

Thorn a German City.

By

Lic. K. Freytag.



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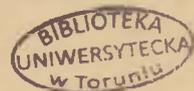
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In the year 1231, the Teutonic Knights of the castle of Nessau, on the left bank of the Vistula, crossed the river, and by building the stronghold, afterwards called Alhorn, about ten kms below the present city of Thorn gained a footing on the right bank of the river, possessing themselves of Culmerland which had been ceded to them by Duke Conrad of Masovia, but at that time was occupied by the heathenish Prussians.

Culmerland had originally formed part of the country of the heathenish Prussians, a district of the Prussian province of Pomesania. By the close of the tenth century, it had been conquered and partly colonised by the Poles under Duke Boleslav the Bold¹⁾. But from 1216, it had been again invaded, and in a fourteen years' fighting entirely occupied by the heathenish Prussians who widened their confines far into the country of Masovia²⁾. The country was utterly ruined, the christian inhabitants were driven from their homes, or perished. In this way the Polish colonisation had come to a poor stoppage, and Duke Conrad not being able to free the country from the Prussians made it over to the Teutonic Knights with all princely prerogatives, that they might become a solid bulwark to his boundaries³⁾.

By a hard and long contest the Knights had to wrest this country abandoned to them from the heathen Prussians; but wherever their sword

¹⁾ The Polish scholar Kęczyński has maintained in his book *O Ludności polskiej w Prusiech niegdyś krzyżakich*, Lemberg 1882, p. 54—60 Culmerland to have been Polish of yore, but he has himself on the ground of documents discovered since then given up this statement and admits that it was originally Prussian territory. *Monumenta Poloniae historica* V, 427f., 470. *Altpreußische Monatsschrift* (Old-Prussian Monthly), 1886, p. 138ff. Plehn, *Hist. of the district of Strasburg*. Leipzig 1900, p. 12f.

²⁾ Perlbach, *Preußisch-polnische Studien I* (Prusso-Polish Studies), p. 63. In a document dated of 1233, but perhaps only of 1247 (cfr. Perlbach, *ibid.* p. 101—106) it is said: *Cum enim jam Culmensis terra finale exitium esset passa ab incursibus Prutenorum, et jam Masovia et supramemorata terre (i. e. Cujavia et cetera terre adjacentes Prussia) ab eorundem Prutenorum tyrannide inciperant demoliri, ipsis jam pro parte maxima demolitis seu devastatis.* *Preußisches Urkundenbuch* (Prussian Documents), t I p. 70f. And in a document of the year 1243 is said with reference to this time: „propter Christianorum exterminium, quos feritas Pruthenorum expulerant etc.“ (Book of documents of the bishopric of Culm, p. 16).

³⁾ Deeds of the 23rd of April 1228, 3rd of May 1228, besides the deeds of the year 1230, in particular those of June 1230 of Cruswicia as well as the bulls of Gregory IX of 18. January and 12. Sept. 1230. *Book of Prussian deeds* I, No. 64, 65, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 80.

established their dominion they took care at once for a fresh colonisation and cultivation of the country.

One of the first feats of the Teutonic Order was the foundation of the city of Thorn which together with Culm, built on the spot of an ancient heathen earth-work, received its charter (the so-called „handfeste“ of Culm) on the 28th of December 1233¹⁾.

The city was destined to be a homestead of German nationality and custom in the new domain of the Teutonic Order. Most of the names handed down to us from the first time after its foundation point to Westphalia, Lower-Saxony, and Silesia as being the homes of their bearers. On account of the near frontier a number of Polish inhabitants have no doubt always been living in Thorn; but their number was only small when compared to that of the Germans; besides these Poles were only among the lower classes, while the circle of the citizens, the bearers of the whole town-life, took up such persons only as could present „birth-deeds of German description²⁾“.

A closer information we have about the national character of the population of Thorn at the close of the 14th, and the commencement of the 15th century. Of this time there are different duty-and taxregisters extant by whose lists of names we are informed about it. In 1401, there are among 793 names of tax-payers of the city only 20—30 that were probably Polish, among those of 78 butchers and 45 bakers only about 1 or 2. The few Poles appear to have been in low situations. In a register of ratepayers of the year 1394 we find in the inner city 800 German, and only 15 Polish names, in the „Werder“ (i. e. the bazar-enclosure) 45 German and only 3 Polish, in the suburbs 469 German and only 80 Polish, on the Great and the Small Mocker 109 German, but only 9 Polish names. Poles are in a considerable number only among fishermen, ferrymen, and the like, and from this reason in the suburban lanes outside the Althorn Gate. The inner town where besides the bakers, butchers, shoemakers, and strapmakers, only merchants and their assistant trades appear to have resided; the suburbs before the Culm Gate where artisans dwelled, and at length the Mocker appear to have been purely German. Even the 31 names of the „Polish Village“ which may have stood on the Grützmühlenteich (Groatsmill-pond), as well as 33 out of the 38 names of the „Polish Lane“ are undoubtedly German³⁾.

