

# Herman Rauschning's Talks With Hitler

*THE VOICE OF DESTRUCTION.* By Hermann Rauschning. 295 pp. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. \$2.75.

By FERDINAND KUHN JR.

**H**ERMANN RAUSCHNING can claim a truer insight than most of us into the mentality of Hitler and its meaning for our world. As President of the Danzig Senate he was admitted, for three dizzy years until 1934, into the little circle of Hitler's confidants. He watched the Nazi leaders spin the web of tragedy which was so soon to entangle Europe. On the strength of what he had heard and seen and pondered, he wrote "The Revolution of Nihilism," which not only foresaw the German-Russian pact with uncanny clearness but which also pictured Hitler as the prophet of a nihilistic world revolution, consciously aiming at the downfall of all that we call Western civilization.

Now Dr. Rauschning has written another book that is less penetrating but more shocking. It is a report, most of it in quotation marks, of his confidential talks with Hitler in 1932, 1933 and 1934, when democratic Europe still had no conception of what was in store. He used to see Hitler frequently, sometimes alone, sometimes with men like Goebbels, Hess and Walter Darré, from whom Hitler seems to have taken some of his ideas of "blood and race." Dr. Rauschning explains that he jotted down a record of these conversations when he was still "under the immediate influence" of what he had heard. There is, of course, no way of checking the literal accuracy of every word attributed to Hitler; but Rauschning is more than a

mere sensationalist, and the story he tells is so terrible that it cannot be ignored.

If his former book was frightening, this one is hair-raising. It has all the stabbing terror of a nightmare. Dark shapes and evil ideas stalk through its pages; and it is more than a bad dream, for much of it has come true in blood and tears. Hitler talked to Rauschning of colonizing Bohemia and Moravia with German peasants and transporting the Czechs to Russia; they are being transported from their homeland now. He boasted, in those early years, of how easy it would be to make the Austrians "sweat" to take the softness out of them; he was planning the Anschluss from the very beginning.

As long ago as 1934 Hitler told his incredulous guest that he would some day begin the systematic depopulation of the Slav territories to the east of Germany. He saw no need of doing it by mass murder; there were other ways of accomplishing the same object. "I shall keep their men and women separated for years," he said. "If I can send the flower of the German nation into the hell of war without the smallest pity, then surely I have the right

to remove millions of an inferior race that breeds like vermin." The depopulation of Poland, by murder and mass separation, is going on before our eyes.

"It will be a simple matter for me to partition Poland," he said in 1934, the year of his nonaggression pact with Pilsudski; "I could at any time come to an agreement with Soviet Russia." This kind of thing is what gives the new Rauschning book its nightmarish quality. It chills the blood to think of this man coldly planning a world tragedy.

Rauschning heard other grisly threats and prophecies from Hitler's lips, but they have not yet been fulfilled. Apparently Hitler loved to talk about the lightning

war in which he would destroy the West, establish German domination from Flanders to the Caucasus, and build a new Germanic religion in place of Christianity. The war of the future, he said, would consist of "aerial attacks, stupendous in their mass effect, surprise, terror, sabotage, assassination from within, the murder of leading men, overwhelming attack on all weak points in the enemy's defense." "We shall easily Germanize the population of the Baltic States," he said in 1932, in another prediction that went wrong; seven years later thousands of Germans were being deported, by Hitler's orders, from the Baltic lands they had inhabited for centuries.

One day a group of Danzigers came to see Hitler, with Rauschning among them. They sat sipping tea and eating *Streuselkuchen* and *Napfkuchen* while Hitler talked of his plans. The guests laughed as Hitler said he would "consider" driving Jews ahead of the German attacking lines in the next war, as "they'd be the best protection for our soldiers." Hitler laughed, too, at the idea. The *Streuselkuchen* were good.

Hitler's imagination in those days seems to have been unbounded. There was to be a German-inspired revolution in Brazil, and another in Mexico, for Sir Henri Deterding had told Hitler that Mexico had the laziest population in the world, and rich prizes for Germany to grasp. "It will be a simple matter for me," said Hitler, "to produce unrest and revolts in the United States,"



Herman Rauschning.

(Continued on Page 18)

# Conversations With Hitler

*(Continued from Page 4)*

with German-Americans as the spearhead of the attack.

Sometimes the record of these incredible monologues suggests a Nazi blueprint of the world as it will be if Hitler wins this war. More than once he told Rauschning that there would have to be a dominant race of German élite for whom subject races of aliens would sweat and strain like Roman slaves. He planned the occupation of Sweden as well as Holland. He talked vaguely of dying as a martyr; and in one memorable threat, which Rauschning remembered more vividly than all the rest, he proclaimed, "We may be destroyed, but if we are, we shall drag a world with us—a world in flames."

Madness? Dr. Rauschning goes exhaustively into the question without giving a positive answer. He portrays Hitler as a man abnormal, emotionally unstable, given to fits of weeping and storms of anger; hypnotic to a degree, so that even Dr. Rauschning fell under the spell; cold to

human suffering, paranoiac in his visions of power, and yet so cunning that he was able to outguess most of the leading political intellects in Germany and abroad.

Evidently Dr. Rauschning is troubled by the thought that a Hitler legend may arise in Germany in the distant future. The best way to avert it now, he suggests, is to pin on Hitler the sole responsibility for the war and the miseries of "inevitable" defeat. At any rate it is reassuring to find Dr. Rauschning using the word "inevitable." He is sure now that Hitler's gigantic conceptions of future German power are as impermanent as a card-castle. He is confident that the men and women of this generation who worshiped him will stone him and spit on him when the evil spell is broken. But "The Voice of Destruction" remains a terrible warning. Hitler and his movement, says Dr. Rauschning, are "the apocalyptic riders of world annihilation." After reading his book no one can fail to agree with him.

**The New York Times**

Published: February 18, 1940

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