



THE RISE AND FALL  
OF ADOLF HITLER

阿道夫·希特勒的兴亡

外语教学与研究出版社

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# **PART I THE RISE OF ADOLF HITLER**

## **Father and Son**

One day when Adolf Hitler was only eleven years old he got into a violent quarrel with his father. The stern and stubborn parent was a retired customs official in Austria. He insisted that his son follow in his footsteps<sup>1</sup> when he grew up. But the boy had already made up his mind that he wanted to be an artist. His father, he later recounted, was struck speechless at such an idea.

“Artist!” exclaimed the father. “No! Never as long as I live!”

Angry words flamed up between them.<sup>2</sup> But the youth would not give in. He refused even to consider becoming a government official. The very idea of sitting in an office filling out forms, he said, made him sick to his stomach. He was determined to become a painter.

Hitler never became a painter, though he considered himself to be an “artist” to the end of his life. But this determined stand against his father at a time when he was only a boy in the sixth grade at school revealed

a fierce, unbending will that was to carry him far in this world.

In fact, combined with other qualities, it carried him to a point where he became the dictator of Germany and then the conqueror of most of Europe.<sup>3</sup> As a conqueror he belongs in history with Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar and Napoleon Bonaparte.<sup>4</sup>

Like them he was undoubtedly a genius. But it must be added at once that he was an evil genius, one of the cruelest, most bloodthirsty and barbarous tyrants who ever lived. Perhaps it would be more accurate historically to say that Hitler was closer to Genghis Khan,<sup>5</sup> the ruthless Asiatic conqueror, than to Alexander, Caesar and Napoleon.

Absolute power corrupted him, as it does all who hold it. Before he died at the age of fifty-six he had massacred millions of innocent persons, including some five million Jews. And he had plunged the world into the bloodiest and most destructive war in history.

We know much more about Hitler than we shall ever know about such illustrious predecessors of his as Alexander, Caesar, Napoleon and Genghis Khan. For one thing, he was a child of our time. Millions of persons still living remember him. Many of them suffered from his barbarous acts. For many years my own job, as an American correspondent in Berlin, gave me

the opportunity to meet him, to listen to his numerous speeches and to observe him at first hand at the moment of his greatest triumphs.

Furthermore, at the end of World War II in 1945, the victorious Allies<sup>6</sup> captured most of his secret papers. They were found in abandoned mines and in cellars of old castles where they had been hidden by the Germans. We can thus tear away the curtain that for so long hid his odious acts.

We can read his confidential letters. We can follow his secret talks to his generals and see him browbeating his victims, double-crossing his friends and enemies, ordering the murder of his opponents and the massacre of the millions he disliked.

Never before in history has there been such a well-documented story as this one.<sup>7</sup> There is no need to invent or to imagine anything, as chroniclers of the lives of great men who lived in the distant past sometimes have done. What is set down in this book is based almost entirely on Hitler's own records, or on what the author saw in Germany with his own eyes.

The story of the life of Adolf Hitler both fascinates and repels one. He rose literally from the gutter to become the greatest conqueror of the twentieth century. He overcame incredible obstacles in his rise to power. What he did with his power—how he abused it—we shall see.

## School Days and an Interlude of Loafing

Adolf Hitler was born April 20, 1889, in a modest inn in the Austrian town of Braunau-on-the-Inn across the border from Germany.

Austria was a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which was ruled by the ancient and autocratic House of Hapsburgs, the oldest ruling family in Europe. This Austro-Hungarian Empire<sup>1</sup> no longer exists. It was destroyed at the end of World War I, (which it largely provoked) when the various nationalities that comprised it—the Poles, Czechoslovaks, Hungarians and Yugoslavs —broke away to form their own countries.

But at the time of Hitler's birth, eleven years before the end of the nineteenth century, Austria-Hungary was one of the most important empires in Europe. It sprawled along the Danube River<sup>2</sup> in central and southeastern Europe. It had a large army and navy. It was economically prosperous. It had an extensive aristocracy made up of dukes, archdukes, princes, counts and barons, most of whom lived in beautiful castles or palaces.

The Austrians, though outnumbered by the other nationalities, dominated the empire. They were a branch



of the Germanic people and spoke German. Many, like Hitler, thought of themselves as German. This must be kept in mind in tracing the career of the future German dictator. Though born an Austrian, he considered himself to be as good a German as those who lived in Germany. And he thought that all "Germans" should be united into one country—an objective he ultimately achieved for a short time.

