BACKGROUND OF GERMAN "JUNKER" SOCIETY IN RUSSIA; ITS DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL CHARACTER IN PRE-RUSSIAN TIMES

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Our own times have witnessed the end of "Junker"-society in Russia and the exodus of the last remnants of the former ruling class from the Baltic provinces. A development encompassing seven centuries has come to a close. While many arrangements in eastern Germany after the second World War will ask for early readjustment, it is hardly conceivable that Germanic influence in the eastern Baltic states will ever be revived. The collapse is particularly significant because it is the result not of political but of economic changes. In former Estonia, Latvia, and Courland, the dominant position of the German aristocracy has survived such fundamental political changes as the passing of their lands from German into Polish, from Polish into Swedish, from Swedish into Russian control. And, despite economic and social revolutions, German noble families have been able to adapt themselves to the rule of their former subjects during the brief interlude of Latvian and Estonian independence in the twentieth century. But when, after seven hundred years, communistic forces appropriated the regions, German rule came to an end.

If the hypothesis is acceptable that no institution can exist unless it serves a natural and ethical purpose in line with the spirit of the times, then German domination in the Baltic region had certainly accomplished its task and was ripe for dissolution. And likewise, if no logical and moral power directs events, and if, instead, developments are the result of temporary and accidental economic conditions, personal influences, and scientific achievements, then again the German role in Russia's Baltic provinces was finished. No myth nor propaganda can convince us that German society in the Baltic region forms an integral part of the future development there, just as no historical interpretation can alter the fact that for centuries it was the most progressive and essentially civilizing force in that area.

The coming of the Germans, coinciding with the arrival of the

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Danes, occurred in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The Germans arrived at a time when the indigenous population—later collectively called “Livonians”—did not yet possess institutions characteristic of advanced western races. It is true that in certain respects the Livonians showed a high degree of culture. Songs and an epos of the Estonians, and folk rhymes of the Letts, the Dainas, hundreds of thousands of which have been collected in recent times, demonstrate artistic achievement, a spirit of chivalry, and high moral standards. But the fate of the Livonians has been justly compared to that of the early Etruscans, whose accomplishments in some fields of human endeavor did not make up for their lack in the others nor—for better or worse—save them from colonization by the overpowering Romans. Like the Etruscans, the Livonians had developed few if any social institutions that could withstand pressure from abroad. Communities had developed, but they were of a primitive character, grouped around clans or families in the widest sense of the word. Permanent buildings were not erected; people dwelt in small villages, few of which included more than thirty primatively constructed houses. They were ruled by numerous chiefs, several of whom, especially in the western part, in Courland, were misleadingly called “king.” The connection between the various tribes was perhaps of long standing but weak, and little state-building force was evident.

The people were of a belligerent nature. They fought among themselves and against external enemies, and barbarous warfare characterized their existence. During the tenth and eleventh centuries many of them were subjected to Russian sovereignty, and tribute was paid to the principalities of Pskov and Polosk. When the Germans came, led by priests, merchants, and later by knights, they were by no means unwelcome. German-Lettish cooperation thrrove and was directed against Lithuanians and Estonians as well as the inhabitants of Novgorod. Christianity was readily accepted.

1 M. Walters, Le Peuple Letton (Riga, 1926), p. 47.
2 Walters, p. 53.
3 A. Schwabe, Grundriss der Agrargeschichte Lettlands (Riga, 1928), p. 56.
4 Among them were the Penikis, Tautegodis, Widding, and others. Descendants of these families can be traced in the privileged position of vassals down to the sixteenth century. Alexander Senning, Beiträge zur Heeresverfassung und Kriegsführung All-Liélands zur Zeit seines Untergangs (Jena, 1932), pp. 21, 67.
The sovereignty of the newcomers was recognized and, in order to secure protection, land was ceded to them.\(^7\)

The Germans brought with them the civilization of the Roman, the Germanic, and the Christian world and introduced government along lines prevalent in western Europe. They built towns, established churches, developed trade, and constructed fortifications against foreign invaders. Prominent among them were three distinct groups, joined later by a fourth. In order of their arrival, they were merchants, churchmen, knights, and finally the lay nobility.

