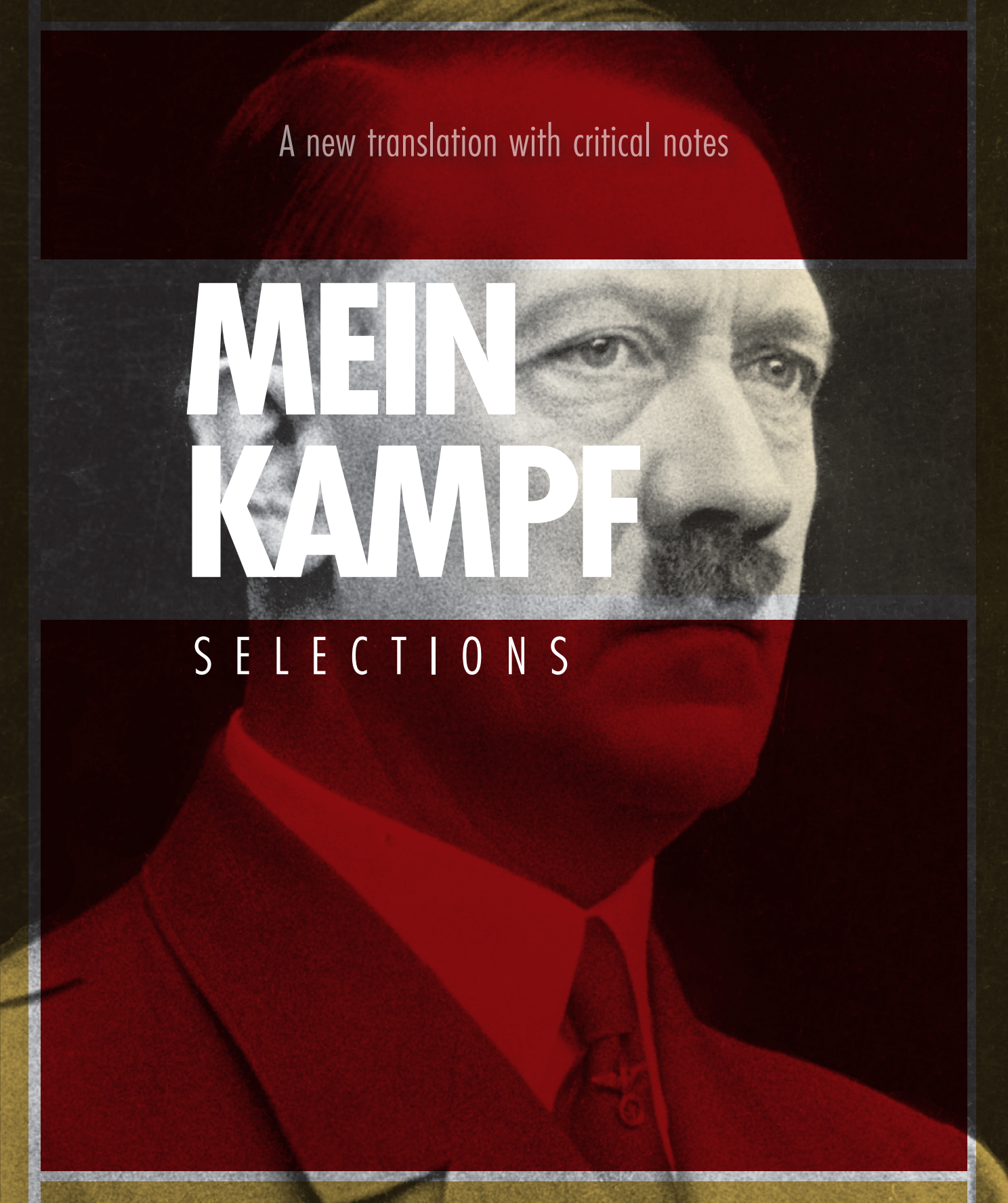
A new translation with critical notes

MEIN KAMPF

SELECTIONS



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(MY STRUGGLE)

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SELECTIONS
(MY STRUGGLE)

Adolf Hitler

Translated from the German edition of 1943

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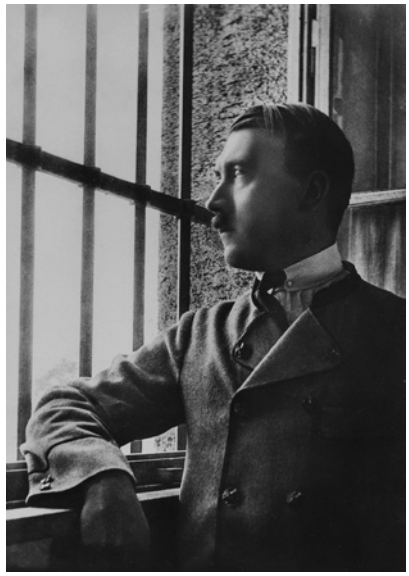
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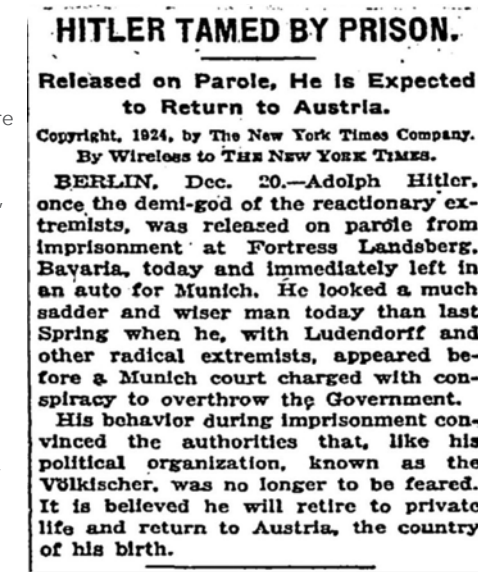
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Top: Hitler wrote *Mein Kampf* during his time in Landsberg Prison in 1924 after being convicted of treason. He spent almost nine months there before being released on parole.
Middle: Aftermath of the "Night of Broken Glass," known as Kristallnacht, the Nazi government's anti-Jewish pogrom on November 9–10, 1938. Besides Jews, like those in the Warsaw Ghetto in occupied Poland, other "undesirables" included Roma (Gypsies), Slavs, and political and religious dissidents.
Bottom: Liberated prisoners at the Auschwitz concentration camp in January 1945. Aerial view of Cologne, Germany, in ruins following Allied air raids.