His father, as we have seen, was a stern, short-tempered man. Adolf respected him but did not get along with him. His mother, as he often said later, he loved.<sup>3</sup> She was a gentle, devout woman, devoted to her husband and especially to her children.

Until Adolf came into conflict with his father, he too seems to have been a gentle and devout child. Indeed while attending elementary school at the Benedictine monastery at Lambach he became a choirboy and dreamed of becoming a Catholic priest.

At this school and at others his grades at first were quite good.<sup>4</sup> But he claimed that his quarrels with his father over what he intended to be when he grew up caused him to lose interest in getting good marks. From the sixth grade on they became progressively worse. At the age of sixteen, when he was midway through secondary school, he became so discouraged that he quit school for good.

Forever after he blamed his teachers for his scho-

lastic failure. "The majority of them," he wrote later when he had grown up, "were somewhat mentally deranged, and quite a few ended their lives as lunatics." To blame others for our failures is a common fault. But Hitler then—and later—carried it to extremes.<sup>5</sup> He was always finding a scapegoat.

One of his teachers, he later admitted, did inspire him in his youth. This was Leopold Poetsch, who taught history at the secondary school. Young Adolf was carried away by his dazzling eloquence.<sup>6</sup>

"You cannot imagine," Hitler once exclaimed years afterward, "how much I owe to that old man!"

Although Adolf was bored by most of the subjects he was forced to take, he developed a passion for history. This was to help him in his ultimate career.

Hitler once described the three years after he quit school as the happiest days of his life. His father had died in the meantime, leaving his mother but a small pension to support herself and her two children,<sup>7</sup> Adolf and a younger sister named Paula.

Adolf refused to get a job or to learn a trade, as most boys did when they quit school. Regular employment disgusted him—not only at the age of sixteen but throughout his life. He never once held a steady job until he became dictator of a great country.

Instead of working and trying to help his mother,

he preferred to loaf. So for three years after he left school, from the age of sixteen to nineteen, he spent his time roaming the streets of Linz, a pleasant Austrian town on the Danube River, and dreaming of his future as an artist. Evenings he would often spend at the opera, for he also had a passion for music and especially for the mystic opera music of Richard Wagner, the great German composer.

A ticket for standing room at the opera cost him no more than the equivalent of ten cents. Nevertheless, attending the opera took most of his meager pocket money. The rest he spent on books, for he also read a great deal. Hours on end he would curl up with books on German history and mythology.<sup>8</sup> He could not, of course, afford to buy these books. He borrowed them from lending libraries, which charged a small fee. There were no free public libraries in Austria in those days.

And he brooded. He became deeply concerned with the ills of the world. His one boyhood friend later recounted: "Hitler was always up against something and at odds with the world.<sup>9</sup> I never saw him taking anything lightly."

This friend has described young Adolf at this period as a pale, sickly, lanky youth who was usually shy and reticent. But he could also fly into sudden bursts of hysterical anger against those who disagreed with him.

We thus see forming in Hitler in his early teens some of the aspects of character and mind which later played a key roll in his life. He was at odds with the world and he angrily resented anyone disagreeing with him.

At eighteen, Hitler received a shattering blow from which he never entirely recovered. He flunked the entrance examination at the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts. His crude, lifeless drawings convinced the teachers who examined him that he would be wasting his time—and theirs—in trying to achieve his great ambition of becoming a painter.

This failure became one of Hitler's major, lifelong frustrations. To the very end of his life he saw himself as an "artist" who had been denied recognition by "stupid" teachers.

Another terrible blow soon followed. The next year his beloved mother died of cancer just four days before the family would have celebrated Christmas. It was a sad Yuletide<sup>10</sup> for the nineteen-year-old youth.

It was a dreadful blow [he wrote later]. I had honored my father, but my mother I had loved. Her death put a sudden end to all my high-flown plans. Poverty and hard reality compelled me to take a quick decision. I was faced with the problem of somehow making my own living.

Somehow! He had no trade.<sup>11</sup> He had always disdained manual or office work. He had never tried to earn a cent. But he was undaunted. Bidding his relatives farewell, he declared that he would never return to his hometown of Linz until he had made good.

With a suitcase full of clothes and underwear in my hand [he later wrote of his departure] and an indomitable will in my heart, I set out for Vienna.

I too hoped to wrest from fate what my father had accomplished fifty years before. I too hoped to become "something" —but in no case a civil servant.<sup>12</sup>

## **Down and Out in Vienna—**

### **"The Saddest Period of My Life"**

The next four years in Vienna, between 1909 and 1913, turned out to be a time of utter misery for Hitler.