The knights belonged to the Order of the Teutonic Knights. Comparatively few of them made up the Livonian branch. The Russian historian Leonid Arbusov estimated their numbers at not more than four or five hundred during the time of their greatest strength.\(^8\) Nevertheless, they succeeded in securing complete domination. Unlike the Norman conquerors in England, they did not mix with the indigenous population. As members of the Teutonic Order and the Catholic Church, they were bound by a vow of celibacy. No marital ties were thus established, nor could common offspring serve to amalgamate the races. For the same reason, the dignitaries of the Church remained a society apart. Although Livonians could and did become priests, the higher offices of the Church were almost as exclusively reserved for members of the German nobility as was the Order of the Teutonic Knights itself. As legitimate heirs were lacking, new members of the Church, as of the Order, had to be recruited from the German homeland.

Therefore a mixture between Livonians and Germans was possible only among the remaining two classes, the nobility who, as vassals, followed the knights and secured the greater part of the land, and the merchants, who settled in the towns. But intermarriage remained the exception with them, too. The children of the landholders and burghers were as a rule sent to Germany for their education, whence they returned with an attachment to German culture, and whither they often retired in old age. Consequently no strong bonds could grow between them and the indigenous populations. Livonia remained for them a business enterprise little related to their feelings. The original inhabitants were treated according to their usefulness, but never accepted as equals.

\(^7\) In 1217, e.g., “king” Kaupo, who died without heir, left all his lands to the Church of Riga. *Heinrici Chronicon*, book XXI, 4.

At first, the rule of the invaders was mild. The Letts, Cours, and Estonians were accustomed to making slaves of their prisoners of war; but this system changed with the arrival of the Germans. During the fourteenth century, slavery disappeared completely. The Germans confined themselves to exacting limited dues or labor from the inhabitants, without either infringing upon the freedom of those who were already free and who remained faithful to the Christian Church, or encumbering them with heavy burdens. During the thirteenth century, compulsory work amounted to as little as four days per year, two in the summer and two in the winter. It meant plowing the fields, erecting buildings, maintaining roads or bridges, and performing services as carriers. Of the fees, none was exorbitant; rents and tithes on corn and cattle could be paid either in kind or — increasingly — in money. Property, inheritance, and free disposal of land were guaranteed to all free men. They could acquire additional lands and bear arms. Some few Livonians became vassals and thus were accepted as members of the Teutonic ruling class; but the majority held peasant estates. Their private property escheated to the squire whenever heirs were lacking. Customary law was codified in the fourteenth century; sessions were held under the auspices of the bailiffs of the Order or bishops three times a year when taxes were levied; jurisdiction over peasants was in the hands of their peers.

As A. Svabe, the foremost Lettish agrarian historian, points out, the lot of the peasants during the first two centuries of German rule was consequently better, and their rights even greater than after the emancipation of the serfs under Russian rule in the nineteenth century. And the chronicler Russow, who on occasion violently denounces the abuses of the squires, speaks in other instances of the extravagant life the peasants led in imitation of their masters. But no matter how favorable may have been the situation of the Livonian peasants during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries compared to


10 Schwabe, p. 34.

11 An example for a later period is furnished by Dr. Paul Johansen, Das älteste Wackenbuch des Revaler St. Johannis Siechenhauses, 1435–1507 (Reval, 1925), pp. xiv–xv.

12 Schwabe, p. 34.

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other regions and different times, as a political factor they had ceased to exist with the coming of the baptizing Germans and Danes.

