² J. Straubergs, *Rigas Vēsture* (History of Riga), Riga, 1938, pp. 184–185.

⁵³ P. Einhorn, *Historia Lettica* (Dorpat, 1649), reprinted in *Scriptores Rerum Livonicarum*, II, 590.

⁵⁴ *Es Vīnu Pazīstu*, p. 348.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 59 349, 377.

Not only the town houses of the German squires but their country seats as well were far from resembling French châteaux. Usually they were quite unimposing, with the exception of certain stylish castles in Kurland and Vidzeme or Livonia proper.

The most impressive castles in Kurland were built by Duke Ernest Biron of Kurland (of humble origin) and his son Duke Peter. They are the work of the famous Italian architects of the eighteenth century Rastrelli and Quarenghi.⁵⁶ One of these buildings, the majestic Ducal Palace of Mitau, was burned in 1919 by the retreating German soldiers, who had also burned the Riga Opera House. The Latvian Government rebuilt both. The Castle of Jelgava (Mitau) was eventually made the seat of the Academy of Agriculture. The beautiful castle of Rundale, with a pleasure-garden in the style of Versailles, also built by Rastrelli, was restored by the Latvian Government and established as a subdivision of the National Historical Museum. Quarenghi built the castle of Eleja in Kurland, which was also destroyed in the first World War.

Among the Livonian castles one should mention the castle of Zarnikava, built by Haberland, in Empire style. This castle belonged to the morganatic wife of Grand Duke Paul, an uncle of Tsar Nicholas II. The Countess of Zarnikava was the daughter of the Jewish millionaire Stieglitz of St. Petersburg and the divorced wife of the Livonian nobleman von Pistohlkors. The castle was used in modern Latvia as a school. The German baronial castles were in modern Latvia mostly transformed into high schools, hospitals, agricultural institutes, etc. However, a certain number of the castles continued to be the property of noblemen who lived there as farmers, as, for instance, the castle of Straupe, belonging to Baron von Rosen, and others.

During the present war many of the buildings mentioned above were demolished by artillery fire. Thus, the Old Riga quarter was completely destroyed in the three days of fighting in the summer of 1941. The retreating Soviet-Russian Army burned the "Black-Heads" club, the old City Hall, and all adjacent buildings, including the church of St. Peter, which had the highest (440 feet) wooden steeple in the world.

After all this one may ask the question: what became of the huge incomes of the German Balt merchants and landlords accumulated during the centuries? So far as can be ascertained, they were partly

⁵⁶ "Latvju Architektura" (Latvian Architecture), *Latviešu Konversācijas Vārdnīca*, XI, pp. 21500-21506.

invested in Hanseatic trade and partly transferred to Germany. In more modern times they were squandered by the scions of the Baltic nobility in foreign capitals, especially in St. Petersburg, where they played a prominent role at the imperial court. It was indeed "easy come, easy go." At the same time, they were very reluctant to spend money in Latvia on public schools, libraries, hospitals, museums or such other "luxuries."

4. Germans But Not Balts

Like their brethren the Prussian Junkers, who adopted the name of the subjected, fierce and non-German Prussians, the Germans in the Baltic lands, too, liked to be known as "German Balts." They considered themselves to be a special superior race of Germans, predestined to be the Paladins of Germanism on Germany's eastern borders. At the same time they were servile toward the Polish Kings and the Russian Tsars, who upheld their illegally obtained privileges and huge estates.

In the so-called "Polish Inflantes," as the south-eastern Latvian province of Latgale was called while under Polish domination (1561–1773), the local German nobles (von Manteuffel, von Tiesenhausen, von Ropp, von Sieberg, etc.) became completely polonized in order to maintain their properties there.⁵⁷

On the other hand, the russianized Germans aided the Russian government in the partitioning of Poland at the end of the eighteenth century, commanding Russian troops, and holding the posts of Russian envoys to Poland, as ascertained by the Russian historian Kostomarov. He mentions among the most active prosecutors of the Orders of Catherine II, Baron Igelström,⁵⁸ General von Weimarn,⁵⁹ Baron Stackelberg,⁶⁰ General von Derfelden,⁶¹ Baron Fersen,⁶² von Knorring,⁶³ von Palmbach,⁶⁴ Graf Mellin,⁶⁵ Graf Sivers,⁶⁶ von Rautenfeld,⁶⁷ etc.

The Latvians themselves never called the local Germans "Balts"; their names for these intruders was *vāci* (pronounced vatzī), a name allegedly derived from a tribe of Germans, the Vāka-Goths, with whom the Latvians in prehistoric times might have had some territorial contact. Germany is called *Vācija* (pronounced "Vatzia") in Latvian. The Lithuanians call the Germans *Vokiečiai* and Germany

⁵⁷ *Litovskaya Metrika* (Moscow, 1903–1914), I–III.

⁵⁸ N. J. Kostomarov, *Poslednie Gody Reči Pospolitoi* (St. Petersburg, 1870), p. 96.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 463.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 464.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 489.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 539.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 675.

Vokietia; and the Estonians call them *Saxad*, or “people of Saxony” but never “Balts.” The real Balts are the indigenous inhabitants of the Baltic shores, their designation being a collective noun — the Balts — standing for the Old Prussians, Lithuanians, Livs, Latvians and Estonians.

