



# **Hitler and his God: The Background to the Nazi Phenomenon**

*Georges Van Vrekhem*

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*Part One:*

*When Hitler became the Führer*

# 1. Turnabout

*“I guarantee you, gentlemen, that the impossible always succeeds. What is most improbable is most certain.”*

Adolf Hitler

## A Corporal Watching Mice

The corporal woke up rather early in the morning, before the start of his daily routine. As he had nothing else to do, he amused himself by throwing bread crumbs at the mice which were the regular visitors of his small room, and watched them playing with the crumbs or fighting for them. The First World War – the so-called “Great War” – was over, and the future of the corporal, who had no ties with relatives or friends, looked very bleak indeed.

He had not come back marching among the endless grey, weary throngs of soldiers carrying the smell of mud, gun powder and rotten human flesh in the folds of their uniforms. For shortly before the armistice he had been blinded by gas near Wervik, on the French-Belgian border, and transported far northwards to a military hospital at Pasewalk, in Pommerania. There he had touched the depths of his ordeal when hearing the announcement that the fighting had stopped on 11 November, that Germany had lost the war, that the

Kaiser and all German princes had abdicated, and that a German republic had been proclaimed. Now he was waiting in Munich, in the barracks of what remained of his regiment, to be demobilized.

Although Austrian by birth and still by nationality, Adolf Hitler had in August 1914 been allowed to enlist in the 16th Bavarian Reserve Infantry Regiment, the “List Regiment”. He had served most honourably from the first weeks of the war until the last days, a full four years. As a battle dispatch runner (*Gefechtsmeldegänger*, to use his own designation) in the regimental headquarters he had participated in a great number of murderous battles in France and Belgium; he had escaped death narrowly on several occasions, and was awarded the Iron Cross Second and First Class for bravery “Nobody who has known [Hitler] from nearby will doubt his courage”, testified the Adjutant of the Regiment later on. “In the field he has proved himself to be a brave, exceptionally reliable dispatch runner who really deserved the Iron Cross First Class, and who several times had been mentioned for it before he was awarded with it. He was the example of the unknown soldier who quietly and unassumingly performed his duty.”<sup>1</sup>

The war had been “the most unforgettable and greatest time of his earthly life”<sup>2</sup>; as Hitler himself would write, he had been “passionately happy to be a soldier”. He was now twenty-nine years old. What would become of him? He had no

prospects, no future. Therefore he did everything possible to postpone his demobilization, for the army still gave him a bunk to sleep and a chunk of bread to eat. Once on his own, he could only slide back into his dreams of becoming a great architect, while having to earn a living selling water colour paintings of picturesque buildings and monuments. For that was what he had done in Munich before the outbreak of the war, as it was what he had done in Vienna, where he had led the life of a tramp. “He always looked so starved”, remembered people who had known him at the time.

He might have to change into civilian clothes any day now. War heroes there were aplenty. Nobody cared for the columns of bedraggled soldiers, ill-fed and shabbily clothed, still carrying their weapons, with the reflection of unspeakable horrors and death in their eyes, moving through a civilian world they no longer recognized and deeply despised. The food situation in Germany remained so bad that nobody cared about the starvation of others. A few crumbs could be spared for the mice, though. “Since I regularly woke up before five o’ clock in the morning”, wrote Hitler in *Mein Kampf*, “I had got into the habit of putting a few left-overs or crusts of bread on the floor for the mice which amused themselves in my little room, and watching the droll little beasts chasing around after these choice morsels. I had known so much poverty in my life that I was well able to imagine the hunger, and hence also the pleasure, of the little creatures.”<sup>3</sup>

But, lo and behold ... not that many years later there stood

that selfsame Adolf Hitler, triumphantly, as the new Chancellor of Germany on the balcony of the Reich Chancellery in Berlin, acclaimed by thousands of enthusiastic German citizens! And then he stood, all by himself and with the Iron Cross First Class on his chest, high above huge, neatly drawn up columns of uniformed Germans on the Zeppelin Field in Nuremberg. They hailed and revered him as their Leader, their *Führer*, even as their Messiah, who had come to make them great again, greater than they had ever been before in their history, rulers of the earth. *Deutschland über alles, über alles in der Welt*. The one-time desperate corporal-without-a-future had become “Leader of the nation, Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, Head of Government and Supreme Executive Chief, Supreme Judicial and Leader of the [NSDAP] Party”.<sup>4</sup>

Not only had he become master of life and death in the country he ruled, where his will was law and his word gospel truth, he also “changed the map of Europe, destroyed empires, and promoted the rise of new powers, evoked revolutions, and brought the colonial age to an end.”<sup>5</sup> The “man from nowhere” united Austria with Germany and entered as conqueror into Prague, Warsaw and Paris. He conquered, enslaved and killed – and intended to conquer more, kill more and enslave more.

How had this come to pass? How had the former Austrian corporal, once compared to a worn out stray dog, reached

such a pinnacle of power that Joachim Fest could write: “If Hitler had succumbed to an assassination or an accident at the end of 1938, few would hesitate to call him one of the greatest German statesmen, the consummator of Germany’s history”? <sup>6</sup>

Libraries have been written about Hitler and Nazi Germany, yet several of the best-known and most widely read historians agree that he remains enigmatic. “The more extensive the material at our disposal and the greater the historical distance, the more puzzling Hitler seems to become”, writes Christian von Krockow. <sup>7</sup> Alan Bullock, author of such essays like *Hitler – A Study in Tyranny* and *Hitler and Stalin – Parallel Lives*, admits in a conversation: “The more I learn about Hitler, the harder I find it to explain ... I can’t explain Hitler. I don’t believe anybody can.” <sup>8</sup> And to H.R. Trevor-Roper “after fifty years Adolf Hitler remains a frightening mystery.” <sup>9</sup>

“At one time I have within myself chosen my way in spite of totally inimical surroundings”, said Adolf Hitler, “and I, an unknown and nameless man, have kept walking until the final success. Often declared no longer existent and always wished to be non-existent, in the end I was the victor.” <sup>10</sup>

There must have been a time “when Hitler became Hitler”, when the nonentity turned into a seer and a politician who, in a very short time, accomplished feats deemed impossible: wipe out the humiliation of the Versailles Treaty, build up a prostrate and despondent Germany, and unify the country into

an efficient war machine for his megalomaniac and criminal overt and covert goals. There must have been a source of the power supporting this rootless, often ridiculed and always underestimated man to build up a powerful and ruthless political party, inspiring him to overcome the most critical situations, and impelling him to take his stand above all those superior to him inside and outside Germany. There must have been a fountainhead of the evil that through this man tried to ravage humanity and make it regress into a state of barbarism supposed to belong definitively to the past.

## Germany in Turmoil

“Caste” is generally associated with India and fossilized backwardness. Little does the common awareness in the West realize that caste did and to a considerable extent still does determine the patterns of its social structures. In the Middle Ages – not so very long ago – caste was a fact of life. There was the Catholic Church with its clergy (*brahmins*); there was the nobility with its feudal hierarchy (*kshatriyas*); there was the upcoming and very diligent class of the merchants (*vaishyas*); and last and very much least there was the class of the workers (*shudras*), mostly serfs without any rights, on a par with the animals and other possessions.

Because of the Renaissance this social pyramid, which had shaped the Western outlook on life for centuries, was put into question, together with everything else in life. Acquiring the

ideals of the Enlightenment – among them equal rights for all human beings – the “third estate”, the merchant or bourgeois class, grew conscious of itself. The French Revolution would be the revolution of this “third estate”. To work out the impetus of its ideas the revolution of 1789 needed subsequent revolutions in the nineteenth century, the high time of the bourgeoisie, of reason, liberalism, materialism and progress. These subsequent revolutions (in 1830, 1848 and 1870) were made necessary by the resistance of the clergy and the nobility, fighting for their survival, and because of the resistance to any kind of change in the nature of the human being.

But what about the “fourth estate”, the class of labourers, servants and peasants, of the workers of all kinds? They too were human beings, after all, and therefore entitled to equal rights like anybody else. When in parallel with the unexpected French Revolution a no less surprising Industrial Revolution came about, the role of the workers, of the *shudras*, grew in importance: they were the manpower with which to make that gigantic industrial development possible. Fed up with their peasants’ existence, the toilers of the land left their ploughs and their cows and migrated to the towns, expecting heaven but stumbling into a hell worse than their soil-bound labour. They became the “proletariat”. Only the blind could fail to see that this down-trodden, struggling, exploited human masses would soon arise in an effort to take their due place in humanity, that they would strive for an equal footing with

those who had for so long used and abused them.

After a preparation and build-up of almost a century, the “proletariat” resolutely took the fore of the stage of history in the Russian Revolution of 1917. The German Army High Command, by that time de facto rulers of the country, had supported the Russian revolutionaries in the hope that the collapse of tsarist Russia would free them from the burden of their eastern front, and allow them to deal a decisive blow to the Allies in the west. Their calculations proved almost correct, for the German “spring offensive” in 1918, made possible because of the Peace Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, threw the Allies back and even threatened Paris again, creating the exhilaration of impending victory among the population in Germany. But the Allies recovered, partly thanks to the fresh American troops, and from 8 August, Germany’s “black day”, the Hindenburg-Ludendorff duo knew that defeat was inevitable and informed their Kaiser accordingly.

All this has a direct impact on our story. The German proletariat, represented by the “German Socialist Party” and the more radical Marxist “German Independent Socialist Party” – which would soon become the “German Communist Party” – formed a considerable part of the population. The German Socialist Party had in the 1912 general election, just before the war, won the highest number of votes. This had caused unease and fear among the traditional classes who were, in that Prussian dominated country, extremely aware of their social status, in other words class-conscious. There was

place for the workers beneath them, not beside them, and surely not above them as members of a government, administrators, or whatever. Germany had not assimilated the ideals of the Enlightenment; it had remained a Prussian, autocratic, hierarchically structured society where all looked up to those above and down on those below.

Yet the war had shattered many a certainty. The Germans felt that the Bolshevik revolution in Russia threatened their existence directly. Had the Marxist doctrine not predicted that Germany, the foremost industrialized country in Europe with a massive proletariat, would be the country best prepared for the great proletarian revolution? And did the Russian Bolshevik leaders not do everything in their might to light the fuse of revolution in other countries, especially in Germany? Russian refugees arrived in droves in Berlin, Hamburg, Leipzig, Munich, every one of them with his or her tales of horror about the Reds, and with dire warnings. Along with them infiltrated Bolshevik agents, teleguided by the Third International, and in the eyes of the German Marxists adorned with the halo of heroes who had accomplished a historical feat that would change the world.

The traditional German higher and middle classes were, in the last months of 1918, more fanatically nationalistic than ever, misled as they were by the propaganda of the Supreme Army Command and the narrowness of their own convictions. The hell of the battlefields they knew only from hearsay. But so many young men would not come home anymore; the food

was scarce and procuring it often the main occupation in life; the tension of the war was hard to bear and gnawed at the roots of all certainties. The Left, less socially inhibited and incited by the events in Russia, no longer hesitated to go on strike at the end of October and in the beginning of November 1918.

Then came the coup in Munich: Kurt Eisner, a Jewish journalist, proclaimed Bavaria a Socialist Republic on 7 November. The Wittelsbach king, Ludwig III, abdicated the very day, the first of all eighteen still ruling German princes to do so. (Kaiser Wilhelm II would follow suit on 9 November. It had been one of the peace conditions formulated by the American President Woodrow Wilson that all authoritarian and military structures and institutions in Germany should be abolished.) Eisner, a bearded intellectual who did not look the part of a revolutionary, was not a fanatic; he was a pacifist, idealistic-humanitarian socialist, carried forward by the enthusiasm of his comrades and the war-weariness of many different-minded but starving citizens. Bavaria would be governed by a council of inexperienced workers, soldiers and farmers who had to improvise an administration in harsh circumstances. The most inexperienced was Eisner himself. This he proved soon at a socialist congress in Bern, where before the world he declared Germany guilty of starting the war, thereby pronouncing his own death sentence.

**I like a Worn Out Straw Dog**

This was the Munich corporal Hitler arrived in on 21 December 1918, discharged from the hospital at Pasewalk. He was assigned to the Reserve Battalion of the 2nd Infantry Regiment, a battalion marked for immediate demobilization. But demobilization was what Hitler tried to prevent by any means for, as we have seen, he really “stood before the Void”.<sup>11</sup> He managed to be detailed to a prisoners of war camp in Traunstein, between Munich and Salzburg, to guard the last Russian and French soldiers there before they were sent home. Towards the end of January 1919 Hitler was back in Munich, where he joined a military guard unit at the Central Railway Station.

He was also elected *Vertrauensmann*, i.e. representative, of the lower ranks of his battalion. This is not surprising considering his war record and the impression made by his occasional outbursts of oratory, when provoked, which testified to a certain level of intellectual capability. But his election is startling because the whole army garrison in Munich was governed by Eisner’s socialists, which means that Hitler went along with the leftists, something diametrically opposed to his later beliefs. He even became a member of the propaganda section of the Soldiers Council. And when Kurt Eisner had been murdered, on 21 February, *Vertrauensmann* Hitler was one of the hundred thousand mourners following the remains of the Jewish prime minister

to the burial ground. <sup>12</sup>

“With a probability bordering on certainty Hitler has, till May 1919, chosen the side of the people [i.e. the socialists] of whom he later untruthfully said ‘that already in November 1918 he had found out that they possessed no honour’.” <sup>13</sup> Many students of Hitler’s life have been surprised by these recently discovered facts because they took for granted Hitler’s statement in *Mein Kampf* that “the granite foundation” of his world view had already been laid in his years in Vienna (from 1907 till 1913). But Brigitte Hamann and others in her tracks have shown “how much *Mein Kampf* is political propaganda and how little a biography”. <sup>14</sup> In the beginning of 1919 corporal Hitler would have done anything to stay another day in the army, for he had nowhere else to go.

