

THE ENGLISH PAGE



HARVEST TIME IN INDEPENDENT LITHUANIA

A PLEASANT DISCOVERY

By NELE LAPE

It was with some apprehension that I gave in to my Mother's pleas and promised to read a Lithuanian novel. I had just completed a current best-seller, and, frankly, the sight of a little volume entitled "Kaimynai", by Juozas Paukštėlis, did not seem too appealing.

The very title suggested something quaint and dull. Nevertheless, a promise was a promise. I picked up the distasteful little volume and opened it to page one. The print glittered up at me in shameless taunting — I could almost hear a mocking "You'll be so sorry!" Oh, well, perhaps I could eliminate a few pages here and there, once I got going.

I was in for a surprise. Not only did I not eliminate a single page, I read three chapters without so much as a breathing spell. I felt completely baffled. The book was good—really good. Paukštėlis, who must be quite a likable chap despite his misleading name, uses such an intriguing style, that you soon forget you are reading a novel, and, instead, find yourself living—yes, actually living the lives of the characters. And what a wonderful array of characters there are! His "Pilė" could give some of our best-sellers stiff competition any day, and his other, more conservative characters are equally appealing. There is the customary hero, a strong, silent type in this particular case. (I can just see Gary Cooper in the film version) the sweet, lovely heroine, and, oh yes, the villain. Perhaps I am making the book sound too frivolous. I sincerely hope not, for it is anything but that. It is not straight comedy—nor is it a winsome little romantic story. It is simply a brilliant combination of all the elements that go into the making of a successful novel. Moreover, it is a glimpse into the very heart of Lithuania.

The plot of "Kaimynai" is simple, but none the less effective. Jonas, a hard-working young farmer, sees a lovely stranger at a community gathering. Immediately attracted to her, he finally makes his feeling known, and is overjoyed to discover that she is willing to return his love. The progress of their courtship and the unexpected developments of their charming love story would make worth-

while reading in itself. But there are so many other features. — Descriptions of the Lithuanian "gegužinė," "rugpiūtis," "vestuvės," "kryžiaus šventinimas," and many more.

It is an entertaining, as well as an informative, book — and gives you the feeling of accomplishment and a real sense of satisfaction.

I fell it is especially suited for beginners in the field of Lithuanian literature, for, while it is light enough to be read quickly, it leaves a lingering impression—one that you will want to supplement by reading other Lithuanian books.

I, for one, have begun to regard Mother's "Lietuvišką knygyną" with genuine respect and admiration. I've discovered that Lithuanian books are not "dry" — on the contrary, many of them are stiff competition for the average American novel.

Lithuania under Soviet occupation

News of reliable sources confirm the reports of Soviet terror, executions, and deportations. On July 30, 1944, the first blood-bath is said to have been organized at Zarasai. The officials and clerks of the local institutions and the families of the rebels of 1941 were tortured and executed. Women and children were compelled to watch this crime. Further executions were organized at Utena, Vilnius, Daugaliai, Degučiai, Salakas, Dusetai, Antalieptė, Kamajai, Svedasai, Daugai, Varena, Siauliai, Rumsiškės, Jonava, Ukmergė, Kupiškis, and Rokiškis. All the population found in the Leliūnai, Moletai, and Daugai parishes were shot. Only a small number who were in hiding managed to escape the massacre. Lithuanian sources state that at several places near Panevezys and Kedainiai the local population was ordered to dig up the bodies of the communists who had been executed by the Germans. After the exhumation, executed Lithuanians were hurled in the same graves. There are repeated reports of mass deportations to Siberia. The figure 83,000 is often mentioned as an estimate of persons deported during the second Soviet occupation.

Mobilization for the Red Army was proclaimed by the Soviets as soon as they entered Lithuania. This involved all men born in the years 1908 to 1926. It is estimated that only about 30 percent of the men who were called up appeared for registration.

Reports indicate that communication facilities in Lithuania, disrupted by the Nazi-Soviet warfare, are still in a bad state of repair. Horses and carts owned by farmers living near the more important localities are being confiscated for military purposes. "Every community, isolated from the larger centers, lives its own life. The inhabitants of the country are fed on all sorts of rumor. Though two Lithuanian newspapers, Tarybų Lietuva (Soviet Lithuania) and Tiesa (Truth), are published in Vilnius, they rarely reach the provincial towns and villages since transportation is poor. All the good radio sets were confiscated some time ago, and the people are allowed to possess the most primitive radio receivers only.

After its experience under three consecutive occupations, the nation's determination to fight foreign enslavement has strengthened. Their achievements during the uprising of 1941 and their stubborn resistance against the Germans have given the Lithuanians increased self-confidence. It is stated that the patriotic partisan movement in Lithuania has become so strong that in December, 1944, they set free the town of Ukmerge and kept it under their control for three days. When Russian forces approached Ukmerge, these Lithuanian patriot fighters took to the woods. The morale of the Lithuanian people is unbroken. In many places in Lithuanian Soviet authorities are unable to organize local Communist committees, for the persons appointed by them are usually found dead the following night. The Soviets, unable to find the necessary number of collaborators, have been forced to appoint several non-Communists to relatively important municipal positions.

(Reprinted from the Lithuanian Situation).

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