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GERMANIZING PRUSSIAN POLAND
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GERMANIZING PRUSSIAN POLAND

*The H-K-T Society and the Struggle for the Eastern
Marches in the German Empire, 1894-1919*

BY

RICHARD WONSER TIMS

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DR. CLAIR FRANCIS LITTELL

PREFACE

DURING the century between the Peace of Vienna and the Peace of Paris, Prussia numbered among its inhabitants more than a fifth of all the Poles in Europe. In the course of that century many momentous developments took place. Prussia became a constitutional state, following the revolution of 1848. This state was merged, after a score of years, in a German federal union more substantial than any which Germany had known before. Almost immediately the Germany thus nationally unified shouldered its way to the forefront of industrialized nations on the continent of Europe and prepared to challenge the supremacy of England upon the seas and in the markets of the world.

In the world's greatest war which followed, the Germans rightly calculated the Irish question as one of their own resources within the enemy's lines. But Germany had an Ireland of its own, brought to it by Prussia—the Polish districts of its easternmost provinces. Here, for more than a quarter of a century, had been waged one of the most dogged struggles between nationalities that Europe had witnessed.

The study contained in the following pages is concerned with a particular aspect of this struggle between Germans and Poles. It aims, specifically, to describe the German reaction to the contest—how it brought to a focus some characteristic aspects of German life and German ways of thinking and acting during the period from Bismarck's chancellorship to the World War, and particularly what it did to one group of Germans who took it the most seriously of all. This group was the "German Eastern Marches Association," or the "H-K-T society" as it came to be called from the initial letters of the names of its three founders.

What the western frontier has done for the imagination of Americans, what the sea lanes have meant to Britishers—that, or something corresponding to it, is what the *Ostmarken* or "eastern borderlands" came to signify in recent times for countless Germans—the avenue of the future, the fluid, dy-

namic margin of national growth. And just as in American experience the word "frontier" appropriated an emotional content far more potent than the recollection of a merely political line drawn across the map, so the term "eastern marches" at the end of the nineteenth century was infused with the power to evoke in German minds a whole range of attitudes capable of leading to group action and amounting to something like a faith or a frenzy or both. Of this state of mind the Eastern Marches Association was at once the principal product and the foremost instigator.

The "Hakatists"—the members of this organization—came in the twenty-five years following 1894 to be known as one of the most vociferous and influential groups in the well-known constellation of patriotic societies that flourished in Germany during that time. Investigated here is the rôle that they played, not only in helping to determine governmental policy with reference to the Polish minority, but also in contributing to the shaping of that type of German nationalism which has subsequently become of such world-shaking importance. No pretension is made of systematically describing the opposing phenomenon, the Polish nationalist movement in Germany, which is an interesting and important subject in its own right. The story that follows is primarily about Germans, and the materials used in it were consequently almost entirely German.

These materials, so far as they lay overseas, were found principally at Berlin in the *Preussische Staats-Bibliothek*, the *Bibliothek der Stiftung Preussenhaus* and the *Ostbücherei des Geheimen Staatsarchivs*, and at Poznan, Poland, in the *Bibliotheka Uniwersytecka*, the *Bibliotheka Raczyńskich* and the *Deutsche Bücherei*. In the process of using all of these collections many new and valued friends were found, both German and Polish, who were generous in helping make their resources available to the student from America. But the entire undertaking would scarcely have materialized except for the suggestions, aid and inspiration of Professor Carlton J. H. Hayes at Columbia University, to whom the author's first and greatest thanks are due.

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CHAPTER I

THE FOUNDING OF THE H-K-T SOCIETY

It is not peace and human happiness that we have to hand on to our descendants, but rather the eternal struggle for the preservation and improvement of our national character.

MAX WEBER, 1895.

IN the German Empire of Otto von Bismarck and the last of the Hohenzollerns, "Eastern Marches" was the name popularly acquired by the borderlands, beginning beyond the Oder River, between Germans and Slavs—for centuries Prussia's most open frontier—a colonial region and a stage for the exploits of all the Prussian heroes from the time of the Teutonic Knights to the Great Frederick. When the Eastern Marches Association was formed in 1894 it was not a new thing for Germans to feel a lively interest in this part of Germany. What was new was the nature and intensity of the interest. In the quarter of diplomacy it had for many become anxiety, following the retirement of Bismarck in 1890. The dropping of the Reinsurance Treaty with Russia which followed the "dropping of the pilot" seemed to lead straight to an ominous fraternizing between Russia and Germany's unforgetful former enemy, France. Germans thought they saw the war on two fronts again become a possibility that counseled duplication of the watch on the Rhine by a watch on the Vistula. On the other hand, there was a second factor which drew their attention to the East, for the relations of Germany with Russia were complicated by the presence of another nation of Slavs between them and inside their frontiers—the Poles.