“He was after the First World War one of the many thousands of ex-soldiers who roamed the streets looking for work ... At that time Hitler was willing to accept a job from anybody who was kind towards him. He would have worked as eagerly for a Jewish or French employer as for an Aryan”, a certain ex-captain Mayr remembered later on. And he added: “When I first met him he resembled a worn out stray dog looking for a master” <sup>15</sup> – words he would come to regret.

The Russian Revolution had been a two-phase event: in February 1917 the socialist, humane Menshevik revolution with Alexander Kerensky as its leader; in October of the same

year the Marxist, ruthless, Bolshevik takeover led by Lenin. A similar evolvment was tried out in Berlin, where the radical Spartacists led by Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg tried to take over from the socialist government. But the Spartacist coup was put down by the socialist government with the help of *Freikorps*, independent and ultra rightist armed units mainly consisting of war veterans and commanded by charismatic officers with condottiere allures. In Munich, though, the communist follow-up to Eisner's socialist government succeeded, albeit only for a short time. The "dictatorship of the proletariat" was proclaimed on 7 April 1919 and a government of army and workers councils installed, after the Russian example of the "soviets". A "Red Army", under a twenty-three year old sailor, would be this government's power base to change German society into a proletarian paradise.

It should be kept in mind that Germany in those early post-war months was in complete distress. The shock of the unexpected defeat, the thousands of jobless, aimless military men hanging about everywhere, the new social-democratic regime, called "The System", felt as foreign to the body of the "real" Germany and resented from the very beginning, and above all the food shortage undiminished because of the continuing Allied blockade – all this contributed to the mental and physical disarray. Like Eisner and his political amateurs the young communist leaders proved too small for their boots. At first it was an enjoyable game for them to scare and steal

from the clergy, the rich, the petty bourgeois and all those who were considered enemies of the people. But soon the blundering councils succeeded in causing such confusion that the *Reichswehr* (the national Army), supported by several Free Corps units, had little trouble defeating them. By 3 May the last Red resistance was crushed, often brutally.

This object lesson in “dictatorship of the proletariat” so much increased the fear and passionate rejection of Communism, and of leftism in general, that Catholic Bavaria now became a haven for all factions, ideologies, groupings and individuals of the Right. Moreover, and no less important: Bavaria would never forget that, like Eisner, several of the most active leaders of the Red Councils had been Jews, and that at the command of those Jews German nationalist hostages had been murdered. This was at a time that the leadership of the Russian Revolution, including Lenin, was generally (but incorrectly) supposed to be entirely Jewish, that the Jew Bela Kun had started a short-lived Marxist revolution in Hungary, that the Jews Rosa Luxemburg, Leo Jogisches and others had sparked off the Spartacist revolt, and that Marxist revolts were brewing throughout Germany. The more the stomachs hungered, the more the ingrained German anti-Semitism found abundant nourishment.

## Captain Mayr’s Discovery

After the obliteration of the Munich Republic of Councils.

an officer appeared in the city who was to play an important part in the making of Adolf Hitler: Staff Captain Karl Mayr. It was the intention of the central government in Berlin as well as of the Army High Command to wipe out all leftist indoctrination in the minds of the soldiers and to replace it with correct patriotic, nationalist ideas. To this end an “information service”, in fact an intelligence and propaganda section, was created by Army Group 4 which covered the whole of Bavaria under the command of the powerful General Arnold von Möhl. Captain Mayr was appointed chief of this propaganda section.

Mayr, “very much radical Right”, was “ambitious, intelligent, a talented organizer and politically involved”; he was also an opponent of the Weimar Republic and an anti-Semite. <sup>16</sup> His network of connections seems to have extended to the most influential centres of German society. He was extraordinarily active, brimming with ideas and initiatives, and his influence was much greater than his rank and function would suggest. Not only did he have access to the highest levels of the Army through General von Möhl, with whom he stood on a confidential footing, he undoubtedly had direct links with the mighty Pan-German League and the *Germanenorden*, two organizations we will meet further on.

Soon Mayr’s attention was drawn to Corporal Hitler. Not only had Hitler been elected representative of his battalion under the socialist regime, he had also been elected “deputy

battalion representative” under the regime of the communist soldier councils. Then, after the Republic of Councils was crushed, in a new turnabout Hitler surprisingly became a member of a commission of inquiry, whose task it was to report on the patriotic fidelity of the soldiers of his battalion under the ephemeral communist regime, to which he himself had acquiesced! No doubt, he was able to turn with the wind and go to any end in order to stay in the army. But his comrades in arms undeniably looked up to him; and as he also had the gift of the gab, Mayr put his name on the list of participants in a “oratory course” for army propagandists, to be held at Munich University from 5 till 12 June 1919.

The teachers of the course were learned doctors and professor-doctors like Karl Alexander von Müller, Karl von Bothmer and Michael Horlacher. Their themes were “the political history of the war”; “Socialism in theory and practice”; “our agricultural situation and the peace conditions”; and “the relation between internal and external politics”.<sup>17</sup> It was there that Hitler for the first time heard educated intellectuals speak on subjects which interested him, and that he learned how those opinions could be fitted together into something like a coherent opinion or world view. The general trend of the lectures was obligatorily social-democratic, as the government was social-democratic, but the deeper tendency was doubtlessly nationalistic, pan-German and anti-Semitic.

Hitler’s mind, at the age of thirty, was not a blank sheet, of

course. During his youth in Austria he had imbibed the pan-Germanic ideas of his father, of his history teacher Leopold Pötsch and of Georg von Schönerer, and anti-Semitism was part of the air one breathed there. Besides, young Adolf had always been interested in politics, mainly to voice his spiteful disagreement. In Vienna he had attended sessions of the Austrian parliament and avidly read the newspapers in the cafés, as well as any tract or pamphlet he could lay his hand on. Now the physical presence and the discourse of the esteemed doctors and professors made a lasting impression upon him and put many of his opinions into context.

The lectures were followed by discussion groups. Here Hitler came into his own. He had always been what one might call a profuse “monologist” when agitated, unstoppably pouring the flood of his words over any individual listener as if addressing a crowd. His one close friend during the days in Linz and Vienna, August Kubizek, tells in his reminiscences about Adolf’s frequent outbursts of oratory, and many of Hitler’s companions in the asylum and in the trenches recalled how easily he could be egged on into a thundering diatribe when his opinions were contradicted. Hitler now got the occasion to express his newly acquired knowledge in the discussion groups. Speaking was no longer an idiosyncrasy; it became his assigned duty as an army propagandist who had to educate wrong-thinking leftists into right-thinking German patriots.

K.A. von Müller has narrated how, after one of his lectures,

his attention was drawn to a group “spellbound by a man in their midst who, with an unusually guttural voice, talked to them uninterruptedly and with increasing passion. I had the strange feeling that their excitement was caused by him and simultaneously caused him to speak in return. I saw a pale, lean face under an unmilitary strand of hair, with a clipped moustache and striking big, light blue, fanatically cold eyes.”

<sup>18</sup> When Müller pointed the man out to Mayr, the captain said casually: “Oh, that’s Hitler from the List Regiment”.

Hitler became Mayr’s star orator. In the middle of August he was sent to Lechfeld, where there was a camp with German soldiers who had been brainwashed in Russian captivity; they were to be mentally turned around before being released into civilian life. The camp had a permanent unit of Mayr’s “information service” under another trained propagandist, Rudolf Beyschlag, a non-commissioned officer who was to be Hitler’s superior for the duration of this assignment. The themes of the lectures were essentially the same as those taught to Mayr’s trainees during the course in oratory. Hitler was praised by his audiences as “a very good and passionate speaker”, “an outstanding and temperamental orator”. <sup>19</sup> It was to this period that he himself referred when he wrote in *Mein Kampf* the often quoted words: “I could speak.” What he meant was not that he could formulate and orally express his thoughts, for he had done that in countless monologues since his early youth. He meant that he was able

to carry along an audience, and this would be of crucial importance for his and Germany's future.

Another noteworthy fact during his mission in Lechfeld was that Hitler, for the first time, began to attack the Jews, so vehemently that he had to be restrained by his superiors, who, however much they might agree with him, were after all serving a social-democratic government. The commandant of the Lechfeld camp wrote to Army Group 4: "Concerning a very beautiful, clear and temperamental lecture on capitalism by Corporal Hitler, who on this occasion touched upon the Jewish question ... The thought was uttered that the [propaganda] section had been founded by Gruppenkommando Möhl to function as a military unit. Yet as the Jewish problem was very clearly expounded [by Hitler] with special consideration of the Germanic standpoint, then such a discussion could easily give the Jews a pretext to label the lectures anti-Jewish propaganda. I found it therefore necessary to instruct that the utmost care should be taken in the discussion of the problem, and that too explicit references to the race that is foreign to the German people should be omitted as much as possible." 20

Although anti-Semitism was imprinted upon the German mind, the subject was not mentioned by the instructors at Munich University. It has, moreover, been shown by Brigitte Hamann that Hitler was not an actively conscious anti-Semite during his Vienna years, where he had friendly relations with Jews among the inmates of the men's hostel and among the

shopkeepers who sold his water colour paintings. Where, then, or by whom had he been infected with these vehement anti-Judaic feelings?

That by that time he was regarded an authority on anti-Semitic matters is documented by a short letter written to him by Captain Mayr on 10 September 1919. In this letter Mayr asks Hitler to answer a question put to him in writing by Adolf Gemlich, another of Mayr's military propagandists. The question was: "What is the attitude of the social-democratic government towards the Jews? Are the Jews also included in the socialist programme of "equal rights" of the peoples, even so when one considers them to be a threat to the *Volkstum* [the people as a race]?" <sup>21</sup> In his request to answer in his place Captain Mayr addresses his subordinate, a corporal, as *Sehr verehrter Herr Hitler*. This is usually translated as "Dear Sir". But the tone of the German formula is much more reverential, for it says literally: "Very respected Mister Hitler". Joachim Fest, a German, finds this "an unusual salutation from a captain to a corporal", <sup>22</sup> and so does Werner Maser, also a German, who writes that it is "unusually respectful".

Hitler's answer not only reflects the sources of his newly acquired thoughts, it also documents the fact that his thinking had now been ordered into a pattern which will remain, as far as the Jews are concerned, the basis of his ideology, his real "granite foundation", till the last day of his life. There is the

foreignness and the danger represented by the Jewish people; there is the affirmation that the Jews are a race, not a religious community; and there is the statement that the ultimate aim of the struggle against the Jews must be, “unshakeably”, their elimination – whatever this word may have meant to Hitler in 1919. <sup>23</sup>

Mayr has written that he had daily contact with Hitler for more than fifteen months, i.e. from June 1919 till September of the next year. Hitler, acting on his innate despotic impulse, had already managed to push Beyschlag aside. He was “a frequent visitor to the War Ministry and ranked as a member of Mayr’s political staff ... Mayr decided to use his discovery for greater things.” <sup>24</sup> Indeed, on 12 September 1919, Hitler was sent to a conference room in a Munich beer house to report on a small loge-like group that called itself “German Workers Party” (DAP). As the saying goes: the rest is history.

A comparison of the dates is telling. Mayr’s respectful request to his corporal was written on 10 September; Hitler’s answer was sent to Gemlich on 17 September; Hitler’s first contact with the DAP, founded by the Thule Society, took place on 12 September. Clearly Hitler had covered a considerable stretch on the road of his ambitions since 6 June, the day Captain Mayr had reacted so casually: “Oh, that’s Hitler from the List Regiment” and the day he treated his corporal with such respect. “The process [of the formation of Hitler’s ideology] started in the year 1919, or becomes for the

first time discernible in this year. In no earlier notes does one find even the smallest hint of the later concepts ... One may even conclude that Hitler did not have any interest in politics [before 1919] ... One is not even sure that at that time he was already an anti-Semite ...” (Eberhard Jäckel <sup>25</sup>)

It is evident that in the summer months of 1919 an important change took place in Hitler’s life. Sebastian Haffner calls this period “an unexplainable gap”. Konrad Heiden writes: “In these months a transformation took place in Hitler”, and he wonders about “the mysterious circumstances that transformed him”. <sup>26</sup> John Lukacs is of the same opinion: “The year 1919 was a decisive milestone, indeed a turning point in [Hitler’s] life.” <sup>27</sup> While Ian Kershaw writes that “without Captair Mayr’s ‘talent spotting’ Hitler might never have been heard of”. <sup>28</sup> “In this period in Munich lies the key of Hitler’s entrance into politics”, <sup>29</sup> confirms Joachim Fest. Finally, there is Hitler’s own confirmation in 1941, in the course of a conversation in which he unwittingly contradicted several untruthful statements in *Mein Kampf*: “My programme originated in 1919.” <sup>30</sup> By “programme” he did not mean the NSDAP party programme, which was composed in 1920, but the basics of his personal thinking, his ideology.



