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The Ehingers and Welsers in Venezuela, 1520-1560

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THE EHINGERS AND WELSERS IN VENEZUELA

1520-1560

being

A Thesis presented to the Graduate Faculty
of the Fort Hays Kansas State College in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the Degree of Master of Science

by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

By the close of the Middle Ages, the precept of the Church, "Take ye not interest from loans" was found to be impracticable and was supplanted by the principle of "Money is the sinews of war." The monetary relations which we call finance and which had disappeared from the European scene with the collapse of the Roman Empire were coming back into existence.

Collecting interest was regarded as a sin during the Middle Ages. The Church strongly opposed usury and for many years the theory of its sinfulness was undisputed. As long as money did not serve as the chief medium of exchange, usury was rare, but as soon as the Europeans outgrew this stage of development, the doctrine of the Church was changed permitting the rise of such large and wealthy firms as the House of Fugger, the House of Welser, the House of Rem, the Gualterotti and the Medici.

The discovery of the New World in 1492 gave birth to an age of discovery and exploration and set the stage for large scale trade and commerce. In Europe were the large banking houses with capital to invest, with a spirit of adventure and with the desire to participate in a venture which

afforded an opportunity for profit; in the New World were gold and silver, raw materials and colonists who had to be supplied with products from Europe. This was the perfect combination for the promotion of trade.

Columbus sailed for the Spanish Crown and the New World, with the exception of the bulge of what is now Brazil, was claimed for Spain. The institutions, church and laws transplanted to this New World were Spanish and the area was made an integral part of the Spanish Empire. For these, as well as other reasons, little consideration has been given other racial groups who played a part in conquering, exploring and settling Spanish America. Most authorities dwell upon the explorations of Pizarro, Cortez, Quezada and Solís but fail to mention Nikolaus Federmann, Ambrosius Ehinger, Georg Hohermuth, and Philip von Hutten. With the exception of Federmann, these Germans did not find gold or wealth comparable to that found by Cortez or Pizarro, but during their stay in South America they made a number of exploratory expeditions in which they displayed as courageous and daring a spirit as the Spanish.

In South America, the territory which is now Venezuela, was granted to some German bankers whose representatives played a part in the conquest and exploration of that area. Most historians write with the assumption that the Germans played an unimportant role in South America, but this writer

believes that they deserve more attention than is generally given to them. It is the purpose of this study to examine with some detail the activities of the Ehingers and Welsers in Venezuela.

Comparatively little work has been done on this phase of South American history. Except for general histories, the writer was unable to find any works in English. The paucity of existing studies, the destruction of some records and the difficulty of obtaining existing material has necessarily limited this paper. It deals only with material printed in the English and German language and therefore is presented primarily from the German point of view. The only material used giving the Spanish side, is correspondence with members of the Spanish Embassy, the Consulates and the University of Venezuela. In scope the paper is limited to the activities of the Ehingers and Welsers in Venezuela during the period 1520 to 1560.

The writer wishes to express appreciation to Dr. E. R. Craine, under whose direction this thesis was prepared, for his helpful criticisms and suggestions. Without his aid and guidance this thesis would not have been completed. Acknowledgments are also made to Marc Campbell for his help in acquiring material, to Alexander Herzog for his help with German translations and to my parents and sister-in-law for their patience and understanding while this thesis was being prepared.

CHAPTER II

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE ENTRANCE OF THE GERMANS INTO SOUTH AMERICA

That colonial commerce should be the select privilege of merchants of the home country was a principle accepted by most European states prior to the nineteenth century. Since the colony owed its existence to the mother country, it was thought only natural that the metropolis enjoy the benefit of the colonial surplus products and trade. This idea of colonial selectivity was the predominant idea in the rigid and complicated commercial system developed by Spain, and from the discovery of America, trade with the New World and even the right to live there, was reserved for the most part, to subjects of the Spanish Crown.

One of the first and most lasting laws of Spain, regarding the colonies, was that requiring government registry of all cargoes and passengers between Spain and America. This registration not only aided the collection of customs and dues but also provided the government with a way of keeping in touch with trade. In time it was also used to prevent smuggling and the illegal entrance of foreigners into America.

Trade or the right to engage in trans-Atlantic commerce and navigation was restricted to native Spaniards. All goods leaving Spain had to be registered, but the Crown was even

more concerned about goods coming from America because those shipments, usually consisting of gold and silver bullion, were so valuable to the Government.

Emmigration was as rigidly controlled as trade. The early law required every passenger for America to have a permit from the Crown. The penalty for illegal crossing was 100,000 maravedis' fine and ten years banishment from Spain, if the offender was of gentle blood; or 100 lashes instead of the fine, if a person of lesser importance.¹ As time went on and fraud became increasingly common, the penalties became more severe until, in 1560, they included forfeiture of all property acquired in the Indies. Charles V, of course, exercised a more lenient policy, but even he found it difficult to abide by his concessions. In 1549 the Council of the Indies requested that all foreigners be entirely forbidden to trade or reside in the colonies. Charles found it somewhat embarrassing to revoke the privileges, but he ordered that all intending to come to the New World must be examined and obtain a license from the Casa de Contratación. He then secretly instructed the Casa to find excuses for granting licenses to any but Spaniards.

¹ Clarence Henry Haring, Trade and Navigation Between Spain and the Indies (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1918), p. 103.

Before the death of Isabella, the right to emigrate to the New World was enjoyed by the inhabitants of Castile and Leon. After her death Aragonese and other Spaniards were allowed to cross the seas and finally similar privileges were given by Charles V to his non-Spanish subjects.

Theoretically, only native Spaniards were to be in the New World, yet by 1525 the Germans were permitted to engage in the trade of the Indies, by 1531 the Welsers had received the right to explore and colonize Venezuela and the Fuggers were given similar privileges in southern South America. This paradox between the Spanish creed and deed was the result of circumstances occurring in the latter 15th and early 16th century.

Prior to Columbus' voyage, the kingdoms of Spain were achieving a form of unity. One of the most notable steps in this respect was accomplished by the marriage of Isabella of Castile to Ferdinand of Aragon. Queen Isabella stemmed from a family that could not be reputed for its intelligence. Under her father, John II of Castile and her stepbrother, Henry the Impotent, the kingdom declined from all greatness. It may have been these conditions which created in Isabella a desire to make of Spain something great and admirable. The Queen, in her desire to unite Spain to any other monarchy, was responsible for the marriages of her children, Doña Johanna and Don Juan to Philip and Margarita, the children of

Maximilian, the Emperor of Austria. These marriages resulted in what may be termed, the first steps of the Germans toward America because they gave these people an opportunity to meddle in the affairs of Castile.²

Arciniegas regards the nature of the Castilians as a factor beneficial to the Germans. He says the Castilians regarded foreigners with an attitude of hostility and suspicion and possessed a feeling of faith and confidence in themselves. After the death of Isabella, they rejected Ferdinand whom they regarded as a foreigner and accepted instead Philip, the son-in-law of Isabella and Ferdinand.³

With the death of Philip, the Spanish Crown passed to Charles, son of Johanna and Philip and grandson of Maximilian, Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. Charles was not Spanish as he had lived in Ghent, Belgium, and spoke the Flemish language rather than Spanish. After some delay, he took the oath of loyalty, accepted the Crown and became Charles I of Spain. The death of Maximilian shortly after Charles' arrival in Spain provided the Germans with an opportunity to further their influence on the Iberian Peninsula. Charles began to think of himself as Maximilian's successor, but

² German Arciniegas, Germans in the Conquest of America, a Sixteenth Century Venture. Translated by Angle Flores (New York: the Macmillan Co., 1943), p. 9.

³ Ibid., p. 20

acquiring the crown of the Holy Roman Empire was almost impossible without huge sums of money with which to bribe the electors.⁴ The Castilians, hearing of Charles' interest in becoming Holy Roman Emperor, feared the subordination of Spain to the interests of Austria and the Holy Roman Empire. Consequently, Charles, with little hope of getting money from the Spanish, turned to the German bankers for financial aid and his election in 1519 as Holy Roman Emperor was financed by three banking houses: the House of Fugger which contributed 543,333 ducats, the House of Welser which contributed 143,000 ducats and Grellterroth, Forvari and Vivaldi, an Italian firm, which contributed 165,000 ducats.⁵ These loans later served as an excellent basis for demands which the Germans made of Charles.⁶

Charles V seemed willing to have the Germans in South America for two reasons: first, he found that land in the New World served as a convenient means of repaying the German

⁴ The archbishops of Cologne, Mainz and Trier, the Count Palatine of the Rhine, the Duke of Saxony, the Margrave of Brandenburg, and the King of Bohemia composed the group possessing the privilege of electing the emperor.

