

HITLER'S "MEIN KAMPF"*

By CHRISTOPHER DAWSON

(Mr. Christopher Dawson contributes this examination on the occasion of the publication of the full text in English.)

It was high time that a complete version of Herr Hitler's book should be put before the English public, for it does more to explain the significance of the Nazi movement and the mind of its leader than all the books that have been published in England on the subject, and the abridged version on which the English reader hitherto had to content himself was by no means an adequate substitute.

It is a remarkably frank book. I cannot recall an instance of any dictator or leader of a revolutionary movement who has taken the world into his confidence in this way and explained his whole political programme and ideology years before his attainment of power. And this is all the more striking because Hitler owes less than the other dictators to the influence of pre-existing political traditions or organizations. Even Mussolini had had a long and intensive training in the political arena before he first launched the movement with which his name is associated, while the two Communist dictators were the heirs of a long established revolutionary tradition which already possessed its own ideology and its own party organization. National-Socialism, on the other hand, arose literally out of nothing. When Hitler joined the "German Labour Party" it consisted of seven members who possessed no political experience, no material resources and very little idea of what they wanted to do or how they proposed to do it. Yet from this tiny seed has sprung the gigantic mass organization which today dominates the whole of Central Europe and which threatens to dominate the world.

How has it been possible for this portentous development to take place against the will of the parties that held the constitutional power in post-War Germany and no less against the will of the revolutionary forces that challenged their supremacy? Against the will of the victorious Powers which enjoyed such an immense preponderance of military and economic power in the years that followed the Peace of Versailles, and no less against the forces of enlightened public opinion which favoured a revision of the Versailles settlement and the development of the international co-operation for peace?

To understand how this happened is no less important for the politician and the publicist than for the historian, and I cannot but think that if our leaders and guides had studied Herr Hitler's book and had not relied so much on the judgment of observers who saw only what they expected to see, many of the mistakes of the last fifteen years might have been avoided and the international situation might not have deteriorated in the appalling way in which it has done.

The value of Herr Hitler's book to the English reader is precisely that it reveals a hidden world, and one that is alien to his experience and his traditions. The chief cause of the mistakes that have been made during the last twenty years is that we have concentrated our attention on one series of factors as though they were the whole of political reality and ignored the rest. And the success of National-Socialism is due to the way in which Hitler has mobilized and exploited these unseen factors until they swallowed up the political realities with which we were familiar and have become the dominant reality in the international situation.

Thus Hitler's lack of political experience was one of his greatest assets, since he was able to identify himself

with the forces that lay beneath the political surface and to render them politically conscious. And he was all the better fitted for this rôle by the fact that he himself belonged to a kind of intermediate region—a political no-man's-land between the frontiers of two different States and two different classes. He was neither a proletarian nor a bourgeois, so that he found himself between the trenches of Marxian class warfare. He was neither a German nor an Austrian, but a German of the East Mark, a man who, in his own words, combined "a feeling of intense love for my German Austrian home and a profound hatred for the Austrian State."

The tendency in England has been to look at the old Austria either from the point of view of Vienna, or from that of the subject nationalities, and in either case to regard it as an imperial State in which the Germans were the ruling class. We do not realize the complicated character of the racial conflict and how so many of the Germans felt themselves ground between the upper and nether millstones of the Government and the non-German nationalities, and nourished a double-edged resentment. We associate Pan-Germanism with "Prussian militarism" and forget how large a part the Germans of Bohemia and Austria played in the development of the movement. The autobiographical chapters of *Mein Kampf* show how these influences moulded Hitler's mind from childhood, and how the programme and ideology of Nazi-ism have their roots in the experience of his youth, above all during the hard and joyless years of his sojourn at Vienna. The elements of National-Socialism are already present in the racial ideology of the Austrian Pan-Germans and the social programme and anti-Semitic propaganda of the Christian Social Party, and Hitler's real forerunner on a narrower stage was not Bismarck or Frederick the Great, but Dr. Karl Lueger, the Christian Social Burgomaster of Vienna, whom Hitler describes as "the last great German who sprang from the ranks of the people that had colonized the East Mark."

I do not think that it is possible to understand Hitler aright unless one bears these origins in mind. Even the foreign policy which is so profoundly disturbing to the peace of Europe, seems to me to show the influence of this tradition of the East Mark. One of the main theses of Herr Hitler's book is the necessity of Germany turning her back on the colonial and naval policy of the Second Reich and returning to the medieval tradition of territorial expansion in Eastern Europe at the expense of the Slavs: "To acquire soil for the German plough by the German sword and thus provide the nation with its daily bread." Hence he refuses to regard political frontiers as anything more than the temporary limit of continually changing natural forces. "No nation on earth possesses a square yard of ground and soil by decree of a higher Will and in virtue of a higher Right. The German frontiers are the outcome of chance and are only temporary frontiers established as the result of political struggles which took place at various times. . . . The soil on which we now live was not a gift bestowed by Heaven on our forefathers. But they had to conquer it by risking their lives. So also in the future our people will not obtain territory and therewith the means of existence as a favour from any other people, but will have to win it by the power of a triumphant sword."