## 2. Masters

*The Thule people were the first to sacrifice their lives for the swastika.*

Hermann Gilbhard

“It was to members of Thule that Hitler first came, and Thule members were the first who allied themselves with Hitler.”<sup>31</sup> Rudolf von Sebottendorff wrote this statement in his book *Before Hitler Came*, published in Germany in 1933, shortly after Hitler had become Chancellor. Many years before, in 1917, Sebottendorff had founded the Thule Society in Munich and been its Grand Master till 1919, during the eventful months of the Red governments of Eisner and the Republic of Councils. He had then left Germany and found a new home in Turkey. That Sebottendorff had not followed Hitler’s ascent to power from nearby may have been the reason for the ignorance or candour with which he published *Before Hitler Came*. He should have known that Hitler never acknowledged any debt towards a former helper, guide, teacher or superior – with the exception of Richard Wagner and Dietrich Eckart. Those who dared to remind him of such a kind of relationship soon found themselves muzzled and in some cases dumped into a concentration camp. Which is what happened to Sebottendorff. But he was lucky: Rudolf Hess,

once a member of Thule and now a man near the top in the Third Reich, saw to it that his former Grand Master was set free, with the suggestion that the air outside Germany might be better for his health.

The *Thule-Gesellschaft* was a secret society, extensively and sometimes fancifully treated in books on the occult side of Nazism. This must be the reason that until recently academic historians have approached the subject with caution. Peter Levenda writes: “To hear most historians speak of the *Thule-Gesellschaft*, one would think that it was a slight aberration, an anomaly that does not deserve close scrutiny.”<sup>32</sup> Yet the body of historical facts concerning the Thule Society is so large that it must be accorded its proper place in any history of Hitler’s life and of Nazism. Without this information an indispensable episode in Hitler’s life remains lacking. It may therefore be apposite to state at this point of our tale that the facts in the present chapters are historical, not the result of freewheeling fancy.

## Austrian Visionaries

Around 1880 a remarkable change took place in the European consciousness. The acquisitions of the Enlightenment had already been questioned by the Romantic movement at the beginning of the century. Now a powerful wave of vitalism and intuitionism restated the rights of the

emotional components of human nature. This change was initiated in the arts, foremost by the Impressionist “light explosion”. In quick succession Nietzsche, Freud, Bergson and Proust – to name only a few of the important innovators – appeared on the cultural scene. All contended the sole rule of reason; the human being burst out of the straight-jacket of the rational mind. The result was that it felt in some ways disoriented in its newly acquired liberty, while in other ways it felt dizzy because of the new perspectives and possibilities. It was the time that the coming of one kind of “superman” after another was proclaimed to be the destiny of humanity. Nietzsche’s “re-evaluation of all values” created a euphoria and simultaneously a deep fear, for most customary and trusted beacons seemed to vanish.

An important role in this cultural upheaval – which would create the tension that led to the First World War – was played by the Theosophical Society, founded by H.P. Blavatsky and H.S. Olcott in 1875. That Theosophy spread so fast and so widely proves that it provided some answers to deep and unfulfilled needs in the human being. The human being is more complex than thought by Descartes and his philosophical progeny: rationalism, materialism, positivism, scientism, reductionism. In the human being there is of course the material part, but there is also the vital part with the life forces, the mental part (considered no more than an “epiphenomenon” by Descartes) and a soul. Theosophy borrowed from the Eastern wisdom a view of the multi-

layered nature of our being, of the corresponding layers of the cosmos, and of a history of mankind going back much further than the improbably short time span accepted by the academic sciences at present. Reincarnation gave a new value to the small number of years of the human life, suggesting that it had meaning after all. And, not least, Theosophy proposed a new, no longer anthropomorphic image of God, asserting that all was “That” and that That could be directly contacted and even realized, for that That was the living Presence in the soul.

“The modern German [and Austrian] occult revival owes its inceptions to the popularity of Theosophy in the Anglo-Saxon world during the 1880s”, writes Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke.<sup>33</sup> He situates this revival in the period 1880-1910 and notes that Theosophy “made a deeper impression in Germany than in other European countries”. The reason was that in Germany a strong opposition was growing against the ideals of the Enlightenment due to the particular development of a German nationalistic spirit, in the margin as it were and even contrary to modern cultural acquisitions in other West-European countries. This specifically German path is sometimes called *Sonderweg*, Germany’s “road apart”.

In Austria were invented some fundamental beliefs and convictions which would lead to Nazism. This is not always recognized because this beautiful country is usually associated with Tyrolean hats, yodelling and *Gemütlichkeit*, and also because in the tense political situation between the post-war occupying powers Austria escaped its own Nuremberg trial.

The feeling of cultural and racial superiority in the Austrian Germans, leading to pan-German fanaticism, was the result of the hostile relations between the various races and language communities in the ever less governable empire-cum-kingdom of Austria-Hungary. There the German speaking population had to fight for the preservation of their leadership status against no less patriotic or racist Czechs, Slovaks, Poles, Ruthenians, Slovenes, Serbo-Croats, Italians, and others. “In Vienna there lived at the time more Czechs than in Prague, more Jews than in Jerusalem and more Croats than in Zagreb.”

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The new ideas of Theosophy together with the growing self-awareness of the Austrian Pan-Germans explain in part a figure like Guido von List (1848-1919). List was a romantic visionary whose writings glorified a mythic Germanic past. The Ario-Germanic god-man was the highest type humanity had ever produced and would again become “the highest form of life ever to evolve in the universe”.<sup>35</sup> The Ario-Germanics had known an exoteric and an esoteric form of religious practice, the former Wotanist, the latter Armanist. In the far North the line of Armanist initiates had continued to exist uninterruptedly from times immemorial until the present day. This elite, the *Armanenschaft*, had to be revived and made conscious of its sacred task to create the future race of god-men.

List supported his visions with pseudo-historical

narrations, created interest in the remains of the great Ario-Germanic past in the monuments, landscapes and archaeological discoveries of central and northern Europe, wrote volumes about the sacred runes – and doing all that revived the anti-Roman, anti-Catholic sentiments which had been present in the German conscience from times before Luther. The titles of his books are instructive: *German Mythological Landscapes; The Original Language of the Ario-Germanics and the Language of Their Mysteries; The Religion of the Ario-Germanics – Its Esoterics and Exoterics; The Armanenhood of the Ario-Germans; The Secret of the Runes ...*

List's influence spread widely; List Societies and secret Armanen loges were founded in many towns in Austria and still more in Germany. No doubt, his books bolstered the Germanic ego by the evocation of a glorious past and a radiant future. And in List many read for the first time about reincarnation and karma. Much that the brutish imposition of the Christian faith had suppressed in the German psyche found resonance and expression in List's visionary writings, which would become a substantial element in the *völkisch*, i.e. Germanic racist, movement. "List became virtually the guru of the pan-Germans", writes Peter Orzechowski. "In a contemporary biography he was lauded as 'the rediscoverer of age-old Aryan wisdom'. With such publicity there could be little delay before the mythical glorification of Germanhood was also spread, through the members of the List Society, in

the empire of William II.”<sup>36</sup>

List’s revelations were supported and in a way complemented by the publications of another Austrian, Jörg Lanz von Liebenfels (1874-1954). Not only was Lanz acquainted with List, Brigitte Hamann sees Lanz as his “closest disciple and follower”.<sup>37</sup> It was Lanz who coined the term “ariosophy”, applicable to his own and List’s teachings (and showing the influence of theosophy). Ex-monk Lanz was also a learned student of the Bible, for the “true” understanding of which he invented a new key, and he felt a deep longing to realize the ideals of the Knights Templar, or what he supposed those ideals to have been. In later years he would found the “Order of the New Templars”.

He wrote books with titles like *Theo-Zoology or the Lore of the Sodom-Apelings and the Electron of the Gods* (1905). But his most influential essays appeared in his periodical *Ostara*, actually a series of brochures on single themes. Some titles of these booklets are: *Race and Woman, and Her Preferences for the Male of the Lower Species; The Dangers of Women’s Rights and the Necessity of a Superior Morality Based on the Right of Men; The Sexual and the Love Life of the Blonds and the Dark Skinned; Introduction to Sexual Physics; The Blonds as Creators of Language ...* As these titles tell us, the obsessions of the former monk were more vicious than List’s. He seems to have been a badly frustrated man. No wonder that one of the reasons for his expulsion from

the Cistercian Order was formulated as *amori carnati captus*, meaning that he was taken by carnal love, apparently homosexual.

Lanz's fundamental revelation was the existence of an unbridgeable gap between the higher, noble, god-like beings, and the lower, monstrous, animal-like beings whom he called Chandalas, apelings or *Schrätlinge*, i.e. mongrels, monstrosities. The higher beings were "the blond Ario-heroic races of all peoples and nations". Alas, the women of these exalted beings let themselves be seduced by the mongrels, who delighted in thus contaminating the blood of the noble races. They steadily degraded all that was blond, and consequently noble, pure and creative, into the transmogrified image of themselves, nearer to the animal than to the human being. It was through the women that sin had come into the world, for they were far more prone to bestial lust than men.

The ravings of Lanz did not remain confined within an obscure group or sect. The *Ostara* was printed in great numbers and widely read. In Lanz's ideas, as in those of List, resounded the feelings of racial superiority, supported by Darwinism, but also inspired by the longing for the realization of higher ideals that were rife at that time in Germany and Austria. Such feelings were among the driving forces of the multifarious völkisch<sup>[1]</sup> movement, and they will form an integral part of Nazism.

It should be mentioned here that several authoritative writers give credence to Lanz's statement that Hitler was a

reader of *Ostara* during his years in Vienna. Lanz himself wrote in 1932: “Hitler is one of our pupils.”<sup>38</sup> He was, just like Sebottendorff, silenced for his impudence. The saddest fact, however, is that so many of Lanz’s ideas were put into practice by Nazism, especially by Himmler’s Black Knights, the SS. Lanz von Liebenfels even found pleasure in imagining that his quasi-human mongrels would be sacrificed as a holocaust, a burnt offering, to the gods. And he wrote: “Amid the jubilation of the god-men we will conquer the whole planet.”<sup>39</sup>

## The Germanenorden [Order of Germanic People]

It was around 1880 – an axis in European cultural history – that the self-consciousness of the Germans, not to say their superiority complex, took on inflated proportions. Thanks to the statesmanship of Bismarck they had finally succeeded, in 1871, to build a German nation, which they considered to be the Second Reich. (The First Reich, the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation, had ended in 1806.) But the more the Germans became convinced of their exceptional qualities as a nation, and more particularly as a race, the more they felt inclined to look down on peoples who were in their opinion less favoured by the Creator. These were also the years in which Darwinism became accepted even by religious persons, who managed to combine an outlook based on chance

with the omnipotence of their God and with Providence. Social Darwinism suited racism admirably and gave it a new impetus.

That this is not one jot exaggerated may be shown by a paragraph from a propaganda leaflet of the Germanenorden: “The most highly talented and gifted race is the Nordic-Ariogermanic race, of which the main external characteristics, in their purest form and distinguishing them from all other human races, are: blond hair, blue eyes, and a rosy-white colour of the skin, together with a noble stature. This race has been, according to the most recent research, from olden times the one and only originator and owner of the noblest moral notions and of all highly developed forms of culture. It is the age-old noble race of humanity that, because of its innate gift of intelligence, richness of feeling and honour, because of its sense of justice and human benevolence, and because of its creative capacity and power of execution, is chosen to be the leader of humanity.”<sup>40</sup> This was the fundamental belief of all German nationalists and Pan-Germans, as it was the conviction that impelled the Nazis to power and the German armies to conquer the world.

If the Germans were the best, the divinely chosen people, then one should understand that they had reason to feel annoyed by people foreign to the body of their Germanic, or Nordic, or Nordic-Germanic, or Ario-Germanic race. Such non-Germans there had been among them for centuries, industrious, intelligent, even occupying high places in their

society: they were the Jews, now representing about one person out of every hundred in the country. Like the populations of other European nations, the Germans had a long-standing tradition of deep-seated anti-Semitism, centuries ago transmitted to them by Christianity, which taught that the Jews had killed their incarnated God, and that they had been dispersed throughout the world by way of punishment. The bigger the German ego, the less place there was for “foreigners” and the more ardent, or virulent, their anti-Semitic feelings grew.

On this well-prepared soil the *Germanenorden* was born, the brainchild of a mechanical engineer, Theodor Fritsch (1852-1933). Some consider him to have been “the most important anti-Semitic before Hitler”.<sup>41</sup> It was Fritsch who compiled, in 1887, the *Catechism of the Anti-Semite*; its twenty-seventh impression in 1907 was renamed *Handbook of the Jewish Question* and remained till the end of the Third Reich a source of reference and inspiration for all Jew-haters. Fritsch launched the “Anti-Semitic People’s Party” in 1889. In 1902 he started a periodical, the *Hammer*, which became such a success that Hammer Associations sprang up everywhere in Germany. And it was with these associations as a basis that Fritsch founded, in 1912, the *Germanenorden*. “The most important carriers of Listian ideas across the border [between Austria and Germany] were the members of the List Society in the German Reich who were involved in

the founding of the *Reichshammerbund* and the *Germanenorden*”, writes Goodrick-Clarke.<sup>42</sup> Fritsch’s multiple initiatives, which found broad resonance in Germany, leave no doubt that his influence was enormous; he was the person who undertook the step to convert the vague though widespread anti-Semitic sentiments into clearly formulated anti-Semitic concepts, slogans and actions.