5. *German Social Classes in Latvia*

In 1935, according to the official Latvian census, there were 62,144 Germans in Latvia, including 5,651 foreign born Germans. The native Germans numbered 56,441 or 2.96 percent of the country's total population.⁶⁸ In Estonia the Germans formed 1.50 percent of the population, and in Lithuania 4.10 percent. Here the Germans were mostly peasants, while the large landowners were generally Polish, with a few Russian nobles.⁶⁹

Not all German Balts were nobles. In modern Latvia noble Germans were not listed separately from non-nobles in the census, because the class of nobility had been abolished in 1920 by a decision of the Latvian Constituent Assembly.⁷⁰ However, among themselves the Germans had their castes, being divided into: (1) the titled nobles, (2) the non-titled nobles, and (3) the patricians, whose ancestors were burgomasters or councillors of the cities of Riga, Tallinn or of other Livonian Hanseatic towns; (4) the higher Lutheran clergy (Superintendents, Oberpastors, etc.); (5) the intellectuals — university graduates, doctors, lawyers, architects, financiers, newspaper editors, etc.; (6) members of the first guilds of wholesale dealers, including the gold and silversmiths; (7) members of the Little Guild i.e., that of the artisans; (8) finally came the rank and file — butchers, bakers, barbers, tailors, clerks, foremen, tax-collectors, small merchants, actors, etc., and (9) peasants.

In 1935 there were about 14,721 German peasants in Latvia, about 1,800 of them being the descendents of the peasant families which Empress Catherine II imported in 1766 from Bavaria and Württemberg, and the rest German colonists from the Volga settled after the Latvian revolution of 1905.⁷¹ The German peasants lived in compact colonies mostly in northern Vidzeme or Livonia. The purpose of bringing the Bavarian and Württemberg peasants into Latvia had been ostensibly to “educate” the Latvian peasants in

⁶⁸ *Latvija Skaitļos* (Latvian Statistics), (Riga, 1938) p. 65.

⁶⁹ O. J. C. Norem, *Timeless Lithuania* (Chicago, 1943), p. 272.

⁷⁰ *Likumu un Ministru Kabineta Rikojumu Krajumus* (Collection of Latvian Laws), Riga, 1920, No. 187.

⁷¹ M. Skujenieks, *Latvija. Zeme un Iedzīvotāji* (Latvia. Land and People), Riga, 1926, pp. 295, 296.

the higher arts of German agriculture. But the very opposite happened: these German peasants adopted the more adequate methods of the Latvians, a situation strangely reminiscent of the previously mentioned statement made by Tacitus. Besides, these German settlers lived in secluded communities and would not mingle with their Latvian neighbors. As the result, and because of the strict endogamy which they practiced, many degenerates were to be found later among them. On the other hand, the German colonists from the Volga became the principal supporters of the German nobles and the conservative counterpart of the radical landed Latvian peasants.⁷²

It is interesting to note that these and other German peasants were settled on manorial lands which were sold to them on favorable terms. Unlike the Latvians, they were exempt from taxes and enjoyed many privileges, such as the right to own mills, distilleries, breweries, etc. Their education also received more attention, and they had greater opportunities offered to them, since they were able to move to the cities, take up business, and become artisans, pharmacists, etc., backed as they were by their kin, the squires.⁷³ Naturally, this did not make for good feeling among the oppressed Latvian peasantry. Nevertheless, these German peasant colonists benefited by the extensive Agrarian Reform of post-war Latvia and obtained plots of land in equal measure with the Latvian peasants themselves.

Like the German peasants, the German middle class also showed signs of racial degeneration. The Germans tried to strengthen their ranks with germanized Latvians and Estonians, who were contemptuously referred to as *karklu-vāci*, or "Willow Germans," by the Latvians and *Kadakas-Saxad* or "Juniper Germans" by the Estonians, willow and juniper being considered the most useless and at the same time the most flexible kind of tree. However, neither the Germans nor the Russians could denationalize the native Latvians and Estonians, who with every passing year were becoming more and more conscious of their rights and of their innate capacity to achieve full status as a nation and a state.

6. The "Herrenvolk"

The German nobles, the "Herrenvolk," were always very particular about their high-born dignity, and therefore extremely exclusive. According to the statistics of 1839, there were in all the Baltic provinces of Kurland, Semigallia, Livonia and Estonia only 685 heredi-

⁷² M. Skujenieks, *Latvieši svešumā un citas tautas Latvijā* (Latvians abroad and foreign nationalities in Latvia), Riga, 1930, p. 37.

⁷³ *Id.*

tary German noble families: 154 in Kurland and Semigallia, 253 in Livonia, 225 in Estonia and 53 on the Estonian Islands. Of this total number 177 were descendants of the knights or vassals of the Livonian Order or of ministerials of the Archbishopric. They were the real *indigenat* and the foundation of the *matrikul* or scrolls as well as of the Diets of the nobles in Kurland, Livonia and Estonia. Most of them were bearers of titles granted by German kings and emperors; such as Baron or Freiherr, Graf or Count. The rest were nobles created by the subsequent rulers of Latvia and Estonia: the Polish and Swedish kings and the Russian tsars. Thus 67 were ennobled by the Polish kings from 1561–1772; 103 by the Swedish kings from 1610–1721, and 338, or about 50 percent, by the Russian tsars during the period 1721 to 1839.⁷⁴

The “new” noblemen were originally descended from the burgher class, and with few exceptions did not bear titles. This untitled German gentry used the particle *von* before their family names, and they were classified as *Verdienstadel* or nobles who achieved their status by serving as officers or officials. The titled nobility intermarried very unwillingly with them. Furthermore, a distinction was already being made between a land-owning and a landless nobleman. Of the 253 German noble families registered in Livonia proper or Vidzeme, only 162 belonged to landowning families, and these were the upper strata from which the dignitaries of the Diet were chosen: the Landmarshall, the Landräte, etc.⁷⁵