HITLER TAMED BY PRISON.

Released on Parole, He Is Expected to Return to Austria.

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BERLIN, Dec. 20.—Adolph Hitler, once the demi-god of the reactionary extremists, was released on parole from imprisonment at Fortress Landsberg, Bavaria, today and immediately left in an auto for Munich. He looked a much sadder and wiser man today than last Spring when he, with Ludendorff and other radical extremists, appeared before a Munich court charged with conspiracy to overthrow the Government.

His behavior during imprisonment convinced the authorities that, like his political organization, known as the Völkischer, was no longer to be feared. It is believed he will retire to private life and return to Austria, the country of his birth.









FOREWORD

The Prophet of Hatred: A Christian Reading of *Mein Kampf*

Some books are warnings that history hands us in the author's own voice. *Mein Kampf* is such a book. Adolf Hitler published it in two volumes, in 1925 and 1926, seven years before he came to power. In its pages he announced, plainly and at length, what he believed and what he intended to do. The world had the blueprint before the building went up but largely declined to believe it.

The book's legacy is written in blood. Its author led a regime that ignited the deadliest war in human history and murdered six million Jews. Hitler did not conceal his hatred and reveal it only after gaining power. He printed it first.

Mein Kampf is perhaps the most infamous book of the modern age. Why should Christian students read it? Some parents and teachers worry that its ideas might poison young minds, and the concern is even sharper here than with *The Communist Manifesto*. The concern is understandable, but classical Christian education does not hide from the brokenness of the world. We study that brokenness to understand it, to inoculate ourselves against it, and to speak light into its darkness.

We read Hitler's work for three reasons. First, we read it to understand the historical catastrophe it helped cause. Second, we read it to recognize the real grievances and disordered longings it exploited. Third, and most important, we read it to train our minds—to see where its worldview collides with biblical truth and to spot its machinery of persuasion. Students will meet that machinery again and again, in new hands, in our own century.

A word about this edition. We print five chapters only: the self-portrait (Part 1, Chapters 1 and 2), the racial creed (Part 1, Chapter 11), and the propaganda manuals (Part 2, Chapters 6 and 11). These chapters offer clear, unequivocal insights into the

man, his ideology, and his method. Together, the five chapters are a substantial introduction to Hitler's attitudes, ideas, and intentions. The translation is our own, made fresh from the sometimes rambling and often convoluted German. Special thanks to my German friends and VSA instructor Daniel Samms for their vital feedback. We have rendered the author plainly, neither softening him nor sharpening him. Students should meet him as he presented himself.

The Rubble It Rose From

To understand the appeal of *Mein Kampf*, we must first understand the wreckage of post-World War I Germany. In November 1918, Germany signed the armistice, and the defeat stunned the nation. German armies still stood on foreign soil, and newspapers had promised victory almost to the end. The Treaty of Versailles followed in 1919. It stripped Germany of territory, imposed crushing reparations, and forced the nation to accept guilt for the war. Many Germans embraced a darker explanation, the *Dolchstoßlegende*, or stab-in-the-back myth. The army had not failed, the myth maintained; rather, traitors at home, Jews and socialists among them, had betrayed it. The myth was false but believed. Then came 1923, when hyperinflation made German money nearly worthless. Workers carted their wages in wheelbarrows, and families' life savings vanished in weeks. Armed political gangs brawled in the streets of a young republic that few Germans loved, and the republic's enemies slandered its founders as the "November criminals" who had signed the nation's humiliation.

We should concede what was real. The humiliations and the suffering were not inventions. Versailles was widely felt, and not only by Germans, to be vindictive. The hunger and the ruin were not propaganda. Any honest reading of the era must begin there. Like the *Manifesto, Mein Kampf* draws its power from genuine grievance.

Into this rubble stepped an unlikely figure. Hitler was an Austrian outsider, a failed art student twice rejected by Vienna's Academy of Fine Arts, a drifter whom the Great War rescued from aimlessness. He served as a dispatch runner, was decorated for bravery, and found in the army the belonging he had never known. After the war he discovered his one gift, agitation, in the beer halls of Munich. In November 1923 he marched on the Bavarian government in the failed Beer Hall Putsch, a coup that collapsed in a single volley of police gunfire. A sympathetic Bavarian court gave him a

lenient sentence, a comfortable cell at Landsberg prison, and an audience. There he dictated *Mein Kampf,* publishing its first volume in 1925.

He wrote for the millions who were hungry, angry, and desperate. He did not offer them an economic roadmap. He offered them a story about who had wounded Germany and who would avenge it.

The Heart of the Book

The five chapters in this edition show the book's three faces: a myth, a creed, and a method.

First, the myth of the man. Chapters 1 and 2 pose as memoir, but they are self-mythology written backward. The book opens with destiny. Fate itself, Hitler declares, assigned him a birthplace on the border of the two German states he would live to unite, a town haloed, in his telling, by German martyrdom. Vienna becomes fate's school of hardship, and the chapter ends in a conversion. "I had gone from being a weak-willed citizen of the world to a fanatical anti-Semite." The worldview he built there, he boasts, never afterward needed revising. Historians who have combed the records of his Vienna years tell a different story. Sidebars in this volume explain why the tidy conversion narrative does not hold up. What matters here is the pattern: in Hitler's telling, nothing in his life merely happens to him; everything is a manifestation of his destiny.

Second, the creed of race. Part 1 Chapter 11, "People and Race," is the ideological core. Nature, Hitler claims, governs the world by a merciless law of eternal struggle. Humanity divides into three kinds of races: founders, bearers, and destroyers of culture. The Aryan alone creates civilization. The Jew is his cosmic opposite, "the eternal parasite," described throughout in the language of vermin and disease. Mixing blood is the original sin, the single cause, he insists, of every civilization's death. From struggle, he draws his ethic. "Whoever wishes to live must therefore fight, and whoever does not wish to struggle in this world of eternal strife does not deserve life." The creed's territorial corollary appears in the book's first pages. A nation unable to feed its people, he asserts, gains a moral right to seize foreign soil, winning by the sword the bread that the plow cannot. He would later call this *Lebensraum,* living space. Note how thin the argument is. Marx, whatever his errors, was a formidable intellect. Hitler argues by assertion and animal analogy, a crudeness that is itself instructive. Ideas need not be brilliant to be deadly.

