

Times, 14. 10. 1919.

106904

RETREAT FROM THE BALTIC

GERMANY'S NEW LOST COLONIES

LAST OF THE BARONS

From Our Riga Correspondent

The hurried exodus of the Germans from the Baltic States at the behest of Soviet Russia must leave unpleasant thoughts in the minds of many in the Reich brought up to boast of the German colonization of the Eastern Baltic. It is no shock to those who have watched the gradual loosening of Teutonic roots there ever since the Baltic barons were deprived of the military support of Russia in 1914.

Although the greater part of the Eastern Baltic was annexed by Russia during the reign of Peter the Great the Baltic Provinces of



Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania were allowed a great measure of local autonomy. For a century and a half German remained the official language, and schools and institutions maintained their German character, until in the last quarter of the nineteenth century a determined effort at Russification was made. But a third element in these parts were the natives themselves, the Lithuanians, the Letts, and the Estonians. No sustained attempt had ever been made by their German colonizers to assimilate them, and they had been contemptuously regarded as hewers of wood and drawers of water ever since the twelfth century, when the "crusaders" from Saxony, the Teutonic Order of "Brothers of the Sword," conquered them by force and ruse. Time and again the native tribes rose in revolt against their humiliating bondage, but they had no central government to rally them against the new detachments of wily invaders sent from Germany. The Teutonic Knights maintained their strong grip for some three centuries, though contending among themselves and using the natives to fight their battles.

of a scramble; Danes, Russians, Swedes, and Poles met and fought for mastery there. Each in turn held parts of the territory, but none gained dominion over the whole till the eighteenth century, when the Eastern Baltic was incorporated in the Russian Empire at the Third Partition of Poland. But the descendants of the Teutonic Knights remained, and as local landlords gave allegiance to the Tsar of Russia, and won the fierce racial and class hatred of the natives by the cruel methods they used to maintain order for him in the Baltic. In the Great War the Estonians, the Latvians, and the Lithuanians served in the Tsar's army without reluctance, feeling that a victory for Germany would only augment the ascendancy of their Teutonic feudal lords.

The disintegration of the Russian Empire brought the three countries the undreamt-of opportunity of freeing themselves of the double yoke of Russia and Germany. Their land was a devastated wilderness overrun by German troops, but at various dates in 1918 groups of ardent optimists proclaimed the independence of Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia. Before any national armies could be properly formed the German forces still in occupation began to withdraw, and the motley soldiery of Red Russia came to take their place. They entered Riga on January 3, 1919, and Latvia's first Government had to retire to Libau (Liepaja), there to create the machinery of government and to improvise a national army. The "Baltische Landeswehr" of Baltic Germans, organized by the German occupation forces, at first cooperated with the new Latvian regiments in holding up the Bolsheviks, who were eventually driven out of Riga on May 22, and out of the whole country at the turn of the year. The bodies of "class-enemies"—non-Communist citizens—shot by the Bolsheviks were found still warm in prison yards by the delivering troops.

VON DER GOLTZ

Meanwhile the Germans under General von der Goltz had formed a rival Government with German sympathies, headed by Niedra, a Latvian pastor. The Landeswehr's plans against the existing order were revealed when they started to march against Estonia. On June 22, 1919, some 60 miles from Riga, they were defeated by a joint Latvian and Estonian force. M. W. Munters, now Foreign Minister of Latvia, took part in this battle. Bermond-Avaloff, a former officer of the Russian army, then organized remnants of the Imperial German Army who were still active in outlying parts of the country, and for a few weeks in October bombarded Riga from the suburbs. In November, however, he was forced to retire and eventually found his way to Germany.

Separated from the influence of von der Goltz, the Baltische Landeswehr—for a time commanded by a British officer, Colonel Alexander—patched up their quarrel with the Letts, whom they always despised, and were incorporated in the regular National Army. The independence of the republics was recognized by Soviet Russia in peace treaties signed at various dates in 1920.

This independence was the death-knell to the German colonization of the Baltic Provinces. The Baltic-German landlords were dispossessed. The Bolshevik régime had seized all their land, proclaiming it State property; the Latvian peasants wrested it from the Bolsheviks. In February, 1919, the first Latvian Government assured the men who were rallying to the standard of the incipient National Army that they would receive their share of the land for which they were fighting. The promise was kept. The Agrarian Reform Law of September, 1920, granted every Latvian citizen land up to 54 acres provided he was able to cultivate it. All large estates became part of the State Land Fund. A Latvian citizen, though of German stock—a few were of Polish and of Russian origin—might retain up to 247 acres of the estate he had formerly owned.

A complaint was raised by the disgruntled