⁵ Arciniegas, Germans, p. 19.

⁶ Karl H. Panhorst, Deutschland und Amerika (München: Verlag Ernst Reinhardt, 1928), p. 93. In 1523, Jakob Fugger wrote a letter to Charles reminding him of the financial aid he had received from the Fuggers. He said it is well known that without their help Charles could never have acquired the Crown of the Holy Roman Empire.

bankers and second, he recognized the economic inefficiency of the Spanish, whom he regarded as conquerors, not colonizers. One of the main obstacles to lasting and effective colonization was the Spaniards' greed for gold, a passion which blinded them to the rich agricultural possibilities of the New World. This condition resulted in unrest and unstable colonies and finally impelled the Crown to offer great attractions to prospective colonial farmers. Charles V also believed that the Germans would give the additional strength needed by the colonial empire.⁷ The German banking houses acquired one source of Spanish royal income after another and in this manner eventually gained a stronghold on all the revenues of Castile and as Charles' indebtedness increased, the Germans found it easier to gain concessions from him.⁸

⁷ Otto H. Brandt, "Nikolaus Federmann, ein deutscher Weltfahrer des 16. Jahrhunderts," Arch. Wanderungswesen (No Publisher, 1935), VII, p. 84.

⁸ Roger Bigelow Merriman, The Rise of the Spanish Empire in the Old World and the New (New York: the Macmillan Co., 1925), III, p. 195.

CHAPTER III

AGREEMENTS BETWEEN EHINGERS, WELSERS AND SPAIN

One of the first of the German banking houses to become interested in the New World was the House of Welser.¹ At one of the Augsburg aristocratic homes can still be seen a stone slab with the following inscription: "Here was the bank of the Welser family, the first Germans to send ships to India. Bartholomäus Welser possessed Venezuela, which was called Welser land."² Representatives of the Welsers became governing officials of Venezuela and conducted exploratory expeditions in that country. These facts led to the formation of erroneous opinions about that South-American colony in the 16th century, opinions which are commonly current. The first of these mistaken notions concerns the character of Venezuela. It was a Welser colony but it was not, as is generally believed, a particularly German colony. The second erroneous idea is the belief that the Welsers

¹ In Spain the Welsers are sometimes called "Belzares".

² Viktor Hantzsch, Deutsche Reisende des 16 Jahrhunderts (Leipzig: Duncker & Humbolt, 1895), p. 16. An eniem Augsburgger Patrizierhause sieht man noch heute eine Steinplatte mit der kurzen aber bedeutsamen Inschrift: Hier war eheden die Wechselbank der Familie Welser, der ersten Deutschen, doe Schiffe nach Indien sandten. Bartholomäus Welser besass Venezuela, das man der Welser land nannte."

deserve all the credit for the colonial undertakings in Venezuela. Much of the merit should go to the Ehingers and Hieronymus Sailer, who actually received the colony from Charles V. A thorough comprehension of the acquisition of Venezuela by the Welsers requires a look at the agreements made by the Welsers, Ehingers and Spain.

As early as February 13, 1503, Simon Seitz, the Welser agent in Portugal, secured for the Welsers the right to engage duty free, in the trade of the Indies, but the Welsers, not fully satisfied with these concessions, sought to come to Spanish America. As a result of their efforts they were given permission to send, at their own expense, ships from Spain to the New World whenever and as often as they wished. In 1525, they were permitted to establish an office in Seville and Santo Domingo and received all the rights of Spanish subjects.³ Soon the Welser ships and agents were sent to every place that offered trading possibilities.

In 1528, Hieronymus Sailer and Heinrich Ehinger made, with the Spanish Crown, a series of agreements which insured the advent of the Germans into South America. In these agreements made by and for the benefit of Ehinger and Sailer, the Welsers are never mentioned, giving no indication of any interest or share on their part. Some authorities, however,

³ Brandt, Arch. Wanderungswesen, p. 84.

mention the probability of an Ehinger-Welser partnership shortly after the conclusion of the agreements.

According to the terms of the first contract of 1528, Ehinger and Sailer were to transport to Santo Domingo fifty German miners who were to be sent to the various colonial provinces where they were to serve as teachers and foremen for the colonists and their native help. Ehinger and Sailer, to fulfill these terms of the contract, turned for help to Bartholomaeus Welser who was familiar with the mines of Bohmens and Sachsens. Through the Welser agent, Hieronymus Walter, they were able to recruit a number of miners. Walter was given the responsibility of arranging for the miners journey and Ulrich Ehinger was to accompany them to Seville, but his failure to appear at Leipzig forced the miners to advance without him. They were permitted to bring their wives to the New World and were promised $1\frac{1}{4}$ "Rheinische gulden"⁴ weekly but they were required to pay for their own traveling expenses to the New World.⁵ Haebler disagrees with this and states that according to a contract drawn up in December, the miners were to be sent to the New World at the expense of their employers and receive only board and keep for the first three months but after this period they were to

⁴ The gulden contained $37\frac{1}{4}$ grains of fine gold.

⁵ Hantzsch, Deutsche Reisinge, p. 24.

receive one-sixth of the profits.⁶

The miners, to strengthen their position, arranged a definite contract with Sailer at Seville by which they received credit for the necessary tools and implements and were promised one-sixth of the mining profits, and return passage to Europe after a years work. They, in return, pledged themselves to serve only the Welsers and Ehingers.⁷ The first group of miners arrived in Santo Domingo in January of 1529, and on October 2 of the same year a second group arrived with the same understanding as their predecessors and under the command of Nikolaus Federmann.

Living conditions in Santo Domingo were so rough and working conditions so terrible that many of the miners died or became ill and, by 1530, the majority were ready to return to Germany. They begged Sebastian Rentz, the Welser agent, to send them home but he refused. Finally the Bishop of Santo Domingo sent them back to Europe. The miners were so bitter about their treatment that they brought charges against Walter whom they held responsible for their ill-fate. They accused him of lying to them about the climatic conditions and the possibility of getting rich quick. Walter and the

⁶ Konrad Haebler, Die "Überseeischen Unternehmungen der Welser Und ihrer Gesellschafter" (Leipzig: C. L. Hirschfeld, 1930), p. 63.

⁷ Hantzsch, Deutsche Reisende, p. 24.

Welsers regarded the accusations of the miners as a gross exaggeration, claiming the miners volunteered for the overseas work and the sickness and death they suffered was only logical because they ate and drank too much for the climate in which they were living.⁸ However, because the misfortunes occurred while the miners were in the service of the Welsers, they were offered 100 gulden. In regard to this offer, Herzog Georg, a Welser agent, wrote to the miners on May 18, 1534, "You cannot expect the Welsers or Walter to do more than their duty in this case."⁹ The fact that they dropped charges is an indication that the miners regarded the offer as a just settlement. The Ehingers and Welsers attempted to live up to their obligations but the results of the undertaking were not very profitable for either the miners or their employers.

The second agreement, made February 12, 1528, gave the Germans the right to engage in the slave trade and at the same time placed them under obligation to transport to the colonies and put up for sale 4,000 Negro slaves in the period 1528 to 1532.

By the provisions of the third and most celebrated

⁸ Ibid., p. 25.

⁹ Ibid., p. 26. "er konne nicht vermerken, dass Welser oder Walter über ihr ziemliches Erbieten etwas mehr zu thun schuldig sein.

agreement, made on March 27, 1528, the Germans were given supreme authority to settle and explore the land from the Kap Maracapana in the East to the Cabo do la Vela and the border of the province of Santa Marta in the West and in a northern and southerly direction, from the Atlantic to the Pacific.¹⁰ The Germans assumed the responsibility for the establishment of two colonies within the first two years; for the transportation of at least three hundred settlers for each colony, and for the construction of three fortifications. The colonists were promised their homesteads after four years of occupation and were to be exempt from import or export duties for a period of eight years.¹¹ In addition to this the Germans had conceded to them the extraordinary privilege of storage space in the warehouse of the Casa de Contratacion thus assuring them a place in the often overcrowded harbor where they could always load and unload their merchandise.

In the encyclopaedias and general histories one almost invariably finds the statement that the province of Venezuela was ceded to the Welsers first as a cancellation of the

¹⁰ Panhorst, Deutschland und Amerika, p. 191. The Welsers received the land "vom Kap Maracapana im Osten bis zum Cabo de la Vela und der Krenze der Province Santa Marta im Westen, im nordsüdlicher Richtung aber vom Atlantischen bis zum Stillen Ozean."

