

THE LAST DAYS OF HITLER

# THE LAST DAYS OF HITLER

*by*

H. R. TREVOR-ROPER

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## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

SINCE the completion of the original investigation into the circumstances of Hitler's death, I have been indebted to many friends, both British and American, who have helped me in the composition of this book, and whom I would here like to thank for their assistance; but since some of them are still serving, I am sure that the others will forgive me for including all alike in this general and impersonal acknowledgment, and for mentioning only one name, already familiar to most of them. My friend Dick White was brigadier commanding the Intelligence Bureau at the time when Hitler's death was still a mystery. He conceived the idea of this enquiry; and in Bad Oeynhausen in September 1945, he invited me to carry it out. Since then he has encouraged me to write this narrative, and has given me continual help in every problem (and there have been many) which I have referred to him. He is thus both the first parent and the ultimate midwife of this book; and I dedicate it to him.

H. R. T.-R.

Christ Church,  
Oxford.

*25th October 1946*

## FOREWORD

By Marshal of the R.A.F., LORD TEDDER G.C.B.  
Deputy Supreme Commander, Allied Expeditionary Force  
1943-1945

THERE used to be a school of historical thought which held that the course of human history was determined largely by political and economic factors rather than by the characters and actions of individuals. My own experience during this last war has emphasised to me the immense, and in some cases decisive influence exercised on the course of events by individual personalities. In the past it has rarely been possible for the effects of the personality and character of individual leaders to be assessed other than by the study of documents. Their writings may have been recorded; their words may have been memorised; but the life had gone out of them. History written on such a basis is inevitably liable to distortion due to point of view or due to incomplete evidence.

Here on the other hand we have history written from living material. Mr. Trevor-Roper, as an intelligence officer, was given the task of uncovering step by step the events of Hitler's last few weeks of life. In discharging this duty he has produced a piece of history which is as living as it is accurate, and as monumental as the scale of events he recalls. Although Hitler is dead, the agonies he brought on mankind are still alive, and however much mystery he attempted to weave around his personal activities, they have been laid bare by the flood of living testimony and documentary material which has become available since Germany's capitulation. There is no possibility of distortion in this case. Mr. Trevor-Roper's story sets the seal on Nuremberg.

Hitler was not one who was prepared to allow history to follow any pre-determined political or economic course. In a megalomania fired by almost hypnotic personality he set himself to determine the pattern of the history of Europe for a thousand years. Here was a man who by ordinary standards would be judged insane, yet it took the combined might of the British Commonwealth, of the United States and of the Soviet Republic to pull Hitler's lunatic structure to the ground.

It is not for me to attempt to point lessons to be drawn from the horrid madhouse which was Hitler's court, or from the fantastic debacle which is depicted in this record. I can only be unutterably thankful that the lunatic devotion of the madman's judgment pervaded every aspect of German activity. Never before has the truth of the old saying been so conclusively borne out, "Whom the Gods wish to destroy they first make mad." May no nation in the world ever again allow itself to be led by a megalomaniac.

*21st October 1946*

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## *Chapter One*

# HITLER AND HIS COURT

NOW THAT the New Order is past, and the Thousand-Year Reich has crumbled in a decade, we are able at last, picking among the still smoking rubble, to discover the truth about that fantastic and tragical episode. It is a chastening as well as an interesting study; for we discover not only the true facts, but the extent of our own errors. If we are to understand the extraordinary tale of Hitler's last days, and appreciate the true character of Nazi politics, it is essential that we should first dispose of those errors. We must recognise that Hitler was not a pawn; that the Nazi state was not (in any significant use of the word) totalitarian; and its leading politicians were not a government but a court,—a court as negligible in its power of ruling, as incalculable in its capacity for intrigue, as any oriental sultanate. Further we must know the true political significance of the Nazi doctrine, and the extent to which it retained its purity and determined events in these last days; and the nature of Hitler's struggle with the Army General Staff,—the one dissident group which he could neither dissolve nor eliminate, and which, at one time, might have eliminated him. Unless such political facts and relations are understood, the events of April 1945 will be quite incomprehensible, and the labour of collecting and arranging that complicated mass of evidence will have been, in one sense, in vain: for while solving one mystery of fact, it will have added a greater mystery of interpretation.