POLISH GROWTH AND GERMAN ALARM

One out of every ten inhabitants of Prussia, a total of 2,977,951 persons in 1890, spoke Polish or a closely related dialect as his native tongue.¹ Since the founding of the Reich

1 A. von Fircks, "Die preussische Bevölkerung nach ihrer Muttersprache und Abstammung," *Zeitschrift des Königlichen Preussischen Statistischen Bureaus*, XXXIII (1893), 3rd. *Vierteljahrsheft*, pp. 193-94.

in 1871, circumstances had made Germans acutely aware of this non-German group in their midst. A major factor was the crescendo of industrialization in Germany, which could scarcely have proceeded so rapidly without the aid of Polish brawn. The mines and foundries of Upper Silesia, speeding the transformation of Polish-speaking peasants into workers, inevitably prepared them for a new consciousness of their existence as a class, and hence as a nation, distinct from the German owners. From the eastern provinces of Posen and West Prussia, along with many Germans, came a steady stream of Polish peasants and workers to man the expanding factories of Saxony and the Rhineland. Yet their departure, while building up a large community of non-German workers in the heart of western Germany, failed to wipe out the numerical preponderance of Poles in the eastern districts which they left. These trends, which ordinarily might have attracted the interest only of students, were enlivened for the German public by a very marked expansion of Polish nationalism. Undoubtedly the fact that Germany itself was in the midst of a great rebirth of nationalism made many Germans acutely conscious of this Polish awakening. It was possible for Germans of a certain type, in view of the remarkable volume of organization going on among the Poles and their increasing consciousness of kind, displayed in speech and press, to discern in the census returns a "Polish peril." Even certain distinguished scholars expressed alarm at an alleged ability of the Poles to thrive on a more modest standard of living, and to maintain a higher birth rate, than the Germans.² A writer in one of Germany's foremost journals of opinion, marshaling the mathematical type of proof so dear to the modern mind, demonstrated in 1894 that, while the Germans had multiplied faster in Prussia as a whole, during the past three decades they had seriously fallen behind the Poles in the native districts of the latter. This numerical

² Eduard von Hartmann, "Der Rückgang des Deutschthums," *Die Gegenwart*, XXVII (1885), 1-3, 19-22; Max Weber, *Der Nationalstaat und die Volkswirtschaftspolitik* (Freiburg, 1895).

victory of the Poles in Posen and West Prussia was due, he argued, to their birth rate first of all, then to the greater rate of emigration by Germans from those provinces, and finally to the shift of a number of Germans to the Polish side of the census sheet due to their conversion to Polish ways of doing and speaking—in other words, their Polonization.³

The concern felt by Germans as Germans over Poles as Poles was a new habit, but no newer than the preoccupation of many of the latter with the fact of their Polishness. The reciprocal attitudes of a Polish landowning aristocrat and his Polish and German field-hands, or of a German mine-operator and his Polish-speaking colliers, are easy to grasp. A movement on the other hand which separates the Polish worker from the German worker, the Polish nobleman from the German *Junker*, the German physician, lawyer or business man from his Polish colleagues, and joins together in a common sympathy and enterprise employer and employee, aristocrat and plebeian under the sign of a common language, requires further analysis.

For the Polish community in Germany was just such a complex of different classes by the 1890's. To the question, "What united them?" German observers gave differing answers, but it was possible to trace the general course of the development. The western Poles had been a simpler society when Prussia first acquired them—nobles and peasants, largely, the latter too depressed and ignorant to be fierce nationalists, the former too few to constitute a threat to the conquering state. Little trouble any of them gave until well into the nineteenth century. The

3 R. Böckh, "Die Verschiebung der Sprachverhältnisse in Posen und Westpreussen," *Preussische Jahrbücher*, LXXVII (1894), 424-36. Basing his comparison upon the Prussian census of 1861 and 1890 he calculated that the proportion of Germans in the two provinces together had declined from 54.9 per cent to 51.4 per cent. In the District of Posen, comprising the major part of the province of that name, the Germans had actually suffered an absolute loss of 3.39 per cent of their earlier number, while the Poles had increased by 31.27 per cent. In less than thirty years the number of Poles in the two provinces had grown by 341,534, an increase of over 28 per cent, while the number of Germans had increased by 168,811, an addition of only 11.5 per cent.

Upper Silesian masses were indifferent to their change of masters in 1742. West Prussia, under Frederick's colonizing impulse, became rapidly nearly as German as it had been Polish. Posen welcomed Napoleon in 1806 and was tumultuous in 1848, and its Polish patriciate remained separatist in spirit; but the force of their movement amounted to so little that an attempt in the 1860's by an energetic German squire named Hermann Kennemann to organize the German farmers of that province into a patriotic protective association failed for lack of interest. A handful of Polish nationalists continued to resist the progressive integration of Posen in constitutional Prussia and availed themselves after 1850 of seats in the diet at Berlin to advertise their cause before a larger audience than the provincial parliaments had been able to command. But railways, tariffs, roads and business ties had made Posen an integral part of Germany long before its Poles made their last formal protest against absorption into the united Reich in 1871. Meanwhile the Poles had themselves become a more complex group; a considerable urban middle class was appearing among them, and an industrial proletariat. Only one fact appeared to be unchanging—the great mass of Poles in Germany gave no more evidence than ever of any concern for, or inkling of, nationalist ideals.

SPECIAL CAUSES OF THE GROWTH OF POLISH NATIONALISM

It was the *Kulturkampf* which gave them their first, possibly their greatest, awakening. In later years, when the great struggle between the German government and the Catholic church had worn down to a discreditable impasse, Bismarck repeatedly sought to fasten the reason for its commencement upon the Poles.⁴ If he was right, if he had grasped this means for disposing of a handful of troublesome Polish priests, then the alleged malady now turned out to have been far less em-

⁴ Bismarck, *Die Gesammelten Werke* (Friedrichsruhe ed.; Berlin, 1924 ff.), XIII, 474; *idem.*, *Gedanken und Erinnerungen* (New York and Stuttgart, 1898), p. 474.

barrassing for the government than the effects of its cure. That the Iron Chancellor may possibly never have realized this is shown in the fact that to the end of his days he continued to refer to "the Polish problem" only in terms of nobles and priests. But others realized what a fateful jolt had been given to the inert mass of Polish peasants by his jailing of their pastors and restriction of the language in which they prayed. Perhaps no better testimony is needed than that of an ultra-nationalistic Protestant German pastor in Posen, who ruefully admitted in 1908, when Germany's Polish problem was at its sorest, that the chief blame could be traced back to the "unhappy *Kulturkampf*." "Whoever lived through the latter amidst the Posen diaspora," he wrote, "knows how it welded together the various parties and classes of the Poles and strengthened the power of the Roman church."⁵