¹¹ Haebler, Unternehmungen der Welser, p. 162.

Kaiser's financial obligation toward them. Konrad Haebler disagrees with this assumption stating that the Ehingers deserve more credit in this affair than is generally attributed to them. To understand fully and clearly how Venezuela came to be the property or enfeoffment of the Welsers, consideration should be given to the document of February 17, 1531, which not only gives the terms of the transfer but also reveals the circumstances leading to it. According to this contract, all the rights, privileges and regulations of the contract of 1528 were to be put in the Welsers name, giving them the right to settle, explore and govern Venezuela. When Charles V was in Augsburg in 1530, he found it necessary to make some monetary agreements with the Fuggers and Welsers. At this same time, a petition from the two enfeoffed with Venezuela, Ehinger and Sailer, requesting a transfer to the Welsers of all the promised rights and privileges, was presented to Charles V. This request gave Charles a satisfactory means of repaying the Welsers and was therefore willingly granted by him.¹² Some other documentary evidence supports the objection to the belief that the Welsers were the first to receive Venezuela. In the contract of 1528, as is well known, the name Welser is never

¹² Konrad Haebler, "Welser und Ehinger in Venezuela", Zeitschrift des histor. Vereins f Schwaben u Neuberg (Augsburg, 1894), p. 67.

mentioned. The right to material gains and of governing the province was granted exclusively to Ehinger and Sailer and the duration of the enfeoffment was clearly tied to the lives of these two men. More evidence is provided by the document of March 1, 1534, in which the Welsers requested an expressed promise that the enfeoffment of Venezuela not be bound with the earlier mentioned persons but be extended to Bartholomaus and Anton Welser for the duration of their lives.¹³ This is indicative of the fact that the Welsers were not mentioned in the first agreement and only the transferring of the Ehinger rights to the Welsers made of the latter owners of Venezuela. The same indication is evident in the comparison of the Kaiser's decrees before and after the 17th of February, 1513. In the decrees before the latter date, the names of Ehinger and Sailer are mentioned exclusively but in the documents issued after this date, the Welsers are named.

With the completion of these agreements the Germans were ready to enter Venezuela. The Welsers were interested in trade rather than finance and Venezuela was to become a link in their chain of commercial-political undertakings. It was to be nothing less than a means to secure control of colonial commerce. It was not until some years later when

¹³ Ibid., p. 69

they realized that it was impossible to carry out their plans, that they sought gain in precious minerals. The result of this desire was the advance into and search for the legendary El Dorado.

The search for El Dorado was a quest for a mythical city of gold. The legend of El Dorado, the City of Gold, was first recorded by Spanish explorers in the early 16th century. The legend was based on the story of a tribe in the Amazon basin who used to cover their bodies in gold dust. The legend was spread by Spanish explorers who were looking for a new source of gold. The legend of El Dorado was a powerful force that led to the discovery of gold in California and the West. The legend of El Dorado was a powerful force that led to the discovery of gold in California and the West.

¹ Vincent P. Smith, South America (New York: Holt and Company, 1910), p. 100.

CHAPTER IV

THE GEOGRAPHY AND INDIANS OF VENEZUELA

Venezuela, lying between Colombia on the west and Brazil and British Guiana on the south and east, may be divided into four principal geographic regions: the Coastal plain including the lowland area around Lake Maracaibo, the Llanos, the Northern Highlands formed by the Andean and Coastal ranges and the Guiana Highlands. The Coastal plain, centered around Lake Maracaibo and consisting of about 20,000 square miles, is a low and unhealthy area. This region, which is among the hottest areas of Venezuela, swelters under high temperatures most of the time. A flat plain, crossed by numerous streams and containing many swamps, stretches around the southern end of Lake Maracaibo. Precipitation ranges from almost no rain on the low sandy area north of Maracaibo to fifty inches or more in the southern portion of the basin. The rainy seasons of May to July and September to November, separate two seasons of almost no rainfall.¹ The vegetation of this area varies almost as much as the precipitation. Along the narrows of the lake in the north are found shrubs,

¹ Clarence F. Jones, South America (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1930), p. 620.

trees and cacti while the southern portion of the Maracaibo lowland is covered by a dense tropical forest.

The Llanos, lying between the Orinoco River and the Andean and Coastal ranges and comprising about 100,000 square miles, have an almost level surface, most of which is covered with tall, coarse, bunch grass. During the rainy season, when large areas of the Llanos are flooded, this grass grows to a height of six feet. Rainfall during the winter averages from thirty to fifty inches but during the summer precipitation is almost entirely lacking and the Llanos suffer under a blazing sun.

Comprising 40,000 square miles, lying between the Llanos and the Coastal plain and stretching from the Colombian border 600 miles eastward are the Northern Highlands. This region may be divided into three sub-regions: the Sierra Nevada de Mérida, the Segovia highlands and the Coastal ranges. The Sierra Nevada de Mérida, which is 250 miles long by thirty to fifty miles wide, ranges from low plains to peaks rising over 15,000 feet. Rainfall in this region ranges from forty to seventy-five inches. Vegetation in the area varies with differences in precipitation and altitudinal decrease of temperature. Dense forests cover the lower slopes; from 3,000 to 6,800 feet the subtropical forest prevails; from 8,000 to 9,000 feet the cold grasslands exist and up to the snow line at 14,000 feet grow various ferns, mosses

and shrubs. The Segovia highlands, with high temperatures and less than thirty inches of rainfall, have an arid climate. Scrubby bushes and grasses are a common scene in this region. The Coastal ranges consist of two distinct mountain ranges, which do not rise above 8,600 feet. The climate, although less temperate, resembles that of the Sierra Nevada de Mérida.

The Guiana Highlands is an area of dense tropical forest. Most of the region has a hot and humid climate with the average rainfall ranging from forty to eighty inches.

The Orinoco River, with its 436 tributaries, represents the only real drainage system of Venezuela. During the rainy season the Orinoco is navigable for approximately 1,500 miles.

The Indians of Venezuela may be placed into four major groups: those of the Llanos, those of the Northwest region, the Indians of the North Central area and those north of the Orinoco River.²

The Llanos were inhabited by the Chiricoa and Ghahio, a tribe first met by Nikolaus Federmann. These Indians, who were of a hunting culture, subsisted primarily on land animals and vegetables. Occasionally fish, which were shot

² The general discussion of the Indians is based on Julian H. Steward's Handbook of South American Indians (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1948), IV.

with bows and arrows after being drugged, were eaten. Not much is known of their religion but it is believed that the devil served as their deity. These tribes were somewhat advanced in their methods of warfare. They attacked under the command of one chief and displayed some knowledge of war tactics. Bows and arrows and sword clubs were their chief weapons with an occasional use of poisoned arrows.

The Quiriquire, Jirara and Caquetio Indians occupied the Northwest region. The Quiriquire, first met by Juan de Ampies in 1527, and by Ambrosius Ehinger in 1528, because of their strong resistance to Spanish conquest, were rapidly killed or captured and used as slaves. The Jirara were belligerent from the time of their discovery by Nikolaus Federmann, in 1530, until their complete subjugation in 1614.³

Maize and sweet potatoes, which were common to most of these tribes, were the main cultivated crops; deer, tapirs and other game provided meat.

The sun and moon occupied the position of principal gods to whom the shamans made many offerings and sacrifices. The head chief with his great religious power was able to control nature and increase the fertility of crops. The shaman because of his ability to foretell the future, predict

³ Ibid., p. 473.

the outcome of battle and cure the ill, held a prominent position in the tribe.

The Indians of the North Central region, known by the general name of Caracas, were of a farming, hunting, and fishing culture. Cocoa, tobacco, cotton and fruits were cultivated and anteaters, deer, hares, dogs and birds were the animals of the hunt.

These Indians were extremely warlike but no details of warfare are known except that clubs and bows and arrows were used as weapons.

The Indians who lived north of the Orinoco River were also of an agricultural, hunting and fishing culture. Cocoa trees were grown for leaves rather than the fruit and new clearings were constantly being made because land could be used only two years.

Deer, anteaters, rabbits, squirrels, lions and Jaguars were hunted. The only hunting weapon was the bow and arrow. Dogs are not mentioned but a kind of turkey was domesticated.

Fishing was a more important source of food than hunting. Bows and arrows, multipronged spears, harpoons, basket traps, nets and hooks were used. However, the most unusual method for catching fish was for a group of men to swim toward shore in a semi-circle, clapping their hands and making noise and in this manner driving the fish out on land.

