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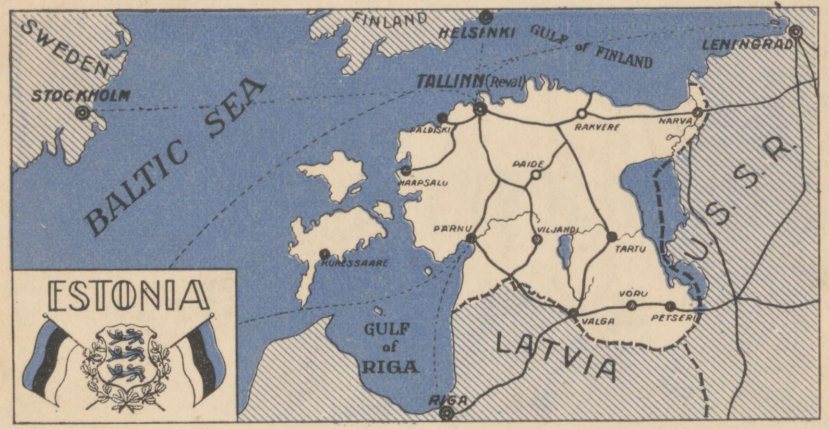

THE STORY OF ESTONIA

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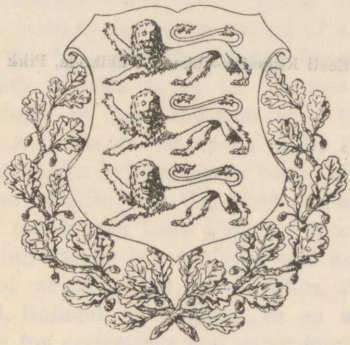
THE STORY OF ESTONIA



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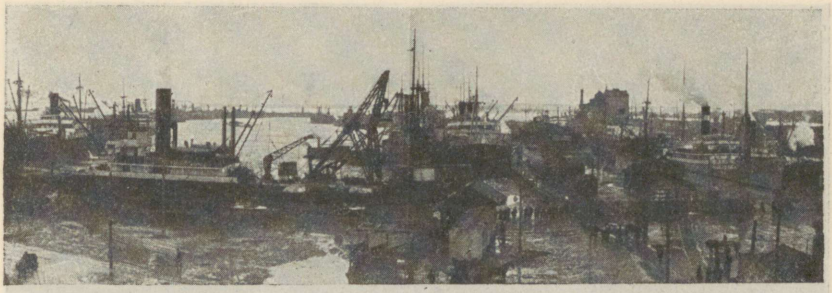


The activity at the port of Tallinn in winter.

THE REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA,

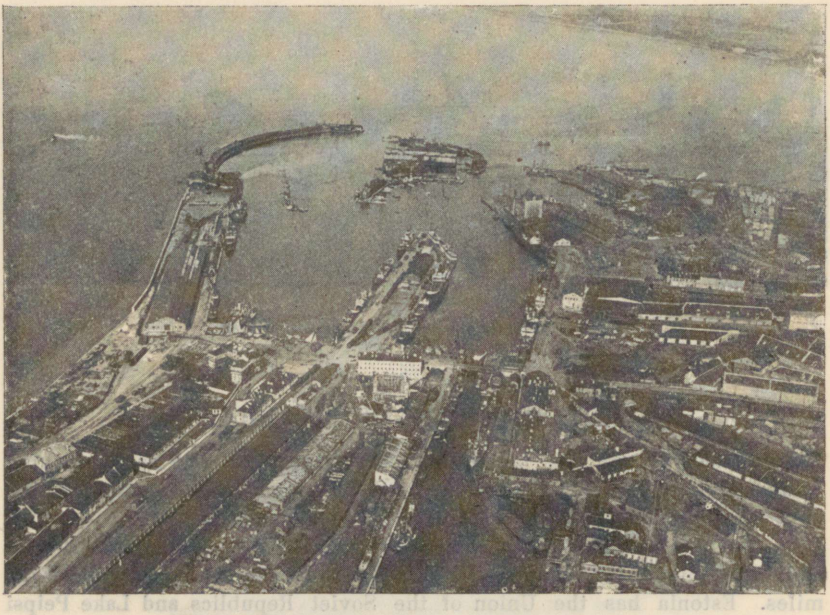
whose independence was proclaimed on February 24, 1918 as a crowning achievement of age-long aspirations of the Estonian people, comprises the area inhabited by Estonians as a solid national majority.

Located on the Eastern shore of the Baltic Sea and south of the Gulf of Finland, the country is in possession of a sea coast line of 725 miles. Estonia has the Union of the Soviet Republics and Lake Peipsi on the east, the south frontier being in common with the Republic of Latvia. The total length of the land frontier is 420 miles. Of this 198 miles are in common with the Soviet Union (Lake Peipsi being included). Several rivers like the Narva (which issues from Lake Peipsi, flows along the eastern border and empties into the Gulf of Finland) and the Emajõgi (flowing for 93 miles from Lake Virtsjärv into Lake Peipsi) provide inland waterways of importance for the local and Russian trade.