Second only to the *Kulturkampf* as a spur to Polish nationalism was the Prussian agrarian program which Bismarck inaugurated in 1886. It is true that the famous Colonization Act of that year, with its appropriation of state funds for the buying out of Polish landowners, was in no sense a threat to the far greater part of the Polish population. Yet the train of economic consequences which it set in motion, the pouring of state money into Polish pockets, the effect on land prices, the encouragement of subdivision of farms, and, on the other hand, the psychological effect and propaganda value of its discriminatory features, acted together to multiply the common interests of the Polish landowner, the Polish peasant and the Polish business man. How the Polish peasant was organized in self-help associations, largely under the guidance of his priest, how his savings were stimulated and placed at the disposal of Polish agrarian banks which not only met the needs of Polish farm-owners but built up a great land-purchasing and colonizing business of their own, was a story at which Germans, too, could marvel when it was placed before them in its en-

⁵ Berthold Rasmus, *Diasporafahrten. Bilder aus dem Leben eines Posener Pastors* (Leipzig, 1908).

tirety.⁶ "Their organizations," says their historian, speaking of the peasantry, "little seen by Bismarck, are the bearers of Polish might."⁷

CAPRIVI'S POLISH POLICY

Some of the reasons, then, for the strength and self-consciousness of the Polish community in eastern Germany at the end of Bismarck's chancellorship are clear enough. But to understand fully the German response to this situation and, growing out of it, the organized counter-movement of German nationalists in 1894 which assumed such an important place in Prussian counsels down to the World War, the immediate occasion must be sought in the policies of Chancellor Georg Leo von Caprivi between the morrow of Bismarck's retirement and the summer of 1894.

When Germans later came to refer to the road taken by their government, after Bismarck had yielded the reins, as "the New Course," they were thinking primarily of its departures in foreign relations. The general course followed by the first chancellor's successor was, however, new in a great many other respects as well, and in none more markedly than in its concessions to the Poles of Posen and West Prussia. Caprivi's motives for a policy of conciliation were several. There can be no doubt that he was well aware of the dissatisfaction of a great many prominent Germans in the Polish-speaking provinces with the effects of Bismarck's policies. One of these, Count Zedlitz-Trützschler, came directly from the governorship of Posen to take the portfolio of religion and public instruction for Prussia in Caprivi's ministry, and from his office the first concessions in school and language matters very shortly

⁶ Ludwig Bernhard, *Das polnische Gemeinwesen im preussischen Staat* (Munich and Leipzig, 1907).

⁷ *Idem.*, "Die Städtepolitik im Gebiete des deutsch-polnischen Nationalitätenkampfes," *Schriften des Vereins für Socialpolitik*, CXIX (1909), p. xxxvii.

emerged.⁸ Some relaxation of the regulations affecting the use of the Polish language which had originated in the 1870's, and the willingness to appoint a Pole to high ecclesiastical office in Posen, were logical developments from the liquidation of the *Kulturkampf* already long since commenced. Less discrimination against things Polish was consonant, too, with the more liberal attitude in other matters which marked the Caprivi government—the termination of the anti-socialist laws and the reduction of trade barriers. A more immediate reason for concessions was Caprivi's need of Polish votes in the Reichstag, following the defeat of the "cartel" parties, the Conservatives, Free Conservatives and National Liberals, upon which the government had previously depended for its majorities, in the Reichstag elections of February, 1890. Finally, the cooling of Germany's relations with Russia helped clothe with meaning this official readiness for a rapport with the Polish leaders. Ever since the Partitions of Poland, their similar treatment of their Polish borderlands had been a barometer of good relations between Prussia and Russia, and by a like logic the minority of one state could be used as leverage upon the other. The Prussian Poles themselves had known how to use the proffer of their loyalty as an alternative in domestic politics to the threat of Pan Slavism—the usual formula being to promise to abandon all separatist hopes with regard to Posen and West Prussia in return for German guarantees of the future independence of Russian Poland.⁹ The Chief of the General Staff considered it important that

⁸ Others who shared his views included Count Posadowsky, who in 1893 became Secretary of the Imperial Treasury, and General von Seeckt of the Fifth army corps with headquarters at Posen. Cf. Bogdan Graf von Hutten-Czapki, *Sechzig Jahre Politik und Gesellschaft* (Berlin, 1936), I, 124-25, 191-92.

⁹ Cf. Tiedemann-Bomst in the Prussian diet, 14 Jan., 1902, lower house, I, pp. 136-37. [Note: Unless otherwise stated, the use of Roman numerals in references to proceedings in the Reichstag or in either house of the diet will denote the volume-number of the *Stenographische Berichte* of that house for the session embracing the date referred to.]

Germany should have the Poles as friends in a future war against Russia.¹⁰ It was reasonable that in a rapidly shifting international scene Caprivi should feel more advantages were to be gained by trying to win the good will of the Poles than by attempting to render their ill will powerless.