Some of these statements may seem paradoxical. How many people, in the past years, were unconsciously seduced by

Nazi propaganda into believing that Nazi Germany was organised as a "totalitarian" state,—totally integrated, totally mobilised, centrally controlled! Had this been true, Germany might yet have won the war, for its advantages in time, resources, and preparation were enormous; but in fact the totalitarianism of Germany was something quite different from this. Only policy, not administration, was effectively controlled at the centre. Total war, to the Nazis, did not mean, as it meant to us (and perhaps only to us), a concentration of all efforts upon the war, and a corresponding suspension of all irrelevant industry, for in Germany the production of many inessential luxuries was continued; it meant indiscriminate war by all methods and in all elements. In Nazi Germany neither war production, nor man-power, nor administration, nor intelligence, was rationally centralised; and Ribbentrop's protest at Nuremberg that foreign intelligence was not supplied by the Foreign Ministry but by thirty competing agencies is substantially true. The structure of German politics and administration, instead of being, as the Nazis claimed, "pyramidal" and "monolithic," was in fact a confusion of private empires, private armies, and private intelligence services. In truth, irresponsible absolutism is incompatible with totalitarian administration; for in the uncertainty of politics, the danger of arbitrary change, and the fear of personal revenge, every man whose position makes him either strong or vulnerable must protect himself against surprise by reserving from the common pool whatever power he has managed to acquire. Thus there is, in the end, no common pool at all. Irresponsibility of the ruler causes irresponsibility of the subject; the conception of the commonwealth no longer exists outside propaganda; and politics become the politics of feudal anarchy, which the personal power of an undisputed despot may conceal, but cannot alter.

And how wrong many of us were about that despot too, who has often been represented as a tool, but whose personal

power was in fact so undisputed that he rode to the end above the chaos he had created, and concealed its true nature,—even presiding from his grave over his weak and worthless subordinates in the dock at Nuremberg! If this absolutism was unchecked, uncontrolled, by any external force, it is vain to suppose that any internal resistance could have corrected it. No man can escape the corruption of absolute power. The inhibitions, the cautions, the introspections which may influence the exercise of power when it is limited by insecurity or competition do not survive those limitations; and in Hitler's last years it will be futile to look for the diplomacy and concessions of his more tentative days, or the reservations and occasional humiliations of *Mein Kampf*.<sup>1</sup>

Then there is Nazism itself, the religion of the German revolution, which underlay and inspired its temporary but spectacular success, and was as important an element in its politics as was Calvinism in earlier convulsions. Many worthy scholars have examined this vast system of bestial Nordic nonsense, analysing its component parts, discovering its remote origins, explaining its significance, and disposing of its errors; but of all the works on that dispiriting subject, the best, the most illuminating, the most valuable, seem to me to have come not from the conscientious scholars, nor from the virtuous victims of the movement, but (since failure is often a better political education than either industry or virtue) from one disappointed Nazi. Hermann Rauschning, an East Prussian magnate, was one of those military aristocrats who joined the movement in its early days, hoping to use it for their own ends, and who, having made their contribution to its success, and been cheated of their reward, saw the final ruin of their class in the purge of 1944. More intelligent than the rest, Rauschning escaped early from the movement which he

<sup>1</sup> Some of the contrasts between Hitler's theory, as published in *Mein Kampf*, and his practice during the war will be noticed as they become relevant. e.g. pp. 48 53, 64.

could neither control nor stop, and in two books<sup>2</sup> exposed, with terrible clarity, the true significance of the Nazi movement. His motives had not been pure, either in joining or in leaving the Party. He was no democrat, no pacifist, no martyr (if these are pure professions); and the intellectual clarity he achieved was the clarity not of suffering but of disillusion. But truth is independent of the stimulus that has provoked its discovery, and the conditions that have guided its expression; and to say that Rauschning is no better than his class is an irrelevant criticism of his books. In those books he demonstrated, as none other has done, the essential nihilism of the Nazi philosophy. This nihilism, the expression of frustration by the existing world, had inspired the Nazi movement in its early days; it was obscured in the days of power by other, more positive interests which became parasitical upon it; but in the last days, with which this book is concerned, when all hope and profit had departed, when all rivals had been eliminated or had fled, and the Party, in undisputed power, had nothing positive to offer any more, it was to this nihilism that it returned as its ultimate philosophy and valediction. The voice that issued from the doomed city of Berlin in the winter of 1944 and the spring of 1945 was the authentic voice of Nazism, purged of all its accessory appeals, its noonday concessions, and welcoming once more the consequences of its original formula, World Power or Ruin.