Third, the method of the masses. The two Part 2 chapters are the book's most chillingly candid pages. Here Hitler explains how he wins minds. Propaganda must subordinate argument to psychological effect. The speaker must make his case "so simple and clear that even the least intelligent among them must grasp it." He must repeat it endlessly, varying only his examples, until resistance collapses. The spoken word beats the written page. Meetings belong to the night, when tired minds resist less. The individual is swallowed by the crowd until he succumbs to mass suggestion. The party, Hitler insists, must be the master of the masses, never their servant. Propaganda recruits supporters; organization forges fighters who will seize the state. Throughout Part 2's two chapters runs one shameless move. Hitler brands his enemies liars while using and teaching a rhetoric unmoored from honesty.

Beneath all three of the book's faces lies a single worldview. Where Marx made economics foundational to everything, Hitler sees that foundation as race and struggle. For both men, ideas, morality, and religion are surface phenomena of a deeper engine: matter for Marx, blood for Hitler.

Worldview Collision

The deepest collision concerns what a human being is. Scripture teaches that God made man in his own image and that every nation on earth descends from one man. There are no culture-founding and culture-destroying races. There is one race—human—fallen in Adam but redeemed in Christ, and heaven will be peopled from every tribe, tongue, and nation. Hitler's hierarchy of blood is not merely mistaken science. It is an assault on the doctrine that gives every human being immeasurable worth. Scripture does speak of a chosen people, but Israel was chosen for God's redemptive purposes, not for its superior blood. What is more, through Israel came the Savior of all nations. The gospel Hitler despised seats Jew and Gentile as brothers at one table. When he dismisses whole peoples as so much racial chaff, he denies the image of God in man, and no other error in the book matters more.

The second collision concerns the law of life. For Hitler, struggle is the supreme law and strength the supreme virtue. Pity is treason against nature, and only born weaklings, he sneers, could find such an order cruel. Christ blesses the meek, commands love of enemies, and reveals a God who delights to level the strong through the weak.

The cross itself is divine power displayed in weakness. A worldview that despises the weak will, in time, destroy them, and Germany's disabled would learn this first.

The third collision concerns religion itself. *Mein Kampf* is saturated in the language of providence. Fate assigns Hitler's birthplace; a pagan goddess of justice fells his enemies; and Part 1 Chapter 2 closes with what may be the book's most outrageous sentence. "By resisting the Jew, I am fighting for the work of the Lord." This is borrowed clothing draped over an amoral nature-god. National Socialism grew into a political religion, complete with a messiah, martyrs, sacred texts, and liturgies. Hitler even admires the candlelit mystery of Catholic worship as a technique worth copying. In his salvation story, the redeemer is a mere mortal and the redeemed is a race. Christianity, by contrast, confesses a personal, holy God who judges the nations and finds them all wanting.

The fourth collision concerns truth. *Mein Kampf* may be the fullest modern manual of persuasion severed from it. Propaganda simplifies, repeats, adapts itself to the audience, and uses emotion, atmosphere, and mass pressure to make Hitler's pseudo-reasoning feel undeniable. Jesus, however, does not merely speak the truth; he claims to be the truth. Paul, likewise, renounced cunning, seeking to persuade by setting forth the truth openly.

What, then, did Hitler have in common with his hearers? The *Manifesto*'s authors and readers often shared a real concern for the poor. Hitler shared only a grievance, and he fed it until love of country became worship of nation. Augustine taught that sin is love out of order, good things loved in the wrong way or the wrong measure. Patriotism is a natural affection Christians can honor; we rightly love our forebears, our homeland, our people. A nationalism of blood, though, makes the nation an idol and its neighbors subhuman, and an idol always demands sacrifice. The Christian answer is not a rival political program. It is rightly ordered love: a love of country beneath love for God and a love of neighbor that crosses every bloodline. To love one's own people is natural and good; to hate another's is sin.

The Cost of the Ideology

Ideas must be judged by what happens when people act on them. In 1933, the author of this book became chancellor of Germany, and the book began to govern.

The Nuremberg Laws of 1935 stripped Jews of citizenship. In November 1938, the state-sponsored pogrom called Kristallnacht burned synagogues across the Reich. The regime then turned on the weak its creed despised, murdering tens of thousands of disabled Germans in the T4 program. In 1939 came the war of racial conquest, *Lebensraum* enacted with the sword and the plow. In its shadow came the Holocaust—the systematic murder of six million Jews, alongside Roma, Slavs, the disabled, and others the creed deemed unworthy of life. The war Hitler unleashed killed more human beings than any other in history.

None of this betrayed the book. Its parasite language, racial hierarchy, claimed moral right to foreign land, and contemptuous propaganda theory supplied ideological warrant for many of the regime's chief crimes. The regime was more than a mere embodiment of the book, but the book had already named the enemies, sanctified the struggle, and trained the method. Those who say the world could not have known what Hitler and the Nazis intended forget that the warning had been in print since 1925.

The church, too, was tested. The regime cultivated a movement of so-called German Christians who draped the swastika over the cross. Against them, the Confessing Church declared at Barmen in 1934 that the church belongs to Christ alone. Martin Niemöller went to a concentration camp; Dietrich Bonhoeffer went to the gallows. We must be honest, though: many churchmen failed the test, whether through fear, nationalism, or silence. Niemöller himself gave the failure its lasting confession. They came first for others, he admitted, and he did not speak out; by the time they came for him, few were left to speak at all. Their failure is part of why we study this book. Discipleship is often proved in a crucible, but the crucible rarely announces itself in advance.

This is what follows when a nation seeks salvation in blood and soil rather than in the blood of the cross.

An Ever-Present Danger

As you read the chapters before you, bring a sharp and discerning mind. Notice how every misfortune finds the same culprit—the Jew. That scapegoat explains and justifies everything, which is the surest sign that it does neither. Notice how the author's life story borrows the shape of a Christian conversion testimony while inverting its fruit.

Notice how appeals to fate and nature do the work that arguments should do. Above all, notice the propaganda techniques he tells you he is using. Read with open eyes, this book becomes a vaccination against manipulation.