In the brief story of Caprivi's policy, two Polish personalities stand out. One is Father Florian Stablewski, for whose nomination as archbishop of Posen and Gnesen the Chancellor was responsible. The other was Josef Theodor Martin Koscielski, leader of the Polish party in the Reichstag. The appointment of a Pole to the see which none but a German had occupied since the imprisonment of Archbishop Ledochowski during the *Kulturkampf* was one of Caprivi's acts best calculated to startle German public opinion. Stablewski was a priest in Wreschen, on the Russian frontier, and for years had been the representative of that easternmost district of Posen in the Prussian diet, where he was one of the best-known speakers. From his mouth, which so regularly had called the government to account because of its Polish policy, there issued in the fall of 1891 to a congress of Catholics at Thorn in West Prussia an address counseling loyalty to the Kaiser and unity of all Catholics against two perils of the day—over which, incidentally, the Kaiser's government, too, was known to have anxieties—the "alien civilization" of Russia, and subversive socialism.¹¹ When Germans protested the archiepiscopal appointment which came to Stablewski very soon after this speech, Caprivi mentioned the difficulty of finding German candidates and assured the Reichstag that after the occurrences in Thorn the government had no doubts about the dependability of the man who had given the address there.¹² Stablewski administered the diocese of Posen and Gnesen through one of its

¹⁰ *Denkwürdigkeiten des General-Feldmarschalls Alfred Grafen von Waldersee* (Berlin and Stuttgart, 1923), II, 221, 294, 307-9.

¹¹ *Europäischer Geschichtskalender*, ed. Schulthess, 1891, p. 130.

¹² Reichstag, 27 Nov., 1891, V, p. 3111.

stormiest periods and remained a symbol of nationalist controversy until his death in 1906.

Acknowledgment by the Poles of the government's new orientation toward them came primarily in the form of votes marshalled by Koscielski from among the Polish party in the Reichstag. The aristocratic deputy from the Inowroclaw district of Posen had been of service to the government even prior to the naming of Stablewski. As the reporter for the committee on naval appropriations he presented the committee's views on Caprivi's naval bill to the Reichstag early in 1891 and, in this—for a Pole—novel capacity, persuasively upheld the government's proposals. When this was followed by the successful passage of the measure through the Reichstag, Koscielski was the recipient of a souvenir picture from the Kaiser, portraying the fleet of the Great Elector and bearing the dedication, "To Herr von Koscielski, in acknowledgment of his valiant support of my navy, from his grateful Emperor and King."¹³ From less venerable quarters the politic Pole soon received the nickname "Admiralski." So ready did he and his party show themselves for a *quid pro quo* relationship with the government—though they publicly denied all charges of logrolling—that Koscielski felt constrained almost to apologize whenever they sided with the opposition.¹⁴ The kinds of measures for which the Poles in the Reichstag helped create government majorities during the next three years were primarily defense bills and commercial treaties. Though the great majority of them were themselves landowners and farmers, they announced in December, 1891, that they would support tariff concessions to Austria-Hungary and Italy, including drastic reductions in the duties against foreign grain; and they rebuffed the charge of playing politics by representing themselves as a "solid troop of good conservative men" interested in strengthening the Triple Alliance.¹⁵ When again in July, 1893, they provided the margin

¹³ *Europäischer Geschichtskalender*, 1891, p. 56.

¹⁴ Reichstag, 29 March, 1892, VII, p. 5082; *ibid.*, 8 May, 1891, IV, p. 2820.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 11 and 18 Dec., 1891, V, pp. 3337-38, 3534 ff., and 3550-55.

of votes required to carry the controversial army bill, Koscielski received from the Kaiser a telegram conferring the Order of the Crown, second class, and reading, "I thank you and your compatriots for your loyalty to me and to my house. You are a model for all."¹⁶ While German agrarian circles raged, the Slav politicians went ahead to bargain their support for trade pacts with Rumania, Spain and Serbia and were apparently ready, at the beginning of 1894, to vote for the lowering of duties against Russian grain.¹⁷ Only the votes of Social Democrats for the same measures were more capable than the votes of the Poles of infuriating the League of Farmers.

The Caprivi ministry, for its part, added to the concession of a Polish archbishop a number of favors in other fields. The Polish language, whose classroom use since the early days of the *Kulturkampf* had been restricted to religious instruction, had long since disappeared from the elementary-school curriculum as a subject of study. Permission for the private teaching of Polish by school teachers outside of school hours, with the use of the school rooms, was now granted under certain conditions and was subsequently bettered by a limited reintroduction of courses in Polish as an aid to religious instruction in the Posen schools. On the farm front, although Caprivi declined to abandon the discriminatory features of the Colonization Act of 1886 and countered Polish clamors with a reminder that Polish families had an average of one more child than German families,¹⁸ he relaxed the rules impeding the free entry of migrant Polish farm workers from Russia and Austria—indeed, the necessities of German farm owners required him to do so—and went so far, in the *Rentengüter* legislation of 1890 and 1891, as to facilitate the creation of new farms by Poles on a basis of equality with Germans. The extensive network of Polish peasant co-operatives and credit associations

¹⁶ *Europäischer Geschichtskalender*, 1893, pp. 93-94.

¹⁷ Reichstag, 17 Feb., 1893, II, p. 1116; *ibid.*, 25 Nov., 1893, I, pp. 85-6; *ibid.*, 1 March, 1894, II, pp. 1518-21.