According to the census of 1897, there were in Latvia 8,124 Germans of noble birth, but only 2,293 or 2.69 percent of them belonged to the gentry.⁷⁶ In 1913 the German noblemen still owned 48.1 percent of the arable land of Latvia,⁷⁷ which they had acquired mostly by devious processes ($\frac{5}{8}$ of all Livonia, $\frac{2}{3}$ of Estonia), as was proved by the Swedish land reduction inquiries of the seventeenth century.⁷⁸ The German squires of Livonia based their “rights” on the alleged *Privilegium Sigismundi* of 1561, which, however, was never signed by Sigismund Augustus, King of Poland.⁷⁹ Likewise, the alleged decrees of the Swedish kings in favor of the German landed nobility of Livonia never existed in reality. The only “right” acquired by the German nobility was that given them by Peter the Great, whom they treacherously supported against Sweden. The Treaty of Nystad of

⁷⁴ A. Švābe, *Latvju Tiesību Vēsture* (History of Latvian Law), Riga, 1934, III, p. 34.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, III, p. 33.

⁷⁶ M. Skujenieks, *Latvija* (Riga, 1926), pp. 331–332.

⁷⁷ *Latvija Skaitļos*, p. 174.

⁷⁸ J. Hampden Jackson, *Estonia* (London, 1941), p. 60.

⁷⁹ Švābe, “Sigismunda Augusta Livonijas Politika,” p. 109.

1721 cancelled the Swedish investigation of the German titles to the land; yet by the same treaty, in Article ix, His Imperial Russian Majesty in the name of the Holy Trinity promised "to maintain all the inhabitants of the province of Livonia, Estonia, and Oesel, nobles and commoners, cities and magistrates, and the guilds of artisans in all their privileges, customs and prerogatives, which they enjoyed under the dominion of the Kings of Sweden."⁸⁰ Furthermore, Article x of the Treaty stipulated that schools should be supported in the same way as under the former Swedish rule. Now it is known that in 1681 the Swedish king liberated the Latvian and Estonian peasants from bondage and serfdom, and they obtained the right to appear before the courts, to attend high schools, etc.⁸¹ Under Russian rule, the German squirearchy promptly annulled all this. In 1716 the Russian Governor-General of Riga, Prince Galitzin, issued a decree about fugitive serfs, thus restoring this institution which Sweden had abolished.

The Livonian nobility used all its connections in St. Petersburg to enforce serfdom on the Latvian peasants.⁸² In 1739 Baron Rosen, a member of the governing board of the Livonian Diet or *Landrat* tried to convince the Russian government, in a memorandum which he submitted, that the German nobles had a right to Livonian lands and population in virtue of the Roman *jus belli*.⁸³ In 1740 the Livonian Diet of nobles again tried to obtain the legalization of a code for serfs prepared by Baron Budberg and von Schroeder — and also based on Roman law. However, the Russian Crown again refused to recognize this code.⁸⁴ No one of subsequent rulers of Livonia — the kings of Poland and Sweden, or the tsars of Russia — would legalize the abuses of the German squires, even though the tsars tolerated the oligarchic regime in Livonia.

Finally, in 1817–1819, by permission of Emperor Alexander I, all lands of the Latvians and Estonians were taken by the German squires as ransom for the peasants' personal freedom.⁸⁵ The agricultural crises of the 1840's and of the 1850's and the proselytizing of the Greek Orthodox priests among the landless Latvians with promises of land were instrumental in compelling the squires to sell a part of these lands to their tenants. From 1849, when the Latvian peasants gained the right to buy land of their own,⁸⁶ up to 1914, they had redeemed 39.4 percent or 2,467,000 hectares (one ha = 2.47 acres) of

⁸⁰ *Latvian-Russian Relations*, p. 20. ⁸¹ Jackson, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

⁸² Vipper, *loc. cit.*, p. 47.

⁸³ Švābe, *Latvju Tiesību Vēsture*, III, p. 40.

⁸⁴ Vipper, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

⁸⁵ Jackson, *op. cit.*, pp. 79–80.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 96–97.

Latvian arable land, despite very difficult and onerous conditions, since the squires exacted from the peasant buyers 6 percent mortgages.⁸⁷ In 1913, 1,338 manorial estates larger than 110 ha each still accounted for 48.1 percent of the land, or 2,942,514 hectares.⁸⁸ This land was usually leased to Latvian tenant-farmers under onerous leases.

But even if he did not possess landed property, the future of any scion of the Baltic German nobility was assured. Lucrative positions were available for younger sons of German noblemen in the offices of the local Diet, in different branches of the association of the large landowners, in the Riga municipality, in the Russian state and municipal administration, in the police, the army, the navy, the diplomatic service, and the Church. A German nobleman would always favor one of his kin: that was the unwritten law of German ethics. If one became an invalid, there were special rest-houses and hospitals for noble patients and homes for noble spinsters. It was enough to be born a German nobleman to be well taken care of. For nobles with university education it was considered fitting to serve in the judiciary the positions of forest inspector, steward of large estates, higher local police officer, etc. were always considered *standesgemäss* (honorable). All such posts were available primarily to German nobles, while such occupations as county doctors, pastors, etc., were held to be acceptable, though less honorable. The organization of the Germans was such that, prior to the independence of the Baltic States, all the better local jobs were in German hands, in spite of the fact that they constituted a very small minority of the population.

7. *Tsarist Russia under Herrenvolk Domination*

Throughout tsarist Russia proper state administrative organs were also subservient to the German nobles. It is well known what an important role they played at the Court of St. Petersburg, in the country's higher administration as well as in the army and the navy.⁸⁹ This German role in Russia's state life was traditional and dated from the beginning of the eighteenth century.⁹⁰ The *Almanach de Gotha* for 1876 states that of 1,064 higher Russian State dignitaries of that year only 25 percent were of native Russian extraction. In 1871 of all Russian General Staff officers 58 percent and of all the Russian generals 74 percent were Germans.⁹¹ Tsarist Russia was, in fact, practically in German grip.