This fact is emphasized by the dominant position enjoyed by German settlers in the towns. With an understanding which neither the Livonians themselves possessed nor other foreign invaders had shown, the Germans perceived the real significance of Livonia. They recognized in the country the link between the western world and the vast Russian hinterland with its enormous potentialities. Having established trading posts near the mouth of the Duena river promptly after their first arrival in 1158, they founded, in 1203, a port which quickly developed into the proud and wealthy city of Riga. They thus laid the basis for the prominent commercial role which Livonia was to assume. Reval, Narva, Pernau, and other smaller ports soon supplemented Riga and likewise developed into important harbors. Even the town of Dorpat, far inland, became a flourishing commercial center. Founded by Russians under the name of Jurjev, Dorpat gained no importance during one hundred and fifty years of existence, until the Germans, through the establishment of ports on the Baltic and trade routes inland, opened up vast prospects for the old town.

Having built cities, factories, and ports, the Germans were, of course, anxious to reap the benefits. They introduced the economic system customary in their own land and in all other western countries. They established their authority in the city councils, trading establishments, and guilds. Lübeck law was introduced in Riga as well as Reval.\(^{14}\) But while insisting upon retention of their special privileges, the Germans welcomed all to their towns, and for want of help in the lesser trades, increasingly encouraged the coming of new burghers. The unfree who stayed for a year won freedom, and civil rights were extended to Germans and non-Germans alike who established their residence in the city and paid the prescribed fees.\(^{15}\)

The Germans reserved for themselves most of the important trades and practically all overseas commerce. The Livonians were artisans, porters, messengers, fishermen, stevedores, domestic employees;


\(^{15}\) The freeing of the unfree was subject to certain restrictions similar to those in other parts of Europe. The citizenship fees, in 1530, amounted in Riga to half a mark. Schwabe, p. 78. In Reval, in 1560, an ordinance was published that whoever wanted to live in the town had to become a burgher within four weeks. *Revaler Stadtrecht*, I, 238.
others owned small shops. Gradually greater restrictions were imposed upon them. At an early date, brewing was forbidden them by the brewers’ guild; beginning in 1354, the merchants’ guild in Riga refused non-German members, and tailors, butchers, and others imitated the merchants during the second half of the fourteenth century. The formation of mixed companies of Germans and non-Germans was also prohibited. As a consequence of these restrictions, Livonian guilds were formed, but they were of minor importance. The explanation of this gradual reduction in the position of the non-German town populations lies, however, not so much in the fact of their non-German character as in their economic inferiority and numerical minority. Their share in the total number of inhabitants in the cities seems to have been not more than twenty per cent, and from the fifteenth century on even this small percentage decreased, particularly in Reval.

It was the fifteenth century which marked the definite break in the development of the Baltic countries. Up to then progress had been normal. During the first two centuries the Germans, as the Danes, both of whom had come from afar, had “opened up” the land to western civilization; they had introduced the standards of Europe with its Roman heritage; they had brought Christianity to the heathen; they had founded towns, taught trade skills, improved the land, and established it as a region holding a great and promising future. But aside from the solaces of the Christian faith they had failed to secure for the people those benefits which were their due. In line with the concepts of the age, they began to exploit for their exclusive benefit the manpower, wealth, and opportunities of the conquered land. Artificial barriers were erected to prevent the spreading of further culture and knowledge in the country, lest the indigenous population learn the methods of the west and deprive the conquerors of their privileged position.

However, beyond retarding the normal development of the population, measures were at the same time introduced which constituted a definitely retrogressive movement. For, while servitude was de-

16 Walters, pp. 192 ff.; Senning, p. 69.
18 Walters, p. 196.
19 Walters, p. 200; Heinrich v. zur Muehlen, Studien zur älteren Geschichte Revals (Zeulenroda, 1937), p. 28.
clining in western Europe, it began to appear in Livonia. Perhaps the economy of the country and its landholding system had reached a stage which favored serfdom and made it practicable and profitable. In any case, a spirit gradually took hold of the country which served to spread the principles of serfdom. The assumption of the peasant’s "being in debt" to his squire found acceptance, not only because he regularly borrowed sums from his master, but also because of his very relationship to him as his bondsman.  