This country of about 18,500 square miles, thus exceeding in area Denmark, Switzerland, Holland or Belgium, is on account of its climate and soil very suitable for agriculture and dairy farming. Rye, barley and oats are cultivated in quantities sufficient to make the country self-supporting in regard to these cereals, while potatoes, flax, meat, butter and eggs are exported. In addition to these resources, the very situation of the country and the fact that her ports are accessible all the year round, makes here the natural gateway of East European trade. And last but not least — she has a highly educated population, skilled in all pursuits of agriculture, commerce and industry and well able to take advantage of these opportunities.

THE POPULATION OF ESTONIA

has not allways enjoyed equality of opportunities. In fact, this was secured for all only as the result of recent developments. But the romance of the country is not confined to her recent history. The whole story of her people is a romance.



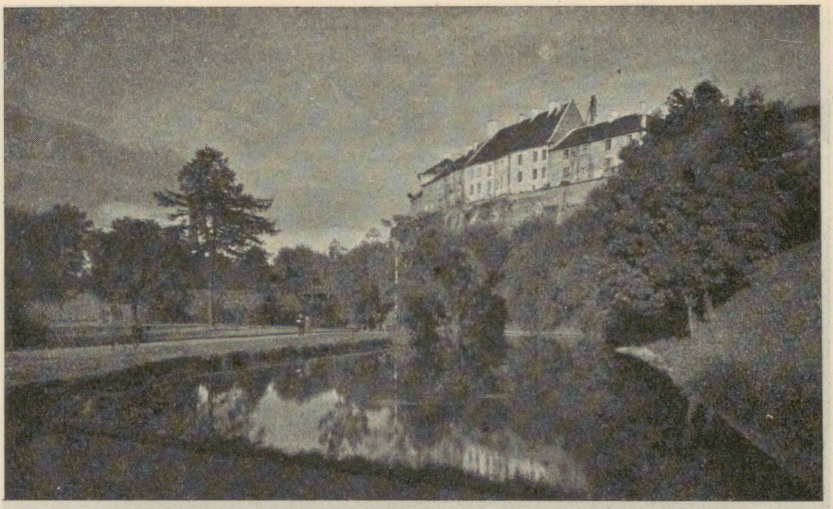
Tallinn. Bird's Eye View of the harbour.

In the light of modern historical and philological research the Estonians are neither Mongols nor Aryans — they have been attributed to both — but form with their kinsmen, the Finns and the Hungarians, an independent group of Finno-Ugric nations, the language of which is very near to the Aryan family of languages.

Already in prehistoric times these nations left their common abode, the Ural mountains. One of these nations, the Estonians, occupied its present sites some time before Christ, their kinsmen the Finns migrating to the North of the Gulf of Finland. The folklore of these nations, a witness of the common past, was piously collected by Finnish and Estonian philologists and contains over 33,000 melodies, 55,000 tales, 125,000 riddles, 135,000 superstitions, 215,000 proverbs and 200,000 songs. Its exploration has already yielded important results in providing also material regarding the old religious beliefs in Scandinavia.

Thus Estonian-Finnish folklore, cultivated through centuries of oppression as a memory and hope of better times enables also the Scandinavian and the Anglo-Saxon nations to trace the original form of their own spiritual life.

The Estonians constitute 87,7 p. c. of the population, of 1,107,059, the rest being made up by Russians (8,2 p. c.), Germans (1,3 p. c.), Swedes (0,7 p. c.) and Jews (0,3 p. c.). The language and culture of all these national minorities is under the protection of what is considered to



Tallinn. The Dome and moat alongside the Fortress.

be the most liberal legislation in the world. Each national minority is granted the right to establish a national organization entitled to levy taxes for the benefit of its national schools and social institutions.

Of this population, 27,4 p. c. live in the cities and boroughs, and 72,6 p. c. in rural districts. 58,8 p. c. depend on agriculture, 15,2 on industry. In regard to religion, 78,6 p. c. belong to the Lutheran, 19,0 to the Greek-Orthodox Church.

HISTORY UNDER FOREIGN DOMINATION.

Until the beginning of the XIII century this country formed an independent commonwealth with very marked warlike tendencies. In the XI century the Estonians even destroyed the ancient Swedish capital Sigtuna.

But this situation underwent a drastic change. The flower of Western Chivalry set out to destroy paganism and to convert the heathen Estonians by means of fire and sword. Thus, after a strenuous fight from 1202 to 1227 A. D. the Danes and the German Knights became rulers of the country, the Danes selling their possessions to the latter in 1346. The country was divided among bishops and the Order of Livonian Knights. In 1561 the State of Livonia ceased to exist, the land passing in the North under Swedish domination and in the South under Poland, while in the XVII century all the country was reunited under Swedish rule. The period of Swedish dominion is even now remembered by the people as "the golden Swedish times".