Set this introduction beside its companion in our edition of the *Communist Manifesto*, and a pattern emerges. Marxism located evil in a class; Hitler located it in a race. Both promised salvation through struggle against a human enemy. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, who suffered under one of these ideologies, saw what both had missed. The line dividing good from evil runs not between classes or races, he observed, but straight through every human heart.

Antisemitism did not die in 1945. The ideas in this book survived and, wearing new clothes, thrive today. You will meet them in life, if you have not already.

Classical Christian education prepares the student to engage dangerous ideas with truth and courage. To defend the faith, he must understand its adversaries. To love her neighbors, she must understand the ideas that have shaped their world. We study ideological darkness so that we might better understand how best to reflect God's light. Read the text carefully, think about it deeply, and stand firmly on the unchanging truth of Christ.

Michael G. Eatmon

PART 1
AN ACCOUNTING

CHAPTER 1

In My Parents' Home

I consider it a stroke of good fortune today that fate assigned me the town of Braunau am Inn as my birthplace. For this little town lies on the border of those two German states whose reunification appears to us younger people, at least, as a life's mission to be carried out by any means necessary!

German Austria must return to the great German motherland, and not for reasons of any economic considerations. No, no. Even if this union were indifferent or even harmful, economically speaking, it must still take place. The same blood belongs in a common realm. The German people have no moral right to engage in colonial policy as long as they cannot even unite their own sons within a single state. Only when the realm's borders encompass the very last German but without being able to provide for his sustenance does the moral right to acquire foreign land arise from the need of one's own people. The plow is then the sword, and from the tears of war springs daily bread for posterity. Thus, this small border town seems to me to be the symbol of a great task. Yet, in another respect, it also stands as a warning to our present age. More than a hundred years ago, this unassuming little town, as the scene of a tragic misfortune that gripped the entire German nation, had the distinction of being immortalized forever in the annals of German history. In the time of our fatherland's deepest humiliation, Johannes Palm of Nuremberg—a bourgeois bookseller, a die-hard nationalist, and an enemy of the French—fell there for his Germany,



Braunau am Inn

Braunau am Inn sits on the river border between Austria and Bavaria, both German-speaking lands. Hitler treats his birth there as more than geography. It is a destiny, a sign pointing toward the union of Austria and Germany he would later pursue as policy. Watch for this pattern—ordinary facts read as omens of an assigned mission—throughout *Mein Kampf*.

Right to foreign land

A hungry nation, Hitler claims, earns the moral right to take someone else's land. Need becomes entitlement in a single sentence. Philosophers call this the is-ought problem (or naturalistic fallacy): a moral right derived from a biological fact. Classical natural-law reasoning works the other way, grounding a just claim to land in justice and law, never in hunger alone. This single line is the seed of what Hitler will later call *Lebensraum*.

Palm and Schlageter

Johann Philipp Palm was a Nuremberg bookseller. He was shot at Braunau in 1806 on Napoleon's order for refusing to name the author of an anti-French pamphlet. Leo Schlageter was a saboteur. He was executed by French firing squad in 1923 during the Ruhr occupation and became a Nazi martyr-cult figure. Hitler yokes both deaths to his own birthplace to suggest his own life shares their destiny.

Martyr rhetoric

There is a name for Hitler's approach here: *pathos*, an appeal to emotion. It is one of Aristotle's three modes of persuasion. Hitler ties his own birthplace to two sympathetic deaths and asks readers to feel his destiny instead of examine any argument for it. Watch for this device elsewhere. Appeals to emotion can be honest companions to an argument or a quiet substitute for one.



which he loved dearly even in misfortune. He had stubbornly refused to name his accomplices—or rather, the principal culprits. Just like Leo Schlageter. Also like Schlageter, Palm was denounced to the French by a government representative. An Augsburg police chief earned this sad notoriety, thus setting the example for the new German authorities in the realm of Mr. Severing.

In this little town on the Inn, gilded by the rays of German martyrdom—Bavarian by blood, Austrian by state—my parents lived at the end of the 1880s—my father as a dutiful civil servant, my mother devoting herself to the household and, above all, showering us children with ever-constant, loving care. Very little from that time remains in my memory, for after only a few years, my father had to leave the beloved border town again to move downstream and take up a new post in Passau—that is, in Germany itself.

But the lot of an Austrian customs officer back then often meant wandering. Shortly thereafter, my father came to Linz and finally retired there. Of course, this was not to mean rest for the old man. As the son of a poor, small-householder, he had never felt at home there. Not yet thirteen years old, the young boy packed his little knapsack and ran away from his homeland, the Waldviertel. Despite the advice of "experienced" villagers, he had wandered to Vienna to learn a trade there. That was in the 1850s. It was a bitter decision to set out on the road into the unknown with just three guilders for provisions. But by the time the thirteen-year-old had turned seventeen, he had passed his journeyman's examination yet had not found contentment. Quite the opposite. The long period of hardship, perpetual misery, and wretchedness at that time solidified his resolve to give up the trade after all in order to become something higher. If in the village the poor boy had seen the pastor as the embodiment of all human achievement, now in the big city that vastly expanded his horizons, it was the dignity of a civil servant. With all the tenacity of one who had grown old through hardship and sorrow even in early childhood, the seventeen-year-old

clung to his new resolve and became a civil servant. After nearly twenty-three years, I believe, the goal was achieved. Now the prerequisite for a vow the poor boy had once made to himself seemed fulfilled—namely, not to return to his beloved father's village until he had made something of himself.

Now the goal had been achieved, yet no one in the village could remember the little boy of yesteryear, and to him the village had become a stranger.

When he finally retired at the age of fifty-six, he would not have been able to endure a single day of this leisure as an idler. He purchased an estate near the Upper Austrian market town of Lambach, managed it, and thus, in the cycle of a long, labor-filled life, returned to the origins of his forefathers.

It was during this time that my first ideals likely took shape. All the romping about outdoors, the long walk to school, and my interactions with extremely rowdy boys, which sometimes filled my mother with bitter worry, made me inclined toward anything but being a homebody. So even though I hardly gave serious thought to my future career back then, my sympathies certainly did not lie with the path my father had taken from the very beginning. I believe that even then, my talent for public speaking was honed through more or less heated arguments with my peers. I had become a bit of a ringleader who learned easily and very well in school but was otherwise quite difficult to handle. Since I received singing lessons in my free time at the Canons' College in Lambach, I had the best opportunity to revel time and again in the solemn splendor of the extremely magnificent church festivals. What could be more natural than that—just as the little village pastor had once been to my father, the abbot now appeared to me as the most desirable ideal. At least for a time, this was the case. But since my father, for understandable reasons, was unable to appreciate the oratorical talents of his quarrelsome son enough to draw any favorable conclusions for his offspring's future, he naturally could not gain an understanding

for such youthful thoughts either. He observed this conflict of nature with concern.