From 1410, the Polish element seems to have somewhat increased in Thorn. In a distribution of hand-and teams-labours upon each inhabitant

¹⁾ Prussian Book of deeds I. p. 105.

²⁾ If there were sometimes also such as originated from Polish towns, for instance Crasow, Kalish, Posen, it is to be remembered that those cities, though situated in Poland, yet by their character and the nationality of their citizens were German cities.

³⁾ Bender, Archival articles to the family-history of Nicolas Copernicus. Communications of the Copernicus Society, Part III 1881, ff.

of the city, maybe of the year 1450, there are amongst about 850 names only 70 to 80 probably Polish, and almost exclusively of workmen, ferrymen, and the like¹⁾.

In 1454, when the Prussian League, consisting of the towns and the country-squires, shook off the rule of the Teutonic Order and chose King Casimir of Poland as sovereign of the Prussian country, this resolution was by no means worked by a national sympathy or a sense of national relationship with the Poles, but solely by the wish for a strong and not too far residing protector. They had first considered whether they should not choose the king of Denmark or King Vladislav of Hungary and Bohemia, and even shortly before the conclusion of the negotiations the leader of the envoys of the league, John of Baysen, declared to the hesitating king: Well, as Your Royal Majesty is unwilling to accept us, we must take our leave, and make our offer elsewhere, and we shall be gladly received²⁾.

In conformity with that, Prussia continued after its union with the Polish crown, as it was enacted by the „privilege of incorporation³⁾“ of the 6th of March 1454, an autonomic country „which, though united with Poland by a solid alliance, retained its separate laws, language, and habits, and only had the king in common with Poland.“

Very soon the Poles began trying to alter this legal state of things with the object of making the Prussian districts of the king of Poland a Polish province. But for more than a hundred years such attempts were thwarted by the Prussians. These very struggles, still intensified since 1525 by religious questions, made the two parties right sensible of their national contrasts. This strife commenced with little encroachments on the part of the ruling party. Though the Charter of Incorporation stipulated that every office should be given to Prussians by birth only, the king gave such places also to Poles, promising that it should be an exception; but he did so later again. If the Prussians wanted the new king to take a special oath on their privileges, the latter declared the general oath he had taken to suffice; and so forth. Finally it was demanded of the Prussians that they should attend the Polish diets therewith to acknowledge their dependence on Poland. At length the Poles attained their object by the decree of Lublin, of the 18th of March 1569⁴⁾. Henceforward Prussia was a Polish province. But the Prussians were Germans. Until 1579 the language of the courts of justice was only

¹⁾ *ibid.* p. 93.

²⁾ Leopold Prowe, West-Prussia in its historical relations to Germany and Poland. Festive program of the Royal college of Thorn 1868, p. 16.

³⁾ Dagiel, Codex diplomaticus Regni Poloniae IV, 145. Toeppen, Deeds of the provincial diets of East-and West-Prussia IV No. 244.

⁴⁾ Lengnich, History of the parts of Prussia of the royal share, II. Documenta, No. 90 p. 104. Cfr. Simson, Fight of West Prussia and Danzig against the Polish efforts of union, and so forth. Periodical of the Society for the History of West-Prussia, part 37.

German; in 1563, the heads of the local governments had for the first time a document presented to them in Polish; till 1555 the king's ambassador used the German language at the diets, or, when ignorant of German, he spoke Latin; in 1587 German for the last time.¹⁾ But the towns continued German also beyond the time of the union with Poland. The lists of the councillors of Thorn as well as of the aldermen only contain German names, even far into the 18th century.

But also the guilds (of trades) of Thorn were German and took care of the purity of the German descent of their members. In the year 1554, the guild of the linen-weavers send two envoys to Kalish to ascertain whether a master-workman that had come to settle in Thorn might not be „a Pole, of Polish kin.“ In 1549, two apprentices are declined by that same trade, „because, though they pretended to be of German kin, and also presented testimonials of distinctly German description“, yet their external parents „had become polonised; whereupon the trade unanimously resolved that none should be apprenticed but himself and his father could speak German and produce good German letters“²⁾.