The sun and moon were the major deities. Thunder and

lightening were caused by the sun's anger and comets had an evil meaning. Frogs, who were representatives of the rain god, were kept in the house. Shamans were highly respected because of their ability to cure the sick. However, if a patient died the shaman was killed. These men received intensive training and lived their life apart from the rest of the tribe.

Men were responsible for hunting, fishing, planting crops and going to war and the women prepared meals, harvested the crops and followed their husbands to war. Most women as well as the men handled the weapons of war, bows and poisonous arrows.

Some consideration should also be given to the Otomac and Guamo Indians, who lived between the Orinoco, Apure and Meta Rivers. These tribes had no domestic animals. The moon was regarded as a supernatural being but no particular deity was observed. Women were thought to have a special relation with the moon. The authorities were chiefs of a certain number of houses and these chiefs were in complete control of every activity.

An unhealthy climate and unfriendly Indians hampered the activities of the Germans. Hans Seissenhofer became a victim of the climate and Ambrosius Ehinger was forced to retire to Santo Domingo to recover from fever and later died as a result of an arrow wound received at the hands of an

Indian. Hohermuth and Federmann also experienced the ill effects of hostile Indians and unfavorable climatic conditions. Federmann returned from his first expedition with only thirty-five healthy men. His progress was hindered by the rainy season and his return was a flight to escape from the natives. Of the 400 men with Hohermuth only 130 returned; the rest succumbed to the natives and climate.

In spite of these difficulties, drought in some areas, floods at some times, sweltering temperatures, and hostile natives, the Germans succeeded in completing a number of explorations.

CHAPTER V

AMBROSIUS EHINGER

One of the first and better known Germans to explore Venezuela was Ambrosius Ehinger¹ who came from a family of Constance. His father trained him in trade and commerce, and, in time, he became interested in overseas trade and commerce, especially that of the Orient and the New World. Information regarding Ehinger's initial steps toward Venezuela is somewhat contradictory. Reimers states that Ambrosius left Germany and went to Saragossa, Spain, where his older brother, Heinrich Ehinger, was in charge of the Welser office. He remained but a short time in Saragossa before going to Seville where, because of his brother's influence, he was given a position in the Welser office. He did such excellent work that he was soon sent, as the Welser agent, to Santo Domingo, where his training, experience and business instincts aided him in bettering his reputation with the Welsers. Here he made certain that the Welsers supplied the Spanish colonists with articles of necessity in return for dye wool and sugar and interested his employers in mining

¹ Panhorst, Deutschland und Amerika, p. 102. In the Spanish records the name Ehinger usually appears as Einquer, Ynquer, Eynquer, Ednger, Ynger, Alfinquer, Alfinger, or Dalfinger.

to the extent that they acquired a part of the copper mines of Cotoy. Reimers states further that Ambrosius and Garcia de Lerma, while they were in Santo Domingo, became close friends and decided that someday they would carry on explorations on the mainland of South America. When Don Rodrigo de Bastidas of Santa Marta was killed and Lerma was chosen to succeed him, Ehinger decided that the Governorship of Venezuela would provide him and his friend with an excellent opportunity to carry out their explorations. Because of his good record and his brother's influence, the Welsers without hesitation gave Ambrosius the Governorship he requested. Garcia de Lerma agreed to take four ships and 300 colonists to Santo Domingo for the Welsers. From there, it was agreed, he would take 200 colonists to Santa Marta and Ehinger would take the rest to Venezuela.²

Arciniegas on the other hand ascertains that Lerma was appointed Governor of Santa Marta to fill the vacancy left by the murdered Bastidas, and was given the responsibility of restoring order in that colony. The Welsers told the King that Lerma needed help to carry out his orders and they were not only able but also willing to help. Their arguments were so convincing that they were given permission to take an expedition of 300 men with the head of the expedition,

² Erich Reimers, Die Welsers landen in Venezuela (Leipzig: Wilhelm Goldmann Verlag, 1938), p. 23.

Ambrosius, becoming Governor of Venezuela.³

In the opinion of this writer, the best explanation is given by Hantzsch who tells us that, when Ferdinand the Catholic permitted the sale into slavery of the Indians who refused to accept Catholicism he promoted a business which proved to be so profitable that Ehinger decided to try his luck.⁴ When Sailer and Ambrosius' brother, Heinrich, concluded the contract of 1528, discussed in Chapter III,⁵ giving them permission to colonize Venezuela, an expedition of 400 people was organized, and Ambrosius was designated to take command of the force. The people making the journey to the New World had to promise to repay the Ehingers for their trip, and had to prove that they were neither heretics or Jews or had ever come before the Inquisition. Before their departure, these good Christians assembled in church and in the presence of a priest promised the King and bankers that they would conquer and Christianize the Indians. On February 24, 1529, Ehinger landed in Coro, which had been established by Juan de Ampies, becoming the first Governor of Venezuela. When the Germans arrived, Ampies had to relinquish his territory and be content with three small coastal islands.

Conditions in Coro did not meet with the expectations

³ Arciniegas, Germans, p. 74.

⁴ Hantzsch, Deutsche Reisinge, p. 20.

⁵ See p. 14.

of Ambrosius. The natives were crude, rough, poor but friendly Indians from the tribe of Caquetios. They had no domestic animals, used a species of small shellfish as a medium of exchange and used tobacco. Their religious needs were fulfilled by a veneration of the spirits of their ancestors and the worshipping of the sun and moon.⁶

Ambrosius, with little regard for the terms of his contract, found neither the time nor the desire to convert the Indians. He immediately sent his troops out to capture slaves and since he believed the area to be rich with gold, made preparations for the first of his three exploratory expeditions. Ehinger, deciding to explore first the area around the lagoon because it was rumored to have a higher civilization, left Sailer in charge of affairs at Coro and in September of 1529, set out on his journey. His troops encountered few difficulties because they were moving in the region of the friendly Caquetios, who furnished not only food but also carriers. Ehinger followed the coast until he reached the lagoon, around which lived the Onotos, a very poor tribe of Indians and crossing to the east side, established Maracaibo, which was to serve as a base for future

⁶ Arciniegas, Germans in America, p. 79. Coro was a poor but peaceful settlement. The Indians had been converted to Christianity and seemed satisfied under the rule of Juan de Ampies.

expeditions.⁷ Ehinger remained in Maracaibo about a year, sending numerous expeditions from there to the interior and the Cabo de la Vela. He made a trip into the land of the friendly Penener and Queriqueriar from whom he received a considerable amount of gold. He then returned to Coro where, with his rosy reports of Maracaibo, he attracted more settlers to his newly established colony. On his return to Maracaibo, Ehinger did not follow the coast but resolved to cross the mountains and go in a southerly direction. Difficulties were encountered when they entered inland at the east side of the lagoon. The climate was very unhealthy and the native tribes were few and widely distributed. In addition, the rainy season had set in causing the swamps to be almost impassable. The Burbes, who lived in the path of this expedition, were not openly hostile but staged many treacherous ambushes, a fact which, in the eyes of the Germans, justified destruction.⁸ The German party, even though hampered by unfavorable climate and unfriendly Indians, continued to explore the west bank of the lagoon and finally reached Maracaibo.

⁷ Ismael Puerta Flores of the University of Venezuela to Leona Wasinger, letter, December 6, 1945, states: "Maracaibo was founded on one of the expeditions organized by the Germans but they made no beginning of settlement in that region. The seat of their power was Coro and they had no intention of establishing other permanent colonies."

⁸ Haebler, Unternehmungen der Welsler, p. 168.

In the meantime, conditions in Coro were unfavorable. Sailer returned to Santo Domingo, leaving the Spaniard, Luis Sarmiento, in charge. Because Sarmiento was unable to maintain control, all was in complete disorder on January 14, 1530, when a ship arrived bringing Georg Ehinger and 147 new colonists.

