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*JEWISH NAZIS AND OTHERS*

I.

PERHAPS THE SADDEST COMMENTARY UPON LIFE IN Europe today is the fact that by comparison with Germany even Poland seemed like heaven.

I arrived at Hamburg two days before the Nazi conquest of power. Outwardly the city was calm and peaceful. It was, however, a superficial calmness. The atmosphere was tense. Everyone was expecting trouble.

In Berlin the Nazis were already in control. The inquisition was proceeding at full speed: Broken windows of Jewish stores on Alexanderplatz . . . Young Nazi hooligans plucking the beards of old Jews . . . Communists, Socialists, Liberals and Jews being murderously beaten and hastily sent off to concentration camps . . .

2.

After much trouble I succeeded in finding the head of the Jewish community in Hamburg. He was a tall, lanky Jew with closely cropped hair. He looked like a Prussian lieutenant.

I wanted to know whether the Jews had taken any precautions against Nazi excesses. I told him of the tortures that the Jews were already undergoing in Berlin.

Herr Freulich was annoyed.

"I am sorry," he said curtly after I had finished my story, "but I know it from a reliable source that real Jews are not going to be touched. If you saw anyone being beaten you can rest assured that they were not Jews. They were Communists . . ."

"Herr," I replied, "perhaps they are Communists, but they are also Jews. And how about those old men whose beards I saw plucked?"

Herr Freulich made a gesture of hopelessness.

"I repeat," he said, "that no real Jews will be touched in Germany. All these stories about Jews being mishandled are only products of the imagination. It is your psychology of fear . . ."

The Herr stood up and the interview was finished.

Thus reassured, I went out to look for a room since I expected to spend several weeks in Hamburg. I was a stranger in the city and as chance would have it, I found one in a house which, as I later found out, was owned by a Nazi woman. I had hardly unpacked my valise when the landlady knocked on my door.

"*Herr Amerikaner,*" she said, "Adolf is speaking on the radio, *Der Führer*, would you like to listen to him . . . ?"

I did not quite understand what she wanted from me. I followed her into the next room. An hysterical

voice was booming over the radio: It was Hitler's voice. I recognized it at once. I had heard the same voice eight months before at the Berlin Sportpalast stirring up the lowest passions of a uniformed mob of gangsters, hoodlums and romantic youngsters. Now as then all I could understand from his speech was that the Jews have betrayed Germany and sold it to Moscow. It was a new variation on an old Nazi theme.

My landlady was moved to tears. She wrung her fingers in despair. "*O, die Juden, die Juden . . .*" she cried, "they have destroyed Germany . . ."

I was sitting there wet with perspiration: "What if it occurs to her that I, too, am a Jew? . . ."

That night when everybody was asleep I packed my valise and sneaked quietly out to look for a more congenial habitat. Through the advice of a railroad official I finally found refuge at the Hyman Warburg Foundation, the Jewish immigrant house on Rotensburgsort.

3.

Next day Hamburg was as quiet as a cemetery—apathy was general. The stores were still open but there was little activity. Everyone was waiting, waiting . . . That day the general elections were to take place. The fate of Germany would be decided.

I went to the American consulate on Alsterdammstrasse. In the basement of the consulate were the quarters of American seamen stranded in foreign

ports. I met many people with whom I had worked together on ships. Among them was Hans Maurmeyer, a German seaman. I knew Hans well. He was a little, bald-headed fellow, the acme of gentility and kindness.

Hans was in trouble. He was known in Hamburg as a Red and he was afraid that Nazi stormtroopers might raid his house and make short work of him as they had done with several other prominent Socialists and Communists that day. He asked me whether he could spend the night at the immigrant house where I was staying. I thought there would be no objection.

To go from the consulate to the Foundation, we had to pass Hamburg's famous railroad station, the Haupt Bahnhof. There was an unusual commotion inside the Bahnhof. It was crowded to capacity. People were running around in confusion under the furtive glances of uniformed Nazis. In a corner, a middle-aged man was selling Hitler's *Völkische Beobachter*. "Heil Hitler," he cried, offering the newspapers to passers-by. Suddenly Hans stopped dead. For a minute, as though paralyzed, he stood gazing at the man. "Heil Hitler," the latter cried, handing us a paper. His eyes met Hans' and the *Völkische Beobachter* fell out of his hands.