⁸⁷ *Latvija Skaitļos*, p. 174. ⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

⁸⁹ V. J. Gurko, *Features and Figures* (Stanford, 1939), p. 101.

⁹⁰ B. von Campenhausen, *Alphabetisches Verzeichniss*, 1747.

⁹¹ A. Švābe, "Latviju Tiesību Vēsture," *Latviešu Konversācijas Vārdnīca*, xi, p. 22149.

A russified German nobleman was usually nominated Governor-General, i.e., representative of the Tsar, in the Baltic Provinces, and thus the entire life of these provinces was in the hands of German Balts. Of 15 Livonian governors during the years 1790–1885, 14 were German nobles; of 12 governors of Kurland between 1795 and 1882, 10 were German nobles.⁹² The Russian bureaucracy in the Baltic Provinces trembled before the German nobles, as it did in Russia proper. One can well imagine the situation of the Latvians and Estonians under such a régime! But it was pleasant for the Germans.

8. *Latvian Renaissance Unsuccessfully Hampered by German Balts*

Throughout the period of the Latvian and Estonian renaissance of the nineteenth century, the Germans did their utmost to persuade the Latvians and Estonians through their pastors, who were subservient to the nobility because they were usually appointed to their parishes by the local landlord, to remain on the land and not to go to the cities, which were described as being full of moral pitfalls. The purpose of this manoeuvre was to keep the Latvians as a class of peasants and to prevent their political enlightenment. Consequently the Latvian patriots and leaders, who encouraged their fellow-countrymen to obtain an education and to enter business and professions, were branded by the reactionary German Balt Tories as “dangerous innovators,” “nihilists,” “revolutionaries” and “Young Letts.”

A progressive Latvian newspaper, the *Peterburgas Awihses* (1862–1865), published in liberal St. Petersburg in the 1860's, was suppressed through intrigues of the German nobles.⁹³ They demanded that before printing the newspaper should be sent for censorship to Riga because it was being published for circulation in Latvia. This of course meant the death of the paper. However, all such measures failed to stop the emancipation of the Latvians and Estonians. Under liberal Russian laws they were entitled to enter universities and thus became Russian Government officials, officers, scientists, etc. At the beginning of the twentieth century both Latvians and Estonians had their own middle classes and intellectuals in all fields of human activities, and were becoming dangerous competitors for the Germans.

At the outbreak of the first World war there were in the Russian army scores of Latvian and Estonian generals, colonels, and officers of lower rank. The civil service too included many high ranking Latvian and Estonian officials, whose successful careers were possible because of their university education.⁹⁴ During the first World War

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ “Latvijas Vēsture,” p. 22363.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 22399–22402.

the Latvians organized an army of their own, with their own officers and generals, an indubitable proof of political state maturity. As a matter of fact, during the war between Russia and Germany (1914–1918) the halo of the German Balts and of the German oligarchy in St. Petersburg lost its lustre, to remember only the affair of General von Renenkampf, who failed to save Samsonov when the latter was trapped in Eastern Prussia. Most of the Germans mobilized in the Russian army were sent by secret mobilization order to the Caucasian front in order to avoid having them to fight their kinsmen, the Reich-Germans. Some of the Baltic German nobles managed to emigrate from Russia before and during the war. Many of them actually entered the ranks of the Kaiser's army, and later appeared as officers in the German occupation army of Kurland and Livonia.

9. *German-Balts and the Reich*

By May, 1915, Kurland was already occupied by the German armies in spite of the existence of strong Russian military and naval bases at Liepaja (Libau) and Ventspils (Windau), and the German government proclaimed the permanent separation of this province from Russia. Now the German nobles of Kurland could act openly and manifest their real sympathies. On July 28, 1915, they issued an appeal to the Reich for military protection and for a dynastic union with Prussia.⁹⁵ On September 22, 1917 they submitted a petition to the German Chancellor, in which they pointed out what an excellent terrain for colonization the Baltic provinces would be for the Germans that had been driven out of Central Russia; and they even offered Field Marshall Hindenburg one third of their lands free of charge for disabled German soldiers.⁹⁶

Their plans for the Baltic provinces were as follows: two separate states were to be set up — one, Kurland, in dynastic union with Prussia, and the other the Duchy of united Estonia and Livonia, which were occupied by the German armies in 1917–1918 to be incorporated into the German Reich. The petition, submitted on March 8, 1918, by the Kuronian Diet,⁹⁷ stressed the idea of a true German “cultural basis” for this arrangement because of the existence of the Baltic aristocracy. The economic basis was to be supplied by the influx of German colonists — mostly demobilized soldiers. To the Latvians and the Estonians was reserved the status of farmhands under this plan. On April 12, 1918, after the signing of the peace treaty of Brest-Litovsk (March 3, 1918), by which the Bolsheviks

⁹⁵ *Latviešu Konversācijas Vārdnīca*, x, p. 19190.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 19161. ⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

renounced all claims to the Baltic provinces, a *Landesrat* consisting of appointed representatives of Livonia, Estonia and the Estonian Islands, convened at Riga. This was nothing but a combination of the old Diets of the Baltic German nobility, seasoned with a sprinkling of German burghers and clergymen who were completely subservient to their noble kinfold. Of the 58 members of this *Landesrat*, 34 were Germans, in spite of the fact that the Germans formed only about 3 percent of the local population. The remainder were picked elders of Latvian and Estonian rural communities, 24 in all. This improvised *Landesrat* "requested" the German Kaiser to take the provinces under his protection.⁹⁸ On August 27, 1918, by the supplementary German-Bolshevik treaty, the frontier between Livonia and Russia was fixed from Narva along Lake Peipus and down to Dunaburg.⁹⁹ On September 22, 1918, the German Kaiser recognized the independence of the Baltic countries and the notorious *Landesrat* as the source of the Baltic Government.¹⁰⁰