Significantly, the peasants with larger estates were the first to slide into dependence. The size of their holdings regularly necessitated substantial loans before harvesting time and they were more often in debt than others. Had they been allowed to sell their land and move away, the loans granted to them might have been lost, and the services which they owed to the squire and which were in proportion to the size of the estates would not have been rendered. Since, in view of the scarcity of agricultural workers, it would have been impossible to replace the labor of these peasants, large tracts of land would have lain waste for lack of cultivation. Restriction of free movement was therefore enforced and the possession of land, because of contracted debts, existing dues, and future obligations, became a burden for the peasant rather than an asset.

The transition to serfdom, which altered the social structure of the Baltic provinces and increased the tension between the German overlords and the Livonians, was slow, and the usus fructi and essential property rights of the peasants were preserved for more than a century. In many instances the new relationship seemed at first to indicate economic improvement. But soon its evils became apparent. The arbitrariness of the squires and their exploitation of peasant labor increased, and the spirit behind the system demoralized rulers and subjects alike. Compulsory labor was gradually extended, and this encouraged waste and laziness among all classes. Near the end of German rule in the sixteenth century, forced labor consisted of six weeks yearly as against the four days required in the beginning.

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20 Schwabe, p. 86.
23 Cf. August v. Bulmerinco, Besiedlung der Mark der Stadt Riga, 1201-1600 (Riga, 1921), p. 43; Schwabe, p. 34.
The ultimate attachment of the peasants to the land (glebiae adscriptio) was consistently enforced. The first laws dealing with fugitives appeared in the middle of the fifteenth century. Thereafter, more and more of the criminal and civil jurisdiction was assumed by the squires. Eventually this status was legalized when, in 1562, the Poles took over the country. It was they who consolidated the assumed rights of the lords by the Privilegium Sigismundi Augusti, which deprived the Livonians of what little remained of their freedom. Criminal and civil jurisdiction, exercised in former days by Order and Church, was granted as well to the lesser nobility, and additional stringent measures contributed to the further decay of Livonian freedom.\(^{24}\) Thus, while in western Europe the political status of the serfs began to improve and the dominating influence of the nobility was broken, Livonia fostered a development inconsistent with the general trend.

The cities showed similar tendencies, but the steps undertaken were less drastic. Toward the end of the fifteenth century, discrimination against non-Germans was prevalent in all fields, and particularly in overseas trade. Riga forbade even the acquisition of real estate to all except citizens or foreigners who already owned property.\(^{25}\) Social differences between the German groups within the cities and the Livonians were almost as much emphasized as those between squires and peasants outside the city walls.

While tension between the classes in Livonia and the discrepancy between the civilizations of eastern and western Europe increased, new threats to the existing order of Livonia emerged. The spiritual and religious rebirth during the sixteenth century undermined the values and concepts on which the Teutonic Knights and the Livonian Church had built their power; and the commercial expansion of Europe directed the activities of many traders into different channels. These changes marked for Livonia the transition from the mediaeval to the modern period and introduced the “critical period” of German rule in the Baltic. The significance of this transition time lies in the fact that while the political structure and the existing feudal ties were destroyed, their collapse proved to be no decisive factor; for so long as the economic basis of German domination in the Baltic provinces remained unshaken, the social classes were preserved and

\(^{24}\) *Codex Diplomaticus Regni Poloniae et Magni Ducatus Lituaniae . . .*, ed. Mathias Dogiel (5 vols.; Vilna, 1758–64), V, cxxxix.

\(^{25}\) Walters, p. 195.
German influence persisted. Far from being reduced in importance, the Germans succeeded in adjusting themselves to foreign rule, in regaining an influence that seemed irrevocably lost, and in exercising it for another three centuries. It is true that we find no historical evidence indicating that the Germans were aware of the fact that their position depended upon their hold on their lands and not on their political affiliation. Nevertheless, we are surprised at the comparative ease with which they relinquished the bonds connecting them with the homeland and submitted to foreign rule, and at their unshakable tenacity, by which they kept a firm grip on the vast estates and continued to dominate the economy of both land and town.