In fact, the temporary longing for this profession soon faded, giving way to hopes more in keeping with my temperament. While browsing through my father's library, I had come across various books on military topics, including a popular edition of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–71. These were two volumes of an illustrated magazine from those years, which now became my favorite reading. It wasn't long before the great heroic struggle had become my greatest inner experience. From then on, I became more and more enthusiastic about everything that had anything to do with war or, at least, with soldiering.

But this was also to become significant for me in another respect. For the first time, even if only as a vague notion, the question forced itself upon me: Was there a difference between the Germans fighting these battles and everyone else? Why hadn't Austria fought in this war as well? Why not my father, and why not all the others too?

Aren't we just the same as all the other Germans?

Don't we all belong together? This problem began to gnaw at my young mind for the first time. With inner envy, I had to hear the answer to my cautious questions that not every German had the good fortune to belong to Bismarck's empire.

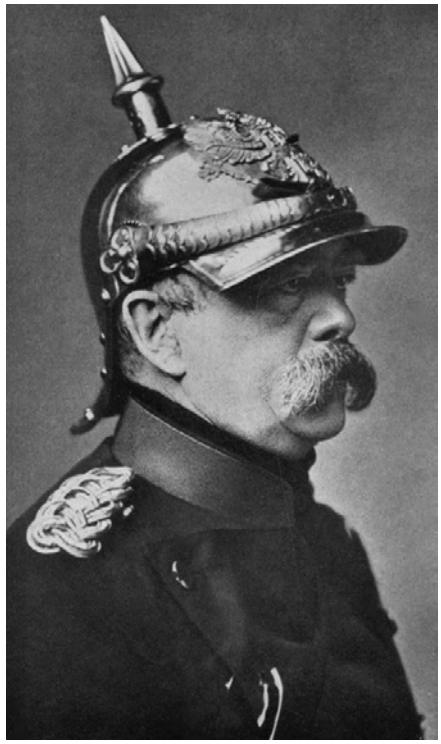
I couldn't understand this.

I was supposed to go to college.

From my whole being and even more so from my temperament, my father believed he could conclude that a humanities-focused high school would be at odds with my disposition. A secondary school seemed to suit him better. He was particularly reinforced in this opinion by my apparent aptitude for drawing, a subject that, in his conviction, was neglected in Austrian high schools. Perhaps, however, his own arduous life's work also played a role, causing him to value a humanities education, which he viewed as impractical, less highly. Fundamentally, though, he was of the firm opinion that, just as he had,

Bismarck's Empire

In 1871, the Franco-Prussian War united Germany's states into a single empire under Prussia's Otto von Bismarck. That empire excluded German-speaking Austria. Reading a boyhood book about the war, young Hitler asks why Austria, full of Germans, was not included. That sense of exclusion becomes the seed of his lifelong pan-German nationalism and his later push to unite Austria with Germany.



his son would naturally become a civil servant—indeed, must become one. His bitter youth naturally made his later achievements seem all the greater to him, even though they were solely the result of his iron diligence and his own drive. It was the pride of one who had made something of himself that moved him to want to bring his son into the same—and, if possible, naturally higher—position in life, all the more so because, through the diligence of his own life, he was able to make his child's path to success easier.

The thought of rejecting what had once become the very substance of his entire life seemed inconceivable to him. Thus, my father's decision was simple, resolute, and clear—in his own eyes, self-evident. Finally, however, it would have seemed utterly unbearable to his nature, which had grown imperious in the bitter lifetime struggle for existence, to leave the final decision in such matters to the boy himself, whom he regarded as inexperienced and therefore not yet responsible. This would also have been incompatible with his usual conception of duty, a sign of weakness and reprehensible failure in the exercise of the paternal authority and responsibility for his child's future life that rightfully belonged to him.

And yet things were to turn out differently.

For the first time in my life, as a boy barely eleven years old at the time, I was forced into opposition. As hard and determined as my father might have been in carrying out plans and intentions once he had set his mind on them, so stubborn and defiant was his son in rejecting an idea that appealed to him little or not at all.

I did not want to become a civil servant.

Neither persuasion nor serious arguments could change this resistance. I did not want to become a civil servant—no, and again, no. All attempts to awaken in me a love or desire for this profession through descriptions of my father's own life backfired. The thought of one day sitting in an office as a man without freedom made me feel sick to my stomach for not being master of my own time but having to squeeze the

contents of an entire life into forms to be filled out.

What thoughts could this possibly inspire in a boy who was truly anything but well behaved in the conventional sense! The ridiculously easy schoolwork gave me so much free time that I spent more time in the sun than in a room. When today my political opponents, in their loving concern, scrutinize my life all the way back to my youth only to conclude with relief what unbearable pranks this Hitler had already committed in his youth, I thank heaven that it still grants me even now a glimpse of the memories of that blissful time. Meadows and forests were then the arena where the ever-present contrasts were played out.

Even my subsequent enrollment in secondary school did little to curb this.

Of course, another conflict now had to be resolved.

As long as my father's intention to have me become a civil servant was opposed only by my fundamental aversion to the civil service profession itself, the conflict was easily bearable. I was able to hold back somewhat with my inner convictions for the time being; after all, I did not always have to contradict him right away. My own firm resolution not to become a civil servant later on was enough to completely reassure me inwardly. But I held fast to this resolution. The matter became more difficult when my father's plan was confronted by one of my own. This happened when I was just twelve years old. I don't even know myself today how it came about, but one day it was clear to me that I would become a painter, an artist. My talent for drawing was undeniable; indeed, it was one of the reasons my father sent me to secondary school. Yet he would never, ever have considered having me trained professionally in such a field. On the contrary. When, after yet another rejection of my father's cherished idea, I was asked for the first time what I actually wanted to become myself and blurted out my now firmly resolved decision rather abruptly, my father was at first speechless.

"A painter? An artist?"