At this stage, the crucial point of interest regarding Ambrosius Ehinger's future in Venezuela lies in Europe where Georg and Heinrich observed their younger brother with jealousy for he seemed to do all that they themselves had hoped to accomplish and their activities from this point on proved to be a hinderance rather than a help to Ambrosius. On January 15, 1530, after deciding to go to the New World and assume control of the colony, Georg arrived in Venezuela, with the understanding that Heinrich was to follow as soon as possible. Georg, upon hearing that for some months no word had been received from Ambrosius, ousted Luis Sarmiento and pronounced himself Governor of the colony, but the colonists would not accept him and became so hostile that Georg feared for his life and fled to Europe, where he hid the shame of his rejection behind unfavorable reports of Ambrosius' activities and influenced Heinrich against investing any more money in a venture which would benefit their brother.⁹ This

⁹ Panhorst, Deutschland und Amerika, p. 206.

feeling of jealousy and bitterness led to the contract of 1531, explained in Chapter III,¹⁰ by which the Ehingers transferred their interests in Venezuela to the Welsers. Brandt believes that the Welsers requested permission to take over Venezuela when the Ehingers, with their limited means, were unable to conquer their territory.¹¹

Even before the transfer was ratified, 500 colonists, including some women, arrived in three ships under the command of Hans Seissenhofer. With the arrival of Seissenhofer, who brought with him attestation showing that he had been appointed Governor of Venezuela by the Welsers, the Welsers for the first time entered that territory with a clear title.¹²

When the news of Seissenhofer's arrival reached Ehinger he immediately left for Coro where he found conditions unpleasant. Since he estimated the proceeds of his first expedition to be only 7,000 pesos he was accused by the Spanish of attempting to cheat the King. In addition, the settlers were dissatisfied with the way they were being treated as they were forced to buy all their food, wares and articles of necessity from the Welsers who over-charged for these things thereby keeping the settlers in constant debt. Unhappy and somewhat discouraged by these unpleasant conditions,

¹⁰ See p. 17.

¹¹ Brandt, Arch. Wanderungswesen, p. 84.

¹² Hantzsch, Deutsche Reisende, p. 23.

Ambrosius appointed Federmann, his representative in Coro, warned him not to make a trip to the interior and in July of 1530, left for Santo Domingo to regain his health which he had lost due to a fever. With Sebastian Rentz, the Welser agent, he was going to discuss conditions in Coro and debilitate the charges brought against him. His attempts were successful but during the course of his conversation with Rentz he became convinced that the Ehingers with their limited means were in no position to conquer Venezuela, and only a wealthy concern such as the Welsers could save the colony from collapsing.¹³

In February 1531, came notice that the Welsers had taken over Venezuela but wished to retain Ehinger as Governor.

In August 1531, with his health restored and the Governorship assured, Ambrosius returned to Coro and prepared for his third and final expedition. On September 1, 1531, Ehinger and his troops which consisted of forty mounted and 130 men on foot, assembled at mass to call on heaven for its blessings for the campaign which was to be undertaken in the service of God and His Majesty, Charles V, to bring Christianity to the heathens and conquer new lands for the Emperor. With fervid activity and joyous hope, the men started their adventure. Nothing was to delay their penetration of the

¹³ Ibid., p. 23.

depths of the jungle where the land of gold was said to be. The forest had some passable paths and the Indian tribes along the way proved to be friendly and willing to help, making the first part of the journey uneventful and the Upare Valley was reached without much trouble. In Pauxoto, the land of the Pacabueyes, from whom Ehinger received 20,000 gold pesos, a rest period was ordered. Here Ambrosius commissioned Captain de Vascaña with twenty-four Spaniards and a number of Indian carriers to take the gold to Coro. Attempting to take the shortest route back to the coast, Vascaña lost his way in the jungle. Wild animals, ants, snakes and flies became a plague for the men who soon became wandering houses of disease. Vascaña and his companions decided to bury the treasure, swore to arrange another expedition as soon as Coro was reached and decided to separate and seek their way individually.¹⁴

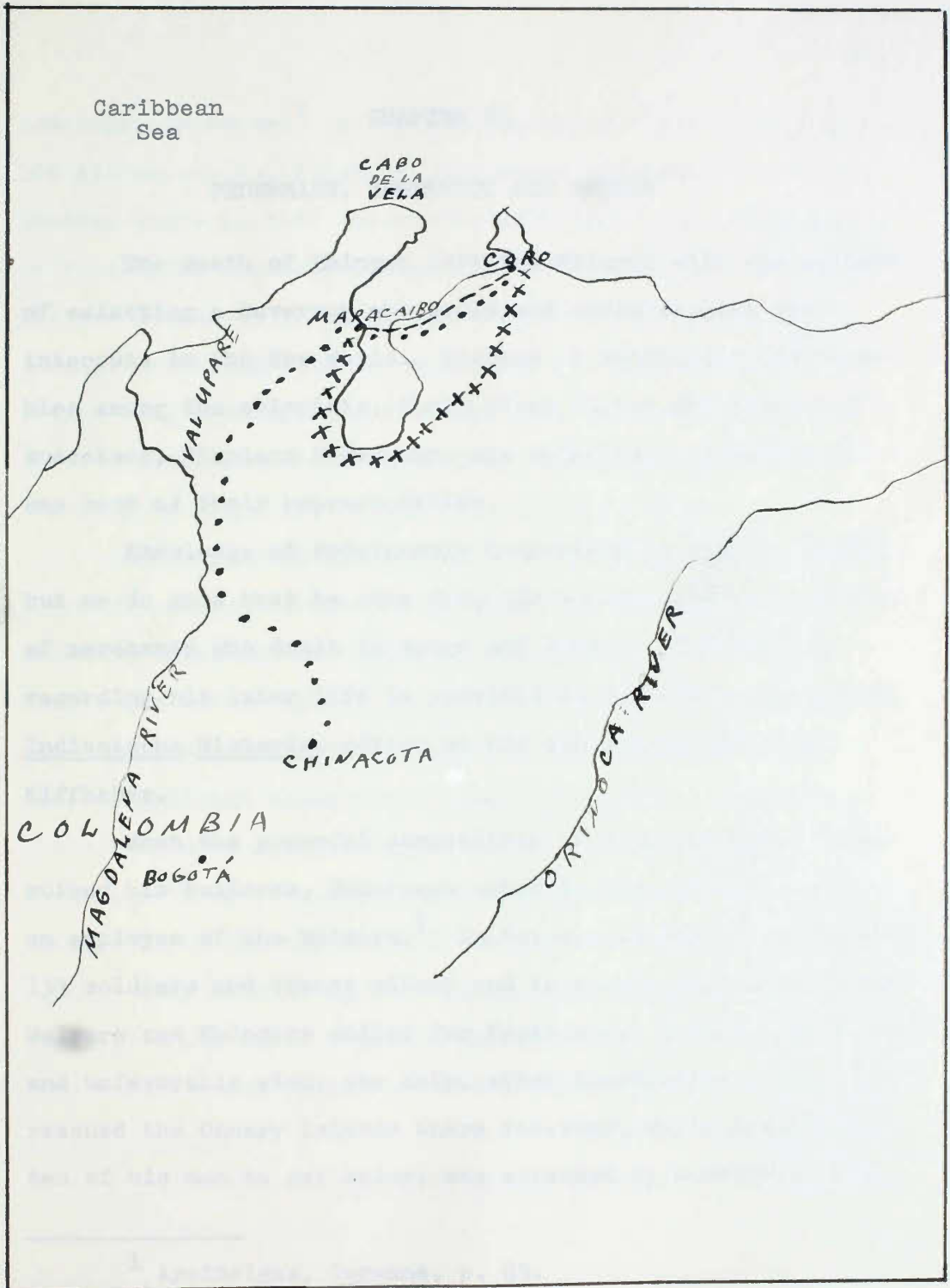
Ehinger, who had given Vascaña three months to return, occupied himself with numerous short explorations from which new treasures were obtained. When five months passed without any word from Vascaña, Ehinger, realizing that ill-fate had befallen the group, sent twenty experienced men with his valuable assistant, Esteban Martin, as their leader, to look

¹⁴ Reimers, Die Welsers, p. 62. The only survivor of Vascaña's group remained with the Indians. To this day no trace has been found of the gold.

for the missing party. While he waited, Ambrosius undertook more short exploratory trips. More and more he realized that he was near the famed El Dorado. Finally, when Estabén Martín returned with no trace of Vascaña but with eighty-two colonists who were willing to help in the search for El Dorado, the journey was continued. Along the Magdalena River hostile Indians were encountered and mastering the Cordilleras meant a rapid change from tropical heat to arctic cold. Almost every step across the mountains was taken while fighting hostile Indians who shot their poisoned arrows at the exhausted men. After the attacks, the Indians burned their villages and fled. During one of these battles in 1533, near Chinacota, Colombia, Ehinger received an arrow wound from which he died.

The death of Ehinger, a brave man and good leader who died fighting for his men, meant the end of that expedition. The men, worn, weary and discouraged, returned to Maracaibo. El Dorado was not located but the financial result of the expedition was a profit of 30,000 pesos, in spite of Vascaña's loss.¹⁵

¹⁵ Reimers, Die Welsers, p. 73.



