

Persons and Personages

HITLER'S SALAD DAYS

By W. W. C.

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THE first time I heard the name of Adolf Hitler mentioned was shortly after the end of the War, when a man named Franz Xavier Huber, a war veteran who had had a leg shot away before Verdun at 1917, told me stories of a curious fellow who had been in his regiment at the front. He was a garrulous chap, and, sitting in that same Bürgerbrau Keller in Munich where in 1923 Hitler took his first plunge into revolutionary activities by firing off his army revolver at the ceiling and declaring the morrow would see him victor or dead, although it saw him neither the one nor the other, but unscathed, a helter-skelter fugitive in the Bavarian hills, he used to tell tales tragic and humorous of his campaign experiences.

The thing that had struck him about 'Private Hitler' was his grandiloquence. He was neither popular nor the reverse with his fellows; they just smiled at him and his vague, rambling speeches on everything in the world and out of it. He acquired very swiftly the reputation of being what in the British Army is called 'an old soldier.' That is, he showed distinct talent in avoiding disagreeable tasks, but he knew on which side his bread was buttered. He interested himself particularly in the important question of seeing that the officers' washing was done or doing it himself. This secured for him the good graces of the colonel, who removed him from the more constant dangers of the trenches and appointed him runner between regimental headquarters and the front line.

These duties brought him frequently in contact with the men and he would sit for hours in a dug-out and hold forth on socialism, of which it was evident he had only very hazy notions. Old Social Democrats used to laugh at him, but no one debated seriously with him. He could not brook contradiction and used to fly into terrible rages if anyone ventured a word of dissent. Though he got the Iron Cross of the second class, no one in the regiment ever looked upon Hitler as any sort of a hero; indeed, they rather admired him for the skill with which he avoided hot corners. The regimental records contain not a line concerning an award of the Iron Cross of the first class to Hitler, though in latter years he has taken to wearing it prominently on his self-constructed uniform.

In those days in Munich I lived in the Thiersh Strasse, where nowa-

days the Hitlerite organ, *Völkischer Beobachter*, has its offices in a sumptuous building, and I frequently noticed in the street a man who vaguely reminded me of a militant edition of Charlie Chaplin, owing to his characteristic moustache and his bouncing way of walking. He never wore a hat, but always carried a riding whip in his hand, with which he used incessantly to chop off imaginary heads as he walked. He was so funny that I inquired from neighbors who he might be; most of them, owing to his Slav type, took him to be one of those Russian *émigrés* who abounded in Germany at that time, and they freely talked of his being probably a trifle mentally deranged. But my grocer told me it was a Herr Adolf Hitler from Braunau in Austria, and that he was leader of a tiny political group which called itself the 'German National Socialist Workers' Party.' He lived quietly enough as a boarder in the apartment of a small artisan, wrote articles for an obscure paper called the *Völkischer Beobachter*, and orated in hole-and-corner meetings before audiences of a dozen or two. His closest friend was a Russian *émigré* from the Baltic provinces, a certain Herr Rosenberg, who was joint owner of the paper. Out of curiosity I bought the paper once or twice, and found it a scatter-brained collection of wild anti-Jewish stories and articles interlarded with panegyrics on the Germanic race. My obliging grocer closed his information on Hitler by remarking that he frequently purchased things in his shop and was, despite his eccentric appearance, quite a pleasant fellow, though inclined to talk sixteen to the dozen about anything and everything.

Some time later I became a frequent customer of a little wine saloon in the Schelling Strasse, called the 'Osteria Bavaria.' It was an historic place in its way, for it had been the haunt of the philosopher, Schelling. The public in this inn was mostly composed of Bohemians, artists, art students, and members of the staff of *Simplicissimus*, the famous satirical weekly. Musicians and poetasters sat around of an evening and listened to Gulbransson or Thöny giving forth their views on art, politics, and the price of a pound of meat. Discussions ensued that lasted far into the night, over tankards of beer and bottles of an excellent Chianti. Hitler was an almost daily visitor; he had, I learned, been a house painter in his early days in Vienna, but he was rather sore on the subject, and posed as an artist. He was very fond of airing his views on art and architecture, which, however, were not taken seriously by any of the artists who frequented the place.

Hitler was often accompanied by one or two friends who, I was told, were members of his little political group. The most sensible of the band was a chemist named Gregor Strasser, a very sound fellow with whom I often spoke. Hitler's closest friend at that time, however, seemed to be an ex-army captain named Roehm, who later became chief of the Storm

Troops, while his friend, Baldur von Schirach, was entrusted with leadership of the 'Hitler Youth,' the boy-scout organization of the National Socialist movement.

One thing that struck me about Hitler was his extreme abstemiousness. He ate every night a dish of vegetables, and mineral water was his only drink. He never smoked. This reminds me of an amusing incident when Hitler became Chancellor. The German vegetarians have a central organ of their league, and this paper came out with flaming headlines:—

FIRST GREAT VICTORY OF GERMAN VEGETARIANS HITLER BECOMES CHANCELLOR

Sometimes instead of regaling us with chaotic speeches, Hitler would sit for hours on end in front of his mineral water, staring into space, not uttering a word, and apparently quite oblivious of his surroundings. If on these occasions someone suddenly addressed him, he would start as if out of sleep, and stroke his forehead with his hand several times before coming back to reality.