The next step would have been the realization of the historic dream of the German Balts to incorporate the Baltic lands into Germany. However, for some reason the German Government had doubts concerning these plans of the Livonian nobles to recreate the Livonia of the Middle Ages as a part of Germany, and no decision was forthcoming for some time. Meanwhile the Latvian and Estonian National Councils (in exile) voiced strong protests abroad. At the same time the powerful German Catholic Party, which was favorably inclined toward Lithuanian independence and toward the aspirations of Latvian Catholics, as well as the German Social-Democrats,¹⁰¹ who supported the Latvian and Estonian Social-Democrats, also expressed sharp objection to this plan which, if realized, would have eventually strengthened only the German reactionaries. But later events themselves nullified this ominous German Balt project. On November 7, 1918, the German Balt puppet *Landesrat* appointed a so-called "Council of Regency,"¹⁰² consisting of 8 persons: 4 German Balts and 2 Estonian and 2 Latvian "quislings." Then, on November 8, 1918, the revolution broke out in Germany, the Kaiser fled, and the Germans were compelled to sign an Armistice on November 11. The same day the Government of Great Britain recognized as a de facto government the Latvian Provisional National Council, which was elected at Walka on November 18, 1917 by Latvians, and which was the real depository of Latvia's sovereignty. Seven days later, on

⁹⁸ Dr. P. Kalniņš, "Kā izauga Tautas Padome" (Latvian State Council), *Latvijas Republika Desmit Pastāvīšanas Gados* (Ten years of independent Latvia), Riga, 1928, p. 58.

⁹⁹ *Latvian-Russian Relations*, p. 51 ff.

¹⁰⁰ Kalniņš, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

¹⁰² "Latvju Vēsture," pp. 22385-22386.

November 18, 1918, in liberated Riga, the Latvian State Council, consisting of the members of the National Council and of additional representatives of the Democratic Block of Riga and the national minorities, elected the first Latvian Government with K. Ulmanis as Prime Minister. The puppet *Landesrat* vanished. A number of the German Balt nobles, however, continued to plot on their own account.

10. Last Attempt of German Balts Ends with Disaster

One of the Livonian nobles, a certain von Stryk,¹⁰³ conceived a plan for the revival of the State of the Livonian Order which existed from 1530, when the Grand Master was recognized secular ruler of Livonia, and until Nov. 28, 1562, when Livonia was partitioned. This feudal German principality was to be reestablished in the Baltic provinces through a *coup de main*. But von Stryk was arrested. Then the initiative toward establishing a German-dominated Livonian State was taken by a Kuronian, Baron Manteuffel, chief of the German territorials — the *Landeswehr*. On April 16, 1919, he proclaimed a certain Latvian germanophile pastor and well known author, A. Niedra, as Prime Minister in Libau, where a Latvian-German Balt state was to be set up.¹⁰⁴

This German putsch was made just at the time when the Latvian army was engaged in fighting at the front against the Bolsheviks. The indignant Latvian nation refused to recognize A. Niedra and continued to support the legal Latvian government of Karlis Ulmanis, elected on November 18, 1918, in liberated Riga.¹⁰⁵ The Latvians then turned on the new foe. The German *Landeswehr*, reinforced by German regulars of the von der Goltz group, was met and defeated at Cesis on June 22, 1919, by a joint Latvian and Estonian military force.¹⁰⁶ Finally, in November, 1919, the last remnants of the German forces were thrown out of Kurland altogether. The German nobles had played their cards and had lost.

The Latvians and Estonians were naturally furious at this treachery of the German territorials in falling upon their rear while they were engaged in deadly fight against the Bolsheviks. Only the intervention of the Allied Military Commission, especially of the British Commissioner, Sir Stephen Tallents, saved the German *Landeswehr*

¹⁰³ A. Kroders, "Latvijas Valsts Liepajas Laikmets" (The Latvian Government in Liepaja), *Latvijas Republika Desmit Pastāvīšanas Gados*, p. 30.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* ¹⁰⁵ *Latvian-Russian Relations*, p. 59.

¹⁰⁶ L. Ekis, *Latvia. Struggle for Independence* (Washington, 1942), p. 10.

from complete extermination.¹⁰⁷ It was only after strong representation from the Commissioner that the Latvian and Estonian High Command agreed to conclude an armistice with the defeated German territorials. The *Landeswehr* was reorganized as the Thirteenth Tukums regiment of the Latvian Army and, in order to avoid any future recurrence of treachery, the command of this regiment was given over to the Assistant Commissioner, Colonel (now Field Marshal) Sir Harold Alexander.¹⁰⁸ The regiment then took a sector of the front against the Bolshviks. Later, after the peace treaties with Germany and Russia had been signed (July 15, 1920 and August 11, 1920), the *Landeswehr* was demobilized, whereupon there was at once organized and duly incorporated a Society of Veterans of the *Landeswehr* with headquarters in Riga

