My Patient, Hitler  By Dr. Eduard Bloch
Collier’s

We were three days out of Lisbon bound west for New York. The storm on Saturday had been bad, but on Sunday the sea had ebbed. A little before eleven o’clock that night our ship, the small Spanish liner Marques de Comillas, got orders to stop. British control officers aboard a trawler wanted to examine the passengers. Everyone was told to line up in the main lounge.

Four British officers, wearing life jackets, entered. Without comment they worked their way down the line, scrutinizing passports. There was a feeling of tension. Many of those aboard the ship were fleeing; they thought they had made their escape from Europe once anchor was hoisted in Lisbon. Now? No one knew. Perhaps some of us would be taken off the ship.

Finally it was my turn. The officer in charge took my passport, glanced at it and looked up, smiling. “You were Hitler’s physician, weren’t you?” he asked. This was correct. It would also have been correct for him to add that I am a Jew.

I knew Adolf Hitler as a boy and as a young man. I treated him many times and was intimately familiar with the modest surroundings in which he grew to manhood. I attended, in her final illness, the person nearest and dearest to him than all others—his mother.

Most biographers—both sympathetic and unsympathetic—have avoided the youth of Adolf Hitler. The unsympathetic ones have done this of necessity. They could lay their hands on only the meager facts. The official party biographies have skipped over this period because of the dictator’s wishes. Why this abnormal sensitivity about his youth? I do not know. There are no scandalous chapters which Hitler might wish to hide, unless one goes back over a hundred years to the birth of his father. Some biographers say that Alois Hitler was an illegitimate child. I cannot speak for the accuracy of this statement.

What of those early years in Linz, Austria, where Hitler spent his formative years? What kind of a boy was he? What kind of a life did he lead? It is of these things that we shall speak here.

When Adolf Hitler Was Thirteen

First, I might introduce myself. I was born in Frauenburg, a tiny village in southern Bohemia which, in the course of my lifetime, has been under three flags: Austrian, Czechoslovakian and German. I am sixty-nine years old. I studied medicine in Prague, then joined the Austrian army as a military doctor. In 1899 I was ordered to Linz, capital of Upper Austria, and the third largest city in the country. When I completed my army service in 1901 I decided to remain in Linz and practice medicine.

As a city, Linz has always been as quiet and reserved as Vienna was gay and noisy. In the period of which we are about to speak—when Adolf Hitler was a boy of 15—Linz was a city of 80,000 people. My consultation rooms and home were in the same house, an ancient baroque structure on Landstrauss, the main thoroughfare of the city.

The Hitler family moved to Linz in 1903, because, believe me, of the good schools there. The family background is well known. Alois Schicklgruber Hitler was the son of a poor peasant girl. When he was old enough to work he got a job as a cobbler’s apprentice, worked his way into the government service and became a customs inspector at Braunau, a tiny frontier town between Bavaria and Austria. Braunau is fifty miles from Linz. At fifty-six Alois Hitler became eligible for a pension and retired. Proud of his own success, he was anxious for his son to enter government service. Young Adolf violently opposed the idea. He would be an artist. Father and son fought over this while the mother, Klara Hitler, tried to maintain peace.

As long as he lived Alois Hitler persevered in trying to shape his son’s destiny to his own desires. His son would have the education which had been denied him; an education which would secure him a good government job. So Father Alois prepared to leave the hamlet of Braunau for the city of Linz. Because of his government service, he would not be required to pay the full tuition for his (Continued on page 35)
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son at the Realschule. With all this in mind he bought a small farm in Leonding, a Linz suburb.

The family was rather large. In later life Adolf has so overshadowed the others that they are, for the better part, forgotten. There was half-brother Alois, whom I never met. He left home at an early age, got a job as a waiter in London and later opened his own restaurant in Berlin. He was never friendly with his younger brother.

Then there was Paula, the oldest of the girls. She later married Herr Rubal, an official at the tax bureau in Linz. Later still, after her husband’s death and her brother’s rise to power, she went to Berchtesgaden to become housekeeper at Hitler’s villa. Sister Klara for a while managed a restaurant for Jewish students at the University of Vienna; and sister Angela, youngest of the girls, married a Professor Hamitsh at Dresden, where she still lives.

A Job for Frau Hitler

The family had barely settled in their new home outside of Linz when Alois, the father, died suddenly from an apoplectic stroke.

At the time Frau Hitler was in her early forties. She was a simple, modest, kindly woman. She was tall, had brownish hair which she kept neatly plaited, and a long, oval face expressive gray-blue eyes. She was desperately worried about the responsibilities thrust upon her by her husband’s death. Alois, twenty-three years her senior, had always managed the family. Now the job was hers.

It was readily apparent that son Adolf was too young and altogether too frail to become a farmer. So her best move seemed to be to sell the place and rent a small apartment. This she did, soon after her husband’s death. With the proceeds of this and the small pension which came to her because of her husband’s government position, she managed to hold her family together.