¹⁸ Prussian diet, 2 May, 1891, lower house, IV, pp. 2105-7.

were permitted the privilege of doing their own auditing, freed to that degree from governmental surveillance. Poles as post office employees and as employees in other branches of the civil service were given greater opportunity of holding positions in their home districts, a practice traditionally considered impolitic; and to the governorship of Posen was named an innocuous German baron who had more in common with the Polish aristocrats than with the majority of Germans in that province.¹⁹

GERMAN OPPOSITION TO CAPRIVI'S POLICY

Caprivi's rapprochement with the Prussian Poles, though limited, was sufficient to provoke a storm among his opponents. German applause for the "New Course," so far as it touched Polish affairs, came mainly from Radicals and Catholic clericals; among the former "cartel" parties it was rarely heard, although here, too, exceptional publicists were to be found, such as Hans Delbrück, who commended the good sense of language concessions and stressed the vital importance of having the Poles as allies in the world war he saw coming.²⁰ Conservatives, Free Conservatives and National Liberals for the most part stressed an opposing set of values, and it was largely their disappointment and mounting criticism that supplied the setting for the creation of the German Eastern Marches Association in 1894.

In fact, the formation of an organized anti-Polish movement in that year is understandable only when the Polish question is seen as simply one element, though an important one, in the political crisis which brought about Caprivi's retirement in

¹⁹ The various concessions are discussed by Manfred Laubert, *Die preussische Polenpolitik von 1772-1914* (Berlin, 1920), pp. 138-40, and Ludwig Bernhard, *Die Polenfrage* (3rd. ed.; Munich and Leipzig, 1920), pp. 133-34. Cf. *Deutscher Geschichtskalender*, ed. Wippermann, 1894, I, 300, and remarks in the Reichstag, 27 Nov., 1891, V, p. 3111.

²⁰ *Preussische Jahrbücher*, LXVII (1891), 904-8; *ibid.*, LXXV (1894), 202. Cf. *Geschichte der Frankfurter Zeitung* (Frankfurt-am-Main, 1911), p. 648.

1894. An important personal element in this complex of political currents was Bismarck. The former chancellor, ever since the emotional crisis of his retirement the most constant critic of the Caprivi regime and a rallying point for discontented patriots, had brought with him to Friedrichsruhe decided views of long standing regarding the Poles and had expressed them repeatedly in retirement. Among those readiest to take up his words were Prussian agrarians, purple-faced over the grain duties which the Reichstag Poles had helped Caprivi reduce. By their side were Free Conservatives like von Kardorff who were similarly opposed to free trade and who were ready, likewise, to heed Bismarck's oft-repeated warning that the Polish policy of his successor was irreparably worsening Germany's relations with Russia.²¹ The Free Conservative *Deutsches Wochenblatt*, critical of Caprivi's methods on general principle, dilated on foreign policy in particular and on the inexpediency of the recent kindnesses of the government to the Poles. Any attempt in this way to impress the Russian Poles it declared preposterous, while any gifts to the Poles inside Germany must be sheer waste, since their interest in preventing Russian expansion must make them Germany's allies in a crisis willy nilly.²²

Among National Liberals, Polish support for the defense measures and the trade treaties was welcomed, but party tradition and the party platform were otherwise weighted against any favors to the Poles in return that might smooth the way for encroachments by the racial minority upon the fabric of the German national state.²³ The capitalist employers, both industrial and agricultural, who were prominent in this and in

²¹ Siegfried von Kardorff, *Wilhelm von Kardorff. Ein nationaler Parlamentarier im Zeitalter Bismarcks und Wilhelms II. 1828-1907* (Berlin, 1936), p. 263.

²² *Deutsches Wochenblatt*, 12 Nov., 1891; *ibid.*, 12 Jan., 1893 and 17 Aug., 1893.

²³ Cf. Sattler in the Prussian diet, 5 March, 1894, lower house, II, p. 882; also *Programmatistische Kundgebungen der Nationalliberalen Partei 1866-1913* (Berlin, 1913), pp. 54-56.

the Free Conservative party, were more ready to trust the use of the firm hand to block any dangerous growth of assertiveness among Polish miners and farm-hands, than to yield to the logic of Polish clericals and nobles who warned that a repressive nationality-policy would play into the hands of socially subversive forces at work among the Poles.²⁴

In addition to all specific grievances there was something particularly repugnant and exasperating to nationalistic Germans—especially if they happened to be of those political parties which had lost in recent elections—in the sight of their government's relying upon the aid of Poles in the Reichstag. That former parliamentary "rebels" had become a sort of picked regiment for the passage of important measures over the heads of men who had helped Bismarck establish the German Empire, and that the Kaiser should decorate such "mercenaries" for their services, seemed, to patriots of a certain kind, like calling in alien troops to enslave the land. As the *Wochenblatt* put it, "The welfare of the country cannot be promoted by a government which seeks its support among clericals, Poles and Radicals."²⁵ Moreover, these critics charged that the open favors shown the Poles at Berlin influenced provincial officials to follow suit, with a resultant snubbing of Germans and growth of Polish assertiveness which was making the life of provincial patriots more and more intolerable.²⁶ On the extremist fringe, the newly-founded Pan-German League, holding its first congress in Berlin, gave the Polish question the chief place on its agenda and in strident tones called upon the government for a complete reversal of its policy.²⁷

24 Cf. "Das Deutsche Reich und die Polen," *Preussische Jahrbücher*, LXXIV (1893), 130 ff., 366 ff. and 522 ff.; also *Ein Wort zu ernster Stunde an die deutschen Mitbürger von einem polnischen Bürger* (Posen, 1893).

25 *Deutsches Wochenblatt*, 26 Nov., 1891.

26 *Caveant Consules! Ein ernstes Mahnwort zur Polenfrage von Verus Germanicus* (Dresden, 1894), *passim*.

27 *Deutscher Geschichtskalender*, 1894, II, p. 52.