11. *German Balts and Baltic Independence*

During the same period, and while their kinsmen were active in Latvia, another group of German nobles — the German Balt Committee — tried to intervene at the Allied Peace Conference in Paris in order to gain some advantage for themselves. Like many other "White Russian" nobles, the German nobles living in Russia proper had left the country after the Bolshevik *coup d'état*, some going to Germany and others remaining together with the majority of Russian émigrés in Paris, London, etc. During their long years in the Russian diplomatic service, many of these German Balt nobles had acquired friends and relatives among members of the Western European aristocracy, which dominated the diplomatic service of the Western Powers. As a matter of fact, it was this intimate inter-relationship which secured a measure of success to the "German Balt Committee" in Paris. This committee, comprised of large Russian and German landowners of the Baltic provinces, claimed to represent the Russian and German minorities of the entire provinces; it was headed by a certain Baron Meyendorff. According to the minutes of the Conférence Préliminaire de la Paix (Commission des Affaires Baltiques, procès-verbal Nos. 1-18), Baron Meyendorff approached the chief of the Commission, Sir Esmé Howard, former British Minister to Stockholm, with complaints against the Latvian and Estonian governments.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Sir Stephen Tallents, *Man and Boy* (London, 1942), p. 327.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 343.

¹⁰⁹ M. W. Graham, *The Diplomatic Recognition of the Border States*, Part III: Latvia (Los Angeles, 1941), pp. 409-433.

The principal theme of Baron Meyendorff's complaints was the extensive land reform policies of the newly established Republics. In Latvia, the agrarian reform provided the creation of a land fund for allotment to landless peasants, to be made up of all manorial estates larger than 100 hectares (1 hectare = 2.47 acres) and of all lands owned by the state and by the municipalities. Out of this land fund 193,284 parcels were distributed.¹¹⁰

At the same time the German Balts, guided of course by the same idea of preserving their privileged position, had, according to Professor M. W. Graham, assured Admiral Kolchak, head of the Russian Nationalist Government in Siberia, to the effect that they had no desire to be separated from Russia.¹¹¹ It is abundantly evident from all these maneuvers that the German Balts did not believe in the viability of the Baltic republics and that they continued to hope and work for the reestablishment of any sort of transitional régime that would prove amenable to their own claims for security and the exercise of their "rights."

In taking cognizance of Baron Meyendorff's exposé, Sir Esmé Howard assured him that he would forward the Baron's desires regarding the Baltic minorities to the Council of Five, *with the Commission's approval*.¹¹² This is proof of how great was the influence of the German Balts at the Peace Conference, in spite of the efforts overtly made by their kin during the German occupation of the Baltic provinces to make the latter a part of the imperial Reich! The Marquis della Torretta, followed by Commandant Aublet of France, both apparently influenced by a note of Baron Meyendorff on the subject of the withdrawal of German troops from the Baltic region as demanded by the Latvians, expressed in July 1919 *much greater concern over the fate of the German and Russian minorities than over the fate of the Latvians and Estonians in case of a German withdrawal*.¹¹³ However, Mr. Philip Kerr (subsequently Marquis Lothian, late British Ambassador to Washington) expressed the view that the minorities were sufficiently protected by the presence of General Gough, the Allied Commander-in-Chief in the Baltic region.¹¹⁴

The German Balt nobles also tried to influence the Paris Peace Conference to demanding from the de facto Baltic governments complete cooperation in the intervention for the restoration of a "recognized Russian government," upon whose subsequent consent the ultimate fate of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia was to depend. A

¹¹⁰ *Latvija Skaitlos*, p. 178.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 432.

¹¹¹ Graham, *op. cit.*, p. 427.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

resolution to this effect was in fact proposed (procès-verbal No. 12, Annexe iv, pp. 16–17) on July 2, 1919, to the Council of Ambassador by Sir Esmé Howard.¹¹⁵ This would have constituted a reversal of the de fact recognition that had been accorded to Latvia by the British government on November 11, 1918, in the form of delaying final recognition and of making it contingent upon an agreement. with the “Mother-Country,” Russia. These proposals were obviously designated to entangle the three Baltic Republics in the far-reaching schemes of intervention which marked that era, while promising them in return only the most illusory status, depending on the caprices of Kolchak, the Russian Political Conference, and other similar Russian authorities. But on July 29, 1919, the Council of Ambassadors refused to adopt Sir Esmé Howard’s recommendation.¹¹⁶

This marked the end of the policy of the *cordon sanitaire* as well as of German Balt intrigues in Paris, but not of German Balt activities in the Baltic.

12. *German Balts Obtain Equal Rights with Other Latvian Citizens and Cultural Autonomy*

After the collapse of the Bermondts adventure in November, 1919, which represented the last effort of certain German Balt circles to restore their old position, it became evident that the game was lost. In 1920, peace treaties were signed with Russia and Germany, and in 1921 Latvia was recognized *de jure* by the Great Powers. The Latvian Constituent Assembly decided that Latvia should become a republican state, with equality realized for all Latvian citizens. Full cultural autonomy was extended to the minorities (by the law of December 18, 1919),¹¹⁷ but the oligarchic Diets of the nobles of Kurland and Livonia were dissolved on June 29, 1920 by decision of the Constituent Assembly.¹¹⁸ Simultaneously all titles and class distinctions, as well as the caste system of the Guilds in the Riga municipal government and the preferential vote of the houseowners (mostly Germans), were abolished in the townships.

Former German and other nobles were allowed to retain their titles only as an integral part of their family names. This did not confer any legal privilege, but marked the liberality of treatment extended by the Latvian state to its former opponents. The latter were in fact

¹¹⁵ *Conférence des Préliminaires de la Paix. Commission des Affaires Baltiques*. Procès-Verbal No. 12, Annexe iv, pp. 16–17. ¹¹⁶ Graham, *op. cit.*, p. 432.