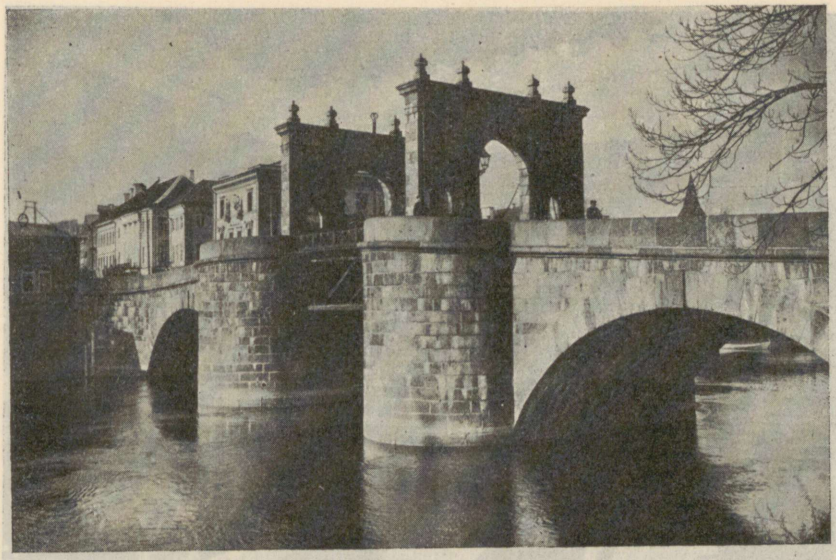
Throughout this time and until the beginning of the last century, the native population had to endure great hardships. During the short

Military review in the Town Hall Square of Tartu.

spell of Polish domination in Southern Estonia in the XVI century, the Polish king Stephen Bathory was forced to remark that "the poor peasantry is tyrannized over and exploited by the lords in a way which is unheard-of throughout the world, even among the pagans and barbarians."

Under the Russian domination the peasant population had until 1804 no right of private ownership. In that year the Russian government issued an edict whereby all the land occupied by peasants was henceforth to remain their unalienable property. Twelve years later the abolition of serfdom caused the repealing of this law. The peasants received personal liberty, but had to leave the holdings they had occupied for generations. Economic enslavement was the result. While before the abolition of serfdom 89 p. c. of the soil was cultivated by the peasants, the forcible destruction of villages which ensued reduced this amount to some 33 p. c. About a quarter of the landless agricultural population was bound to migrate in search of food and shelter. A wave of emigration followed as soon as restrictions were withdrawn. Many went to Russia (whence 100,000 returned after 1920) and to the United States (where Estonians number about 200,000), while the native soil remained in possession of some 600 descendants of the Livonian Knights.

Those who remained had to work harder than before. Gradually there developed a class of independent Estonian farmers, who on account of their energy and perseverence succeeded in attaining in some cases a certain degree of prosperity. Material progress enabled those desirous of getting a good

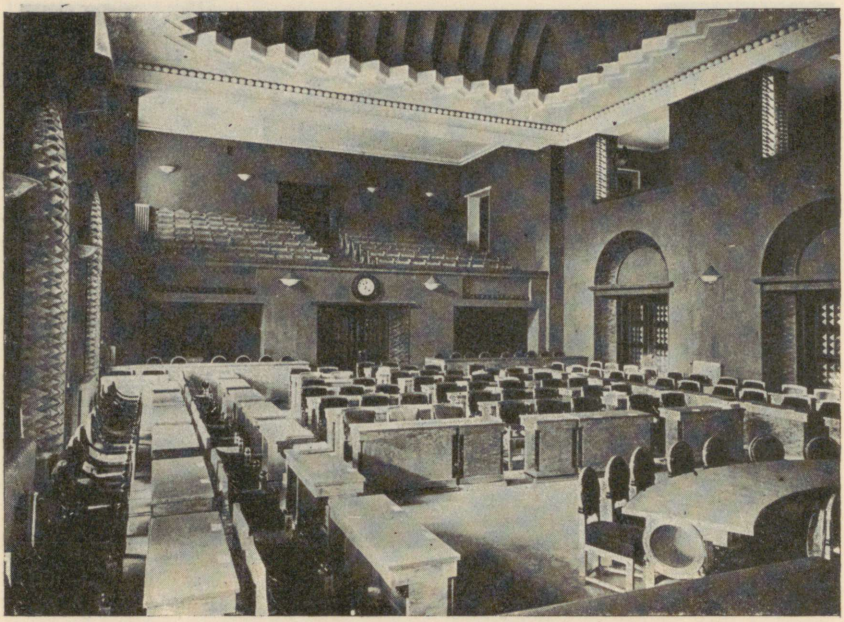


Tartu. The Stone Bridge.

education to take up intellectual pursuits. So strong was the common feeling and common craving for social justice that a gap between the educated Estonians and the rest of the people was never formed. The people simply accepted the leadership of those whose intentions they trusted. Thus the national and democratic ideas of Western Europe could permeate the whole mass of the people, preparing them to bear the heavier responsibilities of an independent nation, which they were soon to assume.