THE PILGRIMAGE OF NATIONALISTS TO BISMARCK

The drama which rallied emotions and groups of this sort in the summer of 1894 and helped to make them available for an organized movement to "save Germany from the Poles," was supplied by Bismarck. The former chancellor had grown used to receiving homage from admirers, especially among the disgruntled, ever since his dismissal from office, and since Bismarck himself was among the disgruntled, the enjoyment of the political overtones in these affairs was mutual. A group of German landowners in the province of Posen now conceived the idea of inviting him to act as the keynote-sounder and the visible symbol in a great public demonstration which should at once rally the German population of the eastern provinces to greater unity of action, stimulate their patriotism, advertise the interests of the Prussian East to the entire Reich, and incidentally serve as handwriting on the wall for the Chancellery and the Imperial palace. Foremost among the proponents of this idea was Ferdinand von Hanseemann, one of the founders-to-be of the Eastern Marches Association—at the age of thirty-three an aspirant, as yet unarrived, in politics, and an amateur publicist. As a farmer who believed his profits had been hard hit by the Caprivi trade pacts,²⁸ he had on several occasions printed his views in the *Wochenblatt*, defending the agrarian vote against the Russian trade treaty, absolving agrarians of all responsibility for bad relations with Russia so long as Caprivi pursued a Polish policy which could only aggravate St. Petersburg, and frankly demanding that the government provide economic favors which would make it possible for Germans to compete successfully with Slavs along the eastern border.²⁹ Hanseemann was the son of the president of the Disconto-Gesellschaft, and both he and his banker-father were on

²⁸ Hermann Münch, *Adolph von Hanseemann* (Munich and Berlin, 1932), p. 340.

²⁹ Ferdinand von Hanseemann, "Handelsvertrags- und Polenpolitik," *Deutsches Wochenblatt*, 16 Nov., 1893; *idem*, "Ueber die politischen Zustände in der Provinz Posen," *ibid.*, 22 March, 1894.

neighborly terms with Bismarck. With him in the present enterprise were associated Hermann Kennemann, an octogenarian farmer, reputedly the largest private landowner in the East of Prussia and a Bismarck-adherent of long standing, and Major Heinrich von Tiedemann-Seeheim, farmer of a large estate some distance west of the city of Posen.

The correspondence with Bismarck regarding the proposed demonstration was conducted by Hansemann, who was best acquainted with the Prince. At first the old gentleman refused, pleading ill health. But when Hansemann persuaded him that the request came not merely from agrarian circles but represented a widespread patriotic impulse and implied a genuine tribute to himself, he consented to receive a deputation. Bismarck was residing on his Pomeranian estate near Varzin at the time, and it was arranged that a pilgrimage of Posen Germans should take place on the sixteenth of September. As the dean of the Poseners both in point of age and in number of acres owned, as well as in his record of prominent service in provincial affairs, Kennemann was designated to be the one who should address the Iron Chancellor on that day in the name of the assembled homage-bringers. Bismarck was then to reply with a message which should voice the principles and ideals held by himself and his hearers, with special reference to the eastern border provinces and their place in a stronger German Empire. Meanwhile Tiedemann actively advertised the coming event among fellow landowners, business and professional men, Evangelical pastors and teachers, in order that the proposed delegation might be as large and as representative as possible. So effective was his publicity that the pilgrimage soon became a public issue in Posen, with the Conservative and the National Liberal press defending it against charges by Radicals and Poles of its being an agrarian, anti-governmental movement on the part of the "Bismarck fronde."³⁰ Toward the end of August, Hansemann submitted to Bismarck the text of Kennemann's address, as a point of departure for his own remarks,

³⁰ *Posener Tageblatt* 11 Sept., 1894; *Posener Zeitung*, 12 Sept., 1894.

and reported later that the Prince had seemed not only satisfied but actually pleased at the prospect of being once more the central figure on a public occasion.³¹ The morning of September 16 was greeted on the front page of the conservative *Posener Tageblatt* as "a long-awaited day, a day of proud and joyful meaning for the Germans of our province." Headed by Kennemann, an estimated two thousand persons from all parts of Posen made their way by train to the little country station in Pomerania and from there went on foot or in farm wagons to the country seat of Bismarck. Adolph von Hanseemann, the Berlin banker, had preceded his son Ferdinand and had already enjoyed for two days the hospitality of his venerable acquaintance at Varzin.³² When Bismarck appeared on the porch of his house to receive the homage of his partisans, Kennemann, in octogenarian voice, delivered the prepared address, gilded with tributes for the architect of the Empire and girt with assurances that not one stone of its eastern walls, at any rate, should ever be removed from its place. Amid the cheers of the crowd, their heads bared, the self-made millionaire farmer confronted the iron-willed *Junker* statesman, each of them within a year of his eightieth birthday.³³

So far as there was any intrinsic importance in the occasion, this simple drama comprised most of it. The speech of Bismarck, lasting half an hour, contained very little that his hearers did not already know of his views—his conviction that nobles and clergymen were the only problematical Poles for Prussia, that it was due to their influence that the state had veered from a sound Polish policy, and that the erection of any independent Polish state in the future, even minus Prussian Poland, would constitute a perpetual threat to Germany.³⁴ Unity was his key-

³¹ Hanseemann recounted the entire story in *Die Ostmark*, some years later. *Die Ostmark, Monatsblatt des Vereins zur Förderung des Deutschthums in den Ostmarken*, 1900, pp. 81-83.

³² Münch, *op. cit.*, p. 395.

³³ *Posener Tageblatt*, 17 Sept., 1894.