The *Germanenorden* was a sister-organization of the *Hammerbund*; it was, in fact, its secret twin. Detlev Rose tells us: “The activists in the *Germanenorden* founded the first anti-Semitic lodge, a secret association which would consciously counteract the Jewish secret associations ... They tried to gain influence through information and instruction, in order that the control of the destiny of the Germanic countries would return into German hands.”<sup>43</sup> For there was supposed to exist a Jewish conspiracy to obtain the mastery of the world and more specifically of Germany. This was a popular rumour long before the fake *Protocols of the Wise Men of Zion* started on its devastating career.

It is rather amazing that the *Germanenorden* was structured in lodges, for Freemasonry would be one of the main targets of all Germanic-minded organizations, most of all of the Nazis. The reason for this enmity was that the sources of inspiration of Freemasonry were the ideals of the Enlightenment, and that the Masons were consequently internationalist in principle. From this the Germanic zealots

concluded that Freemasonry could not but be an instrument of Jewish world power. For, firstly, the Enlightenment had been a Jewish bid for power over the peoples' minds through the imposition of the rule of Reason. And secondly, internationalism was an offshoot of the Enlightenment, as were individualism, democracy, liberalism and socialism – all of which were directly or indirectly under the control of World-Jewry. Given such logic, it would not take long before the Jews would be the cause of all that ached in the world. The revered Herr Professor Treitschke had already coined the formula: “The Jews are our misfortune.”

Still further went the Germanenorden in its imitation of Freemasonry by prescribing rituals which an outsider might find slightly bizarre. Such a ritual was for instance “The Return of the Wayward Aryan to the German Halgadam”.<sup>44</sup> The master of the lodge which was to receive the wayward Aryan in its lap had to sit under a baldachin, flanked by two knights in white robes, wearing a helmet with horns and leaning on their swords. The brothers of the lodge stood before him in a semi-circle, while in the background music was played on a harmonium or piano, accompanying a choir of forest elves. The brothers sang the “Pilgrim’s Choir” from Wagner’s *Tannhäuser*. The ritual had to take place by candle light. And so on. This goes to show that the Germanenorden was still deeply stuck in the naïve imaginings of a romantic past. It is not that simple to create a new culture with new myths. Hitler will do much better.

Still, if a certain aspect of the Germanenorden may appear jejune, its anti-Semitism was fanatical, aggressive and malignant. The order has been the breeding ground of the horrors committed by the Nazis. And it will be in the secrecy of the order that killer commandos will be formed. According to Hermann Gilbhard: “From the ranks of the Germanenorden extremely dangerous terrorists have gone out, as proved by the murder of Matthias Erzberger. For both murderers who shot the former finance minister in August 1921 belonged, together with Manfred von Killinger who gave the order of the murder, not only to the *Organisation Consul* in München, but beyond it to the Germanenorden in Regensburg ...”<sup>45</sup>

Occult organisations are prone to splits and schisms. The reason seems to be that perception of the occult reality is a subjective experience – and who is to say who has the highest or the most powerful subjective experiences among the decision makers of the organisation? In autumn 1916 the Germanenorden broke up into two separate orders, one under Philipp Stauff, who had been a personal disciple of Guido von List, the other under Hermann Pohl. Pohl called his fiefdom “Germanenorden-Walvater” after Wotan (or Odin), “the Nordic All-Father or Walvater who determines the heroic death of the humans on the *Walstatt*, the battle field”.

<sup>46</sup> And it is here that we meet another of the main personages in our tale: Rudolf von Sebottendorff. For Sebottendorff came into contact with Pohl, and seems to have had such impressive

credentials that shortly after the schism he was appointed Grand Master of the Bavarian province of the Germanenorden-Walvater in Munich.

## Rudolf von Sebottendorff

Adam Glauer, alias Rudolf Freiherr von Sebottendorff vorder Rose, was born in 1875 as the son of a locomotive driver. Machinery and all kinds of technical gadgets interested the son as much as the father, for Adam became a skilled technician; he even undertook engineering studies but never brought them to a successful end. He wanted to see the world and signed on for various technical jobs on ships with destination New York, Naples and Australia. He did not hesitate to desert one ship for another if he found the new destination more alluring. In Australia, in the year 1900, he even went on an adventurous search for gold, but had to abandon the project because of the sudden death of his partner. Soon Glauer found a new job on a ship which took him to Egypt. And it was in Cairo that a new leaf in the book of his life was turned over: in the presence of the pyramids he became interested in the reality behind the surface of things, in matters which are called by the generic name “occultism”.

“Glauer began a serious study of occultism”, writes Goodrick-Clarke. “His interest in exotic religions had been kindled when he saw the Mevlevi sect of whirling dervishes and visited the Cheops pyramid at El-Giza in July 1900. His

companion Ibrahim told him of the cosmological and numerological significance of the pyramids and aroused Glauer's curiosity about the occult gnosis of ancient theocracies. Hussein Pasha, his wealthy and learned host, practiced a form of Sufism and discussed these matters with Glauer. At Bursa he made the acquaintance of the Termudi family ... Old Termudi had retired from business to devote himself to a study of the Cabbala and collecting alchemical and Rosicrucian texts ... The Termudis were Freemasons ... Glauer was initiated into the lodge by old Termudi and subsequently inherited his occult library. In one of these books Glauer discovered a note from Hussein Pasha, describing the secret mystical exercises of traditional Islamic alchemists, still practised by the Baktashi sect of dervishes." 47

In 1902 Glauer was back in Germany, but Turkey remained on his mind, the more so because his marriage and some financial matters did not turn out well. By the end of 1908 he was back in Turkey, where he "continued to study Islamic mysticism, which in his opinion shared a common Aryan source with the Germanic runes". One result of his study was an essay on the Baktashi dervishes, "an antinomian mystical order widely spread and influential in Turkey and connected by legend with the origin of the Janissaries." 48 The secret organization of the Baktashi resembled that of the Freemasons; they played an important role in the transition from Ottoman absolutism to a modern Turkish state, for the revolution of the

Young Turks had now established a constitutional monarchy and the rule of parliament. Glauer was, according to his own attestation, naturalized as a Turkish citizen in 1911 and adopted by a German baron who lived in Turkey, Heinrich von Sebottendorff von der Rose, whose name he would wear.

Sebottendorff returned to Germany in 1913, a year before the outbreak of the First World War. What he found there “was a materialistic land without any orientation, and that seemed to be on the verge of spiritual collapse ... the disappearance of the former simple manners and customs, seeking consolation in consumption, empty churches from which nobody drew any confirmation of his faith anymore, the venom of jealousy and hatred ... a boom of false prophets and spiritist circles where ‘hysterical women’ and ‘anaemic men’ desperately looked for help, but became the victims of nothing but cheats. ‘Nothing was too stupid not to be believed.’ ...”

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What was it that made Sebottendorff a fervent German nationalist and anti-Semite – he who had been steeped into the occult tradition of the Near East? Maybe it was the very discipline of inner values, of concentration and the awareness of an invisible but elementary hierarchy, peculiar to all true spiritual exploration. In his reaction to the superficial Western way of living and his rejection of it, Sebottendorff actually joined the mentality of the adherents of the völkisch movement, turning back towards the past and concentrating inwardly on the glow of “the German soul”. “Sebottendorff’s

political views were primarily inspired by a religious orientation: the anti-materialism of pan-Ottoman mysticism, alchemy, and Rosicrucianism, combined with a post-war hatred of Bolchevism, which he identified as the acme of materialism, led him to embrace anti-democratic ideas.”<sup>50</sup> It was this kind of mental make-up which rendered Sebottendorff receptive to the writings of Guido von List and Jörg Lanz von Liebenfels (whose actual names were Guido List, without the ennobling “von”, and Georg Lanz, *tout court*).

Sebottendorff, like List, was fascinated by the runes. Knowledgeable people write that the phonetic runic alphabet dates from the first centuries CE, and that it may be derived from the Etruscan script. Yet numerous runic inscriptions from prehistoric times have been found, especially in Scandinavia. “Prehistorians generally accept that the runes had possessed a symbolism over and above their phonetic value and use in writing, so that they were accordingly used for divination, the casting of lots, magical invocations, and the preparation of amulets and charms.”<sup>51</sup> List had written extensively on the runes and declared them to be sacred glyphs of the Armanen, the Ario-Germanic initiates and godmen of yore. It was this subject that brought Sebottendorff together with Philipp Stauff, a Listian and, as we have seen, since recently Grand Master of the Germanenorden-Walvater.

We have now an idea of the credentials which made Stauff

place Sebottendorff at the head of the Bavarian province of the Order. Sebottendorff would go on to write two semi-autobiographical novels and no less than seven astrological text-books between 1921 and 1923. He was one of the most looked up to astrologers at a time that “Germany counted more astrologers per square mile than anywhere else in the world.” If one adds to these publications his essay on the Baktashi dervishes and his articles in the publications under his supervision, then one cannot but conclude that Sebottendorff was a person out of the ordinary. This is confirmed by the fact that so many prominent members of Munich society joined the Germanenorden. In this light one takes with a pinch of salt statements like: “[Sebottendorff] was a political adventurer with a rather unsavoury past” (Fest <sup>52</sup>) and Detlev Rose’s title of his chapter on Sebottendorff: “The Adventurer from Hoyerswerda” <sup>53</sup> (the name of his birthplace). Such partial statements put a label on Sebottendorff which hampers understanding him. Goodrick-Clarke’s conclusion is much more objective, because better informed, when he writes: “Without this man it is likely that the Germanenorden and Ariosophy would have been condemned to oblivion.” <sup>54</sup>

## The Thule Society

The Germanenorden-Walvater was not in good shape when Sebottendorff took charge of the Bavarian province in 1916.

This was in the middle of “the Great War” which the Germans at the outset had expected to last only a few weeks or months, but which had turned into unending hell at the front and dire hardship in the homeland. Many of the members of the Germanenorden were bearing arms, and everyone’s ideals were put severely to the test. Goodrick-Clarke says that the Germanenorden was then “moribund”; one finds this confirmed in Sebottendorff, for he writes that the members who had stayed behind in the homeland must make an effort “to bring the order to life again”.<sup>55</sup> Sebottendorff, though, proved to be a vigorous and inspirational organizer, and soon the order numbered 1500 members in Bavaria, of whom 250 were residents of Munich.

Grand Master Sebottendorff chose a new seat for the Munich chapter: the prestigious *Hotel Vier Jahreszeiten* (Four Seasons). (This hotel is still one of the topmost in the city.) The new rooms of the order were inaugurated on Christmas Day 1917. On this occasion Sebottendorff launched two periodicals, one typically titled *Runes*, for the friends and sympathizers of the order, the other called *General News of the Order*, for initiated members. Sebottendorff, who had come into money by marrying the daughter of a wealthy businessman, also bought a barely surviving newspaper, the *Münchener Beobachter*. This newspaper would later be retitled the *Völkische Beobachter* and be the flagship of the Nazis. As the emblem of the Thule Society was chosen a swastika backed by a sword and crowned with oak leaves.

The directives and goals of the Germanenorden were the following: 1. One had to be a German “who could prove the purity of his blood up to the third degree; by this would be prevented that descendants from Jews would infiltrate the order”; 2. “Special value would be attached to the propaganda of racial science”, understood in the Darwinian sense; 3. “The principles of the pan-Germans were to be extended to the whole Germanic race; a unification of all peoples of Germanic blood should be prepared”; 4. “The battle against everything un-German, a fight against internationalism, against the Jewishness in the Germans, should be stimulated with all possible energy.” Members of the order also had to sign an attestation concerning their blood: “The signatory assures, to the best of his knowledge and conscience, that no Jewish or coloured blood flows in his veins and in those of his wife, and that there are no members of the coloured races among his forebears.”<sup>56</sup>

On the occasion of the inauguration Sebottendorff revealed the new name of the Munich chapter of the order: *Thule-Gesellschaft*, Thule Society. From then onwards the secret Germanenorden would act in the open under this assumed name. “Since the ritual Germanenorden activities were supplemented by overt right-wing meetings the term Thule Society was adopted as a cover-name for the order to spare it the unwelcome attentions of socialist and pro-Republican elements”, explains Good-Clarke.<sup>57</sup> This cover name

sounded “sufficiently mysterious”, found Sebottendorff, and at the same time “told those-who-knew what it was about”.<sup>58</sup> The lineage of the Thule Society leaves not a shadow of doubt: Fritsch’s Reichshammerbund had created a secret twin-organization, the Germanenorden, of which the Munich chapter of the Bavarian province was named “Thule Society”. In Bavaria the Germanenorden and the Thule Society were one and the same.