Having contributed their full share in human life and property in the world war, the Estonians never lost the hope that the liberation of hitherto oppressed peoples would be the final result of the titanic struggle. The events following 1917 finally severed the bonds which connected Estonia with the Russian Empire. Russia was unable to defend her Baltic possessions and abandoned these in the Brest-Litovsk treaty. As Russia had no real racial, economic or cultural ties with Estonia, the idea of Estonian liberty always alive, became dominant with the collapse of Russian military power. Immediately after the Bolshevik revolution in Russia, *Estonia proclaimed her independence* — first on November 28, 1917 and then again on February 24, 1918, declaring Estonia to be an independent Republic.

German occupation followed and left the country in November, 1918, depleted of arms, food and leaders, open to another Russian invasion. For thirteen months Estonia had to carry on a heroic and exhaustive struggle against overwhelming odds, in the course of which the



Tallinn. Riigikogu (State Assembly).

country received many signs encouragement from the Western democracies, especially from Great Britain and the United States and active assistance from numerous Finnish, Swedish and Danish volunteers. On the other hand Estonia was able to help the sister-republic of Latvia, which had to face a still more desperate situation. An armistice with Russia came into effect on January 3, 1920 and the Peace Treaty of Tartu, a landmark in the history of Eastern Europe, was signed on February 2. The second article of this treaty provides for the recognition of the complete independence of the Democratic Republic of Estonia. The Estonian people had won a place among the free nations.

INDEPENDENT ESTONIA.

The Constituent Assembly was elected as soon as the entire country was liberated from the invaders. It was opened on April 23, 1919 and issued on May 19 a formal proclamation of independence, passed unanimously. A Constitution was accepted on June 4, 1920 and on November 27-29, 1920 the country proceeded to elect the first State Assembly.

The Estonian Constitution places the power of the State in the hands of the people, who exercises it by plebiscite, by initiative in legislation and by election of the State Assembly (Riigikogu). If one third of the members of this Assembly are opposed to any law, no legal measures

Harvest in the province of Viljandi.

can come into force pending a plebiscite. Elections take place triennially. The State Assembly elects the State Head (Riigivanem), who acts also as Prime Minister. He and his ministers, also elected by the Assembly, must resign on failure to obtain a vote of confidence. The Assembly likewise elects the members of the State Court of Justice, which has its seat in Tartu and elects the members of the other courts for life. The election, referendum and initiative bill passed by the State Assembly in February, 1926, contains the stipulation that only parties securing the election of two or more candidates will be considered at the counting of electoral votes.

Meanwhile *the international position* of the country was further consolidated. De jure recognition was first granted by Finland, whose example was followed on January 21, 1921 by the Allied Powers. In the same year Estonia became a member of the League of Nations and by the end of 1922 she was recognized de jure by all powers including the United States. Continuing her traditional policy, Estonia endeavoured to secure closer cooperation with the Baltic States (treaty of defensive alliance and economic union with Latvia of November 1, 1923). She maintained and developed her friendly relations with the Western nations and the Soviet Union, concluding up to January 1, 1926 no less than 96 treaties and agreements, and strove, in common with the rest of the Baltic States, to enhance the authority of the League of Nations.

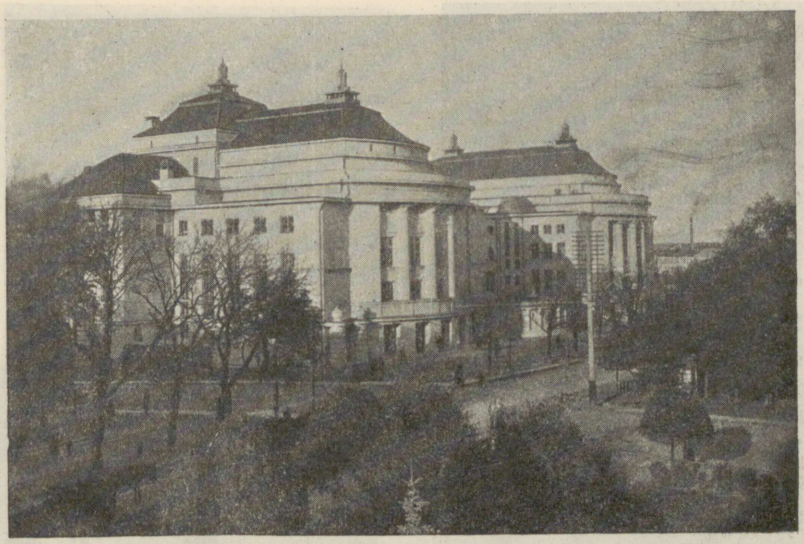
Soon after the beginning of its legislative work, the Constituent Assembly had to solve a question, which had become dangerous to social and political stabilization. *The land reform* law of October 10, 1919 nationalized 2,346,494 ha or 96.6 per cent, of the total area of the large estates (equal to about 56 p. c. of the entire area of the country), belonging to 618 owners and created 32,907 new farms with an average area of 22 ha.

Tartu. Main Building of the University.

A compensation law was passed by the State Assembly in March, 1926, providing for payment according to the real value of the land at the time of nationalization. In January 1926 the Assembly passed a law which expropriated for compensation even a part of the land belonging to small farms (in excess of 20 ha) for the benefit of the leaseholders cultivating it.