"You, too, sold yourself," said Hans to the newsdealer.

"I had nothing to eat," the man replied faintly.

"I have nothing to eat, too."

"I have a wife and a child."

"So you are going to kill me?"

The newsdealer was silent. Hans pulled me by the sleeve and we went on.

When we reached the foundation it was already dark. Some of the "guests"—unemployed German Jews, Jews without a country, deserters from the armies of Poland, Roumania and Hungary—were eating soup and conversing quietly.

In a corner old Schnazel sat murmuring to himself. He was only forty-five years old although he looked like a man of seventy. He had gray hair and a white, tobacco-stained beard. I was told that during the World War he was wounded six times. As a result he lost his mind as well as his nose, which, like a flat piece of chopped flesh, was pasted to his face. The snot was constantly running down his beard and into the soup.

No one had ever spoken to Schnazel. All one could get out of him were the words "They must not win . . ." He would repeat them on every occasion. Perhaps they had some connection with his experiences during the war. Perhaps old Schnazel was conscious of what he was saying. That night, to be sure, his words sounded to me like a horrible prophecy.

After we had eaten our soup, Herr Silberstadt, the manager of the foundation, came in to inspect us "guests." He was a short plump Jew with a silvery Van Dyke beard and gold-rimmed spectacles stuck on his hooked nose. He wore a black silk skullcap and bedroom slippers.

He stood for a while in the doorway and looked

at his "guests" contemptuously. His gaze stopped on Hans.

"Whence does the Jew come from?" he asked Hans in his velvety sing-song voice.

Hans did not reply.

I walked over to Herr Silberstadt and whispered in his ear:

"This man is a German. He is being sought by the Police. If they find him it means death to him. He just wants to stay here for one night . . ."

Herr Silberstadt turned pale and then red.

"Zo-o" he at last stammered out, "a Communist . . . *Heraus!* . . . *Heraus!* . . . (Out . . . Out) . . . *Heraus!* . . . *Heraus!* . . ."

Flapping with his slippers he ran out into the street to call a policeman.

When he returned a few minutes later with a young newly-ordained Nazi cop, Hans had already disappeared through the window into the night . . .

4.

A short while after this incident the notorious Nazi St. Bartholomew's night commenced. Beyond the windows, like the stamping of horses' hoofs, resounded the marching steps of nailed boots. They disturbed the tranquillity of peaceful Hamburg. Towards midnight the stamping grew louder. The Bahnhof clock struck twelve. Suddenly wild shrieks of "Heil" pierced the night. The stamping grew louder. Now we could distinguish shrieks of despair.

Cries of "Heil Hitler" intermingled with the crash of breaking glass . . .

In the morning devastation stared us in the face. Oberman's bakery, where only the previous night I bought bread, was completely destroyed. Pieces of smashed doors were scattered about the sidewalk. The window-panes were shattered. Here and there one could see pale faces peeping through windows. Otherwise the streets were completely deserted.

I made my way to Mönckenbergstrasse, the main street in Hamburg. Here it was much livelier. Groups of stormtroopers were closing Jewish stores. A young farm-boy with pink cheeks, dressed in a brown uniform, was leading a Jew by a rope. A sign inscribed in red letters: "I am a Jew and a traitor," was suspended by a string fastened around the Jew's neck.

Past the Nazi headquarters—the Brown House—filled with armed stormtroopers, I made my way to Altona, the working-class district of Hamburg.

In front of the huge statue of Bismarck, towering majestically over Altona, I encountered a group of armed civilians. They were shabbily dressed people. The majority of them wore sailor's dungarees.

"What has happened?" I inquired from one of them.

The man looked me over suspiciously and did not reply. I cut across Mittelstrasse. On the corner, in front of Chassal's drygoods store, Hans was standing with a rifle in his hands.

It was from Hans that I found out that the Nazis

were getting ready to capture Altona and make a pogrom upon the Jews. Hans and his comrades came out armed to protect them.

"But surely," I said, "you as a Communist don't care to protect petty businessmen?"

"No," he replied, "I don't care to protect businessmen, but as long as they are attacked as Jews it is the duty of any self-respecting person to protect them . . ."

That was the last time I saw Hans alive. He was killed a few hours later.