Ehinger's 1st Trip - - - - -
 Ehinger's 2nd Trip x x x x x
 Ehinger's 3rd Trip

CHAPTER VI

FEDERMANN, HOHERMUTH AND HUTTEN

The death of Ehinger left the Welsers with the problem of selecting a Governor who would and could protect their interests in the New World. Because of complaints and squabbles among the colonists, their first choice for Ambrosius's successor, Nikolaus Federmann, was rejected as Governor but was sent as their representative.

Knowledge of Federmann's background is rather limited but we do know that he came from Ulm and belonged to a family of merchants who dealt in drugs and spices. Information regarding his later life is provided by his diary and a book, Indianische Historia, edited by his brother-in-law, Hans Kiffhaber.

When the powerful competition of large merchant firms ruined his business, Federmann asked to come to America as an employee of the Welsers.¹ In October of 1529, he assembled 133 soldiers and twenty miners and in a ship furnished by the Welsers and Ehingers sailed for Venezuela. In spite of storms and unfavorable wind, the ship, after twenty-three days, reached the Canary Islands where Federman, while ashore with ten of his men to get water, was attacked by hostile natives

¹ Arcineigas, Germans, p. 83.

and taken prisoner.² After gaining his freedom by paying 200 gulden ransom, Federmann continued his journey to Santo Domingo where he left the miners with Rentz and proceeded to Venezuela. Because of the pilot's error, they lost their way and landed at an unfamiliar place. When Federmann attempted to establish his location, the natives fled in fright but, finally, one revealed that they were west of Coro.³ Federmann, sending part of his troops by land and the rest by ship, arrived in Coro March 8, 1530.

Shortly after his arrival in Venezuela, Federmann was placed in charge of Coro by Ehinger with instructions to maintain order and not leave on an expedition. Federmann defied his orders however, and in September 1530, with 114 men, sixteen horses and one hundred Indians, left on his first expedition which lasted about six months. The troops after four days reached the territory of the Xedeharas, a very poor tribe of Indians, and by September 26 they found themselves in the territory of the peaceful Ayamones. By October they were among the mighty Cayones and then reached the Maguas who first regarded the explorers as enemies but soon became friendly and gave them gold. When he reached the

² Hantzsch, Deutsche Reisisinde, p. 28.

³ Ibid., p. 29.

Barquisimeto, Federmann found numerous settlements of wealthy Caquetios from whom he acquired 3,000 gold pesos. At this time, however, the rainy season set in making travel difficult and causing illness among so many of the men that Federmann thought it wise to turn in a southerly direction. In addition to this, food became scarce and the unfriendly Cybus and Cuyones had to be subdued by force. By the time Federmann reached the Cojede River he had suffered many losses through hunger, illness and Indian attacks. Along the Coaheri they met the Guaycarie, a most unfriendly and warlike tribe, and by the middle of December 1530, they reached the Masparro River where the horsemen found it almost impossible to proceed. Federmann still hoped to be near the South Sea but his Indians had deceived him and he had to turn back with only thirty-five healthy men.

In February 1531, the group returned to Acarigua and from there moved in a northerly direction toward Barquisimeto. Because of hostile Indians, the return trip was almost a flight and not until they reached the Cyparicotes, a few days march from the coast did the group find peace and rest. On March 17, Federmann arrived at Coro where he again met Ambrosius Ehinger. Since the latter did not agree with Federmann's actions he reported it to the Welsers. Federmann, still suffering somewhat from the fatigue of his campaign, attempted to reach the Welsers before Ehinger. He left for

Santo Domingo, and from there traveled to Europe, arriving at Augsburg on August 30, 1532.⁴

While Ehinger was on his last expedition, conditions in Coro were in general confusion with the Spanish threatening to remove all the Germans from South America. The Spanish and German colonial officials fought among themselves with the Spanish hoping that the Council of the Indies, tired of the quarrels and complaints, would expel the hated Germans from the colony. They blamed the German colonists for all the trouble and accused the Welsers of never having shown an interest in the colony other than for their own profit. When the Welsers were accused of charging unnecessarily high prices for daily necessities, the Council of the Indies deprived them of their trade monopoly. The Welsers' method of lending money to the colonists and enforcing payment were also greatly resented. When the troops arrived with the news of Ambrosius' death, Spanish officials were very happy. They siezed Ehinger's representatives and sent Alonso de la Llama and Luis Gonzoles de Leiva to the Kaiser with the request that he remove the Germans from Venezuela and make it a Spanish colony. When the Welsers neglected to appoint immediately a successor for Ehinger, the Spanish began to take control of the colony. Federmann,

⁴ Brandt, Arch. Wanderungswesen, p. 85.

who was in Seville at the time of Ambrosius' death, attempted to make the Welsers realize their mistake in permitting the Spaniards to take over the colony. Nikolaus, boasting about his services to the Welsers and his ability as an explorer, gained the confidence of Bartholomäus Welser and received the appointment as Governor of Venezuela. It seems that his arguments were either very convincing or his enthusiasm for colonial undertakings overshadowed the complaints against him.

He immediately began to assemble men and ships, but while he was making preparations the Spanish in Venezuela were protesting to the Council of the Indies against his appointment. All the accusations formerly raised against the German colonists in general were now heaped upon Federmann. Because of these protests and the complaints of Llona and Leiva, the Council refused to endorse his appointment with the Welsers so that only Spaniards could become officials.⁵ The Kaiser, however, was so indebted to the Welsers that he refused and finally succeeded in getting the endorsement for Georg Hohermuth whom the Welsers named when Federmann was rejected. Federmann was to serve as Captain-General, thereby being in a position to control the military

⁵ Hantzsch, Deutsche Reisinde, p. 36.

power of the colony.⁶ Brandt, disagreeing with these assertions, tells us that Hohermuth was simply to serve as a puppet for Federmann who was actually Governor.⁷

Georg Hohermuth assembled some six hundred men including Philip von Hutten, Hans Vöhlin, Lukas Balbier, Hieronymus Köler and Federmann, some miners, twelve monks and six priests. The group left Seville in two ships, the Santa Trinidad and Nuestra Senora de Guadalupe" on October 19, 1534 and arrived in Coro February 6, 1535.⁸ Hohermuth remained at the coast for the first three months to familiarize himself with the country, but Federmann took a number of short trips into the interior where he captured Indians sending them to Santo Domingo where Hans Vöhlin sold them as slaves.

Hohermuth, always somewhat afraid of Federmann, who was the Welser's first choice, and feeling that he would have to abdicate his Governorship as soon as Federmann was

⁶ Arciniegas, Germans in Amerika, p. 152. Federmann had his appointment approved with the following limitations: His lieutenant was to be a Spaniard, he was to work through Spanish employees and was to make sure that payment due from the pillaging of the Indians made to the royal coffers.

⁷ Brandt, Arch. Wanderungswesen, p. 86.

⁸ Reimers, Welsers, p. 80. Only Federmann and his ship and men managed to make the trip successfully. A storm forced Hohermuth and Hutten to return to Spain and make the trip later.

cleared of the accusations against him, prepared for his first journey in search of El Dorado, hoping that a successful expedition would put him in good favor with the Welsers and eliminate the possibility of being removed from office. Hohermuth, disregarding Federmann's advice not to split the existing manpower took 400 men and eighty horses and on May 13, 1535, set out on his trip following somewhat the path of Federmann's first expedition.

Due to Hohermuth's inexperience, the discipline among his men was lax and only the common goal, the search for El Dorado, held them together. Hohermuth did not value the friendship of the Indians who were needed as interpreters, carriers, and scouts and often used force to obtain what they refused to give. Crossing the swampy wilderness necessitated added carriers, a need which was fulfilled by capturing Indians who were used as slaves. The brutality of this is well explained in one of Hutten's letters in which he says,

On the 23 day Cardenas came bringing thirty Indians some of whom had been torn up by the dogs; the rest were parcelled out among the Christians. On the 24 day Andreas was sent out with seventy Christians and returned on the 27 day bringing fifty-three Indians. On

the 30 day Stephan Martin set out with sixty men on foot and ten riders and returned on the 9 day bringing seventy Indians.⁹

By the beginning of the rainy season, the troops were in the Indian village, Hacarigua, where they had to stay because of fever among the men. As soon as they were physically able they continued through the territory of many warlike tribes who gave them much trouble. After one especially heavy attack, their number dwindled to 130 men and thirty horses. In September, they arrived at the Masparro River where they found the Cayones with whom they spent six weeks. By January they were following the path of Esteban Martin, going along the banks of the Apuri River and finally reaching the foot of the Cordilleras. Here a captured Indian, telling them that by going west over the mountains they would reach El Dorado in ten days, gave the troops new hope. Many attempts to cross the ice-capped mountains failed and eight months passed before the Upia River could be crossed. When Esteban Martin was killed by a poisoned arrow all hope was abandoned and the return journey started. Finally, with only 130 battered, beaten and sick men, Hohermuth returned to Coro.