Historians usually date the beginnings of the critical period with the year 1558. It may be more appropriate to date it from the secularization of the Prussian branch of the Teutonic Knights in 1525, the submission of the High Master to Poland, and the introduction of the Reformation into the Baltic provinces. These were the events which combined to interrupt the previously existing ties with the German empire, to undermine the position of the Catholic Church in Livonia, and to expose the anachronistic institution of the knightly Order. Yet, it was only with the Russian invasion of Livonia in 1558 that the final act began and the dissolution of the state of Livonia became a fact.

Contrary to a widely accepted view, the fundamental interests of the German empire as a whole were not affected by the Russian attack on Livonia and the resultant changes in the life of the German inhabitants. Indeed, any interests outside the boundaries of Livonia were only those of one small group belonging to a class occupying a comparatively narrow sector of the empire. This group was part of the Westphalian and Rhenish aristocracy, and to a lesser degree of the lower Saxony and Mecklenburg nobility. The great advantage which the nobility in these regions derived from their connection with Livonia consisted in the opportunity for providing younger sons, who were excluded from the inheritance of their paternal estates, with promising positions in the Order, high offices in the Church, or at least a livelihood as vassals on conquered lands or escheated estates. For many centuries, all these posts had fallen to just this section of the German aristocracy, partly because of tradition and partly because of family ties. Since the loss of Livonia threatened the continued enjoyment of the opportunity, a way was sought to perpetuate the existing status.
As leader of the interested group, Johann Albrecht, Duke of Mecklenburg, joined his efforts with those of the Baltic barons and fought for unified action to preserve the German position in the Baltic provinces. Before the imperial diet assembled at Augsburg in 1559, he urged the estates of the empire to rally to the defense of Livonia against the Russian onslaught. Johann Albrecht was motivated by strong personal reasons, because after an inheritance settlement in Mecklenburg his younger brother, Christoph, had been nominated to the most lucrative and promising position in Livonia, that of coadjutor of the archbishop of Riga. The imperial diet, however, proved reluctant to act in favor of the German Baltic nobility. Not only were the estates of the empire essentially uninterested in the fate of Livonia, but a strong party existed which actually welcomed the breakdown of German domination there. Not having shared, during former centuries, in the benefits derived from Livonia, this party now feared the expense, the poor prospects for its members, and most of all the eventual gains for its political and religious opponents in northern Germany, and was consequently unwilling to make the sacrifices necessary to provide effective means for saving Livonia. Johann Albrecht's renewed efforts during the following year, 1560, at a second diet, held this time at Speier, met with like failure.

Whether or not imperial action could have succeeded at all in postponing the breakdown of an outmoded system may well be questioned. In any case, the attitude of the imperial estates not only shattered the hopes of Johann Albrecht and the North German noble families, but also brought the Germans in Livonia to realize that no help could be expected from the homeland. Unable to defend themselves alone they were thus faced by the prospect of losing their lands, privileged position, and future opportunities. They decided to save these at any price. Ignoring all national bonds, which at the time had come to be of deep meaning to the peoples in western Europe, and invoking—for the last time—the old feudal concepts, they thereupon voluntarily severed their political ties with the empire and sacrificed their independence for the sake

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26 Christoph, of a Protestant family, had been educated by his mother as a Catholic. F. W. Schirrmacher, *Johann Albrecht I., Herzog von Mecklenburg* (Wismar, 1885), pp. 283 ff.

of their worldly possessions. Secularizing the Order, the knights became part of the nobility of the country, and all entered into a new feudal relationship with the Swedish and Polish kings respectively. On June 4, 1561, the Estonian divisions of the country recognized Erik XIV of Sweden as their lord.\textsuperscript{28} In November of the same year, the knights and the barons ruling the rest of the country, including the archbishop of Riga and many other prelates, signed a subjection treaty with the Polish kingdom.\textsuperscript{29} In March, 1562, at a great ceremony at Riga, all the imperial grants, documents, seals, and declarations of privileges were handed over to the new master.