He doubted my sanity, perhaps thinking he hadn't quite heard or

understood correctly. However, once he was enlightened on the matter and, in particular, sensed the seriousness of my intention, he threw himself against it with all the resolve of his being. His decision here was very simple, and any consideration of my actual abilities, if I had any, was out of the question.

"An artist? No, as long as I live, never." But since his son had likely inherited a similar stubbornness, along with various other traits, a similar response came back. Only, of course, with the opposite meaning.

Both sides stood their ground. My father did not waver from his "Never," and I reinforced my "Nevertheless."

Admittedly, this did not have very pleasant consequences. The old gentleman became embittered, and as much as I loved him, so did I. My father ruled out any hope that I would ever be trained as a painter. I went a step further and declared that I would then not want to study at all. Since I naturally came up short with such declarations, insofar as the old gentleman now prepared to ruthlessly assert his authority, I remained silent in the future but put my threat into practice. I believed that once my father saw my lack of progress in secondary school, he would, for better or worse, let me pursue the happiness I had dreamed of.

I don't know if that calculation would have held true. The only certainty at first was my obvious failure in school. I learned what pleased me—above all, everything I thought I would need later as a painter. Anything that seemed meaningless to me in that regard or that didn't appeal to me otherwise, I sabotaged completely. My report cards from that time always showed extremes, depending on the subject and its evaluation. Alongside "commendable" and "excellent," there was "satisfactory" or even "unsatisfactory." My performance was by far the best in geography and even more so in world history, my two favorite subjects, in which I was ahead of the class.

Now, when I look back on the results of that time after so many years, I see two striking facts as particularly significant.

First, I became a nationalist.

Second, I learned to understand and grasp history in its true sense.

Old Austria was a multinational state.

A citizen of the German Empire could, at least back then, hardly grasp the significance this fact held for the daily life of the individual in such a state. Following the marvelous triumphs of the heroic armies in the Franco-Prussian War, people had gradually become increasingly estranged from the German identity abroad to the point where they were partly no longer able, or perhaps no longer willing, to appreciate it at all. Especially with regard to the German-Austrians, one all too easily mixed up the degenerate dynasty with the people, who were fundamentally sound at their core.

People failed to understand that, had the Germans in Austria not truly been of the finest blood, they could never have possessed the strength to leave such a deep imprint on a 52-million-strong state that even in Germany itself the erroneous opinion could arise that Austria was a German state. This was a nonsense with the gravest consequences yet a brilliant testimony to the ten million Germans of the Ostmark. Very few Germans from the Reich had any inkling of the eternal, relentless struggle for the German language, for German schools, and for the German spirit. Only today, as this sad plight is being forced upon many millions of our people from the Reich itself—who, under foreign rule, dream of the common fatherland and, longing for it, at least try to preserve the sacred right to their mother tongue—is it understood by a wider circle what it means to have to fight for one's national identity. Now, perhaps, one or two may also be able to gauge the greatness of German culture from the old Eastern March of the Empire, which, left to its own devices, for centuries first shielded the Empire to the east, only to finally hold the German language border in a grueling series of skirmishes, at a time when the Empire was indeed interested in colonies, but not in its own flesh and blood at its very gates.

As everywhere and always, in every struggle, there were also three strata in the language struggle of old Austria: the fighters, the

Habsburg Austria

The Austro-Hungarian Empire of Hitler's youth governed more than a dozen language groups. Ethnic Germans, though long politically dominant, had become a shrinking share of the population by his lifetime. This is the multinational state (ruled by the royal House of Habsburg) behind the chapter's talk of national struggle and linguistic chaos. It is also the empire whose breakup Hitler came to wish for.



lukewarm, and the traitors.

This sorting began as early as in school. For it is perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the language struggle in general that its waves wash hardest precisely over the school, as the breeding ground of the coming generation. This struggle is waged for the child, and the first appeal of this conflict is directed at the child:

"German boy, do not forget that you are a German," and "Girl, remember that you are to become a German mother!"

Anyone who knows the soul of youth will understand that it is precisely they who most eagerly open their ears to such a battle cry. In a hundred different ways, they then wage this battle, in their own way and with their own weapons. They refuse to sing non-German songs; the more one tries to alienate them from German heroic greatness, the more they rave about it; they save pennies from their allowances to contribute to the great ones' war chest; they are incredibly alert to the non-German teacher and defiant at the same time; they wear the forbidden symbols of their own national identity and are happy to be punished or even beaten for it. They are thus, on a small scale, a faithful reflection of the adults, only often with a better and more sincere disposition.

I, too, once had the opportunity, even in my relatively early youth, to take part in the national struggle of old Austria. We collected for the Südmark and the School Association, emphasized our convictions through cornflowers and black-red-gold colors, greeted one another with "Heil," and sang "Deutschland über alles" instead of the imperial anthem, despite warnings and punishments. The boy was thus politically schooled at a time when the citizens of his so-called nation-state usually knew little more of their national heritage than the language. It goes without saying that I did not belong to the lukewarm at that time. In a short time, I had become a fanatical German nationalist, though this is not identical to our modern concept of a political party.

This development progressed very rapidly in me, so that by the age



Pan-German youth culture

The Südmark and School Association were pan-German nationalist groups. Active in the Austrian borderlands, they raised money for German-language schools and culture. The cornflower was adopted as a badge by followers of nationalist agitator Georg von Schönerer in the 1880s. Habsburg authorities briefly banned it. Black–red–gold were the old colors of German national unity. Risking punishment, teenage Hitler wore both as small acts of political defiance.

Two kinds of loyalty

Hitler draws a hard line between two loyalties. Dynastic patriotism is an attachment to a ruling house whatever one's ethnicity. Ethnic nationalism is a bond with people based on blood and language. The Habsburgs survived on the first; Hitler wanted the second—the hinge his book turns on. A place or a person can be a natural, admirable love. Loyalty to blood and language alone, though, is a fuse, and later chapters show what it lights.



of fifteen, I had already come to understand the difference between dynastic patriotism and ethnic nationalism; and by then I already knew only the latter.

For those who never took the trouble to study the internal conditions of the Habsburg monarchy, such a process may perhaps not be entirely explainable. School instruction in world history alone must have sown the seeds for this development in that state, since there is only a very limited degree of specifically Austrian history. The fate of this state is so closely linked to the life and growth of the entire German people that a division of history into, say, a German and an Austrian history seems entirely inconceivable. Indeed, when Germany finally began to split into two spheres of power, this very separation became German history.

