

Book reviews

BRIEFS ON CURRENT BOOKS

Forstreuter, Kurt. *Deutschland und Litauen im Mittelalte, Studien zum Deuschtum im Osten*. Rheinischen Friedrich-Wilhelm Uni-versitaet, Bonn: Boehlau Verlag Koeln Graz, 1962.

The author is a director of the Teutonic Knights Archives in Goettingen and one of the best known investigators into the acts of the Teutonic Order and the ancient sources of Lithuanian history. This authoritative study objectively summarizes the most important documentary facts and attempts to explain their interrelations. The ancient pagan religion of Lithuanians is viewed positively, as consistent with and deeply entrenched in the national character. He maintains that the down-fall of the Order was due to grandiose pretensions of the Order in foreign and internal relations. Extensive consideration is given to the period after the Battle of Tannenberg when the Teutonic Order was decisively defeated by the combined Lithuanian-Polish forces, and to the especially friendly German-Lithuanian relations during the reign of Vytautas and of gvitrigaila, after the decisive battle. The Emperor of Germany sought to destroy the Lithuanian - Polish union by suggesting a crown of Lithuania for Vytautas and by supporting Lithuanian interests in determining state boundaries.

The monograph also includes two other studies by Kurt Forstreuter, which had been published earlier: 1) "Die Bekehrung Gedi-mins" from *Jahrbuch des Albertus - Universitaet zu Koenigsberg Pr.*, Rd. VI, 1955; and 2) "Kauen, eine deutsche Stadtgruendung," from the journal *Jomsburg*, 1942.

* * *

Political upheavals have always provided a fertile source for literary endeavors. We are still witnessing a stream of literary works which reach back to the Second World War for thematic, situa-tional, and ideological material. In such a vein is the recent novel of Josef Mackiewicz, *Road to Nowhere*, (London: Collins/Harvill, 1963). Mr. Mackiewicz, a Polish writer, chose the Russian subjugation of Lithuania in 1940 as the background in which his characters experience and respond to the overwhelming historical events. The London *Sunday Times* (Aug. 4, 1963) reviewer Frederic Raphael gave Mr. Mackiewicz definite approval. "Mr. Mackiewicz builds and populates a solid four-square world; towns, rivers, forests, their shapes and smells. An unsophisticated society of small officials and smallholders, peasants and carters, students and careerists, all spring unquestionably to life in the train of Mr. Mackiewicz's simple and unadorned realism. But this realism does not exclude art. The incidents apparently flow casually from the natural course of described events, but each illuminates the general theme and perfectly echoes the mood of the moment: even as the down-trodden Lithuanians cringe under the Stalinist whips, the scorpions of Hitler are about to descend."

Mr. Mackiewicz's ability to weave an artful tale of human experience from highly political and recent events, which are too recent to be history and too critical for an unbiased view, is a feat in itself. Too often such novels degenerate into cheap propagand-ism and moralism, and Mr. Mackiewicz is to be congratulated for giving us a truthful account of a complex human situation.

Sokolnikov, Ivan K. *The Battle of Grunwald*, a historical novel. Translated by Julius Jonas Biels-kis. Los Angeles: Lithuanian Days Publishers, 1963. This extremely interesting historical novel was originally written in the Russian language by Ivan Khrushchev - Sokolnikov (1841-1929) and published in 1889 in St. Petersburg, Russia. In 1922 Ona Puida translated it into Lithuanian. An abridged Lithuanian version was written by J. Suziedelis in 1930, and it was republished in 1954 by the Lithuanian Book Club in London. The English version is a liberal translation of Sužiedėlis' text by Julius Jonas Bielskis, a noted Lithuanian diplomat who at present is the Honorary Consul of Lithuania in Los Angeles, California.

The novel deals artistically with the principal characters and events that finally led to the defeat of the Teutonic Knights by the Lithuanian-Polish forces in the Battle of Grunwald (Tannen-berg) in 1410 and spelled the doom of the expansionist policies of the Crusaders (Teutonic Knights).

The complicated history of the novel suggests that not much of the Russian original remains in the present English version. The novel must be viewed principally as entertaining reading and an interpretation of historical events and people of a long time ago.

* * *

With the limited lifting of the Iron Curtain in the wake of de-Stalinization, a few tourists had been permitted by the Soviet regime to visit Lithuania. A few of those visitors wrote of their experiences. One woman from Chicago visited Lithuania in July of 1961 under the guidance of In-tourist agents. On her return to the United States she wrote a lengthy account of her visit. The Lithuanian American Council has published her recollections in a booklet *A Visit to Soviet Occupied Lithuania* (Chicago, 1962). The booklet presents meaningful reading, for in it we find unadulterated impressions of soviet reality. The harsh life, the moral and national degradation of the people, and constant presence of the con-trolling agents of a totalitarian regime are actually sensed by the tourist. Even the hope of a better future, as promised by the soviet leaders, is very vague and faltering. The tourist returned home with the impression that Lithuanian people do not expect any immediate change for the better. "However, in Lithuania the people no longer believe the Communist promises; from experiance they know exactly what such promises are worth. Since the Russian invasion it has been more and more difficult to live from day to day. Not even the communists themselves believe these rosy promises always in the future. They are not waiting for these promised good times, but are today stealing 'state property', splitting it among themselves and dissipating it in their own little corners. Communist-assigned supervisors also steal, since they too do not believe in the promised future. The Lithuanian people are afraid of the future, because it seems to them that the future will be even harder and more severe than the harsh present." With such words the visitor ends a not-too-pleasant travelogue.

The recollections are written in a popular style and lack a higher-level analytical perspective; they are impressionistic rather than definitive. For this reason, the booklet is a valuable supplement to the other available sources on the life in contemporary Lithuania, but at the same time cannot be considered to be a competent analysis of soviet reality.

* * *

After the second World War, many military and political publicists have emphasized that in the last war Hitler made a fatal mistake: when marching through the Soviet Union he was unable to properly utilize the quest for freedom and independence by Lithuanian, Latvian, Estonian, Ukrainen, and other nations, thus paralyzing their potential aid in the war against the Soviet Union. Recently this question was again discussed in a book by Cferald Reitlinger — *Ein Haus auf Sand gebaut*, Hitlers Gewaltpolitik in Russland 1941-1944 — published by Bertels-man Guetersloh of West Germany.

The author describes the inability of the Nazis to utilize anti-soviet activities in the Baltic States and the Ukraine. He maintains that, in regard to Eastern Europe, there were two tendencies in the Hitlerist leadership. A group of advisers and perhaps Hitler himself were of the opinion that first of all a total victory was necessary for the German expansion in the .East. Another less influential group of functionaries believed that German military victory is impossible until the non-russian nations of the Soviet Union are assured by the Germans of a hope for a better future. But Hitler's will to total victory prevailed, hastening the end of his own regime and the conclusion of war.