⁹ Hantzsch, Deutsche Reisinge, p. 37. "Den 23 Tag kam Cardenas, bracht 30 Stuck Indier gefangen, etliche liess er von Hunden zerreißen, die andern theilet er unter die Christen. Den 24 Tag ward ausgeschickt Meister Andreas mit 70 Christen, der kam den 27 Tag wieder, bracht 53 Stuck Indier, die wurden alle unter die nothdurftigen Christen Ausgetheilt. Den 30 Tag zog aus Stephan Martin mit 60 Christen zu Fuss und 10 zu Ross, kam den 9 Tag wieder, bracht 70 Stuck Indier, wurden ausgetheilt."

The financial profit of Hohermuth's expedition was approximately 8,000 pesos in gold and silver, but for this about 270 white men lost their lives and a far greater number of Indian carriers met the same fate.

While Federmann was waiting in Coro, the accusations against him were refuted and he became aware that almost nothing stood in the way of his obtaining the Governorship. He asked for financial support for a new expedition but the Welsers, extremely disappointed by Hohermuth's probable failure refused the necessary aid, leaving Federmann with no alternative but to equip troops with his own money. At the time when Hohermuth was unsuccessfully trying to cross the Upia River, Federmann made preparations for his second expedition which he started in June, 1536. Nikolaus, unlike Hohermuth, realizing the usefulness of the Indians, attempted to secure their good will and establish friendly relations.¹⁰ By the approach of the rainy season he had advanced far into the Llanos and because of his determination to reach the land of gold crossed the Cordilleros in twenty-two days, making a journey which was almost impossible for both men and beasts. Federmann's disappointment was great when, upon finally reaching the land of gold, present day Bogotá, he found it already

¹⁰ Brandt, Arch. Wanderungswesen, p. 86. On his second trip Federmann was more brutal and inconsiderate of the Indians.

occupied by Gonzalo Jimenez de Quesada of Santa Marta¹¹ and even greater when a few days later he witnessed the arrival of Benalcazar, one of Pizarro's men. Bogotá was claimed by the three Conquistadores and for a time it seemed as if a physical struggle was inevitable, but finally, at Federmann's suggestion negotiations were entered into which resulted in the drawing of a contract May 29, 1539, by which Federmann received the rich territory of Tunja.¹² In view of the Germans hopeless military position, this was a success that could not be regarded lightly. The three Conquistadores also agreed to let the King establish the boundaries between Coro, Santa Marta and Quito. After reaching their decisions, the three traveled down the Magdalena River and in July, 1539, set out for Spain.¹³

Federmann, while in Jamaica, received the news of Hohermuth's unsuccessful expedition and was told that the latter was still acting as Governor even though Federmann

¹¹ Arnold Federmann, Deutsche Konquistadoren in Südamerika. Berlin: Reimar Hobbing, 1938, p. 56. Federmann attempted to establish forts at the Cabo de la Vela. Some colonists were sent by land but Federmann after acquiring the needed material in Santo Domingo sailed from there with three ships, of which two arrived safely at their destination but the third was shipwrecked along the coast of Santa Marta. The Spanish Governor after learning from the shipwrecked colonists of the Welsers plans and attempts to find El Dorado immediately sent Quesada in search of the Gold Land.

¹² Federmann, Deutsche Konquistadoren, p. 59.

¹³ Brandt, Arch. Wanderungswesen, p. 87. Federmann did not go to Coro to render account of his actions but went to Jamaica where he sent a report to Santa Domingo.

had officially been appointed to that position. But he had neither the time nor the desire to insist on his rights because the rich Bogotá was more important than the fever area of Coro. Hohermuth at this time, helpless against the growing displeasure against himself, supported the accusations of selfishness, faithlessness and cruelty against Federmann, accusations which were believed by the Welsers to the extent that they demanded of Federmann a squaring of accounts.¹⁴

After his return to Europe, Federmann's conduct became puzzling and arrogant. He refused to square accounts with the Welsers or to give them a share of his treasure. In 1539, he met Charles V and Bartholomäus Welser to defend his position. The decision of Welser to give the Governorship of Venezuela to no one but his son caused Federmann to utter some harsh accusations against Welser who ordered his arrest. While the case was at court, Federmann died, but during the trial when he became seriously ill, his conscience drove him to settle matters with his employers. He ceded them all his rights in Bogotá and wrote a declaration in which he stated that he had many times wronged them.¹⁵

¹⁴ Federmann, Deutsche Konquistadoren, p. 62. The Welsers demanded of Federmann 100,000 Ducats of precious stones and 15,000 ducats gold.

¹⁵ Brandt, Arch. Wanderungswesen, p. 87.

Federmann was called a thief and deceiver by his enemies and accused of unheard of cruelty and greed. In his avarice, he did not care much for an Indian life, and many times disregarded the profits of his masters, but that does not lessen his bravery, cleverness, spirit of enterprise and leadership. This writer believes that Reimers overestimates the power of Federmann when he said that by eliminating him from the development of Venezuela and Bogotá, the Welsers eliminated all Germans from taking an active part in the colonization of the New World. The unification of Venezuela and Bogota for the good not only of the Welsers but of all German colonists depended upon just such a man as Nikolaus Federmann.¹⁶

When Hohermuth died in 1540, he left Coro in a sad condition. He had not proven to be a man capable for the post he had occupied and his plan to relocate Coro away from the fever area into a healthier and more fertile area was not carried out. The Spanish officials hurled more accusations at the Welsers and demanded a commissioner to hear complaints and grievances. When the Welsers began to lose interest in the colony, the Audiencia of Santo Domingo appointed as commissioner, Dr. Antonia Navarro, who was to conduct investigations to prove that the Welsers had failed to fulfill

¹⁶ Reimers, Welser, p. 150.

the conditions of the contract of 1531.

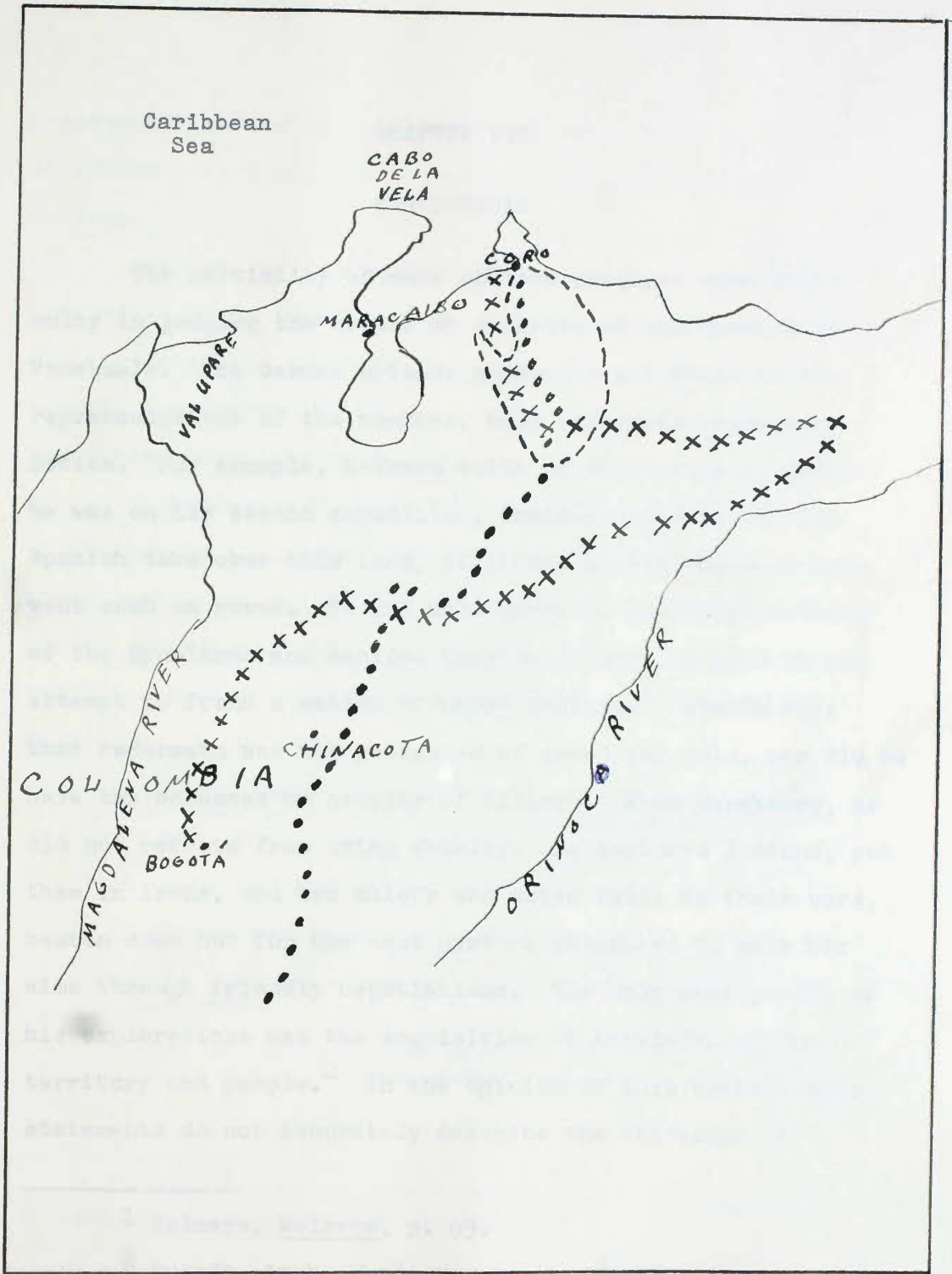
While these investigations were in progress, the last expedition to be conducted on behalf of the Welsers was underway. Led by Philip von Hutten with Bartholomaeus Welser Jr. and Pedro de Limpias, Federmann's Spanish assistant, serving as captains, the group went by known trails to Boca de los Llanos and along the Cordilleras to the Ariari River. When Hutten ordered his men to march southeast, a number of them under the leadership of Limpias refused to go. From then on Hutten's control of his men began to weaken. They finally reached the region of the warlike Omiguas where they suffered for lack of food. In 1544, after torturous marches and Indian attacks, Hutten had to start a return journey. He made promises of Welser aid to his tired men who wanted only to get out of the jungle, but before the end of the journey, Limpias and all but two or three Spaniards who remained loyal to Hutten and Welser, revolted and took control of the expedition. From then on Welser and Hutten were regarded as foreigners.