This is a disquieting programme for Germany's neighbours, but so far as I know, Herr Hitler has never disavowed it, and the events of the last year and the last weeks seem to have already brought it into the region of practical politics. Must we assume that it is to be carried out to the letter, and that the new Germany contemplates a new movement of imperial expansion

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that will carry her through Rumania and the Ukraine to the shores of the Black Sea? That certainly is the conclusion that may be drawn from the pages of *Mein Kampf* and from the policy of the German Government in Eastern Europe during the last year. On the other hand, we must remember that Hitler has always disavowed the intention of repeating the mistakes of the Second Reich and embarking on another world war. The other condition which he lays down in his book for the new German foreign policy—an alliance with the British Empire—is further from being realized than at any time since the advent of National-Socialism. Moreover the incorporation of Bohemia in the Reich, shocking as it may be to our minds, is a far less revolutionary procedure in German eyes than a Rumanian or South Russian enterprise which has no historical precedent to justify it unless we go back to the days of the Goths and the Vandals. Perhaps Herr Hitler is prepared to go back even as far as this, for the empire of Hermanaric was, after all, the first and not the least glorious German Reich. But it is a sinister precedent and the road to the Ukraine has always been a dangerous one for the men of the North. It was the road which led Charles XII to Pultawa, and it brought the Nibelungs to Etzels hall.

GERMANY AND HER EASTERN NEIGHBOURS

THE NEW POSITION IN CENTRAL EUROPE

(FROM OUR CENTRAL EUROPEAN CORRESPONDENT)

Geo-Politics and the Future of Poland

The Reich has gained by its conquest of Czecho-Slovakia an increase in strength and potential resources which cannot be over-estimated. Coal mines, excellent military roads, enormous munitions works, 1,500 aeroplanes, including 650 fighters, 3,000 guns, 10,000 machine-guns, 600 tanks, the equipment of 800,000 men, and a few dozen military and commercial secrets, are to be valued at a sum which is all the greater for the fact that it will never be paid. The German frontier has been shortened by six hundred kilometres. And lastly, the Reich has, by its recent conquests, realized its ambition, namely to round off its territory into a compact and solid block.

Remember to what extent the founders of Prussia were influenced in their policy by the question of "geo-politics," which other Prussians, learned scholars this time, codified and baptized when the guns had ceased firing. The Elector of Brandenburg, separated from his Rhineland provinces and East Prussia by large strips of territory belonging to other monarchs, seized the lands between his States. He did not want for pretexts in his scheme for "straightening out his frontiers." Eternal Justice was called upon betimes to come to the aid of the big battalions, first those of the Hohenzollerns and then those of the Brownshirts. Silesia was taken over in the name of hereditary dynastic rights; Western Prussia was claimed sometimes on the principle of nationality, and sometimes because the Sarmati constituted as great a danger to Prussian security as did the Czechs to German peace of mind; Hanover, because her kings were conspiring with the enemies of Prussia; everything passed under Prussia's high protection in spite of loud English and French protests. And nothing checked this *Drang nach allen Richtungen* (advance in every direction), this congenital land-hunger of the political organization known in the past as Prussia, and now called the Empire of Greater Germany; nothing excepting an armed force superior to that of the attackers.

This "geo-policy," or if you prefer the sonorous,

portentous, and mysterious phraseology so dear to the Teutons, "the chthonic powers," *die dunkeln Mächte*, incite and condemn the Reich to "straighten out" positions, to gather together, without any delay, lands, German and otherwise, if allowed to do so. A glance at the map will show the following victims. Eastern Prussia is separated, as before, from the Empire by a foreign "corridor," Polish territory. A straight line drawn from the easternmost point of the new German frontiers to those of Kant's native province would engulf all the Polish western marches; Poznan, the "corridor" and some adjacent districts, Silesia, from Katowice and part of the old "Kingdom of Poland" to the west of Lodz. It is here that the richest (or the least poor) lands of the *Rzeczpospolita* lie, and here there is a German-speaking minority of more than a million souls, who will, at the psychological moment, suffer persecutions of an intensity which no German ruler will be able to tolerate. This is where the *Reichsheer* militarists would like to build their defensive (and offensive) line against Russia. In a word, this piece of territory is essential to the final German Drive, the triple offensive aiming at the Baltic States, the Ukraine, and the Balkans simultaneously.

Poland therefore is the future object of the German Colossus' aggression. Is it there that the Führer proposes to launch his next attack? We think it unlikely, for first of all it would seem to be the turn of Hungary and Rumania. The reasons which lead us to believe that Budapest and Bucharest will be ahead of Warsaw on the list are of very different natures. Primarily, Rumanian petrol, and Hungarian and Moldavian wheat are a much more pressing necessity for Germany than a political, military and economic extension in an easterly direction. Then, the *coup* would be more easily effected in Hungary and Rumania than in Poland. Fifteen or eighteen million adversaries who hate each other, and who, even in the face of the most appalling danger, could never combine against a common enemy, are much easier prey than thirty-five million Poles who would not, at the critical moment, lack foreign support. Moreover, the Third Reich can count on confederates among the Rumanian and Magyar peoples, whereas the Sacred Union of Poland would immediately face up four-square to a German aggressor.

Hungary and Rumania

Berlin therefore probably anticipates a double event which would bring to their knees both the Kingdom of St. Stephen and of King Carol II, if possible without any ultimatum and without any employment of military threats. Herr Wohlthat, *nomen et omen*, declares himself ready to extend every conceivable benefit, provided that Rumania adapts her economic plans to fit the German pattern. Promises and summons are working side by side in Budapest. In both countries the anti-Semitic argument has considerable point. Is not Germany the mortal enemy of the Jews, and are not Germany's enemies the protectors, confederates, and slaves of the Accursed Race? A Magyar or a Rumanian hesitates before putting himself in the camp which includes Israel, or turning his back on a front erected against Judaism. It is by playing upon this feeling of hatred, and exploiting other more noble feelings such as love of their country, that the National-Socialist propagandists recruited their army of auxiliaries, the troops of the late Codreanu, and those of Szalasi. At the critical moment, Berlin can give the signal for the outbreak of "national revolutions" in Budapest and Bucharest. In the meantime, the Reich's agents are sowing the seeds of discord; they are keeping Hungary and Rumania in a state of feverish agitation. They are persuading the youth of both countries on the