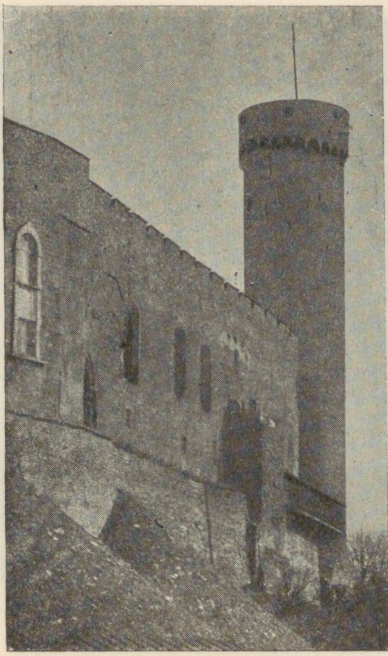
EDUCATION.

In spite of the adverse economic conditions and the policy of russification pursued by the Russian authorities for over thirty years, the educational standard among the Estonians was relatively high. The fact that the number of pupils in secondary schools has increased 42,5 p. c. and that of primary schools 13,1 p. c. since 1918 shows however the importance of the obstacles which existed. 1120 million marks or nearly 20 p. c. of the State budget are being devoted annually by the State and communes for educational purposes. According to the census of 1922 illiterates (mostly Russians along the eastern border) amounted to 3,2 p. c., while 9 p. c. of the population had acquired complete secondary education. 5052 students were enrolled in November, 1925 at the Tartu University. The proportion of university students to the population was thus higher than anywhere else in the world (one student per 220 inhabitants, as against 402 in Denmark, 448 in Germany, etc.). There are about 75 perio-

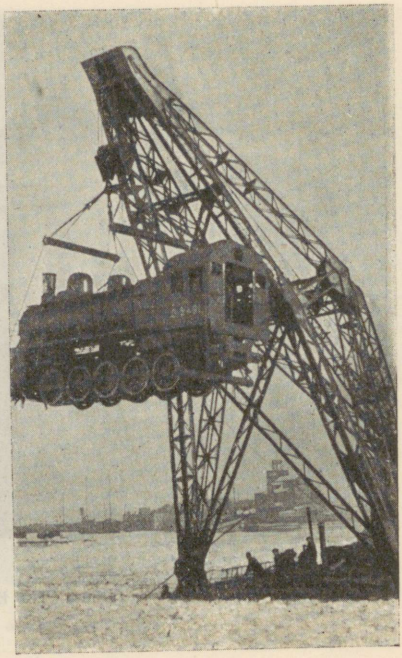


Tallinn. The Estonian theatre.

The Sang Festival (1923) in Tallinn.

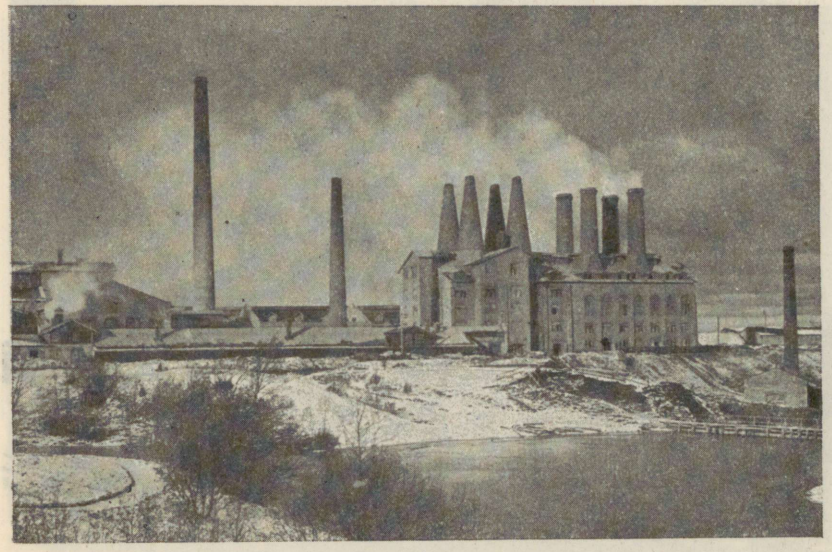


Tallinn. The Fortress containing the Building of the Parliament, and Pikk Herman Tower.



Tallinn. A crane of the port in action.

Timber rafts on the river Emajõgi.



Aseri. Cement factory.