In a small town in Austria poverty doesn’t force upon one the indignities that it does in a large city. There are no slums and no serious overcrowding. I do not know the exact income of the Hitler family, but being familiar with the scale of government pensions I should estimate it at $25 a month. This small sum allowed them to live quietly and decently—unnoticed little people in an out-of-the-way town.

Their apartment consisted of three small rooms in the two-story house at No. 9 Stettenerstrasse, which is across from the Danube from the main portion of Linz. Its windows gave an excellent view of the mountains.

My predominant impression of the simple furnished apartment was its cleanliness. It glistered; not a speck of dust on the chairs or tables, not a stray flake of soil on the scrubbed floor, not a smudge on the panes in the windows.

Frau Hitler was a superb housekeeper.

The Hitlers had only a few friends. One stood out above the others; the widow of the postmaster who lived in the same house.

The limited budget allowed not even the smallest extravagance. We had the usual provincial opera in Linz: not good, and not bad. Those who held him for the best went to Vienna. Seats in the gallery of our theater, the Schauspielhaus, sold for the equivalent of 10 to 15 cents in American money. Yet occupying one of those seats to hear an indifferent troupe sing Lohengrin was such a memorable occasion that Hitler records it in Mein Kampf.

For the most part the boy’s recreations were limited to those things which were free: walks in the mountains, a swim in the Danube, a free band concert. He read extensively and was particularly fascinated by stories about American Indians. He devoured the books of James Fenimore Cooper, and the German writer Karl May—who never visited America and never saw an Indian.

The family diet was, of necessity,

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simple and rugged. Food was cheap and plentiful in Linz; and the Hitler family ate much the same diet as other people in their circumstances. Meat was served perhaps twice a week. Most of the meals they sat down to consisted of cabbage or potato soup, bread, dumplings and a pitcher of pear and apple cider.

For clothing, they wore the rough woolen cloth we call Loden. Adolf, of course, dressed in the uniform of all small boys: leather shorts, embroidered suspenders, a small green hat with a feather in its band.

A Remarkable Mother Love

What kind of boy was Adolf Hitler? Many biographers have put him down as harsh-voiced, defiant, untidy; as a young ruffian who personified all that is unattractive. This simply is not true. As a youth he was quiet, well-mannered and neatly dressed.

He records that at the age of fifteen he regarded himself as a political revolutionary. Possibly. But let us look at Adolf Hitler as he impressed people about him, not as he impressed himself. He was tall, sallow, old for his age. He was neither robust nor sickly. Perhaps "tall looking" would best describe him. His eyes—inherited from his mother—were large, melancholy and thoughtful. To a very large extent this boy lived within himself. What dreams he dreamed I do not know.

Outwardly, his love for his mother was his most striking feature. While he was not a "mother's boy" in the usual sense, I have never witnessed a closer attachment. Some insist that this love verged on the pathological. As a former intimate of the family, I do not believe this is true.

Klara Hitler adored her son, the youngest of the family. She allowed him his own way wherever possible. His father had insisted that he become an official. He rebelled and won his mother to his side. He soon tired of school, so his mother allowed him to drop his studies.

All friends of the family know how Frau Hitler encouraged her boyish efforts to become an artist; at what cost, to herself one may guess. Despite their poverty, she permitted him to reject a job which was offered in the post office, so that he could continue his painting. She admired his water colors and his sketches of the countryside. Whether this was honest admiration or whether it was merely an effort to encourage his talent I do not know.

She did her best to raise her boy well. She saw that he was neat, clean and as well fed as her purse would permit. Whenever he came to my consultation room this strange boy would sit among the other patients, awaiting his turn. There was never anything seriously wrong. Possibly his tonsils would be inflamed. He would stand obedient and uncomplaining while I depressed his tongue and swabbed the troubled spots. Or possibly, he would be suffering with a cold. I would treat him and send him on his way. Like any well-bred boy of fourteen or fifteen he would bow and thank me courteously.

I, of course, know of the stomach troubles that beset him later in life, largely as a result of bad diet while working as a conservatory laborer in Vienna. I believe I can understand the many references to his lung trouble as a youth. I was the only doctor treating him during the period in which he is supposed to have suffered from this. My records show nothing of the kind. To be sure, he didn't have the rosy cheeks and the robust good health of most of the other youngsters; but at the same time he was not sickly.

At the Realschule young Adolf's work was anything but brilliant. As author-
Hilter's Worst Moment

As weeks and months passed after the operation Frankl's strength began visibly to fail. At last he could be out of bed for an hour or two a day. During this period the patient's strength was in a state of constant decline. The final few days of his life were spent in bed, where he remained until his death. In the last few days he had become extremely weak and listless. He seemed to have lost all interest in life, and his eyes were sunken and lifeless. The last time I saw him, he was lying in bed, his face very pale and his breathing shallow. I touched his hand and he gave a weak squeeze in return. It was clear that he was about to pass away at any moment. When I asked him how he was, he simply shook his head and closed his eyes for the last time.

The next day, the day after his death, I went to see him one last time. He was lying in the morgue, his body still partially intact. I stood there for a while, looking at his body, trying to grasp the reality of what had just happened. It was a sad and somber day, with the city in mourning for the man who had been such a great leader.

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