“Thule”, mentioned by some ancient historians, was a legendary country beyond the British Isles, somewhere in the misty regions of eternal ice and snow near or at the North Pole. The romantic völkisch imagination turned that country into “*the myth of the North*”<sup>59</sup>. It was “the homeland of the soul of the Nordic race ... the remembrance of paradise ...” (Sünner<sup>60</sup>); it was “the mysterious country of origin of the Aryans, a superhuman race with god-like capacities and knowledge no longer accessible to modern man”.<sup>61</sup> In short, all dreams and frustrations were projected back onto that legendary country in a mythic past, with the deep longing that they might be realized again in the future of the Germanic people. “Thule was concurrently the expression of a spiritual aspiration with which many Germans reacted to the modern tendencies, experienced as puzzling and frightening, to economic liberalism, materialistic utilitarianism and scientific positivism ... Thule represented a symbolism of life-denial, eternity and solace, a symbolism of death and conquest of

death at the origin of the race.”<sup>62</sup>

Thule was inevitably mixed up with the memory of Atlantis, time and again resurgent if not from the waves of the ocean then from the eddies of humanity’s memory. “All Germans stand in the depth of their unconscious with one leg on Atlantis”, according to Chris Amery. And Franz Wegener writes: “The Nordic-racist myth of Atlantis was understood to be the common starting point of German culture.”<sup>63</sup> The importance of these matters for our tale will be apparent in the following lines by Sebottendorff: “One has tried to convince us, and the world still believes it today, that the place of origin of the [Aryan] people is the Asiatic highlands or Mesopotamia. The light is supposed to have come out of the East. But more recent research has shown that this supposition is wrong: Northern Europe, North Germany is the rootplace of the bearers of culture. It is there that, from the dark prehistoric times till the present, streams of fertilizing German blood have poured forth, that waves upon waves have gone out to bring culture to the whole world.”<sup>64</sup> This was much more than a personal opinion. This kind of thought was given currency in the nineteenth century by a succession of esteemed publicists, scientists as well as litterateurs, and became gospel truth to all völkisch-oriented, racist Germans in the first decennia of the twentieth century. Hitler, for one, held exactly the same opinion, as did Alfred Rosenberg, the ideological supervisor of the Third Reich, and consequently

the official ideology of the Nazis.

Thule had also become familiar in the imagination of the völkisch Germans by another way: the publisher Eugen Diederichs had chosen the word “Thule” as the title of a series of twenty-four volumes of translations of the Nordic myths and sagas, the *Sammlung Thule*, published from 1911 onwards. Few means are so powerful for the spreading of an idea as the publication of a carefully selected book or collection of books at an affordable price. The Eddas and other Nordic myths, legends, songs and epics could for the first time be read and studied by a large public. Diederich’s initiative strongly influenced “the turn northwards” of the German mind, away from the Orient but still more away from southern Europe, more specifically from Rome, symbol of the ancient Roman empire and its culture, and of the Catholic Church. “Thule is not the past: Thule is the eternal German soul”, proclaimed a prospectus of Diederich’s collection. <sup>65</sup>

“In the Thule Society it was like in a dovecote”, reminisces Sebottendorff, “there was in Munich no association representing some national interest or other which did not find shelter in Thule.” <sup>66</sup> As Munich, with its beer halls and its beer culture, was (and is) the kind of city where social interrelation is a way of life and “everybody knows anybody else” – an important factor in the emergence of the Nazi movement – the influence of the Thule Society in the Bavarian capital must have been considerable.

Besides meetings of the nationalistic and anti-Semitic associations, Thule organized a great variety of activities of its own, for it was after all registered as “Study group of Germanic antiquity”. There were lectures on runes, on German history and prehistory, on the Eddas and the Song of the Nibelungs, on other völkisch subjects accepted and promoted by the Germanenorden. Astrology, numerology, and the use of the pendulum and the dowsing-rod were studied. There were artistic evenings with vocal and instrumental recitals. The highlights of the Germanic calendar, especially the summer and winter solstices, were celebrated – all this taking place in clouds of cigar and cigarette smoke en cheered up with sausages and beer.

But there was another side to the Thule: the occult activities, covered up by the outward bustle. Thule was after all a secret society whose members were sworn to silence.<sup>67</sup> In the first place there were the sessions of the pseudo-masonic Germanenorden-Walvater: the return of a “wayward Aryan into Halgadam”, the routine meetings of instruction and proposal of activities *extra muros*, or the promotion of a member to a higher grade within the order. And there were the meetings of Thule members interested in occultism of various sorts. We know about Sebottendorff’s Middle Eastern background and he will have sought or been requested to share his knowledge. The readings of Walter Nauhaus, a close collaborator of his, “ranged from Guido von List’s

‘researches’ to astrology, chiromancy, and the writings of Peryt Shou. In a letter to List he admitted to an interest in the Cabbala, and in Hindu and Egyptian beliefs. Like Sebottendorff, Nauhaus was fascinated by the mystical ideologies of ancient theocracies and secret cults.”<sup>68</sup>

We find another echo of the goings on in Thule in the memoirs of Walter Schellenberg, the SS chief of foreign intelligence: “Hitler’s racial mania was one of his characteristic features. I discussed this several times with Dr. Gutbarlett [correctly: Gutberlet], a Munich physician who belonged to the intimate circle around Hitler. Gutbarlett believed in the ‘sidereal pendulum’, an astrological contraption, and claimed that this had given him the power to sense at once the presence of any Jew or persons of partial Jewish ancestry, and to pick them out in any group of people. Hitler ... had many discussions with him on racial questions.”

<sup>69</sup> Wilhelm Gutberlet, a medical doctor, is mentioned in Sebottendorff’s list at the end of *Before Hitler Came* as a member of Thule’s *Kampfbund*, one of its two Free Corps to which belonged also a certain Rudolf Hess.

Taking all this into consideration, there can hardly be any doubt that another focus of interest in Thule was spiritism. Philipp Stauff, one of the founders of the Germanenorden, “was involved in a series of spiritualist séances which claimed to have communicated with long-dead priest-kings of the old religion.”<sup>70</sup> In Germany the evocation of

otherworldly spirits was then at an all-time high because so many sought consolation in a contact with their son, father or brother killed on the battlefield. Spiritism was, moreover, more than what it is now commonly supposed to be, namely a pursuit of hair-raising sensationalism: it was the search for “a new form of transcendental experience” based on a holistic interpretation of reality. <sup>71</sup>

In *Before Hitler Came*, Sebottendorff reproduces some of his writings in the Thule publications. Some brief quotations will have to do: “The German needs a *Führer* who imposes himself on him ... We don’t acknowledge any international brotherhood, but only the interests of our race; we don’t acknowledge the brotherhood of men, but only the brotherhood of the blood ... Struggle is the father of everything ... We don’t want to be the anvil anymore, we want to be the hammer [an allusion to Fritsch’s Hammerbund] ... Democracy is Jewish, any kind of democratic revolution is Jewish ... There are higher and lower races. If one attributes the same value to racial bastards, the Chandalas, as one does to the Aryans, the noble people, one commits a crime against humanity. Humanity needs leaders and leading races for its upward evolution ...” <sup>72</sup> Sebottendorff’s own proud comment: “This was a language one had not yet heard in Munich until then.” The position taken by Thule represented “a fundamental change in the attitude of the Germans towards the Jews ... Now research and proven facts leave no more

doubt that the Jewish problem is a racial problem which has nothing to do with religion. The question is the following: shall we, German companions-in-race [*Volksgenossen*] let ourselves in the future be dominated politically, economically and culturally by a decreasing minority of a people of a foreign race, that feels itself as such and keeps itself carefully apart and of pure blood through law and religion, which to the Jews are one and the same?” 73

In the first days of November 1918 sailors of the German fleet at Kiel and Wilhelmshaven, following the example of the Russian Kronstadt Revolt, rose against their officers and thereby started the German revolution. They spread through the country, inciting the population to join them in their protest against the war, the war mongers and the catastrophic consequences for Germany. They raised the red flag and preached the international revolution of the proletariat. On 7 November, Kurt Eisner, before a huge crowd on the *Theresienwiese* (a large open space) in Munich, declared Bavaria a social-democratic republic. The Wittelsbach king abdicated and went into exile. On 11 November Germany put down its weapons. Its “grasp for the world power” had failed, its “war of illusions” had been lost. The shock to the psyche of the Germans and their feelings of superiority was numbing. This was a chance for the Thule Society to prove that it could do more than promulgate grandiloquent proclamations.

Sebottendorff reacted immediately to the revolutionary situation in a speech to the members of Thule: “My Brothers

and Sisters: Yesterday we experienced the collapse of all we were used to, of all we loved and valued. In the stead of our princes, related to us by blood, reigns our deadly enemy Juda. We do not yet know what will develop out of this chaos. We can guess it ... All of us who are involved in this struggle are in danger, for the enemy hates us with the boundless hate of the Jewish race. Now it is an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth ... It will be my aim as long as I am holding this iron hammer [as Grand Master] to involve the Thule in this struggle ... From today we will act ...”<sup>74</sup>

And act they did. Hermann Gilbhard writes: “The Thule represented, at the time of the [German] revolution, the umbrella organization of nearly all nationalistic and anti-Semitic forces in Munich.”<sup>75</sup> Detlev Rose agrees: “The Thule Society became a centralising organization for pan-German, patriotic and similar associations and tried to harbour all groupings which became threatened by the political upheaval ... The significance of the Society in this phase of turmoil cannot be overestimated ... Many invisible threads met in the *Vier Jahreszeiten*.”<sup>76</sup>

The Thule Society ran an active propaganda campaign against the Reds and printed tens of thousands of leaflets, one of the principal means of political action at a time that the “media” were not what they have become today. Weapons, massively available after the return of the armies from the front, were bought and stacked in hidden places. The Thule

Society formed its *Kampfbund Thule* in the very first days of the Republic, and the Society would equip a second fighting unit, the *Freikorps Oberland*. Both Free Corps units were commanded by demobilized officers with years of front experience; they would distinguish themselves in the liberation of Munich from the communist Republic of Councils as well as in the battles against the Russian Bolsheviks in the Baltic region. When Kurt Eisner was murdered on 21 February 1919, he was on his way to step down as president. His murderer, a young student Anton von Arco auf Valley, was allegedly connected with Thule.

Thule's antirevolutionary endeavours became still more intensive after the communist Republic of Council's had succeeded Eisner's socialists and increased the general confusion. The Bolsheviks were a direct challenge to every single article of the Thulean creed, and they did not hesitate to requisition, ransack, imprison and kill. In a tragicomedy of errors seven Thule members were arrested and executed, some say in a gruesome manner. One of them was Walter Nauhaus, who had proposed the swastika as Thule's emblem; others were Baron Karl von Teuchert, Countess Heila vor Westarp and Prince Gustav Maria von Thurn und Taxis. The eighth person to be executed together with those anti-Semites was a Jew, professor Ernst Berger, arrested by mistake; he had insisted on being led to his execution thinking that they were taken to be interrogated and that he would be able to prove his identity. The news of those executions quickly

reached the units of the *Reichswehr* (the national army) and the Free Corps who had encircled Munich and who, when executing their attack, took bloody revenge on the communists.

As Grand Master of the Thule Society Sebottendorff did not survive very long the six months of the revolutionary events in Munich (from November 1918 till May 1919). As he himself puts it: the socialist newspaper the *Münchener Post* had printed a pamphlet accusing him of living under a false name; of having deserted the Thule cowardly at the time of the murders; of having acquired the Turkish nationality to be exempt of military service and thus escape being sent to the front; of having embezzled certain sums of money; etc. <sup>77</sup> Sebottendorff claims that he refused to defend himself to prevent that the Order's secrets would be exposed, and that he preferred to take his leave: "He had to go so that the delicate plant would not be smothered" – the delicate plant, that is, of the political movement he had initiated. But this brings us to our following chapter.

<sup>[1]</sup> The German term *völkisch* is not adequately translatable. It is closely associated with "race" and with things belonging to the past, and evokes English words like "folklore", "folk music", etc. In this book a simplified spelling is adopted which leaves no doubt about the provenance and the meaning of the word.



### 3. Mentor

*The German soul, like the light of the suns,  
Conquers the night with a new dawn!*

Dietrich Eckart

#### Thule Reaches Out

Bismarck had not been able to suppress the social-democratic upsurge, feared and hated by the reactionaries. In 1912 the Socialists obtained 110 seats in parliament, more than any other party. In 1914, carried on the wave of general euphoria with which the war was greeted, the social-democrats temporarily put aside, or betrayed, their internationalist principles, but most of them, under pressure from the Communists and the 1917 events in Russia, reverted to their original ideals when the war turned sour. Since the 1918 revolution, which made Germany from a monarchy into a republic, the country was fissured into two hostile blocks and “the menace of civil war hung like a black cloud over Germany”.<sup>78</sup>

The Thule Society, “probably the most powerful secret organization in Germany”,<sup>79</sup> had become aware of the potentially catastrophic gap between Right and Left, and decided to do something about it by trying to win over the

workers for the nationalist ideas. In the following words of Hitler, in *Mein Kampf*, one hears an echo of Thule's concerns: "The bourgeoisie has misjudged the importance of the mass and therefore of the social problem. Because of this the bourgeoisie has estranged the workers from their own *Volkstum* [racehood] and driven them into the arms of their Judeo-Marxist leaders. This has been an unforgivable mistake ... It is decisive for the success of the Party to reach out in the first place to the large masses." 80

Thule's awareness of the necessity to gain the workers for the nationalist (and anti-Semitic) cause may have been prompted by politically active elements in the Reichswehr like General Arnold von Möhl and Captain Karl Mayr. "There was a personal and ideological relationship between the Reichswehr and the Thule", 81 according to Orzechowski. This is corroborated by Joachim Köhler: "Mayr was a confidant of the Order." 82 There was, in fact, a close interaction between all rightist activists to whatever organization they belonged, be it the Germanenorden or the Reichswehr, the Pan-German League, the Free Corps, etc. In the confused and tense atmosphere of those years the Right felt that they, and with them German culture, were besieged from within by "Bolshevism". The civil war was rarely fought out in the open, but for the most part on countless fronts by secret associations in hidden ways.