Later on the guilds could not maintain themselves so quite purely German, but still in the course of the 17th century several council decisions forbid „more than six Polish masters to be admitted to the tailors'guild.“ It was a matter of course that moreover also Polish immigrants should find their way into the city which was after all under the Polish sovereignty. And the religion was the means for them to intrude themselves also into the guilds and the council.

As the reformation of the Church was well received in every town of West-Prussia, in particular in the large ones, so it was also in Thorn. The two parish-churches of the city as well as the convent-church of St. Mary, and the hospital-church of St. George had become protestant. Soon, however, the counter-reformation set to work, and the Roman catholic church, supported by the Polish political power, succeeded first to take from the protestants the city-parish of St. John (1596), then the parish-church of St. James in the new-town (1669), and at length the third of the churches in their possession, St. Mary's (1724). The latter was chiefly owing to the Jesuits, who had been received in Thorn since 1595. It was chiefly by their doings that a row between the boys of the protestant college and those of the Jesuit college was puffed up to a revolt, and finally by an incredibly harsh judgment the mayor Resner was executed together with nine citizens, St. Mary's was taken from the protestants, the city was condemned to pay a heavy penalty, and its constitution was altered: henceforward one half of the councillors, the aldermen, and the third order were to be chosen out of the catholics;

¹⁾ Prove, *ibid.* p. 35.

²⁾ Bender, *ibid.* p. 94f.

besides, catholics were at once to be admitted to citizenship and to guilds; the municipal militia was to consist half of catholics, and so were to be all their officers¹⁾. The latter part of the judgment has never been carried out, because there were not a sufficient number of fit catholics in the town. At the very first choice of four councillors they were obliged to resort to two external men. Withal they were later under a necessity to take up some Polish town-citizens in the corporation-council, as qualified Germans were not to be had. But their number was always a small one, and the last Roman catholic councillor died in 1774.

How little even that misfortune, the consequences of which the city could not overcome, while it was under the Polish rule, could strip it of its German character appears from the following occurrence. In 1787, when an aspirant applied for a vacancy among the clerks to the council with a letter written in Latin, one of the members of the corporation objected to his choice, saying that the applicant was ignorant of the Polish language. Then the chairman replied „he was surprised at such an utterance, it being notorious and settled in the constitution that a councillor was allowed to open his mouth only for Latin and German“²⁾.

Even more distinct the following is: In 1766 the Polish government tried to prevail upon the town-council of Thorn to receive amongst them the inspector of customs of Dibau, Grekowitz. On that matter the resident of Thorn at Warsaw, Geret, writes: „I shall be ready to answer that no Pole can hold a civil office with us any more than a country-post in the province; he must be a Prussian, at least of the German nation, and, though he be not a citizen of Thorn, must yet have his residence with us“³⁾.

After the first partition of Poland had allotted Polish Prussia except Danzig and Thorn to the kingdom of Prussia, Thorn was in danger of being more closely connected with Poland, after being severed from its mother-country.

In April 1773, the city of Thorn sent a deputation of the three orders to Warsaw to plead their interest in the face of the diet. The article 2 of their instruction informed them how the city wished to see its relation to Poland settled by law. „But to prevent the city from becoming gradually Polish, or from being set in its rights on an equal footing with the Polish towns, it will be necessary that by a special decree it should be conserved in its original constitution as a German city founded by the German nation with German law and customs; and lest it may be bent under the arbitrary power of the Polish Republic, and be exposed to the danger of the Republic or a „Permanent Council“ of it being free to dispose of it

¹⁾ Jacobi, *The Criminal Court of Thorn* (Halle 1896), p. 101 ff., 138f.

²⁾ Prowe, *ibid.* p. 37.

³⁾ Semrau, *Commemorative Pages to the centenary of the union of Thorn with the kingdom of Prussia*, p. 36.

at discretion and without the consent of the city, it will moreover be necessary that it should not be summoned before any Polish diet, nor that anything there should be decreed against it; and in case the hitherto senators of this province should continue in office as „titulares“ and either at present or in future should presume to take resolutions or dispositions of the Prussian towns left under the Polish protection or of their estates, that the towns shall not be obliged to respect such decisions, but on the contrary shall be esteemed perfectly free and independent¹⁾.