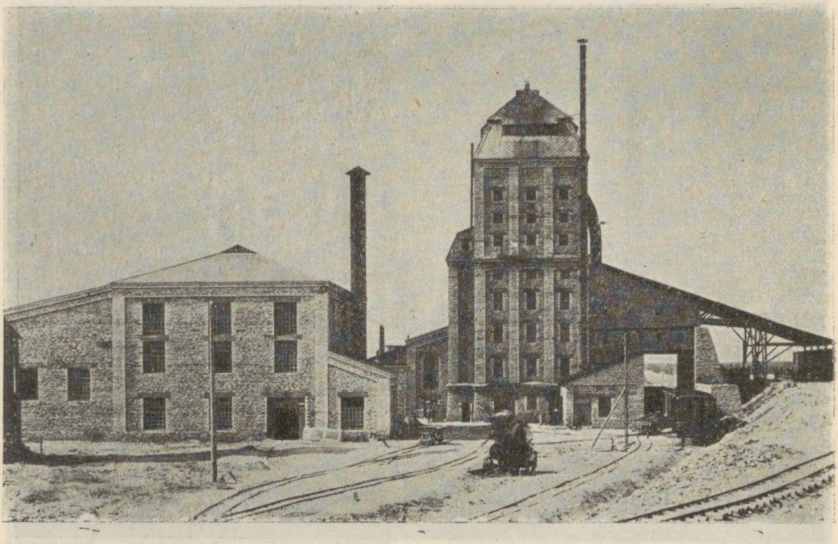
dicals with 230,300 copies in circulation, proving the existence of well-informed public opinion.

Considering all this, it is no wonder that there is talk of over-production in the field of the higher education — a problem which has been the subject of lively discussion in the press. It is hoped, however, that the high educational standard of the population will nevertheless be of benefit to the country, enabling the organization of productive forces and making rural districts more attractive to live in.

ECONOMIC LIFE.

As was expected by the authors of the land reform, this act of social justice has, owing to the development of cooperation and to the spreading of scientific methods of agriculture, resulted in an appreciable growth of agricultural production. This is seen from figures of the following table:

	1925.	1924.	1914.	1910—1914 (average)
Winter Rye (in tons).	182,563	147,077	152,200	170,100
Wheat	21,530	—	6,800	7,000
Barley	115,159	128,377	121,200	114,800
Oats	126,611	163,053	130,100	109,300
Popatoes	649,708	675,411	736,400	754,800
Linseed	12,370	11,694	14,100	12,500
Flaxfibre	13,623	10,742	16,000	12,900



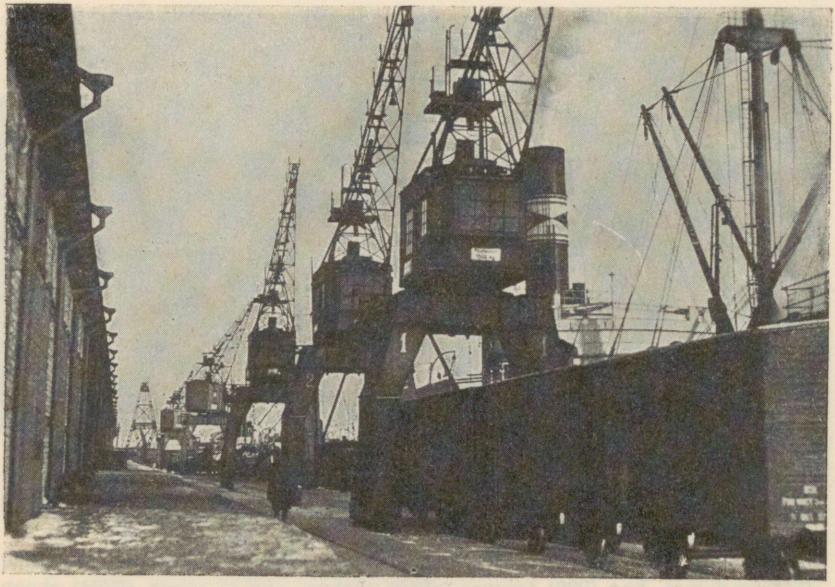
Kohtla. Oil Distillery.

Furthermore, the peasant holder of the small farm has succeeded in solving the difficult problem of fertilizing by increasing his live stock:

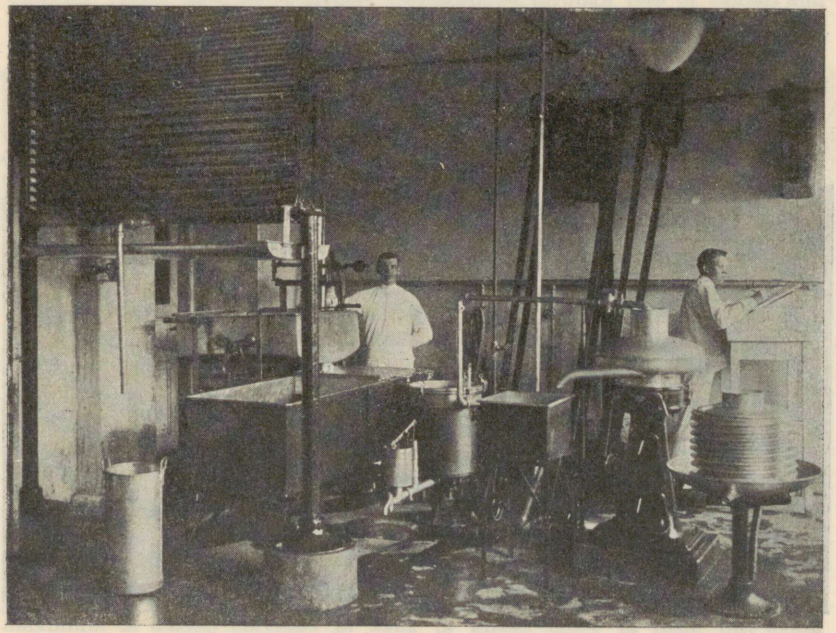
	Horses	Cattle	Sheep	Pigs
1910	163,049	520,822	409,968	220,513
1919	164,980	406,559	419,909	150,672
1922	198,787	527,368	744,937	292,348
1925	223,560	554,570	718,740	338,090