As a condition of their submission and in exchange for their political allegiance, the now unified German nobility demanded new grants and liberties which ultimately strengthened their position. Despite their separation from the empire they insisted upon remaining a society apart and preserving their national character. The agreement made with Sweden was not quite so specific as that with Poland, which left no doubt as to the rights of the Germans. Twenty-seven points embodied the concessions wrested from the Polish king. He agreed to appoint none but Germans to offices in Livonia; they alone were to fill the various positions as magistrates; German law and German courts were to be preserved. The landholding nobility were assured of their privileges, of their rights regarding female inheritance, restitution for losses incurred during past years, jurisdiction over their own members, and free access to the king. Peasants were not to be taken into servitude by Poles, and full recognition, protection, and integrity of the individual estates was guaranteed.\textsuperscript{30}

Like the former knights of the Teutonic Order and the nobility in the country, the German merchants in the towns secured the most extensive liberties before submitting to new rulers. The leading city, Riga, fought for her rights for almost twenty years, and it was only in 1581 that she surrendered to the Poles, after securing through the \textit{Corpus Privilegiorum Stephanum} such rights as would guarantee continued control by German merchants. Reval submitted to Swedish domination more promptly, receiving from the less

\textsuperscript{28} Sveriges Traktater med frammande makt, ed. O. S. Rydberg (14 vols.; Stockholm, 1887-), IV, 329, 340.
\textsuperscript{29} \textit{Codex . . . Poloniae}, V, cxxxviii.
trade-minded Swedes the privileges which she shrewdly bargained for. Riga and Reval likewise retained their membership in the Hanseatic league.

While the nobility in Livonia—or, as they may from now on be termed, the "Junker"—and the merchants succeeded in preserving the essential foundations of their social position, the nobility in the empire, was the only group that failed to maintain its former advantages. In vain did Johann Albrecht of Mecklenburg struggle to hold the endangered position. In 1564, he travelled to Poland. Fully prepared to adjust his policy to the new situation, he did not insist on the continuation of imperial authority but accepted, like the nobility in Livonia, the fact of foreign rule. Yet he made every effort to preserve the opportunities formerly existing for the younger sons of the north German aristocracy. But his actions were no longer in the interest of the Livonian nobility. Freed of their vow of celibacy, there was no longer the necessity for a steady influx of Germans from abroad; the noble class within the country now provided heirs. Nevertheless, Johann Albrecht of Mecklenburg persisted. He offered an oath of allegiance to the Polish king, provided Poland assumed the role formerly played by the empire and were willing to invest Johann Albrecht's seven year old son with the vacant see of Riga.31 This request was fulfilled, but additional conditions rendered all efforts futile. Eventually, the Duke of Mecklenburg and the class which he represented, victims of the changed times, were obliged to abandon their hopes.

It was thus under a different rule, yet with renewed strength, that the Germans in Livonia emerged from the critical period. The withdrawal of the Russians from Livonia in the early eighties of the sixteenth century marked the end of the era. Vast changes had taken place during the twenty-five years of struggle. The connection between the Germans in Livonia and their homeland was severed; no longer could they procure support or reinforcements from the empire, and their political rule had passed into foreign hands. The Order was dissolved, the Church broken up. But the new allegiance compensated for all this by the excellent prospects it offered. The new masters were responsible for the defense of the country; internal strife resulting from rivalry between Order and Church ceased; heirs to German institutions and tradition were reared in their own ranks; treaties guaranteed the preservation of

31 Codex ... Poloniae, V, cxliv.
the classes; and peace brought prosperity. Economically, the foundation for future strength, the possession of landed estates, was safeguarded.

How quickly, on the basis of such arrangements, the rehabilitation of the German nobility could proceed, is evidenced by the fate of one of the best known families in Livonia, the Tiesenhausen.

Heinrich von Tiesenhausen, the head of the family, born about 1520, had been an important political figure during the critical period. With others he had participated in various diplomatic missions and had fought for and secured the wide privileges which the Poles and the Swedes alike were compelled to grant to the nobility when they abrogated the rule of the empire and submitted to foreign suzerainty.

