

AUGUSTINAS VOLDEMARAS.
LETTERS TO JUJA (1902–1919)

Summary

Augustinas Voldemaras, one of the most notable and controversial politicians of the inter-war Lithuania, lived in Saint Petersburg for nearly 18 years. There he went to gymnasium and then university, began his academic career. Eventually, in Saint Petersburg he got involved in the Lithuanian movement: at first the cultural and later political activities. This intensive, active and colourful period of Voldemaras' life is not well-known as it has not been researched much. Therefore, even encyclopedias incorrectly indicate when he left gymnasium, when he graduated from the university and when he became a lecturer there. Such confusion to some extent resulted from the fact that a personal archive of Voldemaras was lost in the fire during the first days of the war between Germany and the USSR. Only a few fragments remained. Under such circumstances the Saint Petersburg period of Voldemaras might be restored only from tiny patches. Regrettably, his memoirs about his youth written in 1936 while imprisoned in Utena prison have not survived. It is such a shame that Voldemaras' intentions to have them published at that time were not supported by the authorities. Such lack of sources was the main stimulus to prepare a publication of Voldemaras' letters to Aleksandra Volterienė.

In 1900 Voldemaras came to the capital of Russia committed to achieve academic prominence and soon met Eduardas Volteris, the head

of the Slavistics Department at the Imperial Academy of Sciences and a privatdocent of Saint Petersburg University. In the beginning of his academic activities Volteris served the Russification policy imposing Cyrillic script and advising officials of the Tsar's administration since he was certain that the Lithuanian nation was dying out. However, gradually during his continuous visits to Lithuania to collect ethnographic and archaeological material, through sincere communication to the locals and closer meetings with activists of the national revival movement, he was persuaded that the Lithuanian nation was viable and the brutal policy of denationalization was without prospects and detrimental to Russia itself. He was more and more open about his sympathies with the Lithuanian national revival movement and demanded abolishing the prohibition of the Lithuanian press. Volteris left an outstanding trace in ethnography, linguistics and history of the printed books and libraries as well as in the minds and memory of a number of Lithuanian students of that period. According to some of the most authoritative researchers of the history of the Lithuanian literature even without scientific works of Volteris or his lectures about the Lithuanian language, customs and traditions at Saint Petersburg University delivered for thirty years, but with his support and patronage to a number of generations of Lithuanian students, Volteris would have remained in the history of the Lithuanian culture as an exceptionally bright and noble figure, naturally together with his wife Aleksandra. The home of the Volteriai was a significant centre of the Lithuanian cultural life, a unique school of intellectual self-education.

Voldemaras earned special sympathies of the Volteriai and was even accepted into the family. His letters to Aleksandra Volterienė of 1902–1919 obviously show that the home of the Volteriai was a truly peaceful harbour for him where he felt even better than at his parents'. Volterienė, whom he soon began calling Mummy and later simply Juja, was the person with whom he could open most and who extended the greatest consolation and

encouragement in the face of challenges. There may be those who will be disappointed by these letters since Voldemaras did not discuss global problems in them and was mostly writing about ordinary things: daily issues, physical and spiritual ailments etc. However, such subjects are also important as they enable us to get to know this controversial personality of a complex nature, who did not have an easy life though initially it may seem so. Letters to Volterienė reveal that sometimes Voldemaras felt very miserable because of his certain character features, attempted to change and was blaming himself for failure.

The letters written by Voldemaras to Volterienė in 1916–1917 when he worked at the Perm University are particularly significant. They are the most exhaustive and nearly the only available source concerning this period of his life. Considering the fact that it is one of the least known stages of Voldemaras' life, the publication also contains 6 letters of Kalerija Popova, a librarian of the Perm University, whose heart was broken by Voldemaras (though unintentionally). Moreover, they really shake certain deeply-rooted stereotypes associated with the personality of Voldemaras.

The letters from russian translated by Gediminas Rudis.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Eduardas Volteris. Kaunas, 1930s.
2. The cover of the play by T. Rutkovski translated into Lithuanian by A. Voldemaras and a dedication to A. Volterienė.
3. Meeting of *Fraternitas Lituanica*. Sitting from the left: A. Dirvianskaitė, K. Būga, Z. Ščepanavičius, V. Nagevičius, P. Rimša, P. Sližys; standing from the left: J. Blažys, S. Šimkus, A. Voldemaras, K. Oželis, A. Žmuidzinavičius, V. Ingelevičius. Saint Petersburg, 1910.
4. A. Voldemaras. Saint Petersburg, before or in 1914.