To gain the proletariat for their cause, the Thule Society

founded towards the end of 1918 two front organizations. The first was named “German Socialist Party”, for which the propaganda was launched on Christmas Day. This was meant to be a political party in the classical sense of the word, “German-völkisch and socialist”, but not accessible for Jews. Its newspaper would be the *Münchener Beobachter und Sportblatt* – a title intended to allure the lower classes by the addition of *Sportblatt*, which means “sports magazine”. The president of the new party, Hans Grassinger, was a member of the Thule Kampfbund.

The Thule Society was less ambitious at the cradle of its second offspring, the “German Workers’ Party”, German initials *DAP*, founded on 5 January 1919. The president of the DAP, Karl Harrer, a member of Thule, conceived his party more like a lodge, a secret völkisch club where members of the working class would be introduced to the Thule ideals. Thus the DAP would be something like a proletarian annexe of the more select Thule Society. Ironically, it was the DAP which grew into the NSDAP, Hitler’s National Socialist Workers’ Party, and which would swallow up its fledgling sister organization, the German Socialist Party.

“Brother” Karl Harrer (1890-1926), “untiring fighter for justice and truth”, was a sports journalist by profession. The evening paper for which he worked, the *München-Augsburger Abendzeitung*, had once published an article in favour of continuing the war by one Anton Drexler. In March 1918 Drexler had founded a “Worker’s Committee for a Just

Peace” in Bremen, and had invited Harrer to one of the meetings. And so it happened that, when Harrer was entrusted with his assignment by the leadership of the Order to create an instrument “to win the workers for the völkisch politics”<sup>83</sup>, he sought out Drexler, who was now employed as a locksmith with the German Railways in Munich.

Anton Drexler (1884-1942) certainly was no ordinary proletarian, taking into consideration his previous activities in Bremen, his writings, including *My Political Awakening*, and his political initiatives. He became a “guest” of the Thule – the designation of persons who had close dealings with the Order without being initiated – and founded in collaboration with Harrer “a workers’ circle” of which he was the president for Munich and Harrer the “national president”, and of which at first most of the members were recruited among Drexler’s co-workers. “The persons who were accepted as members by the executive committee were sworn to silence about the activities and membership of the group.”<sup>84</sup> This circle soon became the DAP. “While the political workers’ circle was clearly meant to be a creation of Thule, the German Workers’ Party, for tactical reasons, had to be presented as an initiative of Drexler’s.”<sup>85</sup> “The German Workers’ Party gained no great influence at first and remained mainly limited to Munich. Only when through an intervention of Destiny Adolf Hitler joined the still thinly populated ranks of the Party, in the autumn of 1919, came the turnabout which gained

great historical significance for the whole German people.”

86

## The Corporal Joins a Party

In *Mein Kampf* Hitler tells his first and fateful contact with the DAP, on 12 September 1919, as follows: “One day I received an order from my superiors to investigate the nature of an association which was apparently political. It called itself ‘The German Labour Party’ and was soon to hold a meeting at which Gottfried Feder would speak. I was ordered to attend this meeting and report on the situation ... I decided to attend the meeting of this Party which had hitherto been entirely unknown to me.”<sup>87</sup> These few lines have lived on as part of the Hitler myth, suggesting that his first contact with the DAP was coincidental. Yet there are sound reasons to see Hitler’s debut in politics in a very different way.

The Thule was a secret society and so was, as we just saw, its “workers’ circle” which had become the DAP, contrived by Harrer more as a lodge than as an ordinary political party. A footnote in Ralph Manheim’s English translation of *Mein Kampf* reads: “As part of the party’s policy deliberately to restrict membership so as to maintain its esoteric quality, attendance at its meetings was usually by invitation ...”<sup>88</sup> Hitler was now no longer only a Reichswehr propagandist, he was also an agent in military intelligence, commissioned to

spy on the frenzied and often shady political hustle and bustle in Munich. How had he been informed about the date and venue, the Sterneckerbräu, of the secret DAP's meeting on 12 September? Moreover, how could he enter that meeting without an introduction? He was but a corporal still wearing uniform. And he was accompanied by three other military men, for we find in Joachimsthaler: "On that day, Friday 12 September 1919, 43 persons were present, according to the attendance list, among whom, as companions of Hitler, Sergeant Alois Grillmeier and two propagandists of the Gruko [*Gruppenkommando*], Ewald Bolle and Alois Knodn." 89

The chief speaker at the meeting in question was Gottfried Feder, author of a *Manifest for the Breaking of the Interest Slavery of Money*, a cranky theory which at the time made a deep impression on the German anti-Semites, including Hitler, who remarks: "Feder's lecture was known to me from the courses [for propagandists at Munich University]." In fact, Feder was standing in for Dietrich Eckart, a "guest" of Thule who had recently become a member of the DAP and was well known to Captain Mayr. "The speaker was to have been Eckart, but he was ill." 90 And here we meet again with an old acquaintance, the inventor of the sidereal pendulum, Wilhelm Gutberlet. "Dr. Wilhelm Gutberlet (1870-1933), medical doctor at Munich, member of Thule and eminent astrologer, sat by the side of Hitler [at the 12 September meeting], and wrote a long report on him for Dietrich Eckart."

Hitler's flaming retort towards the end of the meeting to a certain professor Baumann, who had dared to defend the idea of an alliance between Bavaria and Austria, both Catholic, against Protestant Prussia, may have been less impromptu than Hitler himself would have us think. "At this juncture I felt bound to ask for permission to speak and to tell the learned gentleman what I thought. The result was that the honourable gentleman who had last spoken slipped out of his place, like a whipped cur, without uttering a sound. While I was speaking the audience listened with an expression of surprise on their faces." <sup>92</sup> The corporal had demonstrated his oratory skill and passed muster. He was invited to become a member of the DAP and joined the party a few days later.

Most of the recently published experts on this period in Hitler's life agree that he, in his appearance on the political scene, was supported by the Reichswehr and by the Thule Society. "Hitler wanted to conceal", in his chapter on the German Worker's Party in *Mein Kampf*, "that the initiative of his joining the DAP had not been taken by himself", writes Ralph Reuth. <sup>93</sup> Ian Kershaw, in this connection, refers to Captain Mayr: "In a little noticed piece of evidence, [Hitler's] Reichswehr boss Captain Mayr later claimed that he had *ordered* Hitler to join the German Worker's Party to help foster its growth. For this purpose, Mayr went on, [Hitler] was provided at first with funds ... and, contrary to

normal practice about members of the Reichswehr joining political parties, was allowed to stay in the army.”<sup>94</sup> Anton Joachimsthaler also says that Hitler was ordered by Mayr to have a look at the DAP “and even to establish contact with them ... One may accept that Captain Mayr has advised Hitler to join the DAP, if he has not instigated him to do so, that he generously supported him in his subsequent political activities in the DAP, and that he gave him further assignments”.<sup>95</sup> “Hitler was as representative of the Reichswehr smuggled into the DAP”, according to Orzechowski, who also writes: “The members of the occult Thule Society helped Hitler into the saddle.”<sup>96</sup>

All this is undeniably confirmed in letters from Captain Mayr to Wolfgang Kapp, the front man of the rightist “Kapp Putsch” in 1920. (The letters, by the way, prove again that Captain Karl Mayr was one link in a wide nationalist network, and that there existed a coordinated interaction between the nationalist organizations against the social-democratic government.) It is here that Mayr writes that he had daily contact with Hitler for more than fifteen months. And he continues: “We are building the organization of national radicalism. The national worker’s party (DAP) must constitute the foundation of the strong storm troop we hope to form ... I have been trying to strengthen the movement since July [1919] ... I have set going very tough young people ... Hitler has become a moving force ... I agree fully with Mister

Hitler that what is called the social-democracy of the government is completely at the mercy of the Jews ... All harmful elements must, like breeders of illness, be expelled or isolated – which goes for the Jews too ...”<sup>97</sup>

Hitler’s first visit to the DAP was not the casual occurrence it is still generally supposed to have been. This can also be deduced from some statements in his autobiography in spite of the smokescreen with which he tries to conceal the truth. The last words of chapter 7, “The Revolution”, are the often quoted: “As to me, I decided to become a politician.”<sup>98</sup> This decision is supposed to have been taken in the Pasewalk hospital, at the end of the deep depression which overtook him on learning that Germany had lost the war and that the country had become a republic overnight. Hitler’s statement is untrue and even nonsensical. At Pasewalk his social isolation was nearly absolute; at the age of twenty-nine his heroic years as a soldier were wiped out by the German defeat; he had no future, no professional competence, no relatives or friends who could help him, and no means whatsoever. He himself confesses: “That I was poor and without means seems to me the most bearable part, but it was harder that I was numbered among the nameless, that I was one of the millions whom chance permits to live or summons out of existence without even their closest neighbours condescending to take any notice of it. In addition, there was the difficulty which eventually arose from my lack of schooling.”<sup>99</sup> We may find a clue to

what really happened at Pasewalk further on in our story.

But then the providential turnabout happened to Hitler, and now, in September 1919, he *was* entering politics. Surprisingly, “on joining the DAP he had very concrete ideas about the aims he was going to pursue”.<sup>100</sup> “This absurd little group with its few members [the DAP] seemed to me to possess one advantage”, he writes, “that it had not frozen into an ‘organization’, but left the individual an opportunity for real personal activity. Here it was still possible to work, and the smaller the movement, the more readily it could be put into the proper form. Here the context, the goal and the road could still be determined, which in the existing great parties was impossible from the outset.”<sup>101</sup> And he declares: “I had no intention of joining a ready-made party, but wanted to found one of my own.”<sup>102</sup> Max Amann, who had been Hitler’s sergeant in the army, met the corporal by chance “somewhere in the spring of 1920”. “He was still wearing his military uniform”, remembers Amann. “To my question what he was becoming, he answered that he was now an educational officer in the Reichswehr ... He did, however, not find any satisfaction in this occupation. It was his intention to enter the political life and to found his own political party.”<sup>103</sup> (What we have seen before allows us to adjust Amann’s recollection and to place the encounter in early autumn 1919.)

Where had Hitler got the idea to found a party – he who was “a man from nowhere”, and who was himself very much

aware of the fact? “The so-called ‘intelligentsia’ still looks down with infinite superciliousness on anyone who has not been through the prescribed schools and allowed them to pump the necessary knowledge into him. The question of what a man can do is never asked, but rather: what has he learned? ‘Educated’ people look upon any imbecile who is plastered with a number of academic certificates as superior to the ablest young fellow who lacks these precious documents.” (*Mein Kampf* <sup>104</sup>) This feeling of social inferiority was ingrained in Hitler and he will, in spite of his authoritarian predispositions, always bear a grudge against ‘educated people’.

From where did he have the idea that “it was a new ideology and not a new election slogan that had to be proclaimed”? How came that he, who initially participated in meetings attended by no more than thirty, forty people, “thought from the very beginning on the scale of a party for the masses”? <sup>105</sup> There are secrets in between the lines of *Mein Kampf* which are part of the “enigma” that keeps the historians guessing. Why would, for Hitler, joining an insignificant group of rightist fanatics and their sympathizers be “the hardest question of my life” – he for whom survival from one day to the next had been the most urgent problem on his mind? And has joining a political party, especially one hidden in the dingy darkness of a second-rate beer hall, ever been for anybody “a decision that would be for good, with no

turning back”, as Hitler says it was for him? <sup>106</sup> A man who had some answers to these questions was Dietrich Eckart.

## Dietrich Eckart

Brigitte Hamann, in her highly rated *Hitlers Wien* (1998), calls Dietrich Eckart the “closest friend and mentor” of Hitler. <sup>107</sup> In this she is not alone. Actually, most students of Hitler’s life say the same and use identical words. A “mentor”, according to the dictionaries, is “a wise and trusted adviser and guide”, “a wise and trusted counsellor or teacher”.

One obtains a somewhat different impression about Eckart from Joachim Fest: “A roughhewn and comical figure, with his thick round head, his partiality for good wine and crude talk, Eckart had missed the great success he hoped for as a poet and a dramatist ... In compensation he had thrown himself into that bohemian group which indulged in politics.”