³⁴ Bismarck, *Die Gesammelten Werke*, XIII, 537-43.

note, a unity of the Germans of the eastern provinces which should lift them above all differences of party and join Radical with Conservative to ensure the integrity of the fatherland and its interests along the eastern borders. Major von Tiedemann led a triple "hoch!" for the old oracle when he had finished; and the occasion was ended. One week later Bismarck addressed a similar gathering of pilgrims, this time from West Prussia, from the same porch and emphasized the same views.³⁵

THE END OF CAPRIVI'S POLISH POLICY

The two pilgrimages of eastern German patriots to Varzin in September, 1894, might have enjoyed less attention had not other events of the summer conjoined to focus the eyes of the public in the same quarter of politics. From the Kaiser came the first public pronouncement made by that monarch since his accession, on the Polish question. Accompanying military maneuvers in East and West Prussia, he made speeches at Königsberg, Marienburg and Thorn during September, calling for a greater degree of unity and patriotism among Germans, particularly agrarians, of the East, and chiding his Polish subjects for not conducting themselves unreservedly as loyal Prussians.³⁶ No one seemed sure as to precisely which of the recent acts of the Poles had occasioned these royal strictures, but the general background was clear. Since the end of 1893 the conciliation policy had not been functioning smoothly. The Poles were divided as to its utility and a vociferous faction known as the "People's party," impatient with the aristocratic leadership of Koscielski's "Court party" in the Reichstag, cultivated at home in Posen the opinion that the government's favors in return for Polish votes were neither prompt nor great. When, in March, Koscielski had resigned his Reichstag seat after proving unable to deliver the Polish votes promised for the Russian trade pact, German newspapers saw it as the end of Polish co-operation with Caprivi and as a presage of

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 543-49.

³⁶ *Europäischer Geschichtskalender*, 1894, pp. 142-43.

intensified nationalist activity among the Poles.³⁷ The Kaiser's *rapprochement* with Bismarck had done nothing to aid the prospects of Polish friendship with the government. The scene was further jarred, at the moment of Bismarck's and the Kaiser's speeches, by public utterances of Koscielski at Lemberg in Austrian Poland, where the aristocratic Posener assured a gathering of his fellow-nationals from Galicia that "lines and colors on the map" could not destroy the solidarity of the Polish nation.³⁸ After this speech the more rabid Polish and German newspapers alike rejoiced that, whatever else might come, the four-year-old collaboration between "Admiralski" and the German government was certainly at an end.³⁹

The nationalistic wing of the German press voiced disagreement with Bismarck's analysis of the "Polish peril," his one-sided distrust of Polish noblemen and priests and his confidence in the masses of the Poles, but it was unanimous in praising the significance and the timeliness of his speeches. In particular it echoed his appeal for German unity. Some papers chose to view the parallel remarks at Varzin and Thorn as evidence that the Kaiser and Bismarck were drawing still closer and that Caprivi's days were numbered. All voiced the hope that they marked a turning-point in the government's "Eastern Marches" policy and a revival there of German patriotism, and that the various ministers at Berlin would take them as a signal for vigorous action to "keep the Poles in their place."⁴⁰ From far across the Reich the *Kölnische Zeitung* warned the provincial authorities of Posen to be advised by the trend of their superiors and "cease groveling" before Polish aristocrats.⁴¹ Bismarck,

37 *Deutscher Geschichtskalender*, 1894, II, pp. 284-85.

38 *Europäischer Geschichtskalender*, 1894, p. 231.

39 *Deutscher Geschichtskalender*, 1894, II, p. 47; *Posener Zeitung*, 25 Sept., 1894; *ibid.*, 25 and 27 Oct., 1894. Cf. Richard Witting, *Das Ostmarken-Problem* (Berlin, 1907), p. 19.

40 *Deutscher Geschichtskalender*, 1894, II, pp. 96-97; *Posener Zeitung*, 19 and 25 Sept., 1894.

41 *Kölnische Zeitung*, 24 Sept., 1894.

said the *Deutsches Wochenblatt*, had voiced the convictions of all patriotic Germans that the "Eastern Marches" problem was a question of *power* and that "we must be the hammer, or else we shall be the anvil."⁴² The *Kölnische Zeitung* brought its readers a bulletin that "according to a report from Posen, German patriots of that place, men highly esteemed in their province, intend to found an association" to guard German interests in the border provinces. Such an organization, it wrote, would find a response throughout the Reich; let the blow be struck while the iron was hot.⁴³

THE BEGINNING OF THE EASTERN MARCHES ASSOCIATION

In this atmosphere the "Association for the Advancement of the German Nationality in the Eastern Marches" (*Verein zur Förderung des Deutschthums in den Ostmarken*) was founded by Hanseemann, Kennemann and Tiedemann. The blow was indeed struck while the iron was still hot. Immediately following the pilgrimages to Varzin the three had sounded out the pilgrims, together with other likely patriots in the East and in other parts of Germany, regarding the possibility of organizing; and even while Caprivi was meeting, at Berlin, the crisis which brought his retirement, newspapers in East and West were able to spare some attention from governmental affairs to print frequent notices of a new movement among German nationalists in the Polish borderlands. The local Polish press interpreted the projected society as the spearhead of a new economic boycott, and the *Kuryer Poznanski* warned that time would show which nation was best prepared to wield this two-edged sword.⁴⁴ The *Kölnische Zeitung* insisted, however, that the movement was non-partisan and that its sole aim would be merely to protect and foster German interests in the eastern frontier provinces and to secure the ending of a governmental

⁴² *Deutsches Wochenblatt*, 27 Sept., 1894.

⁴³ *Kölnische Zeitung*, 20 and 25 Sept., 1894.