While Hutten and Welser were on their expedition, the Council of the Indies, apparently collecting enough evidence against the Welsers to cause their loss of the colony, appointed Juan de Carvajal, a man obsessed with hatred for the Germans, as provisional Governor of Venezuela. He immediately started the relocation of Coro, selecting the

Tocuyo Valley as the new location. When Hutten and Welser returned and before they could get to Coro, they were lured to Tocuyo where Carvajal was awaiting them. Carvajal called a public meeting at which he accused the Welsers of neglecting the colonists, enumerating all the bad they had done and all the good they had neglected to do. He went on to say that the colony now had in himself a man who would work for a new and better colony. This statement was more than Hutten could bear and he ordered his men to return with him to Coro. When the men refused, Hutten reminded them of their obligations to the Welsers, which they had assumed before starting the expedition, whereupon Carvajal accused Hutten of rebelling against the Spanish Government, of being a rebel and a traitor and of intending to lead the Spaniards into desolate regions to let them die on useless expeditions. Hutten then took the few men who were willing to follow him and started for Coro. Carvajal, blind with anger, ordered the execution of the Germans but Villegas, his assistant, advised against it because of the importance of Hutten and Welser. Carvajal, convinced that a public execution was not advisable, decided to rid himself of the Germans by more cowardly means. With a small group of men, he followed the trail of the Germans and when Hutten and Welser were sleeping, a moment which Carvajal regarded as most opportune, he captured the Germans. When Hutten and Welser were hopelessly

in irons, Carvajal ordered them beheaded, thus ending the life of the last Welser representatives in Venezuela.¹⁷ With the death of these two men, the Welsers lost all control of their American colony and, in 1556, transferred to the Spanish government all their rights in the New World. However, the valuable and worthwhile geographical and ethnographical reports of the explorers remained in the hands of the Germans.

¹⁷ Simon Pedro, The Expedition of Pedro de Ursua and Lope de Aguirre in Search of El Dorado and Omagua in 1560-61. Tr. by William Bollaert from Fray Pedro Simon's Sixth Historical Notice of the Conquest of Tierra Firme. London: Hakluyt Society, 1861.



Federmann's 1st Trip — — — — —
 Federmann's 2nd Trip x x x x x
 Hohermuth's Trip

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSIONS

The partiality of many writers presents some difficulty in judging the merits or demerits of the Germans in Venezuela. The German writers generally attribute to the representatives of the bankers, high and noble characteristics. For example, Reimers tells us that Ehinger, while he was on his second expedition, decided never to let the Spanish take over this land, if it was in his power to prevent such an event. He was well aware of the cruel methods of the Spaniards and decided they could have no hand in his attempt to found a nation of happy Indians.¹ Brandt says that Federmann was not possessed of greed for gold, nor did he have the hardness or cruelty of Pizarro. When necessary, he did not refrain from using cruelty. He tortured Indians, put them in irons, and had chiefs who acted false to their word, beaten down but for the most part he attempted to gain his aims through friendly negotiations. The only real profit of his explorations was the acquisition of knowledge of the territory and people.² In the opinion of this writer, such statements do not accurately describe the character of

¹ Reimers, Welsers, p. 63.

² Brandt, Arch. Wanderungswesen, p. 85.

Federmann, especially in view of the fact that his second expedition was taken for the express purpose of finding El Dorado.

Present day Venezuelans seem to be diametrically opposed to these ideas in that they have very few good words for the Germans. Their feelings are aptly expressed in several letters to the writer. José D. Citraro of the Venezuelan Consulate at Chicago says, "the Welser's colonization in Venezuela between 1528 and 1546 is ill recorded in history by the atrocities of these barbarians, who in their insatiable desire for gold searched in vain for El Dorado, leaving in their pass a wake of blood and undescriptive crimes."³ The Venezuelan Information Service in Washington, D. C. says:

In 1531, their representative, Ambrosius Alfinger, who had been appointed Governor of the Province of Venezuela, travelled from Coro to Puerto de Altigracia on Lake Maracaibo, where German brigantines awaited. From there he embarked on a trip of blood and fire.

Alfinger continued his cruel expedition on land to the region of Perija, Southwest of Lake Maracaibo, occupied by the Indians of the Mara tribe, who fought him heroically.

Other Welser Governors were Georg Spira, Nicolaus Federmann and Philip von Hutten. Their administration

³ José D. Citraro, Venezuelan Consul, Chicago, Ill., to Leona Wasinger, December 5, 1955.

was a fatal one. They sold thousands of Indians as slaves, and with Spanish soldiers they carried out cruel expeditions with the sole purpose of seeking gold treasures.⁴

Ismael Puerta Flores of the University of Venezuela at Caracas is not quite so harsh with his judgement. He says:

We are not able to say that the short stay of the representatives of the Welsers in Venezuela had any lasting influence in this country. The Welsers were merchants. They obtained from the Emperor Charles V the government of a region of Tierra Firme and had no other purpose but that of enlarging their commercial transactions.

It was not, therefore, to be expected that after the failure of their enterprise there would be sorrow over the departure of the Germans.

The paucity of documentation upon the period of the Welsers has not permitted a well established judgement in respect to them.

Briefly: The movement of the Welsers in Venezuela was too short and superficial to leave roots in this nation which has always maintained intact its Spanish customs and traditions.⁵

The conquests of the 16th century have been reputed to be raids on a large scale, as a means of quickly obtaining treasures and riches, but such a severe judgement is generally out of place, for thereby, modern ethical and social preceptions are carried into the past. The Germans were intent upon finding gold and wealth, they sold the Indians as slaves and mistreated them in other ways but

⁴ Venezuelan Information Service, Washington, D. C., to Leona Wasinger, October 3, 1955.

⁵ Ismael Puerta Flores, University of Venezuela at Caracas to Leona Wasinger, December 6, 1955.

such actions were only characteristic of that day and age. The Germans who came to Venezuela were conquerors and as such were no different than those of other countries. The Spaniards accused the Germans of cruelty and barbarism, but they were no great protectors and defenders of the Indians. Today, the deeds of the first Germans in Venezuela deserve respect and attention. Federmann, Hohermuth and Hutten penetrated regions which were not to be seen by Europeans for many years. Federmann and Hohermuth left worthwhile geographical and ethnographical reports. It is the opinion of this writer that the work of the Germans in Venezuela should not be regarded as lightly or as worthless as it has been in the past.

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