

Collier's

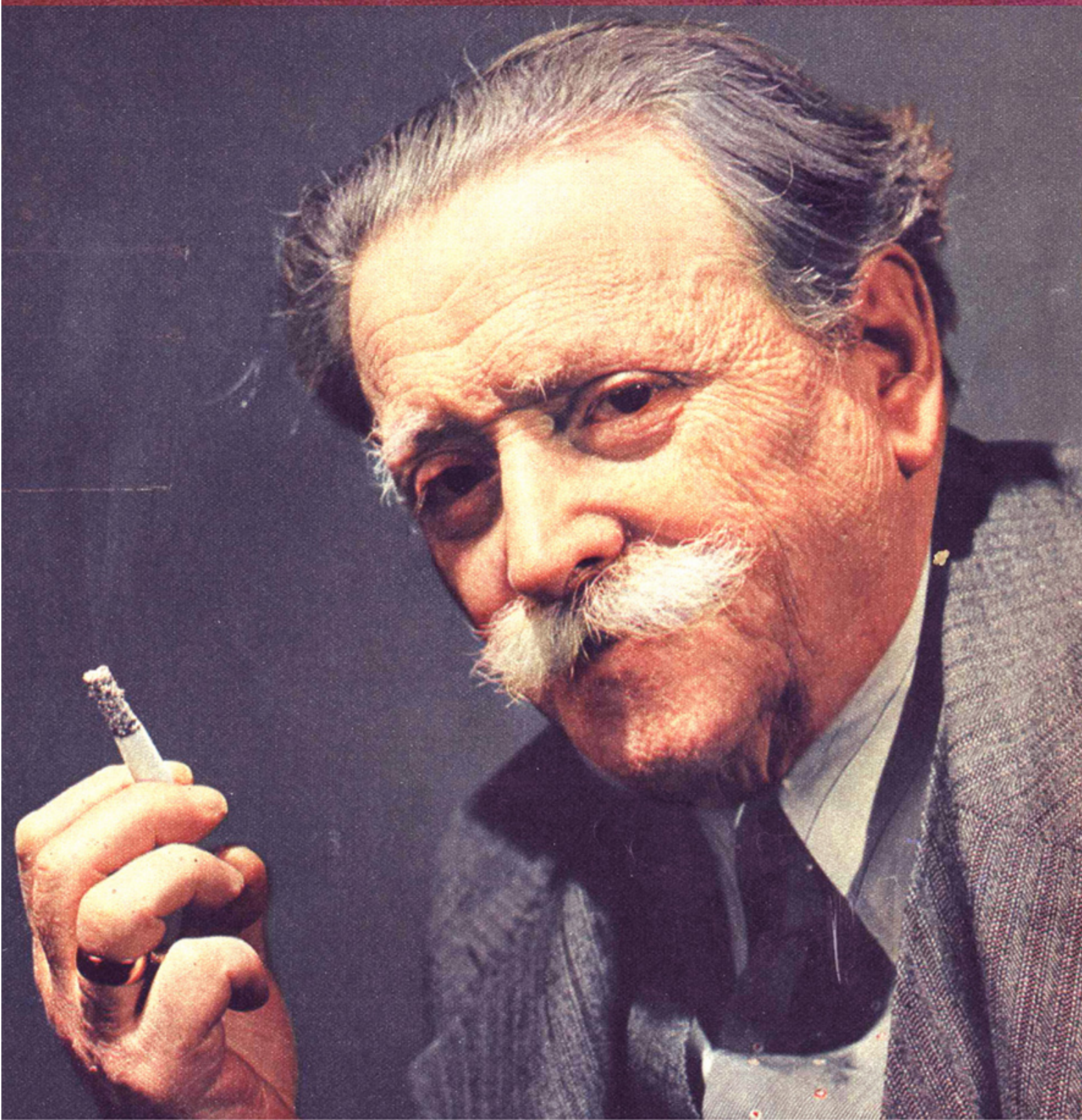
MARCH 15, 1941

My Patient, Hitler

By Dr. Eduard Bloch as told to

J. D. Ratcliff

The physician of the Hitler family tells about the dictator, who was his patient as a boy in old Austria



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 subsided. 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 tenseness. Many of those aboard the ship were fleeing; they thought they had made good 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 nearer and dearer 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 most 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.