<sup>2</sup> *Die Revolution des Nihilismus*, 1938 (English translation, *Germany's Revolution of Destruction*, 1939), and *Hitler Speaks*, 1940 (Published by G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York, under the title, *The Voice of Destruction*). The latter volume is a collection of conversations with Hitler from the period 1932 to 1934, the period when Rauschning, who was President of the Danzig Senate, was one of Hitler's intimate circle. I make no apology for recommending it, although Professor Norman Baynes, in his *Short List of Books on National Socialism*, published for the Historical Association in 1943, shows considerable distrust of its authenticity. Professor Baynes' list (in which he mentions with praise Rudolf Olden's *Hitler the Pawn* and Mr. Arthur Bryant's "deeply sympathetic" study of Nazism) is based on the public beliefs of 1943, which represent a very inaccurate knowledge of the true nature of the Nazi Government. The vast mass of intimate matter since available has shown Rauschning to be completely reliable.

For by the winter of 1944 the positive alternative of the formula had failed, as all knew except a few still blinded devotees. That positive alternative was described in general terms as "world power," or "historical greatness"; more particularly defined, it meant one thing only,—the conquest of Russia, the extermination of the Slavs, and the colonisation of the East. This was the real message of Nazism. It is the burden of *Mein Kampf*; <sup>3</sup> obscured by the more general terminology of destruction, it rings through the conversations recorded by Rauschning; <sup>4</sup> and in Hitler's last written message, composed when the Russians were already at the gates of the Berlin Chancellery, the last and only positive aim which he bequeathed to his people was still "the conquest of territory in the east." <sup>5</sup> This Eastern policy was essential to Nazism; all other positive aims—the conquest of France or Britain—were subsidiary and incidental to it. The offence of France was its traditional policy of Eastern alliances, which had enabled it, for three centuries, to intervene in Germany. The offence of Britain was its refusal to be content with a maritime supremacy, its insistent tradition of preventing the domination of Europe by a single continental power. But the offence of Russia was the existence of Russia. As these offences were different, so the German response to each was different,—at least until Hitler, in the intoxication of success, abandoned all discrimination and diplomacy. France was to be finished as a great power; it was to be reduced to second-rate status, and, thus reduced, might survive as a western Croatia or Slovakia, independent, but incapable of a European policy. Britain was to become a purely maritime power; it need not sink to second-rate status,—Hitler was always prepared to "guarantee the

<sup>3</sup> *Mein Kampf*, chap. xiv, p. 933. All references to *Mein Kampf* are to the 1939 edition published by Reynal & Hitchcock, N. Y., copyright, 1939, by Houghton Mifflin Company.

<sup>4</sup> *The Voice of Destruction*, chap. III, p. 30 ff. (Darré's war-time speeches fully confirm this account by Rauschning of his earlier utterances.)

<sup>5</sup> See below, p. 195.

British Empire,”—but it must never intervene in Continental politics again. Thus the Nazi policy in respect of the West would ensure to Germany freedom to deal unhindered with the fundamental problem of the East. For Russia there was no such indulgent solution. As Russia’s crime was its existence, so its judgment was extermination. The war in the West was a traditional war, a war of diplomatic aims and limited objectives, in which some residue of international convention was regarded; the war in the East was a crusade, “a war of ideologies,” in which all conventions were ignored. It is essential that we remember the basic anti-Russian significance of Nazism. All the general concepts of that terrible creed conceal a particular anti-Russian significance. Racism means the supremacy of Germans to Slavs; “living space” and “geopolitics” mean the conquest of their territory; the rule of the “master race” means the enslavement of their surviving population. Crusades require crusaders; and again it is in the anti-Russian character of Nazism that we find the significance of the S.S., the most fanatical, most mystical missionaries of the new gospel. It was they who preached racialism and “living space,” and practised extermination and enslavement; it was they who emphasised the crusade by organising “Germanic” foreigners into anti-Russian legions; they carried Nordic mysticism to lengths which even Hitler ridiculed; and in the end they were prepared to carry on the Eastern crusade at a price which even Hitler rejected—surrender in the West. It was not Hitler but Himmler, the high-priest of the S.S., who expressed the Nordic gospel in its most outrageous form; and it was particularly in respect of Russia that he expressed it.<sup>6</sup> An appreciation of this anti-Russian character of Nazism is not only necessary to the understanding of Nazism itself; it will also explain, in part, the most significant opposition to Hitler inside Germany,—the opposition of the Army General Staff.

