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a Foreign Correspondent
1934–1941*



William L. Shirer

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of a Foreign Correspondent
1934-1941*

WILLIAM L. SHIRER

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STRANGER COME HOME

THE CHALLENGE OF SCANDINAVIA

THE CONSUL'S WIFE

THE RISE AND FALL OF THE THIRD REICH

THE RISE AND FALL OF ADOLF HITLER

THE SINKING OF THE BISMARCK

THE COLLAPSE OF THE THIRD REPUBLIC

GANDHI — A MEMOIR

THE START

THE NIGHTMARE YEARS

Berlin Diary

To TESS
Who Shared So Much

FOREWORD

Most diaries, it may well be, are written with no thought of publication. They have no reader's eye in view. They are personal, intimate, confidential, a part of oneself that is better hidden from the crass outside world.

This journal makes no pretence to being of that kind. It was recorded for my own pleasure and peace of mind, to be sure, but also — to be perfectly frank — with the idea that one day most of it might be published, if any publisher cared to commit it to print. Obviously this was not because I deemed for one second that I and the life I led were of the slightest importance or even of any particular interest to the public. The only justification in my own mind was that chance, and the kind of job I had, appeared to be giving me a somewhat unusual opportunity to set down from day to day a first-hand account of a Europe that was already in agony and that, as the months and years unfolded, slipped inexorably towards the abyss of war and self-destruction.

The subject of this diary therefore is not, except incidentally, its keeper, but this Europe which he watched with increasing fascination and horror plunge madly down the road to Armageddon in the last half of the 1930's. The primary cause of the Continent's upheaval

was one country, Germany, and one man, Adolf Hitler. Most of my years abroad were spent in that country in proximity to that man. It was from this vantage point that I saw the European democracies falter and crack and, their confidence and judgment and will paralysed, retreat from one bastion to another until they could no longer, with the exception of Britain, make a stand. From within that totalitarian citadel I could observe too how Hitler, acting with a cynicism, brutality, decisiveness, and clarity of mind and purpose which the Continent had not seen since Napoleon, went from victory to victory, unifying Germany, rearming it, smashing and annexing its neighbours until he had made the Third Reich the militant master of the Continent, and most of its unhappy peoples his slaves.

I jotted down these things from day to day. Unfortunately some of my original notes were lost; others I burned rather than risk them and myself to the tender mercies of the Gestapo; a few things I dared not write down, attempting to imprint them in my memory to be recorded at a later and safer date. But the bulk of my notes and copies of all my broadcasts, before they were censored, I was able to smuggle out. Where there are lapses, I have drawn freely upon my dispatches and radio scripts. In a few cases I have been forced to reconstitute from memory the happenings of the day, conscious of the pitfalls of such a method and the demands of ruthless honesty.

And, finally, certain names of persons in Germany or with relatives in Germany have been disguised or simply indicated by a letter which has no relation to their real names. The Gestapo will find no clues.

Chappaqua, New York
April 1941

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