In 1577, while Tiesenhausen happened to be in Riga, his estates, painfully preserved throughout the times of the change in political rule, were invaded by the Russians and his entire family fell into their hands. "Anno 1578, the eighth of January," he wrote in his diary, "when, alas, deprived by the Muscovite not only of my house, estate, and all possessions, but also of my dear wife together with five children, and also of all my records, I had to begin all anew." 82 With the proceeds from the sale of some valuables, with gifts, and with considerable sums which he managed to collect, he began, close upon his sixtieth year, to rebuild the lost estates. In 1582, when peace in Livonia was restored, he was reinstated in his two great estates of Berson and Kaltznau. In the same year he started anew the cultivation of his former lands. Barley, rye, and wheat were raised and although, by the end of the year, he had but 40 marks in cash, the total balance showed no less than 14,680 marks. Another two years later, the entry for the year is followed by the well justified words: "To God be praise and thanks in eternity." Political and economic conditions soon became stabilized, and Tiesenhausen's family, who had to wait for their liberation until the possession and prosperity of the estates were restored, were eventually reunited, except for two children who stayed on in Russia by choice. From 1590 on, for more than ten years, the crops were good and the price paid for Tiesenhausen's rye remained stable, bearing witness to the soundness of conditions on the great estates.

Like the Tiesenhausen, the other noble families drew new strength and new importance from the land they possessed. With an economic foundation safely laid, they had small cause for anxiety at foreign political domination. As long as their landholdings and privileges were untouched, they faithfully served the new masters. Aided by superior education and knowledge, as well as economic prestige, they were soon seated in the highest councils of state. They influenced policies in the entire east and thus gained a wider authority than they had ever before possessed.

Throughout the times of Polish sovereignty, the backward character of Polish institutions and the unhindered liberties of the Polish aristocracy coupled with their disregard for the rising spirit in western Europe served to protect the position of the Junker in the Baltic provinces. The ruthlessness of the Poles toward their own peasants, the rigor with which they tried to force Catholicism on this Protestant land, and their ambitious policy of aggrandizement which drained away the wealth of the country,\(^{83}\) gave the Baltic nobility and merchant class ample opportunity to regain much lost sympathy. It also enabled the Junker to maintain their exclusiveness, which persisted until their removal in the twentieth century.

When, in the first part of the seventeenth century, the Swedes took Livonia from the Poles and united it to their Estonian possessions, a new problem arose for the Germans in the Baltic provinces. It was not, to be sure, the transfer of their allegiance to another foreign power, for by now aware of their international role, they easily arranged for the transition. It was that the Swedish attitude toward the landholding system in Livonia was entirely different from the Polish. As early as the first year of Sweden’s rule in Estonia, in 1561, King Erik XIV had issued orders restraining the license of the squires toward their peasants,\(^{84}\) and in 1570 King John III had followed his brother’s example.\(^{85}\) From that time on, the Swedish kings consistently opposed the extravagant privileges of the nobility, although they had guaranteed its liberties. However, thwarted in carrying out their intentions by interminable wars encompassing the whole of Europe, they were unable to devote their full attention to domestic affairs until the termination of the Thirty

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\(^{83}\) “Polonia caelum nobilium, paradisus clericorum, aurifodina advenarum, infernus rusticorum.”

\(^{84}\) Schirren, VIII, 229 ff., 322.

\(^{85}\) Sveriges Traktater, IV, 340.
Years' War. In 1655, plans were drawn up by the crown for the confiscation of landed estates. The measures were aimed at all the possessions of the Swedish aristocracy which had been obtained illegally or through the practice of favoritism, whether in Sweden herself or in conquered territories. This confiscation was soon extended to reach the German barons in Livonia, although these had acquired their estates at a much earlier period, long before the alleged alienation of crown goods, and had received definite promises regarding their possessions at the time of their submission. At the outset, Sweden sought to persuade the Junker to end serfdom voluntarily and to consent to a reduction of their holdings, but failing in this the Swedes resorted to force. At the same time, they undertook to appoint non-German professors at the University of Dorpat and to reduce, if not entirely abolish, the German Church service and to replace it by services in non-German language.  