<sup>6</sup> Compare his speeches quoted below, pp. 19 note, 23–24, 27.

Hitler's struggle with the Army General Staff is one of the most interesting features of Nazi history during the war, for the General Staff was the one centre of opposition which Hitler, though he succeeded in ruining it, was never able to conquer. In 1924, when Hitler wrote *Mein Kampf*, he looked back on the German General Staff as "the mightiest thing the world has ever seen";<sup>7</sup> but once he had attained power, he discovered, with disgust, that the General Staff was not content to be a mighty instrument of his policy,—it had a policy of its own. Just as it had dictated terms to the Kaiser, so it sought to dictate to the Fuehrer. Hitler liquidated the trade unions without a blow; he frightened the middle-classes into submission; he bribed the industrialists; he had no trouble from the Churches; and the Communists, since they had long surrendered their independence, supplied the easiest converts of all. But the Army refused to be converted or bribed or frightened; and since Hitler needed it, he could not ignore or liquidate it,—rather, he had to increase it. At one time, in 1934, the Army even forced Hitler to crush his own radical wing and publicly to disown the Revolution of Destruction.<sup>8</sup> In 1938, at the time of the Munich crisis, the General Staff, under Halder, decided to remove the demented government; but the sudden news that Chamberlain had accepted the invitation to Munich knocked the weapons from their hands as they were preparing to strike.<sup>9</sup> Hitler's success at Munich was temporarily fatal to the Army leaders. They never had any outside support; they represented only themselves; and they were powerless against a dictator who could achieve triumphs such as this. For a time, the opposition of the General Staff

<sup>7</sup> *Mein Kampf*, p. 308.

<sup>8</sup> In a speech to the Reichstag after the liquidation of Roehm and his followers on 30th June 1934, Hitler condemned those who regarded revolution as an end in itself; but this was only a tactical condemnation forced upon him by the temporary ascendancy of the Army.

<sup>9</sup> The account of this abortive plot, first revealed by Halder, and since confirmed by other generals (*e.g.* Mueller-Hillebrandt), has been accepted as genuine by the authorities who examined it.



became again insignificant. Besides, the policy of the German Government for the next three years was not inconsistent with their own.

The leaders of the German Army believed in a policy of limited conquest. They wished Germany to be a great power, capable of supporting an efficient, well-paid, and privileged army. Such a position could be achieved by a mere reversal of the events of 1918; in fact, a restoration of imperial conditions. In so far as Hitler was likely to gain for them that external support which they lacked, they were prepared to support him, and to connive at some of the incidental vulgarities of his movement; but as practical men, organisers and calculators, not mystics or prophets, they were opposed to any unlimited venture of which they could not foresee or control the consequences. In particular, they were opposed to any conquest which would alter the social structure of Germany, and submerge their own privileged but precarious class in a new millenary Nazi Reich. Thus they were consistently opposed to war with Russia. Russia was the traditional ally of the German Junkers, whose prejudices, though swamped in the middle-class officers' corps, still dominated the General Staff. The Bolshevik Revolution did not alter this alliance, for they were practical men, above mere ideological conceptions; and in fact it was through an agreement with Bolshevik Russia that they had contrived to keep a shadow army in existence during the dark days after Versailles. Thus the interest of the German Army leaders was satisfied by the conquest of Poland and France, and in 1940 they would gladly have called a halt and stabilised the position on the basis of their gains. Unfortunately, what had satisfied them had merely inspired the confidence and excited the appetite of Hitler. The imperial frontiers of Germany were to him a contemptible ambition.<sup>10</sup> What was an end to them was only a means to him. In June 1941, flushed with success, and intoxi-

<sup>10</sup> *Mein Kampf*, pp. 944 ff.