<sup>108</sup> And John Toland writes: “Dietrich Eckart – poet, playwright, coffeehouse intellectual – was a tall, bald, burly eccentric who spent much of his time in cafés and beer halls giving equal attention to drink and talk.” <sup>109</sup> The correspondent for the *Frankfurter Zeitung* Konrad Heiden, though, who was an eye-witness and an opponent of the rise of the NSDAP in Munich, reports: “... The recognized spiritual leader of the small group [around Hitler] was Eckart, the

journalist and poet, twenty-one years older than Hitler ... He had a strong influence on the younger man, probably the strongest anyone ever has had on him". 110

In *The Crisis of German Ideology*, George Mosse agrees that Dietrich Eckart was "the man who exercised the greatest influence on Adolf Hitler in the immediate postwar years". In his opinion "this important figure in the völkisch movement played the key role in crystallizing Hitler's attitudes ... The two formed a team in which Hitler was the avid and quickly learning disciple". And Mosse adds quite rightly: "Thus it is indeed surprising that historians have failed to give Eckart due credit for his contribution to the viability of National Socialism." 111 François Delpla puts it bluntly: "History has not been interested in Eckart." 112 In their Hitler biographies Fest (1973) dedicates to Eckart one page, Toland (1976) one and a half paragraphs, Steinert (1991) two paragraphs, and Kershaw (1998) also two paragraphs, although he thinks that "Eckart's role was crucial.

This gaping lacuna in the life of Adolf Hitler and the history of Nazism is still more amazing as there is no lack of documents. Eckart's considerable literary and journalistic oeuvre could have been studied if sought for; Ernst Nolte, one of the dominant German historians, has drawn attention to the relevance of Eckart's *Zwiesgespräch*, a so-called dialogue with Hitler, in 1969; and Margarete Plewnia's biography of Eckart was published in 1970. But the main source indicating

Eckart's historical importance was Adolf Hitler himself. Here the abundance of references is really overwhelming, taking into account that Hitler as a rule blotted out all traces leading towards his pre-public past and in many cases eliminated the persons connected with it. ("A Führer can never admit that what he advocates, he got from others." 113)

The greatest honour Hitler did to Eckart was highlighting his name as the last two words of *Mein Kampf*. "Here at the end of this second volume<sup>11</sup> let me again bring those men to the memory of the adherents and champions of our ideals, as heroes who, in the full consciousness of what they were doing, sacrificed their lives for us all ... Together with those, and as one of the best of all, I should like to mention the name of a man who devoted his life to reawakening his and our people, through his writing and his ideas, and finally through positive action: *Dietrich Eckart*." 114

Hitler bought, with funds provided by an industrialist supporter, the Barlow Palace on Briennerstrasse in Munich and had it renovated into the local Nazi headquarters by his favourite architect, who was soon to die, Paul Troost. Two busts were installed in what was called the "Senate Hall": the one of Otto von Bismarck, the other of Dietrich Eckart. In the canteen of that building was a seat permanently reserved for the Führer, under a bust of Eckart.

The person most often mentioned in Hitler's monologues at his Head Quarters in Rastenburg, on the eastern front, was

Dietrich Eckart, some twenty years after his death. One of Hitler's secretaries has said that tears would well in Hitler's eyes every time he remembered the man he once called his "fatherly friend". "Eckart's merits are imperishable", he said, and: "It is deeply tragic that Dietrich Eckart has not lived to see the rise [of the Nazi Party]." <sup>115</sup> He reminisced about his discovery, thanks to Eckart, of the Obersalzberg and the house there that would become his villa *k*, and how one night he had woken Eckart up unannounced, and how Eckart had opened the door in his night-shirt, showing his hairy legs. "Today, we have all come a step further; therefore we do not realize what [Eckart] was at the time: a polar star."

When the Reichstag building had burned and the Reichstag, the German parliament, met for the first time in the Kroll Opera House, its president Hermann Göring opened the session with a memorial address on Dietrich Eckart. A statue of the poet was inaugurated in his birthplace, Neumarkt, by the Führer himself, as was an open air theatre, named after Eckart, in Berlin. There were Dietrich Eckart Societies and Dietrich Eckart Homes in Dortmund and in many other places. His poems were learned by heart in the schools and university students wrote theses on his oeuvre; his birthday was commemorated in the press; his plays were, sometimes at the instigation of the Führer, revived in many theatres. Eckart was made posthumously into "the symbolic figure of the young [NSDAP] Party". <sup>116</sup>

Dietrich Eckart was born in Neumarkt in 1866 as the son of a royal notary.<sup>117</sup> He studied medicine – and also law for some time, according to Hitler – but he never finished his studies because of illness. Delicate health will remain a factor throughout his life and be the cause of his dependence on pain-killing morphine. In 1899 Eckart went to live in Berlin, where he tried to realize his literary ambitions and led the bohemian life in literary circles and cafés. This and the fact that he was a generous, uncalculating man, at times even a spendthrift, soon finished the money he had inherited after his father's death and turned his Berlin period into “twelve hungry years”. It was then that he wrote most of his plays, such as *Father of a Family*, *A Fellow who Speculates* and *King of the Frogs*. The plays were put on the stage but met with no more than moderate success. In the meantime he kept himself afloat with journalistic work and by writing literary and political essays – besides his production as a poet, which he essentially was.

However, one of his plays, *The Hereditary Count*, was attended by Emperor Wilhelm II, who liked it so much that he went to enjoy the next performance. It was at this time that Eckart's adaptation of Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* obtained an unprecedented success and became the most often performed play of the *Hofbühne*, the Court Theatre, of which the emperor was the protector. As a consequence the emperor commissioned Eckart to write a play for the marriage of his

daughter with the Duke of Brunswick. The play, *Heinrich the Hohenstauffer*, had its premiere in 1915.

1915, the second year of the Great War, was also the year that Eckart shifted from Berlin to Munich, where he felt much more at home and where he became involved in political circles and in journalistic skirmishes with leftist newspapers, for during the first war years he had turned into a fervent nationalist and a rabid anti-Semite. The reasons for this portentous change in his mental outlook are not clear. A spiteful reaction to the non-acceptance or the critical failure of some of his plays does not seem a sufficient explanation. Contact with circles like the Thule Society may have been a more adequate reason. Eckart is mentioned as a “guest” of Thule in *Before Hitler Came*, and many of the new features of Eckart’s thought fit closely with those of the Thule as presented by Sebottendorff in the same book. That both men knew each other is confirmed by Sebottendorff’s words about the publication of Eckart’s magazine *In Plain German*. “The launching of this magazine was the cause of Eckart’s enmity towards Sebottendorff” (Sebottendorff writes here in the third person), because the latter could or would not provide the former with the necessary finance. <sup>118</sup> The underlying cause of the friction may have been that both strong characters refused to cede part of their turf to each other.

The first issue of *In Plain German* came out on 7 December 1918, less than a month after the armistice and during the short-lived presidency of Kurt Eisner. Among the first well-

wishers of the new magazine, in principle a fortnightly but reflecting Eckart's character by its irregularity, were, significantly, Wolfgang Kapp and Captain Karl Mayr. Mayr bought clandestinely a great number of copies for distribution among the military. How well-known Eckart actually was is shown by the names of the collaborators to his magazine. They included many prominent nationalist and anti-Semitic writers, and *In Plain German* was praised by Theodor Fritsch himself, the founder and supreme Grand Master of the Germanenorden. The main themes of the polemical publication were: 1. the spreading of the *Dolchstoßlegende*: Germany had not been defeated but stabbed in the back by the internal enemy, Jewish Bolshevism; 2. the Jews, who in a worldwide conspiracy were striving for world hegemony and were focusing particularly on Germany; 3. democracy, socialism and communism, all Jewish inventions and machinations to bring chaos into the world and destroy the German soul; 4. Germany, which had to become a strong and self-conscious unified nation; therefore the traditional Bavarian tendency towards separatism was to be condemned and the feeling of national unity promoted.<sup>119</sup> All four themes would become pillars of Hitler's thought. (It was the fourth point which provoked Hitler's fiery intervention on the occasion of his first contact with the DAP.)

It is difficult to say who determined the political course of the Thule Society – probably to a great extent Sebottendorff

himself. Yet it is striking that the goals of the Society intimately agreed with those of an independent personality like Eckart. The exchange of opinions between the dominating Thule members must have been frequent and intense. Eckart also vividly felt the need to reach out to the workers and convert them from socialist internationalists into nationalistic Germans, because the primordial requirement of a unified Volk and nation could not be attained otherwise. He did not see the body of the German Volk as consisting of *Volksgenossen* (racial compatriots) but of *Bürger*, a body of “citizens” forming a natural hierarchy, based upon the individual state of psychological perfection, which would constitute the nation of all Germans. To that end Eckart founded a “Citizens’ Association” for the unification of all “workers of the head and the hand”. The association never took off. Still Eckart tried to make himself useful by participating in the Thule resistance against the communist Republic of Councils. The result was that the Reds caught him, and that his name could very well have been on the list of the executed Thule members, had he not managed to talk himself out of a risky and totally unnecessary situation.

It was around this time that Alfred Rosenberg, a German Balt who had emigrated from Russia and arrived in Munich in November 1918, went knocking on Eckart’s door, looking for support and possibly a job. Rosenberg describes Eckart on that occasion: “From behind a desk covered with papers rose a tall man with a shaven head, a deeply furrowed forehead

and horn-rimmed spectacles before blue eyes. The slightly curved nose was rather short and fleshy. He had a full mouth and a broad, one might say aggressive chin.”<sup>120</sup> Eckart took Rosenberg under his wing, improved his knowledge of the German language, made him a collaborator of *In Plain German*, and got in return a fanatical anti-Semite who would be the main advocate of the *Protocols of the Wise Men of Zion*, the faked, widespread anti-Semitic pamphlet which has done so much damage.

This brief biographical sketch of Dietrich Eckart would remain incomplete without mentioning another aspect of his personality, the side turned towards the philosophical, the occult and the spiritual. He was, like Hitler, an admirer of the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860). (Hitler has said that during the war he always carried in his knapsack the five small volumes of the Reclam edition of Schopenhauer’s work.) The thought of this philosopher is one long but well-written lamento on the misery of all existence, supported and ever impelled by Desire, which he names “Will”. Because of his stress on the Life Force and his disparagement of reason, Schopenhauer became an inspirer of the völkisch movement. He was also the philosopher who, as one of the first Westerners, discovered Buddhism and its techniques of world-negation as a means of escape from an absurd, blindly desire-driven world subjected to *Maya*.

Eckart was, moreover, a devoted admirer of Angelus Silesius (1624-77), of whom he could quote whole passages

by heart. Eckart was of the opinion that what counted in life was “to wake up the Divinity in man”, and that nobility was not a matter of birth but of the spirit. In his hierarchical view of humanity he was strongly anti-materialistic, and therefore against the ideals of the Enlightenment, modernity, industrialization and progress. (Plewnia defined him in the title of her book as “a völkisch publicist”.) The more spiritual and the greater the portion of the Divine in man, the higher the degree he will occupy in the human hierarchy. Eckart, like others at that time, conceived of a higher, internalized man, a “superman”, i.e. a chosen being, child of the Light, who would react against all forms of materialism. If the Germans became aware of their superior soul quality, they would become such supermen. They had to fight against the increasing materialism and cultivate their superior Aryan soul. The German people were destined to redeem the world.

As high as the Aryan Germans stood on the hierarchical ladder of humanity, so low stood the Jews. “The Jew has no sense of the experience of what is eternal or of the need of immortality. Ergo: he has no soul, and is therefore the opposite pole of the Germans, who are always striving for something higher. They are as light is to darkness.”<sup>121</sup> The Jews are materialistic, intellectual, world-bound, egoistic, children of darkness; the Aryans (read: Germans) are noble, pure, idealistic, aspiring for the light, selfless world-negators, worthy of ruling the world.

This kind of thinking was common among the German nationalists and volkists, whose sources were Luther, Wagner, Houston Chamberlain and Theodor Fritsch, to name only four of the most influential. Less common was Eckart's "dualism", his conviction that idealism and materialism, light and darkness, the Aryan and the Jewish side of the scale, were present in humanity since its beginning and therefore in every individual. In the eternal struggle between good and evil for dominion over the world the Germans constituted the vanguard. This battle must not only be fought in the open, between the opponents in society, but first of all in every individual, for only mastery *within himself* of the Aryan over the Jew could lead to mastery over the world. The Jews "belong to 'the organism of humanity' as certain bacteria do to the human body. ... We have to endure the Jews among us as a necessary evil, who knows for how many millennia more."

<sup>122</sup> Hitler will take over Eckart's ideas to a certain degree and speak about an "anti-Semitism of the reason" in contrast to the impulsive anti-Semitism of the pogroms, but he will found his eschatological world view on a crude racist, Darwinian theoretical basis.

All this makes one see Eckart in a way quite different from the usual manner of depicting him as a Bavarian *Stammtisch* hero. This he was also, but this aspect of his character would certainly not suffice to explain his influence on Hitler and on the budding Nazi movement. A crude, impulsive and

comical beer swiller would not have built up the wide network of prominent people throughout Germany which could be contacted by Eckart. Nor would a cultured man-of-the-world like Ernst Hanfstängl have written: “[Eckart] was a man of education, a poet, whose German version of *Peer Gynt* remains the standard translation ... He it was who had first taken Hitler under his wing in the Party ... Eckart has always been one of my favourites, a big bear of a man with sparkling eyes and a genuine sense of humour.”<sup>123</sup>

Eckart made the existential choice to try out the realization of world-negation *in* the world. We will follow him there for a while.

<sup>123</sup>*Mein Kampf* was originally written in two parts, the first in the prison at Landsberg, the second after Hitler's discharge from prison on the Obersalzberg. From 1931 onwards the two parts were published as one volume.