¹¹⁷ *Latvijas Pagaidu Valdības Likumu un Rīkojumu Krājums* (Collection of Latvian Laws and Decrees), December 31, 1919, No. 156.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, August 31, 1920, No. 187.

treated with fairness and without discrimination. Upon partitioning of the large estates among the landless peasants, landowners were left middle-sized farms with all the necessary inventory and livestock. A few of these estates were confiscated, because their owners had been duly convicted as traitors for participating in plots against the state after the proclamation of Latvia's independence, but many of these were restored in part to their owners, when the latter were granted pardons by the President of Latvia.

In general, the German Balts enjoyed the same rights as Latvians and had cultural autonomy besides. They obtained commissions in the army and navy; they entered the civil, diplomatic, judiciary and municipal services; practised medicine, law and other free professions; the chairs of colleges and universities were accessible to them. Many of them once more became prosperous, especially those who entered business, finance, commerce and industry.

However, the German Lutherans, forming only 5.48 percent of all the Lutherans in Latvia, preferred to establish a separate German Lutheran church organization, forming their own Synod, electing their own Bishop (A. Poelchau), and founding their own theological school at the German Herder Institute in Riga.¹¹⁹ They made great efforts to maintain their own parishes, no matter how small numerically, and tried hard to continue to hold on to the largest Lutheran churches in the capital, reluctantly sharing these churches with the Latvians through the establishment of an elaborate schedule of services. In 1935 there were 242,731 Latvians in Riga, as compared with 38,523 Germans,¹²⁰ yet the latter demanded the Cathedrals of St. Mary and of St. Peter for their exclusive use. At the beginning of the present century the Latvians had been obliged to build the church of St. Gertrude by popular subscription for this very reason.

In independent Latvia this situation became intolerable, and in 1931 by referendum a law was passed assigning the Dome or Cathedral of St. Mary Latvian for the use of the great majority, while the Cathedral of St. Peter was made the Cathedral of the Garrison consisting of soldiers also predominantly of Latvian origin (93.45 percent Latvians and only 5.48 percent Germans).¹²¹ These acts of the Latvian majority provoked combined protests from the Germans which culminated in ostentatious services in the German cemetery. Even intervention from abroad was tried, and this "Kulturkampf" ended only when the Baltic Germans obeyed the call of Hitler and abandoned the entire region in 1939–1940. Curiously enough, the German Lutheran Bishop was the strongest promoter of this mass exodus.

¹¹⁹ *Valdības Vēstnesis*, No. 119, May 32, 1927; No. 219, September 30, 1927.

¹²⁰ *Latvija Šķaitļos*, p. 67.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

There was, indeed, no future in store for them comparable in any sense with their brilliant past. Lettland was no more "Fettland," nor Lievland "Blievland," an inviting land of fat and plenty. Their children sooner or later would have become Latvians under the pressure of circumstances. They were surrounded and submerged by Latvians and had to speak the Latvian language. Latvians were rapidly attaining leadership in all fields — intellectual and economic. The Germans, shorn of their privileges, were being assimilated in the democratic mass of Latvia's citizens. The same happened in Estonia. So they preferred to go back to Germany.

13. *German Balt Mass Exodus in 1939*

The gloomy prospect of completely losing their privileged status was one of the primary reasons why the Baltic Germans voluntarily left Latvia and Estonia on such a large scale in 1939–1940. The liquidation of the properties of the German repatriates were assumed by the German Trust Company in Riga, the *Umsiedlungs Treuhand Aktiengesellschaft* or UTAG. The final accounts were to be settled through the German government with repatriates. The repatriation convention was signed by Latvia and Germany on October 30, 1939; and was ratified by Latvia on November 9. It was published in the Official Gazette, *Valdibas Vestnesis*, No. 247 (October 30, 1939), and No. 255 (November 9, 1939).¹²² The Germans were to leave Latvia not later than December 15, 1939, but this date was subsequently extended. According to the agreement, only personal property could be taken along. Real estate, houses, farms, cattle, machinery, gold and silver specie were taken over by the UTAG, and the final date of settlement was set at December 31, 1941.

It has been said that the German government realized a handsome profit on this transaction (more than one hundred million dollars). The repatriated German Balts, however, were not brought to Germany, but were settled in the Polish provinces occupied by the German armies at the beginning of the war, mostly in Poznan. Some were assigned to Gotenhafen, as the Germans had renamed the Polish port of Gdynia, which the newly arrived German Balts among themselves had renamed "Totenhafen" or the harbor of the dead. There is certainly no way back to Latvia for them. After conquering the Baltic States from the Russians, Hitler did not allow the evacuated Germans to return to Latvia, but held them, as seasoned and experienced oppressors, in the Polish border regions where he had first settled them.

¹²² An English translation of the text of the Convention can be found in *Latvian-Russian Relations*, Appendix vi.

In his recent book on Russia, Sir Bernard Pares pities "these poor people" and states textually: "They might be thought useful here (in the Polish Corridor, where most of them were settled by Hitler) but what of their removal from where they had always been?"¹²³ The fact is that they left the Baltic States quite voluntarily, and were legally released from their citizenship there.

Sir Bernard Pares is evidently more concerned with the fate of these Germans, who freely emigrated to their mother-country, than with that of the 200,000 Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians forcibly deported by the Bolsheviks to Siberian prison-camps. Furthermore, the eminent writer finds no other name for the indigenous Baltic people than "the subjugated under-dog population — the Letts and Estonians," whom the Russians, according to him, "stirred up against the Balt-Germans."¹²⁴ The latter, according to Sir Bernard, "had a highly advanced civilization of their own — with order, discipline, property, learning and literature . . .,"¹²⁵ whereas the former two never gained any recognition on the map as nationalities until the Versailles settlements of 1919. It is to be noted, in this connection, that on historical maps of Livonia the designations "Esten" and "Letten" as a rule are marked as subdivisions of that province.