Thus, compared with 1910, there were in 1925—37 p. c. more horses, 6,5 p. c. more cows, 75 p. c. more sheep and 53 p. c. more pigs. The success of cooperative methods has made possible the achievement of excellent results in dairy farming. The butter export in 1925 amounted to 6494 tons, showing an increase of over 400 p. c. against that of 1922 and doubling the total of the previous year. This increase has continued in 1926. In 1925 the agricultural exports reached the figure of 4000 million marks, forming 45,4 p. c. of the total exports. Industry formed 35,7 p. c., the remaining 17,5 p. c. representing the timber trade. The total exports in 1925 reached 9665 million marks as against 9656 million marks of imports, thus effecting a favourable trade balance.

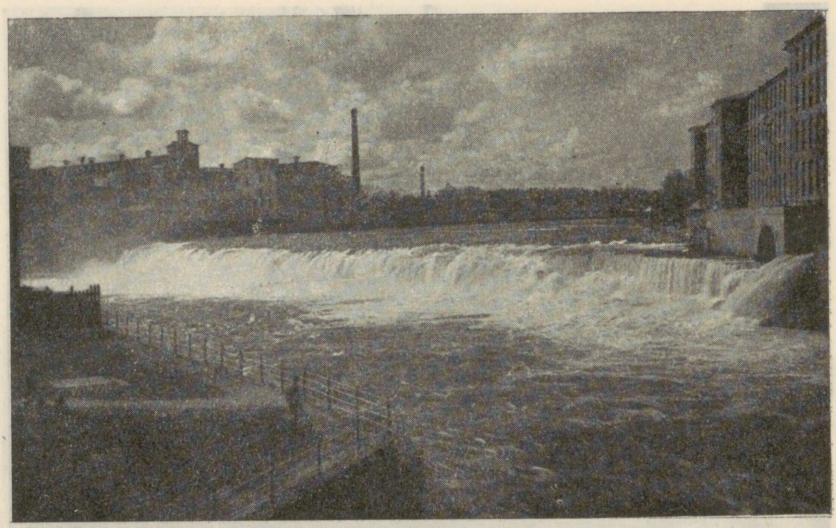
The cooperative movement, which is largely responsible for the rapid development of Estonian farming, consisted in 1925 of 1907 cooperative societies, the central organizations of which have suceeded in gaining a monopoly in regard to the buying and selling of certain agricultural products.



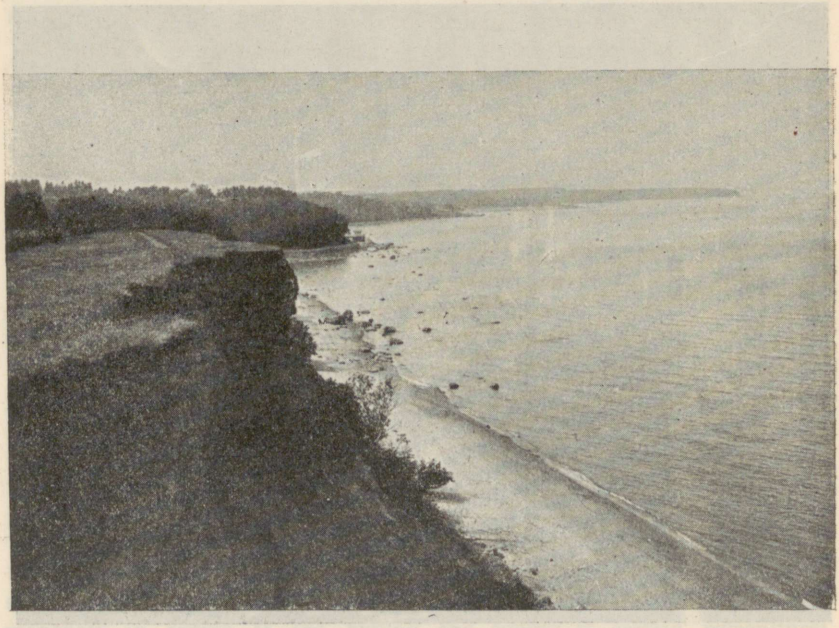
Tallinn. A Wharf in the harbour.



