

Germany, the Liberator

By LUDWIG LORE

How quickly the human mind forgets! For should we otherwise have believed the peace protestations of the German Government and the assurances of German government socialists? Should we otherwise have allowed them so completely to lull our suspicions that we forgot the things that had gone before, that the disclosure of German imperialism in all its shameful nakedness, that the true significance of its role as "liberator" of the Baltic Provinces should strike us like a bolt from the clear blue sky?

How was it possible that we should have forgotten the words of the Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg, when he declared in the Reichstag on the 5th of April, 1916: "Even Mr. Asquith has emphasized the principle of nationalities. If he does this, putting himself in the place of an unconquered and unconquerable nation, can he really assume that Germany would ever return to the dominion of reactionary Russia the peoples between the Baltic Sea and the Swamps of Volhynia, whether they be Poles or Lithuanians, Balts or Letts, that Germany and its Allies have liberated?" In the same speech the Chancellor showed that the German nation would have to recreate boundaries in the East.

In September, 1914, the psychologist Professor Wilhelm Wundt had demanded the liberation of the Baltic Provinces. And Ernst Haeckel, whom the war has shown to be little better than a small minded chauvinist had spoken in the same year in a similar tone. Then came the victories on the Russian front and the occupation of Courland. In May, 1915, petitions were circulated by the six great German manufacturers' association with the active assistance of the ever servile German professors. The literature on the Baltic question became more and more voluminous, until finally the official leader of the German nation took an open stand on the side of the "liberators."

On the 12th of December, 1916, the German Chancellor sent up the first dove of peace. Germany desired an honorable peace. It made no demands from other nations, but insisted, equally, upon the inviolability of its own possessions. It was left to the world to interpret the German declaration. But on the very next day Professor Hans Delbrueck, the famous historian and editor of the "Preussische Jahrbücher," published an article in the "Tag," in which he declared the German peace proposals to be a stroke of genius, and acceptable to every nation of Europe. But then he added: "I will not go into detail, but will only say that I can see but one factor that will probably arouse violent opposition, upon which we, nevertheless, must absolutely insist. That is Courland."

In a meeting of the "Unabhängigen Ausschuss für einen deutschen Frieden," on January, 1917, the conservative Reichs-tags-deputy, Count Westarp, declared, amid general applause, that Germany needs new farmland in the East for colonization purposes. He declared Courland to be a more valuable war aim than the independent Polish Kingdom. The national-liberal leader Fuhrmann in the Prussian Diet declared in February, 1917: "A statesman who would emerge from this war without Briey, Longwy, without Belgium, Courland and Lithuanian possessions, would go down as the grave digger of German power and German greatness."

At that time, only Courland was in German hands. Livonia and Esthonia had still to be overpowered. Dr. Paul Rohrbach devoted a special brochure, "The Struggle for Livonia" to this noble purpose and was seconded by Dr. Richard Pohle. Indeed the latter outlined, in the 12th of January number of the "Deutsche Politik" a plan for the subjugation of Russia by separating it from the Baltic Sea. Russia's weakest point, he declared, is on the shores of the Baltic. It is here we must concentrate our forces to cut off Russia from the rest of Europe. And today Germany is acting according to this plan.

The Baltic Provinces must become German—on this all were agreed. The word "liberated" served merely to cover up a disgraceful piece of imperialistic robbery.