Indeed, such designs imperiled the position and the very existence of the German aristocracy in the Baltic provinces far more than all prior changes. The Junker countered with energetic opposition. With tears and petitions the Swedes were entreated to withdraw their plans. But when instead the king appointed a ruthless and head-strong governor to enforce the decrees, open rebellion broke out. Parties were formed, one of which schemed for re-establishment of Livonian independence under the sovereignty of Poland as the haven of privileged aristocracy, while another allied itself to Russia, Sweden's persistent rival for the possession of the Baltic provinces. Soon the conflict assumed the form of a struggle between a nobility clinging to the feudal system and supported in this by Russia, against absolutism representing the progressive forces of the age and championed by Sweden. Because of geopolitical implications and material superiority, the conservative forces triumphed. Sweden was defeated, the intended reforms were postponed, and the position of the Baltic nobility was once more reaffirmed.  

The Junker adapted themselves now to Russian rule with the same ease with which the German nobility had managed the passage from German to Polish and from Polish to Swedish rule. Their readiness to serve the Tsars found two-fold recompense in the security they could now enjoy from devastations by a "barbarous" enemy, and in  

38 The literature of this contemplated Güter-Reduktion is very extensive. A scholarly account of the events in Livonia—though reflecting mainly the German point of view—may be found in Ernst Seraphim, Geschichte Liv-, Ekhst- und Kurlands (2 vols.; Reval, 1895-1904), volume II.
the honors and positions that a westernizing Russia began to confer upon them. Peter the Great particularly and his immediate successors saw the advantage in supporting the Junker. Persistent admirers of foreign education and western accomplishments, they welcomed the Baltic nobility among their chief advisors. Notwithstanding serious opposition, Junker influence grew. Their economic position guaranteed them independence, their social position afforded them opportunities, and their caste system provided the Russian crown with a type of administrator suitable for Tsarist needs.

The aristocracy of the Baltic provinces thus found itself as firmly entrenched under foreign domination in the eighteenth century as it had been under German rule in the fourteenth, drawing constantly revived strength from the land which it possessed and administered. It carefully preserved its own traditions, emphasizing strict education, preserving the German language, and maintaining an exclusive social system. Assured of their fundamental position, the barons did not hesitate to act resolutely and with foresight whenever adjustments to new conditions became expedient. Thus, when early in the nineteenth century the question of the emancipation of the serfs arose, they faced the issue squarely. Realizing that the solution of this problem could not be indefinitely postponed, they decided to anticipate coming legislation, lest it eventually shake the basis of their strength. Having fought an attempt at freeing the serfs in 1804 and 1805 by giving them land of their own, they proposed, in 1811, outright liberty for all serfs and peasants, but without economic compensation.\textsuperscript{87}

The act admirably served the interests of the Junker. It was liberal in itself and antedated by almost half a century the emancipation of the slaves in the United States, where it was carried out along similar lines. The privilege of jurisdiction over the peasants and the stability of the labor supply were lost, but a decisive advantage was gained in that the Russians made no further effort to partition the landholdings of the nobles, whose lesser interests were thus sacrificed to the important one, the maintenance of economic preponderance through the possession of the large estates. The act differed from those for the rest of the Russian possessions where the emancipation laws of 1861 granted the peasants land in exchange for conditional freedom only.

\textsuperscript{87} It was carried out in 1816 in Estonia, 1818 in Courland, and 1819 in Latvia.
In evaluating the development of Junker society in the Baltic provinces, the interesting fact stands out that by far the greatest test of their power of survival was put to them not in modern times, but in the sixteenth century. Economic foundations deeply embedded in the soil of a conquered country coupled with the exclusiveness of a specially trained group, and not, as it would appear, their national affiliation or political domination, account for the extent and persistence of their rule. Once they succeeded, during the sixteenth century, in surviving the breakdown of their political fabric and the destruction of their independence, their future was assured. Whatever the nature of the vicissitudes they encountered or the foreign attacks on their social set-up, they remained a dominating force. It was only upon the shattering of their economic dominance, entrenched in the agricultural system of Russia's Baltic provinces, and upon the spread of education to all, that their power was irrevocably lost.