All one can say of Sir Bernard Pares' treatment (though, perhaps, mistreatment would be more accurate) of historical facts is that he seems to have been duped by some alleged "expert" on Baltic history. But the facts clearly are quite to the contrary, and even Sir Bernard's standing as a historian can hardly change them.

It has been a commonly repeated error in the English speaking world to call the Baltic Germans the "backbone" of the Baltic States. It was assumed that without this "backbone" these countries would lose their independence. It suited the purposes of German propaganda to have this fiction believed. The clearly documented fact is that if the German Balts had had their way the Baltic States would have been either satellites of the German Reich, or supporting provinces of a hoped for resuscitated Russian Empire. Real independence was the last thing the German Balts wanted the Baltic peoples to have.

14. *In Memoriam*

Somewhere in Finland the Finns erected a monument to a Swedish Governor-General with the simple inscription: "The inhabitants were satisfied with me and I with them!" But the Latvians did not have a single German Governor-General of this kind. The only good for-

¹²³ B. Pares, *Russia* (Penguin Books (London), 1940), p. 247; American edition (New York, 1941), p. 214.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

eign domination was the Swedish one, which period the Latvians call "The good old Swedish days!" The Germans, on the contrary, are not popular in Latvia. They had established there bondage, serfdom, and the most retrograde squirearchy in Europe. All too few were the humane and enlightened Germans who tried to introduce reforms; and they were invariably overruled and ostracized by their peers.

The few good men among the German Balts will always be remembered. Foremost among these is Duke Gothard of Kurland (1561–1587), who was sensitive to the spiritual needs of the Latvians and in 1567 ordered the building of 70 new churches, since the existing 3 churches and 9 chapels were insufficient. He ordered also the printing of hymnals and of a religious handbook (*vademecum*) in the Latvian language, the first of which appeared in 1586.¹²⁶ His grandson Duke James (1639–1682) made Kurland again a prosperous maritime country. In 1649 the Kuronian Lutheran superintendent-general Paul Einhorn wrote a Latvian history, in which he stated that all Latvian inhabited lands — Kurland, Semigallia and Livonia — had always belong to Latvians, who called themselves *Latvji*. The Latvians, according to P. Einhorn, inhabited all the northeastern Baltic shores from Danzig to Libau, which is also attested by the existing geographical names in East Prussia such as Kurische Haff (Gulf), Kurische Nehrung (Sandspit), Kurische Niederung (Lowlands) and many others. In 1644 Rehehusen wrote a *Manductio ad Linguam Lettonicam* — a handbook of the Latvian language; also in the seventeenth century Mancelius wrote a *Phraseologia Lettica*. The Livonian Pastor Ernest Glueck (an immigrant from Germany) in 1689 translated the Bible into Latvian.¹²⁷ The Landrat or Councillor of the Diet, Baron Schoulz von Asheraden, tried to ameliorate the situation of the tenants and issued liberal peasant laws for his estates in 1764, but was therefore ostracized by the other German nobles.¹²⁸

Pastor Eisen von Schwarzenberg, an enlightened immigrant from Germany, wrote a memorandum in 1764 on the abominable conditions of the Latvians and Estonians, which was printed by the Academy of Sciences of St. Petersburg and which he submitted to the Empress Catherine II, thus being instrumental in raising Empress Catherine's interest in the Latvians.¹²⁹ Last but not least, Garlieb Merkel, the son of a Livonian pastor, wrote a flaming accusation against the German squires in 1796 under the title *Die Letten*, a

¹²⁶ "Latvju Baznīcas Vēsture," p. 21560.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 21566–21567.

¹²⁸ Švābe, *Latvju Tiesību Vēsture*, III, pp. 48–51.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

pamphlet which was published in Leipzig, translated into French by the famous Abbé de Siéyès, and read by Emperor Alexander I.¹³⁰ The effect of this was the inclusion of the Baltic provinces in the decree of 1804, which created a class of hereditary tenants. This decree was prepared by the liberal Colonel F. von Zivers, who had also read G. Merkel's appeal.¹³¹ Baron Hamilkar von Voelkersam should also be mentioned as the man who in 1849 advocated in the Livonian Diet the passing of decree allowing tenants to buy farms of their own: eventually he also was ostracized by his peers.¹³² There have been several German pastors who deserve merit for promoting the Latvian language, literature, press and the study of Latvian folklore, of whom Pastor Dr. A. Bielenstein is the most prominent.¹³³

In more modern times, too, a few Germans actually participated in the establishment of the Latvian State Council, the most prominent being Dr. Paul Schiemann, a brilliant editor. It is interesting to note that during the German occupation of Riga (in 1917) Dr. P. Schiemann was imprisoned as a dangerous radical. He was a member of the Latvian Constituent Assembly and of all subsequent Latvian parliaments.

Some other Germans cooperated with the Latvians in strengthening the Latvian state; foremost among these are Count A. Kaiserling, Admiral of the Latvian Navy; Baron Stromberg, of the General Staff; Baron Duesterloe and von Bruemmer of the Department of Justice; and von Bulmerincq of the Riga municipality. There are several more such names to be remembered. But they were all sporadic "knights errant."

However, most of these good people willingly followed the call of Hitler and left Latvia with an easy conscience, departing with bag and baggage. It is said that the older generation followed the younger, which had become deeply imbued with Nazi doctrines. On the other hand, it may have been the premonition of the imminent Bolshevik invasion that moved them all.

In any case, the exodus was complete.

WASHINGTON, D. C.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 52. ¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² *Es Viņu Pazistu*, p. 163.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 76.