This was the period when he was entering manhood—between the ages of twenty and twenty-four. Usually these are happy years. A young man is getting a start in life, and all beginnings are exciting. They bring fresh experiences, new problems and unexpected

challenges that stimulate a youth to make the most of himself.

No city on earth was more congenial to get a start in than Vienna,<sup>1</sup> the capital of the old Austro-Hungarian Empire. It was—and is—one of the most beautiful cities of Europe. It lies along the blue Danube River beneath the wooded hills of the Vienna Forest. There is a stately atmosphere about the city, as befits a once imperial capital. It has wide, tree-lined boulevards, spacious parks, elegant public buildings, soaring church spires, and is dotted with many splendid old palaces.

In Hitler's time—as before and afterward—music filled the air. It was the music of the great composers who had lived there—Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert<sup>2</sup>—and in the last Indian-summer years of the empire,<sup>3</sup> the gay, haunting waltzes of Vienna's own beloved Johann Strauss.<sup>4</sup>

The Viennese are the most attractive people I have ever known in Europe. They are gay. They find life worth living and they make the most of it. They like music. They like to dance, especially waltzes, which they originated. They like to meet with one another in coffeehouses and have good talk. They go often to the theater and they have a passion for the opera. They enjoy good food and wine. And when the times are difficult they like to dream of a better life.

But Hitler did not share in the gaiety or in the

dreams of the Viennese, nor did he appreciate the beauty of the city. His years in Vienna he later called "the saddest period of my life." It is easy to see why.

For one thing, he shunned regular employment. He preferred to putter about at odd jobs: shoveling snow, beating carpets and carrying bags outside a railroad station. Occasionally when he was desperate he worked as a building laborer, but not often for he hated such hard work. Without regular wages he was forced to live in what we would call flophouses. His clothes were shabby, his hair uncut, his face unshaved. He became a vagabond.

Contrary to a popular legend, Hitler was never a paper hanger or a house painter. He was too lazy to acquire those skills. He did eventually earn some money painting crude water-color pictures for posters and advertisements. This satisfied his "artistic" ambitions to some extent, but not the requirements of his stomach.<sup>5</sup>

It was truly a meager living [he wrote later] which never sufficed to appease even my daily hunger.

Hunger was then my faithful bodyguard; he never left me for a moment and partook of all I had. My life was a continuous struggle with this pitiless friend.

Anyone who saw the future German dictator on the streets of Vienna in those days must have thought he was what we Americans would call a bum. He was

down and out, and looked it.<sup>6</sup>

And yet there is another side to this story of his vagabond days in Vienna. Unlike most of the tramps who plodded the streets with him, he neither smoked nor drank. Unlike them, too, he read much. In fact, without much work to do, he spent most of his days and evenings devouring books and pondering them.

From the reading of books and from a firsthand experience of the seamy side of life, Hitler learned during these vagrant early years in Vienna almost all that he was to know throughout his life. He often said so himself.

Vienna [he wrote years afterward] was the hardest, most thorough school of my life. I had set foot in this town while still half a boy, and I left it a man, grown quiet and grave.<sup>7</sup>

In this period there took shape within me a world picture and a philosophy which became the granite foundation of all my acts. In addition to what I then created, I have had to learn little; and I have had to alter nothing.

What, then, did Hitler learn as a down-and-out tramp in Vienna between the ages of twenty and twenty-four? What was the "world picture and philosophy" upon which he later based the awful deeds that nearly destroyed the world? It is of vital importance to know



the answers to these questions. They explain a great deal of world history during the third and fourth decades of the twentieth century.

First, Hitler learned to glorify war and conquest. The finest thing men could do, he concluded, was to go to war and conquer foreign peoples. Peace, he decided, was a bad thing for mankind. It corrupted men and made them soft.

What about the millions of men who were killed in wars while still young? And the millions of others who were maimed—blinded for the rest of their lives or crippled by the loss of a leg or an arm? Hitler didn't much care. That was the way life was, he said—hard and cruel.

In his Vienna days Hitler also conceived the preposterous idea that the Germans were superior to all other peoples. They were, he was sure, stronger and more intelligent and more skillful than Americans or Britishers or Italians or Russians or others. In fact to him the Germans were the Master Race.<sup>8</sup> Other people were fit only to be their slaves.

This was a widely held view among Germans in those days. And though Hitler was an Austrian, many Austrians, as we have said, considered themselves as German as the people who lived in Germany.

The young tramp in Vienna also absorbed a number of political ideas which he later put into practice in