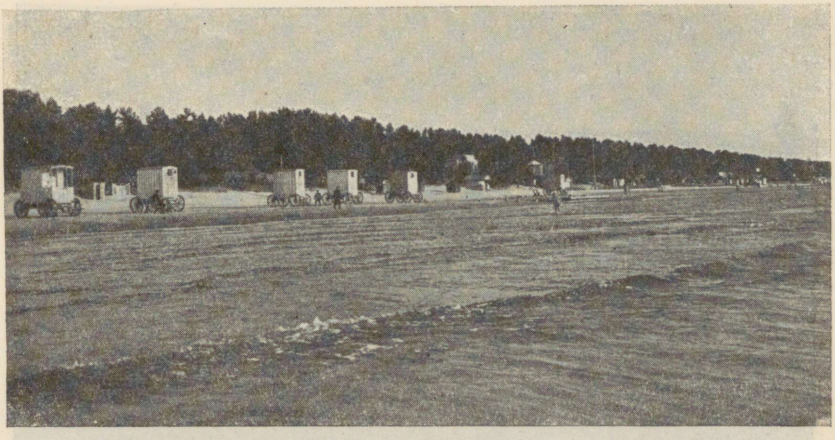
Dairy in a rural district.



Narva. The Kreenholm Cotton Mills.



Seaside view.



Narva jõesuu. The sea shore.

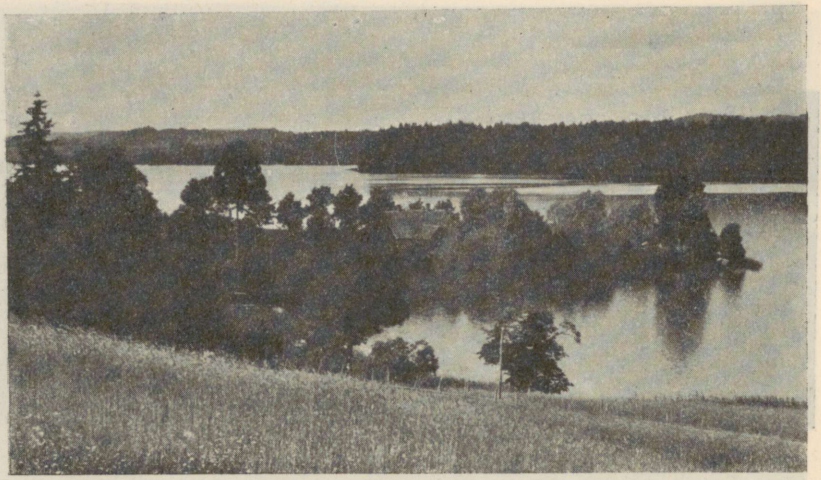
The agricultural effort has been seconded by *the industries.* The principal industrial exports were in 1925 (in million marks): textile goods (1822) paper (1135), veneer (440), cement (269) and matches (117). Nevertheless certain industries, as for instance metal factories and shipbuilding yards, have been greatly handicapped through loss of capital and lack of markets, the total number of persons employed in factories on December 31, 1925 being only 31,352 as against 46,700 in prewar times.

The question of fuel for the industries and railways is being solved through the increased use of oil shale, the deposits of which are estimated at four billion tons. Nearly 240,000 tons were produced in 1925, covering 40 p. c. of the industrial fuel consumption. This industry was called into existence in 1919, since when production has been rapidly increasing. The State Oil Shale Works at Kohtla have opened a distillery, yielding fourty tons of shale oil daily, which may be futher refined into gasoline and lubricating oils, asphalt being a by-product.

The favourable geographical position of Estonia and the accessibility of her chief port Tallinn makes her *a natural gateway for East-European trade.* It has been the traditional policy of Estonia not only to keep the gate open wide, but also to create facilities better enabling her to play the rôle of a valuable link between the trading nations.

Improvements effected in the port of Tallinn since 1919 have doubled its working capacity. Similar improvements have been made in other principal ports like Pärnu, Narva and Paldiski (Baltic Port). The rolling stock of the 700 miles of railways has been repaired and increased. 60 bridges destroyed during the war have been rebuilt. The transit trade with Russia has been subject to great fluctuations, dropping from the maximum of 33,000 carloads in 1922 to about 2,000 in 1925, but again increasing in the first halt of 1926.

TÜ Raamatukogu



Pühajärv.

FINANCE.

The budget of the country has not only been perfectly balanced, but has since 1922 yielded an annual surplus, the latter amounting from 1922 to 1925 to 2298 million marks. This furnishes the State with additional means to accelerate the process of reconstruction. The currency was stabilized in 1921 and remained throughout 1925 at 372.0 to the dollar.

Owing to war losses, the accumulation of capital proceeds slowly, though steadily. The balances of the Estonian banks amounted on December 1, 1925 to 16,010 millions against 12,283 millions in 1923, the total deposits being 3096 millions against 2550 millions. The circulation of paper money on December 1, 1925 was 3488 millions.

Thus the balance of State revenues and expenditure, the balance of foreign trade and the stabilization of the currency are the encouraging economic results of eight years of independent existence. In spite of great initial difficulties, the experiment in democracy and self-government has succeeded and Estonia, having contributed her full share towards the economic stabilization and political re-settlement of the world, has gained an equal and honourable place among the free nations.

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