**An excerpt from the essay "This Wicked Man Hitler"**

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Despite the recent outpouring of popular and scholarly books on Hitler, no work has yet been produced that satisfactorily explains Hitler's obsessive ideas about the Jews, the readiness of the German people to accept those ideas, and Hitler's ability to harness an enormous apparatus of men, institutions, and facilities 'lust in order to murder the Jews. Hitler has proved to be an elusive and unrewarding subject for conventional biography because the explanations for the baffling mystique he exercised, for the power he came to wield, and for his unspeakable accomplishments are not to be found in the facts of a banal life, but in the ideas and feelings that created the symbiosis between him and the German people. Their mutuality and interdependence thrived, as Hitler first expressed and later gratified the Germans' most arrogant and abominable ambitions. He relieved their deepest fears and anxieties and, near the end, disburdened them of both guilt and responsibility for the wickedness they had given him warrant to commit. J. P. Stern, an English literary scholar and a refugee from Germany, perceived that the biographical approach was likely to trivialize rather than to illuminate this particular man: "If sociological interpretations lose sight of the man behind the trends, it is the common failing of biographies that they abstract a man from his world--a procedure that is particularly misleading in the case of one whose every public word and every public act expressed for almost the whole of his career the fears and aspirations of his contemporaries.

That conclusion is borne out in the popular biographies by Robert Payne and John Toland, neither of which adds much to our knowledge or understanding of Hitler. Payne, a prolific professional writer, produced a briskly told account of Hitler's life which is altogether devoid of ideas. He tells little about Hitler and the Jews: barely ten pages out of over 6oo are devoted to the Final Solution, with a handful of other references to anti-Semitism, though not even a mention of the Nuremberg Laws.

Toland's book is more accomplished, yet despite massive research and countless interviews with countless persons, he has not succeeded in telling (in over a thousand pages) anything important that we had not known before. Asking few questions of historical significance of either his documents or his living subjects, Toland approached this book on Hitler, he admits, without a thesis. The "most meaningful" conclusion he reached was "that Hitler was far more complex and contradictory" than he had imagined.

But the nadir in Hitlerology is reached by David Irving's Hitler's War. An amateur historian, whose reputation as a German apologist and as a writer without regard for accuracy or truth won him a measure of notoriety, Irving produced a 926-page work intended to show that Hitler was kind to his animals and to his secretaries, that he was "probably the weakest leader Germany has known in this century," and that he did not murder the Jews or even wish to do so, but that the murder was committed behind his back, without his knowledge or consent. The killing of the Jews, Irving believes, "was partly of an ad hoc nature, what the Germans call a Verlegenbeitsldsung-the way out of an awkward dilemma, chosen by the middle-level authorities in the eastern territories overrun by the Nazis-and partly a cynical extrapolation by the central SS authorities of Hitler's anti-Semitic decrees."

Irving claims to have new evidence and fresh interpretations of known documents, but in fact, all his evidence is familiar. He develops his arguments mostly by suppressing or ignoring the impressive body of existing evidence and partly by applying a guileful literalness to cases of Hitler's Aesopian language.

Irving's thesis, which denies Hitler's responsibility for the murder of the Jews, is too preposterous to require refutation and argument, but one example will suffice to show his "scholarly" method. As seemingly irrefutable proof for his case, Mr. Irving offered an entry in Himmler's handwritten telephone log. On November 30, 1941, at I:30 p.m., Himmler, then in Hitler's military headquarters bunker "Wolf's Lair," telephoned SS Obergruppenfuhrer Heydrich, then in Prague. The gist of the telephone message was entered in four short lines in the log, though Mr. Irving cited only the last two lines:

 judentransport aus Berlin

 keine Liquidierung.

That is: "Transport of Jews from Berlin. No liquidation."

From this Mr. Irving concluded that Hitler had somehow learned what Himmler was up to and had ordered him to stop. An obedient Nazi, Himmler had called Heydrich in Prague to transmit Hitler's order. But in view of everything we know about the destruction of the Jews, Irving's construction of events makes no sense. If Himmler continued to kill the Jews long after November 30, I941, why did he order the liquidation of this one transport stopped? If he deceived Hitler before and after about the murder of the Jews, why should he be honest about it this once? Besides, what became of that transport of Jews from Berlin? Were they returned home? Irving's conclusion fails to provide a satisfactory explanation of those two lines in view of what actually happened, though it serves to support his perversely fanciful interpretation of Hitler's character.

To understand those two lines it is necessary to read also the first two lines of the telephone conversation. Here is the full German text:

 Verhaftung Dr. jekelius [name not fully decipherable]

 Angebl [ich] Sohn Molotovs.

 judentransport aus Berlin.

 keine Liquidierung.

That is: "Arrest Dr. jekellus. Presumably Molotov's son. Transport of Jews from Berlin. No liquidation."

The last two lines now make sense. Himmler called Heydrich to instruct him that a certain Dr. Jekelius, presumed to be the Soviet Foreign Minister's son, was to be taken in custody by the security police. jekelius could be located in the transport of Jews from Berlin arriving in Prague and, unlike the rest of the transport, was not to be liquidated. (Perhaps the Germans intended to exchange Jekelius for one of their officers captured by the Russians.)

Irving, wittingly or unwittingly, has in fact disproved his own theory. For if Hitler was indeed responsible for Himmler's call (there is no evidence that he was), then Irving has shown that Hitler did in fact know all about the murder of the Jews. And indeed, how else could it have been? The murder of the Jews was Hitler's most consistent policy, in whose execution he persisted relentlessly, and obsessiveness with the Jews may even have cost him his war for the Thousand Year Reich.