Apart from politics and art, Hitler's chief topics of conversation were Italy and clairvoyance. He had never visited Italy, but had apparently read a great deal about it, and he would sometimes talk for half an hour on end about the glories of ancient Rome and the greatness of the Cæsars. There was something about his talk that made one think of the prophets of the Old Testament; he spoke as if he believed himself to be inspired. The only thing that dispelled the illusion was his frequent use of words that are not found in the dictionary of a cultivated German.

One day I remember that a man came in who, for the price of a plate of soup, read hands and told fortunes. Hitler retired with the soothsayer into a corner and spent a whole hour with him in earnest conference. When he got back among us, he turned with anger upon a student who had made a slighting remark about clairvoyance, and launched out upon an eloquent defense of occultism of every kind, and especially of astrology. He made a confidant, too, of a Jewish charlatan named Steinschneider who had taken to himself the name of Hanussen, and consulted him frequently. Hanussen, who subsequently founded and ran a weekly newspaper on astrology, devoted to indirect propaganda for Hitler, became for a few weeks after Hitler's accession to power almost as important a factor in Germany as Rasputin had been in Russia. But his end was a tragic one. He was found murdered in a field in the environs of Berlin. Accounts vary regarding his death. Some say he knew too much; others that he had warned Hitler that the stars were unfavorable to him and that in the beginning of the winter of 1933 he would collapse. Others again ascribe his death to the jealousy of professional colleagues. However that may be, the incident does not appear to

have shaken Hitler's faith in astrology, and one of Hanussen's chief rivals, a man named Mücke, has been appointed by Hitler 'Federal Commissary for Occultism.' This, I believe, is the first time in modern ages that a state has officially recognized soothsaying and turned it into a government department.

But there is one extraordinary feature about Hitler's faith in the occult which gives rise to intriguing speculation. As everyone knows, he has adopted the swastika as the emblem not only of his party but of the state. But curiously enough this swastika is reversed, and anyone acquainted with Eastern beliefs and superstitions knows that this is to be regarded with positive horror. An inverted swastika is indicative not of endless life but of the flood and flame of life leading to a violent destruction.

Did Hitler know this when he foisted it upon the German nation? Is the reversed swastika just another sign of the man's half-baked conception of things, even his beloved mysticism? Or is this a last vestige of the irony of his political faith?

Hitler was not without devoted adherents in the 'Osteria Bavaria.' Some students after a while became seized with a sort of hero worship regarding him, and hung on to every word he said with wrapt attention. But there is no doubt that his chief admirers were the two waitresses, buxom Bavarian wenches who listened open-mouthed to him and danced attendance on him in a way that formed the subject of many jokes among the habitués of the place. Hitler's relations with women indeed are a strange and obscure chapter. I saw a great deal of him at that time, and I can certify that he was in these matters as abstemious as in regard to food and drink. The only woman he seemed to care for at all was the lady to whose villa in the hills he fled after his inglorious collapse in November 1923. He used to correspond with her a great deal and spent frequent week-ends at her place. Latterly he is said to have fallen in love with Winifred Wagner, but I can hardly imagine the Hitler of 1921 in love. Another thing that struck me was the man's utter incapacity to deal with important details. When he spoke of Italy, or the German race, or occultism, or the Jews, his talk was a succession of vague generalities, couched in attractive if flowery language, but showing in every case either complete ignorance or at least complete contempt for detail.

Though he insisted in season and out of season on the greatness of 'pure Germanism,' I never met a German who was so entirely un-German. His speech, his thought, his outlook upon men and things were far more Slav than Teutonic. He loved everything foreign while he denounced it. His race theories came from the Frenchman, Gobineau, and the English renegade, Houston Chamberlain. His famous phrase, 'the

'Third Reich,' was the invention of the Dutchman, Moeller van den Bruck. The party salute was an Elizabethan stage convention—a subterfuge adopted by actors to give a Roman effect. His regimental standards were a pale imitation of Roman eagles. His uniforms are anything but Germanic. They are a sort of cocktail of French, Austrian, and English uniforms with most of the bad points to all three. But I will say this, as the result of these long evenings spent with him: he was, and probably still is, passionately, almost ferociously, sincere in all he says and does, even when it appears hypocritical and insincere.

THREE STATESMEN OF CHINA

By WILLIAM MARTIN

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HAVING been closely associated for nearly fourteen years with the activities of the League of Nations, I have had the occasion to see, know, and judge a great many statesmen from every country in the world. I therefore know what I am talking about when I affirm that the men governing China at this moment are not inferior in any respect to their colleagues of the Occident.

In theory China is governed by a complicated system composed of five different powers, instead of the three that are customary in Europe. And on top of these five powers is a party government somewhat like that of Russia. But one can say that the real power is in the hands of three men, one of whom represents the military element in the Government; the second, political authority; while the third holds the economic life of the nation in his hands.

The military leader is General Chiang Kai-shek, who bears the modest title of President of the Committee of Military Affairs. The political leader is Mr. Wang Ching-wei, President of the Executive Council. The third member of this triumvirate, Mr. T. V. Soong, has no important function in the party, but is Minister of Finance, Vice President of the Council, and, moreover, brother-in-law of General Chiang Kai-shek.

Who are these three men and what is the secret of their alliance? In China, generals are not necessarily military leaders; they are simply men who have recruited an army. General Chiang Kai-shek has not always been a soldier; he began his career in the cotton business. But he is distinguished from his colleagues in two respects. For one thing, his army lacks any personal character, having originally been the army of the party and having consequently become the army of the nation. In the second place, Chiang Kai-shek has actually studied military affairs, which is