⁴⁴ Prussian police reports, *Gesamtüberblick über die polnische Tagesliteratur* (Posen), 1894, pp. 468-69.

policy which allegedly favored Poles at the expense of Germans.⁴⁵ More authoritative details regarding the nature of the nascent organization were furnished by a newspaper close to Hansemann, the *Berliner Neueste Nachrichten*. A correspondent, possibly the junior triumvir himself, wrote from Posen that the aims which the new society would set for itself were of two sorts—"an *idealistic* one—the strengthening and quickening of the patriotic attitude, which suffered perceptibly in intensity under the regime of the 'New Course,' and an eminently *practical* one—the economic co-operation of our German community, which in business affairs and amount of property owned (and—relatedly, due to emigration—in numbers also) is visibly on the decline." This material plight of the Germans, the writer added, was due partly to the economic policies of the Caprivi regime and had been aggravated through the "ruthless competition of the swiftly multiplying Polish trading and shopkeeping classes, which, largely through the influence of priests, has degenerated into an economic boycott."

The Association [he continued] aims to be a bulwark against such aggressiveness on the part of the Poles; and in this role it should appear as a welcome prop to the prevailingly German-minded authorities of the province, and, by its very existence, to say nothing of its patriotic activities, restrain them from showing too much complaisance toward Polish aspirations, as one or another of them has done in recent days.⁴⁶

Finally, he said, the organization would exercise a constant surveillance over Polish newspapers and the doings of Polish societies, afford "special protection" to Germans in the country towns, and in particular see to it that school instruction in every locality should be genuinely German.⁴⁷

On November third, 1894, in the Hotel Mylius at the corner of Kaiser-Wilhelm Square in Posen, the meeting called by

⁴⁵ *Kölnische Zeitung*, 29 Sept., 1894.

⁴⁶ *Berliner Neueste Nachrichten*, 2 Oct., 1894.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

Major Heinrich von Tiedemann-Seeheim to organize the Association for the Advancement of the German Nationality in the Eastern Marches took place. Although it had been advertised that much interest was astir in the West and South of Germany as well,⁴⁸ the attendance at the founding session was principally representative of the provinces of Posen and West Prussia. In a speech concisely reviewing the history of the current situation in Posen which he felt made imperative the creation of such a society, the elderly Kennemann opened the meeting. An executive board (*Hauptvorstand*) and a steering committee (*innerer Vorstand*), with Tiedemann as chairman of each, were chosen by acclamation. The charter-members then listened to a keynote address from the new chairman, in which Tiedemann reminded them of the picturesque stages, *via* Varzin and the Kaiser's words at Thorn, through which "the rebirth of German resolve" in the eastern provinces had come about. He proceeded to stress three aspects of the coming effort. One was the absolute need of unity in the "imperiled" borderlands. "We need," he said, "a fusion of the Germans, without distinction of class, religion or political views, upon a purely patriotic platform, and a harmonious common effort of town and countryside." A second aspect of the movement was its innocence of malignant intentions against the Poles. "Our society," Tiedemann asserted, "has defense as its sole aim—an attack is something far from our minds. No Pole-baiting, no warfare with poisoned weapons. . . . Our endeavors are fully compatible with a regard for our Polish-speaking fellow-citizens, so far as they constantly think and behave like Prussian citizens, without mental reservations." In the third place he painted a prospect of future political effectiveness. "Should we succeed," he said, "in fusing the Germans of the East into a compact corps, then the government and administration will have to reckon with that fact as well."⁴⁹

⁴⁸ *Die Post* (Berlin), 2 Oct., 1894.

⁴⁹ *25 Jahre ostmärkischer Arbeit und Kämpfe. Zum 25jährigen Bestehen des Deutschen Ostmarkenvereins* (Berlin, 1919), pp. 7-9. Other details

The founders accepted without recorded criticism the somewhat romantic name proposed for the society by Hansemann, Kennemann and Tiedemann. The term "Eastern Marches" as now applied by them was, strictly speaking, borrowed from a considerable distance, both in space and in time. In Carolingian times there had been a Bavarian *Ostmark*, exposed to raids by fierce Hungarians, which early became *Oester-Reich*, or Austria. Only slightly later, in the tenth century, a Saxon *Ostermark* or *Ostmark* was defined in the region between the Oder, Spree and Elbe rivers.⁵⁰ But this likewise underwent a change of name with the advance of civilization and, when first acquired by Brandenburg in the fourteenth century, had been known for some time as Lower Lusatia. While certain parts of Brandenburg, such as the *Neumark*, retained in modern times the historical appellation attesting their original frontier status, a Prussian "Ostmark" was unknown to Prussian administration until the Posen squires, now, at the end of the nineteenth century, commenced using the term in a crusading sense. As applied by Hansemann, Kennemann and Tiedemann it covered portions of the four easternmost provinces of Prussia—East Prussia, West Prussia, Posen and Silesia—where Poles lived intermingled with Germans, but particularly Posen and West Prussia. As a term reminiscent of early medieval exploits at arms and connoting frontier outposts of Germanic civilization, "Eastern Marches" was an aptly chosen name for an organization with a cause of this sort to promote. On psychological grounds and for propaganda purposes it was bound to be effective. "Ostmarken," thanks to the efforts of the new society, was to be accepted and to pass currently as a usable term with a definite meaning in the political vocabulary of Germany for the next twenty-five years.

derive from a letter of Tiedemann's to Bismarck of November 12, 1894, in F. S. Krysiak, *Hinter den Kulissen des Ostmarken-Vereins. Aus den Geheimakten der preussischen Neben-Regierung für die Polenausrottung* (Posen, 1919), pp. 32-33.

⁵⁰ *Allgemeine Encyclopädie der Wissenschaften und Künste*, ed. J. S. Ersch and J. G. Gruber (Leipzig, 1836), article "Ostmark".