The imperial regalia of former imperial glory, preserved in Vienna, seem to continue to work as a wondrous magic, serving as a pledge of an eternal community.

The instinctive cry of the German-Austrian people in the days of the collapse of the Habsburg state for union with the German motherland was, after all, merely the result of a feeling of longing, slumbering deep in the hearts of the entire people, for this return to the never-forgotten fatherland. But this would never be explainable if the historical education of the individual German-Austrian had not been the cause of such a general longing. In it lies a well that never runs dry, one that, especially in times of forgetfulness, as a silent admonisher, beyond the comforts of the moment, will whisper again and again of a new future through the memory of the past.

The teaching of world history in so-called secondary schools, however, is still in a very sorry state today. Few teachers understand that the very purpose of history instruction can never, ever lie in the rote memorization and regurgitation of historical dates and events; that it does not matter whether the boy knows exactly when this or that battle was fought, a general was born, or even a (mostly very insignificant) monarch received the crown of his ancestors upon his head. No, by God,

that matters little.

To learn history means to seek out and discover the forces that, as causes, lead to those effects which we then see before our eyes as historical events.

The art of reading, as well as of learning, lies here too: retaining what is essential, forgetting what is unessential.

It may well have shaped the course of my entire later life that fortune once granted me, specifically for history, a teacher who—as one of the very few—understood how to make this perspective the guiding principle of his instruction and examinations. In my professor at the time, Dr. Leopold Pötsch, at the Realschule in Linz, this ideal was embodied in a truly exemplary manner. An elderly gentleman, with a demeanor as kind as it was firm, he was able, particularly through his dazzling eloquence, not only to captivate us but to truly sweep us away. Even today, I recall with quiet emotion the gray-haired man who, in the fervor of his presentation, sometimes made us forget the present, transported us back to bygone eras, and transformed dry historical memory into living reality from the misty veil of millennia. We would sit there, often inspired to a feverish glow, sometimes even moved to tears.

Our joy was all the greater because this teacher knew how to illuminate the present through the past and to draw the consequences for the present from the past. Thus, more than anyone else, he instilled in us an understanding of all the current issues that kept us on the edge of our seats at the time. Our small measure of national fanaticism became a tool for our education, as he, by appealing more than once to our sense of national pride, thereby alone brought our ranks into order more quickly than would ever have been possible by other means.

This teacher made history my favorite subject.

Admittedly, even back then, though likely unintentionally on his part, I was already becoming a young revolutionary.

Who could study German history under such a teacher without becoming an enemy of the state, which, through its ruling house, so

Leopold Pötsch

Dr. Leopold Pötsch taught history at the Realschule in Linz from 1901 to 1904. His contemporaries independently confirm his passionate, pan-German-tinted teaching style. The flattering memory of the man is not Hitler's alone. Pötsch's approach blurred education with nationalist formation. National pride often stood in for careful inquiry.



disastrously influenced the fate of the nation?

Who, after all, could remain loyal to an emperor of a dynasty that, in the past and present, had betrayed the interests of the German people time and again for the sake of its own shameful advantages?

Did we not already know as boys that this Austrian state had no love for us Germans, indeed could not possibly have any?

This historical understanding of the Habsburg dynasty's actions was further reinforced by daily experience. In the north and in the south, the poison of foreign peoples was eating away at the very fabric of our national identity, and even Vienna was visibly becoming more and more of a non-German city. The archduchy Czechified wherever possible, and it was the fist of the goddess of eternal justice and inexorable retribution that brought down the deadliest enemy of Austrian Germanism, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, precisely through the bullets he himself had helped to cast. For he was, after all, the patron of the top-down Slavicization of Austria.

The burdens imposed on the German people were monstrous, their sacrifices in taxes and blood were unheard of, and yet anyone who was not completely blind had to recognize that all of this would be in vain. What pained us most in all this was the fact that this entire system was morally sanctioned by the alliance with Germany, whereby the slow eradication of German identity in the old monarchy was, in a sense, even sanctioned by Germany itself. The Habsburg hypocrisy, with which they managed to give the outward appearance that Austria was still a German state, intensified the hatred against this house into both fierce indignation and contempt.

Only within the empire itself did those who were already, even then, the chosen ones see none of this. As if struck by blindness, they walked alongside a corpse and believed they could even detect signs of new life in the symptoms of decay.

In the ill-fated union of the young Reich with the Austrian sham state lay the seed of the later World War but also of its collapse.

I will have to deal with this problem in depth in the course of this book. It suffices here merely to note that, in essence, I arrived at an insight in my earliest youth that never left me, but only deepened.

Namely, the preservation of German identity required the destruction of Austria, and, furthermore, national sentiment is not identical with dynastic patriotism—above all, the House of Habsburg was destined to be the misfortune of the German nation.

Even then, I had drawn the consequences of this realization—a passionate love for my German-Austrian homeland and a deep hatred for the Austrian state.

The way of thinking about history that was taught to me in school in this manner never left me thereafter. World history increasingly became for me an inexhaustible source of understanding for the historical actions of the present—that is, for politics. I do not wish to learn it but rather to let it teach me.

If I had become a political revolutionary at such an early age, I became an artistic one no less early.

The Austrian capital had a relatively decent theater at the time. They staged just about everything. At the age of twelve, I saw *William Tell* there for the first time; a few months later, *Lohengrin* became the first opera of my life. I was captivated at once. My youthful enthusiasm for the Bayreuth master knew no bounds. Time and again I was drawn to his works, and I consider it a special stroke of luck today that the modesty of the provincial production preserved for me the possibility of a later appreciation.

All of this reinforced, especially after I had overcome my rebellious years (which, in my case, was a very painful process), my deep-seated aversion to the career my father had chosen for me. I became increasingly convinced that I would never be happy as a civil servant. Now that my talent for drawing had also been recognized in secondary school, my resolve only grew stronger.

Neither pleas nor threats could change that anymore.



William Tell* and *Lohengrin

Friedrich Schiller's play *William Tell* and Richard Wagner's opera *Lohengrin* were the first play and first opera young Hitler ever saw. Both inspired him with heroic stories of national deliverance and resistance. His devotion to Wagner, "the Bayreuth master," begins here and resurfaces later in this volume, at the Bayreuth Festival.

I wanted to become a painter and, for all the world, not a civil servant.