In the city of Thorn there came already into existence at great Prussian party that under the economical pressure made it their object to reunite the city with Prussia and to join the kingdom of Prussia. The town-council, however, opposed such aspirations, not because they felt any national sympathy with Poland, but because in spite of their greatest antipathy to Polonism they dreaded a curtailing of their freedom from the absolutism then ruling in Prussia. Still this union took place in 1793. Thorn together with the Polish districts fallen to Prussia was to take the oath of allegiance at Posen, on the 7th of May. Remonstrating against it the city of Thorn declared that it was a German and Prussian place, nay, the most ancient and first city in Prussia, that it had never been reckoned among the Polish towns, that it had never had Poland for its country, being thoroughly separated from the latter by its national character, language, customs, law, and authorities. Every decree of the Polish empire concerning the towns had only concerned Polish towns, but never the Prussian cities of Danzig and Thorn. On that account the city demanded the right to take that oath of allegiance outside Poland, together with its sister-town of Danzig. This request was granted, and Thorn and Danzig were permitted to do homage at Danzig, 7th of May 1793²⁾.

Once more Thorn was severed from Prussia, by the treaty of Tilsit, July 1806. It was allotted to the duchy of Warsaw, and continued there till 1814. Only for that short space of time Thorn was a Polish city. 1814 it was reunited with Prussia. As Thorn had ever been a German city, and as it had well maintained its German character through the centuries of its dependence on Poland, so it has stuck to this character up to this very day. The number of its citizens of Polish tongue is doubtless not small, but they owe their rise from the lowest classes to the middle classes to the German civilisation which benefited the citizens of the Polish tongue fully as much as its German citizens.

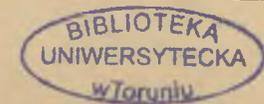
The following statistics will show the present proportion of the German nationality to polonism in Thorn.

¹⁾ Semrau, *ibid.* p. 33.

²⁾ Semrau, p. 31 f. cfr. Instructive historical information about the proper and true mother-country from centuries since of the city of Thorn, confirmed by nature and diplomas. 1794.

Résumé.

- I. A. In the town-district of Thorn the whole of the population was in 1910 (last census) 46 227.
Among the total population were:
- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 1. Germans | 30 505 = | 65,99 % |
| 2. Poles | 14 889 = | 32,21 % |
| 3. of other nationalities | 833 = | 1,80 % |
| | <u>46 227 =</u> | <u>100,00 %</u> |
- B. In the town-district of Thorn the whole of the population amounted on the 12th of January 1919 to 47 443.
Among the total population were:
- | | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 1. Germans | 29 434 = | 62,04 % |
| 2. Poles | 17 835 = | 37,59 % |
| 3. Foreigners | 174 = | 0,37 % |
| | <u>47 443 =</u> | <u>100,00 %</u> |
- II. In the town-district of Thorn the total of tradesmen, registered firms, are 309.
1. Of these are:
- | | | |
|------------------------------|--------------|--------------|
| a) in German hands | 275 = | 89 % |
| b) in Polish hands | 34 = | 11 % |
| | <u>309 =</u> | <u>100 %</u> |
2. The total of the license-taxes levied or those 309, trading firms is for 1918 67 062 M.
Of these are paid:
- | | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| a) by German firms | 64 361 = | 95,97 % |
| b) by Polish firms | 2 701 = | 4,03 % |
| | <u>67 062 =</u> | <u>100,00 %</u> |
- III. In the town-district of Thorn the whole of the landed property is = 3641,3442 ha, consisting in 1954 estates and in the hands of 1429 proprietors.
1. Of these are:
- | | | | |
|--------|--------------------------------------|----------------|---------|
| German | a) private property | 1215,7809 ha = | 33,39 % |
| | a I) property of the Empire or State | 789,4572 „ = | 21,68 % |
| | a II) church property | 7,0399 „ = | 0,19 % |
| | a III) town property | 1419,6257 „ = | 38,99 % |
| | <u>3431,9037 ha =</u> | <u>94,25 %</u> | |



Polish	{	b) private property	151,5595 ha =	4,16 %
		b I) church property	18,1116 „ =	0,50 %
			<u>169,6711 ha =</u>	<u>4,66 %</u>
Israelite	{	c) private property	38,5291 ha ==	1,05 %
		c I) church property	1,2403 „ =	0,94 %
			<u>3641,3442 ha =</u>	<u>100,00 %</u>

2. Number of the estates:

a) in German hands	1286 =	65,81 %
b) in Polish hands	551 =	28,20 %
c) in Jewish (prevailingly German) hands	117 =	5,99 %
		<u>1954 = 100,00 %</u>

3. Number of the owners of properties:

a) German	1023 =	71,59 %
b) Polish	327 =	22,88 %
c) Jewish (chiefly German)	79 =	5,53 %
		<u>1429 = 100,00 %</u>

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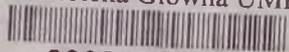


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