## 4. Wolf

*The best would be if one could liquidate all pessimists.*

Adolf Hitler

### A Mental Make-Up

Hitler is still often represented in the popular media as a madman obsessed by a few fixed ideas. There is truth in the obsession, but he was not a madman. “Hitler was not mad”, writes John Lukacs, “he was responsible for what he did and said and thought ... He had very considerable intellectual talents”.<sup>124</sup> He had, for one, an excellent memory, which was a principal instrument in his exercise of authority in all phases of his political career, and which he used to impress his interlocutors. He had also the gift of simplifying and summarizing complex matters. As Fest puts it: “Hitler had the knack of translating into simple images the abstract character of political and functional relationships.”<sup>125</sup>

When reading some biographies one might gain the impression that Hitler studied, in his Viennese years, some of the most influential philosophers – an impression furthered by Hitler himself by dropping their names in his writings and speeches. Yet it is hardly believable that a twenty year old,

unsystematic autodidact could grasp the intricacies of philosophers like Nietzsche, Marx and Schopenhauer. Hitler would no doubt be able to quote striking sayings and passages from philosophers which accorded with his prejudices, but this is not exactly the same as insight into a philosopher's thinking. "It must be understood that young Hitler in no way drew from primary sources, which means that mostly he did not have his knowledge from let us say Darwin, Chamberlain, Dühring, Le Bon, Nietzsche, Schopenhauer or Schiller. He drew his knowledge in the first place from articles about all this in newspapers, brochures and popular writings." (Brigitte Hamann <sup>126</sup>) "In actual fact, knowledge meant nothing to Hitler; he was not acquainted with the pleasure or struggle that go with its acquisition; to him it was merely useful, and 'the art of correct reading' of which he spoke was nothing more than the hunt for formulations to borrow and authorities to cite in support of his own preconceptions ..." (Joachim Fest <sup>127</sup>) "Ideas held no interest for Hitler as abstractions. They were important as tools of mobilization." (Ian Kershaw <sup>128</sup>)

"Books, always books! I cannot think of Adolf Hitler without books. Books were his world," <sup>129</sup> writes August Kubizek, Hitler's close friend in Linz and Vienna until somewhere in 1909, when Hitler failed his entrance examination to the Academy of Fine Arts for the second time and disappeared into the anonymity of the metropolis. Hitler

read about the subjects that interested him: Richard Wagner, the theatre, the technical aspects of stagecraft, architecture, military equipment and war, German history, and the political background of the events he witnessed in Vienna. But another and no less important source of his mental make-up were the newspapers, at present still a familiar feature in the Viennese cafés, where it was warm and where Hitler could pass hours reading behind a cup of coffee. “He learned especially from newspapers”, writes Hamann, and Hitler himself mentions “so much reading of the newspapers when I was quite young”. “Earlier Hitler biographers tended to confine their surveys of Hitler’s supposed sources of inspiration to intellectually respectable writers on racial superiority and anti-Semitism such as Gobineau, Nietzsche, Wagner and Chamberlain. But there is no evidence that Hitler read their scholarly works. It is altogether more likely that he would have picked up ideas to rationalize his own dualist outlook and fixation on Germany from cheap and accessible pamphlets in contemporary Vienna.” 130

André François-Poncet, the French ambassador in Berlin who knew Hitler well and who was the only foreign diplomat to gain his esteem, writes in his memoirs: “He is an autodidact whose curiosity goes out to the subjects which catch the attention of the public mind, the attention of the man in the street ... Hitler’s talent consists in absorbing what the brain of the common man might absorb, in linking the various elements with one another by apparent logic, and in presenting

them in a simple and vivid way, comprehensible to a rudimentary intelligence.”<sup>131</sup> “[Hitler] read not for knowledge or enlightenment, but for confirmation of his own perceptions”,<sup>132</sup> writes Kershaw echoing Kubizek’s remark: “He found in the books only what suited him.”<sup>133</sup> “Amateurishness was one of Hitler’s dominant traits”, remembers architect Albert Speer. “He never learned a profession and basically always remained an outsider to all fields of endeavour. Like many self-taught people, he had no idea what real specialized knowledge meant.”<sup>134</sup> And Speer writes in another context: “We all knew that he firmly believed in reading only the end of a book, because everything important was to be found there.”<sup>135</sup>

All of the above is confirmed in the passage in *Mein Kampf* where Hitler lectures his readers on the art of reading. “I know people who read interminably. book after book, from page to page, and yet I would not call them ‘well-read’. Of course they ‘know’ an immense amount, but their brain seems incapable of assorting and classifying the material which they have gathered from books. They lack the faculty of distinguishing between what is useful and useless in a book ... For reading is not an end in itself, but a means to an end. Its chief purpose is to help towards filling in the framework which is made up of the talents and capabilities that each individual possesses. Thus each one procures for himself the

implements and materials necessary for the fulfilment of his calling in life ...” 136

There was, however, another side to Hitler’s mind: a kind of intuition which made him remarkably perceptive and able to react instantly to the attitudes and arguments of the persons or situations he had to deal with, using the mental material at his disposal and charging it with the power of conviction. SS-General Walter Schellenberg, who worked with him, writes: “There was his extraordinary dialectical ability which enabled him to out-argue even the most expert authorities in any field of discussion ... He threw them so off balance that they did not think of the appropriate replies until afterwards.”

137 Few were Hitler’s interlocutors who could keep a clear mind in his presence and did not leave him convinced or at least impressed.

## Persisting Memories

Hitler’s mind was certainly not a tabula rasa when, after the war, Captain Mayr picked him out, aged thirty, for the course at Munich University. He had lived through many very strong experiences, stronger than those of an average person, especially in turbulent, overcrowded, decaying Vienna and in the unending hell of the trenches. His authoritarian father, whom Adolf hated but who as a customs inspector was a uniformed official (in that society a matter of importance),

may have communicated to him his fanatical preference for all things German, although the customs inspector always remained faithful to his supreme superior, the Austrian Emperor. “Racial hatreds dominated politics in the Hapsburg Empire, where both Hitler and Adolf Eichmann spent their formative years. From 1882 through 1914 constant demonstrations and riots were mounted by ethnic groups fighting for power within the multinational Austrian state. Already in 1848 Catholic anti-Semitism flourished among Austro-Germans ... In 1911, the last election before 1914, two-thirds of all Austro-Germans voted for anti-Semites. It is not surprising that Austro-German participation in the Holocaust was higher than that of Germans in general.” (Johr Weiss 138)

The pages in *Mein Kampf* written on Georg von Schönerer and Karl Lueger, mayor of Vienna, bear testimony to the influence both men had on Hitler. Karl Lueger (1844-1910), mayor of Vienna, impressed Hitler because of his oratory skill and his power over the masses, capacities which appealed to Hitler’s own, as yet latent, capabilities. Lueger was not only the mayor, he was also “the Lord of Vienna”, an uncrowned king powerful enough to stand up to Emperor Franz Joseph. It was not so much Lueger-the-politician and his party, the Christian-Socialists – by 1895 the most powerful anti-Semitic party in Europe – who attracted Hitler, as his towering personality, an example of what young Hitler dreamed of becoming.

More concrete was the influence of Georg von Schönerer (1842-1921), the proclaimed *Führer* of the Austrian Pan-Germans, who strove for unification of their country with Germany. “Schönerer held no brief for either Catholicism or the Empire. Leader of the Austrian pan-German movement, a racist pure and simple, supporter of *Anschluss* [the joining of Austria with Germany] and an enemy to the death of both Slavs and Jews, he would become Hitler’s ideological model.”<sup>139</sup> A failure Hitler would never make, though, was Schönerer’s open belligerence against the Catholic Church in anti-Semitic but predominantly Catholic Austria. Schönerer’s “Away from Rome” movement cost him the adherence of so many supporters that he fell from power.

A young vagabond like Adolf Hitler during his Vienna years could never meet with a rich and revered pan-German *Führer*, but “the young Hitler experienced with certainty the cult of the idol of the Pan-Germans, especially in the newspapers of their party”.<sup>140</sup> Schönerer’s speeches, moreover, were printed as brochures, and the terror exerted by the Pan-Germans against Jews and Czechs in the streets of Vienna was a fact of everyday life. Schönerer had become “the idol of German shopkeepers, artisans and clerks, his photo was displayed in countless shops, his paper was available for reading in nearly every pub. A brisk business was done in watch chains with images of hanged Jews ... The party program was depressingly familiar: Jews must not teach or serve in the

army or the civil service, and there should be quotas in law and medicine ... Artisans and peasants must be protected [against the Jews] and Jews kept out of the empire; those already there were to be treated as aliens with special legal and tax burdens.”<sup>141</sup> “It is indeed beyond question that Hitler not only took over Schönerer’s political principles, but that he nearly copied them,” writes Hamann.<sup>142</sup>

Another pronounced influence on Hitler’s mind, preceding the role of Schönerer and Lueger, was that of his history teacher Leopold Pötsch at the Linzer *Realschule* (gymnasium), which young Adolf left without finishing his studies. The beloved history teacher made an indelible impression on Hitler – headstrong and rebellious towards the other members of the teaching staff – so much so that he dedicated to his memory no less than two and a half pages of *Mein Kampf*. “To study history means to search for and discover the forces that are the causes of those results which appear before our eyes as historical events ... Perhaps my whole future life was determined by the fact that I had a teacher of history who understood, as few others understand, how to make this viewpoint prevail in teaching and in examining. This teacher was Dr Leopold Pötsch, of the *Realschule* in Linz. He was the ideal personification of the qualities necessary to a teacher of history in the sense I have mentioned above. An elderly gentleman with a decisive manner but a kindly heart, he was a spellbinding speaker and was able to inspire us with his own

enthusiasm.” 143

Hitler, when in power, honoured Pötsch in many ways. “You have no idea what I owe that man”, he said to his entourage after having met privately with his old teacher at Klagenfurt in 1938. <sup>144</sup> One of the effects of Pötsch’s influence upon Hitler, together with that of his veneration for Wagner, was his love of the German myths and legends, often held to be historical fact. “The volumes of the *Sagas of the German Heroes* were his favourite reading which he never lent to anyone else”, remembers Kubizek. “He identified always anew with the great men of that bygone world ... It remains a fact that Adolf Hitler did not find during his lifetime another ground on which he, with something like pious devotion, could dwell than the world to which the sagas of the German heroes had opened the gate.” <sup>145</sup>

All these influences were stored in Hitler’s memory when he was “discovered” by Captain Mayr, who soon afterwards introduced him into the DAP. But the process of Hitler’s mental development in matters of pan-Germanism, nationalism and anti-Semitism seems less articulated and rectilinear than Brigitte Hamann would have it with so much certainty. If Hitler’s mental make-up had already been configured to the degree she suggests, then it would be incomprehensible that several people he was acquainted with at the men’s hostel in the Meldemannstrasse were Jews, as Hamann herself found out. She also writes: “The decisive question when anti-

Semitism became for Hitler the crucial point cannot be answered from his time in Linz and Vienna.” 146

When Hitler in the hostel and in the frontline dugouts launched into one of his rhetorical outbursts, his vehemence was not directed against the Jews; he was angered because Germany and his pan-German feelings had been offended by a scathing remark sometimes expressly made to get him going. Some officers in his regiment were Jews, one of them the captain who cited him for his Iron Cross First Class. And there is also the fact that Corporal Hitler wore the red armband under Eisner and the Republic of Councils. The influence of Schönerer and Lueger, as well as that of List and Lanz von Liebenfels, must have been revived and reformulated at the time of his instruction and his activities as a propagandist. And here all the evidence converges on the well-read, well-informed, well-connected and fanatic anti-Semite Dietrich Eckart.

Before carrying on with our story, a last and rather surprising source of influence on Hitler's mind should be mentioned: the German author Karl May, fertile writer of some seventy adventure stories for the youth. “Adi” (Hitler's pet name) had also liked *Don Quichote*, *Robinson Crusoe*, *Gulliver's Travels*, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *The Arabian Nights*, but May remained his favourite author even in adulthood. “Hitler's cult of May weathered time unscathed. It is said that even when Chancellor of the Reich he took the time to read May's complete works. In 1943 he had, in spite

of the paper shortage, 300 000 copies of a Winnetou book printed for the soldiers, this notwithstanding the undeniable fact that May's heroes belonged to a foreign race, for they were 'Redskins', [American] Indians." <sup>147</sup> "He might well mention Napoleon and Old Shatterhand in one sentence", writes Speer. <sup>148</sup>

Karl May belonged to the Christian faction of the German völkisch movement. He gave in March 1912, shortly before his death, a talk in Vienna which Hitler, if he knew about it, will not have missed. May's subject was *Empor ins Reich der Edelmenschen*, <sup>149</sup> which means something like "Up towards the Reign of the Noble Human Beings". *Edelmensch* was an often used synonym of the Arian-Nordic-German in his purest state – one of the many forms of expectation of the "superman" around the previous turn of the century. Whatever the ideology behind his literary production, Karl May's fantasies have kept innumerable children spellbound, not only in Germany. His suggestive writings – especially about the skills of Winnetou and Old Shatterhand in dangerous situations – may have contributed to saving Hitler's life in the First World War when he was a dispatch runner, one of the most risky assignments in battle.

## A Sudden Burst of Energy

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