It was only peculiar that, as I grew older, I developed an increasing interest in architecture.

At the time, I considered this a natural complement to my painting skills and was inwardly delighted by the expansion of my artistic horizons.

I had no idea that things would turn out differently.

The question of my profession was now to be decided sooner than I had previously dared to expect.

At the age of thirteen, I suddenly lost my father. A stroke struck the otherwise robust man and ended his earthly journey in the most painless way, plunging us all into the deepest sorrow. What he longed for most—to help secure a livelihood for his child, thereby sparing him from his own bitter fate—seemed at the time not to have been achieved. Yet he laid, albeit entirely unconsciously, the seeds for a future that neither he nor I could have grasped at the time.

At first, nothing changed outwardly.

My mother felt obliged, in accordance with my father's wishes, to continue my education, that is, to have me study for a career in the civil service. I myself was more determined than ever not to become a civil servant under any circumstances. To the very extent that the secondary school's curriculum and education diverged from my ideal, I became increasingly indifferent inwardly. Then illness suddenly came to my aid and settled the dispute in my father's house. My severe lung condition led a doctor to advise my mother most urgently that under no circumstances should I ever be sent to work in an office. My attendance at the secondary school also had to be suspended for at least a year. What I had longed for in silence, what I had always fought for, had now, through this event, suddenly become a reality almost of its own accord.

Under the impression of my illness, my mother finally agreed to take me out of secondary school later and let me attend the Academy.

Those were the happiest days, which seemed to me almost like a beautiful dream; indeed, it was to be nothing more than a dream. Two years later, my mother's death brought an abrupt end to all those beautiful plans.

It was the culmination of a long, painful illness that had offered little hope of recovery from the very beginning. Nevertheless, the blow struck me particularly hard. I had revered my father, but I had loved my mother.

Poverty and harsh reality now forced me to make a quick decision. My father's meager resources had been largely depleted by my mother's serious illness; the orphan's pension I was entitled to was not enough even to make a living, so I was now forced to earn my own bread somehow.

Carrying a suitcase of clothes and linens in my hands, with an unshakable resolve in my heart, I set off for Vienna. I hoped to achieve what my father had succeeded in 50 years earlier; I, too, wanted to become something, though under no circumstances a civil servant.

CHAPTER 2

Years of Learning and Suffering in Vienna

When my mother died, fate had already made its decision in one respect.

During her final months of suffering, I had traveled to Vienna to take the entrance exam for the Academy. Armed with a thick stack of drawings, I had set out at the time, convinced that I could pass the exam with ease. In secondary school, I had already been by far the best draftsman in my class; since then, my skill had developed even more extraordinarily, so that my own satisfaction made me proud and happy, allowing me to hope for the best.

There was, however, one occasional cloud: my talent for painting seemed to be overshadowed by my talent for drawing, particularly in almost all areas of architecture. At the same time, my interest in architecture itself grew ever stronger. This was further accelerated when, not yet 16 years old, I was allowed to travel to Vienna for the first time for a two-week visit. I went there to study the painting gallery of the Hofmuseum, but I had eyes almost exclusively for the museum itself. I spent my days from early morning until late at night running from one sight to another, yet it was always the buildings that captivated me most of all. I could stand in front of the opera house for hours, admire the Parliament for hours; the entire Ringstrasse seemed to me like a spell from *One Thousand and One Nights.*

Mein Kampf as self-mythology

Hitler frames his Vienna years as a sudden awakening to antisemitism. Brigitte Hamann's research into contemporary Vienna sources, however, found no documented antisemitic remarks from the young Hitler. That modern finding complicates the tidy conversion story he tells. A retrospective narrative composed years later can smooth, or even rewrite, a messier, less convenient past. It can shape that past into a dramatic turning point, serving the story its author wants to tell.



The Ringstrasse

Vienna tore down its old city walls in the 1860s. In their place rose the Ringstrasse, a boulevard ringed with opera house, parliament, museums, and city hall. Teenage Hitler stood in front of it awestruck and reached for a fairy tale to describe it. The same street shows up later in the chapter wearing a very different face. Unemployed men are bedding down in its shadow, just outside the frame of the fairy tale.

So now I was in the beautiful city for the second time, waiting with burning impatience but also with proud confidence for the result of my entrance exam. I was so convinced of success that the rejection I was handed struck me like a sudden blow out of the blue. And yet it was so. When I asked to be introduced to the rector and requested an explanation of the reasons for my non-admission to the Academy's general painting school, the gentleman assured me that my drawings clearly demonstrated my unsuitability as a painter but that my ability lay evidently in the field of architecture; for me, the Academy's painting school was out of the question; only the architecture school was an option. The fact that I had never attended a school of architecture nor received any other instruction in architecture was, at first, completely incomprehensible to them.

Defeated, I left the Hansen family's magnificent building on Schillerplatz, at odds with myself for the first time in my young life. For what I had heard about my abilities now seemed to me, like a flash of lightning, to reveal a conflict I had long suffered from, without having been able to give myself a clear account of the whys and wherefores.

Within a few days, I knew for myself that I would one day become an architect.

Admittedly, the path was incredibly difficult; for what I had neglected in secondary school out of defiance was now to take its bitter revenge. Admission to the Academy's School of Architecture depended on attending the Technical School of Construction, and entry into the latter required a high school diploma obtained beforehand. I lacked all of this entirely. By human standards, therefore, the fulfillment of my artistic dream was no longer possible.

When, after my mother's death, I moved to Vienna for the third time, and this time for many years, calm and determination had returned to me with the passage of time. My former defiance had returned, and I had finally set my sights on my goal. I wanted to become an architect, and obstacles are not there to be surrendered to but to be overcome.

Mein Kampf is one of the most dangerous books ever written—not because it is persuasive, but because people believed it. Adolf Hitler's ideas, first shared in this manifesto, shaped a movement that brought war, destruction, and the death of millions. The excerpts in this student edition were selected as representative symptoms of a monstrous disease. With a helpful introduction and sidebar guidance, readers can study Hitler's words the way a doctor studies pathogens. They can learn to understand them, to guard against them, and to tell the truth about what they really are.

Reading *Mein Kampf* is not easy. It is not meant to be. Learning to read hard things wisely is part of growing up. It helps train people to love what is good, hate what is evil, and live faithfully in a broken world.



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