OldMagazineArticles.com

My Patient, Hitler

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 13—Linz was a city of 80,000 people. My consultation rooms and home were in the same house, an ancient baroque structure on Landstrasse, the main thoroughfare of the city.

The Hitler family moved to Linz in 1903, because, I believe, 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) 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 in 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

My Patient, Hitler

students at the University of Vienna; and sister Angela, youngest of the girls, married a Professor Hamitsch 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 apopleptic 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 with beautifully 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 sale 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 Bluetenstrasse, which is across 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 glistened; not a speck of dust on the chairs or tables, not a stray fleck of mud 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 would hear 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 these 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

My Patient, Hitler

the German writer Karl May—who never visited America and never saw an Indian.

The family diet was, of necessity, 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 would be 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 "frail 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 his 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 unflinching while I depressed his tongue and swabbed the trouble spots. Or, possibly, he would be suffering with a cold.

My Patient, Hitler

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 trouble that beset him later in life, largely as a result of bad diet while working as a common laborer in Vienna. I cannot 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 sort. 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 authority for this, I have the word of his former teacher, Dr. Karl Huemer, an old acquaintance of mine. I was Frau Huemer's physician. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler records that he was an indifferent student in most subjects, but that he loved history. This agrees with the recollections of Professor Huemer.

Desiring additional training in painting, Hitler decided he would go to Vienna to study at the Academy. This was a momentous decision for a member of a poor family. His mother worried about how he would get along. I understand that she even suggested pinching the family budget a little tighter to enable her to send him a tiny allowance. Credit to the boy, he refused. He even went further: he signed his minute inheritance over to his sisters. He was eighteen at the time.

I am not sure of the exact details of what happened on that trip to Vienna. Some contend that he was not admitted to the Academy because of his unsatisfactory art work. Others accept Hitler's statement that his rejection was due to his failure to graduate from the *Realschule*—the equivalent of an American high school. In any case he was home again within a few weeks. It was later in this year—1908—that it became my duty to give Hitler what was perhaps the saddest news of his life.

One day Frau Hitler came to visit me during my morning office hours. She complained of a pain in her chest. She spoke in a quiet, hushed voice; almost a whisper. The pain, she said, had been great; enough to keep her awake nights on end. She had been busy with her household so had neglected to seek medical aid. Besides, she thought the pain would pass away. When a physician hears such a story he almost automatically thinks of cancer. An examination showed that Frau Hitler had an extensive tumor of the breast. I did not tell her of my diagnosis.

The Family Decides

I summoned the children to my office next day and stated the case frankly. Their mother, I told them, was a gravely ill woman. A malignant tumor is serious enough today; but it was even more serious thirty years ago. Surgical techniques were not so advanced and knowledge of cancer not so extensive.

Without surgery, I explained, there was absolutely no hope of recovery. Even with surgery there was but the slightest chance that she would live. In

My Patient, Hitler

family council they must decide what was to be done.

Adolf Hitler's reaction to this news was touching. His long, sallow face was contorted. Tears flowed from his eyes. Did his mother, he asked, have no chance? Only then did I realize the magnitude of the attachment that existed between mother and son. I explained that she did have a chance; but a small one. Even this shred of hope gave him some comfort.

The children carried my message to their mother. She accepted the verdict as I was sure she would—with fortitude. Deeply religious, she assumed that her fate was God's will. It would never have occurred to her to complain. She would submit to the operation as soon as I could make preparations.

I explained the case to Dr. Karl Urban, the chief of the surgical staff at the Hospital of the Sisters of Mercy in Linz. Urban was one of the best-known surgeons in Upper Austria. He was—and is—a generous man, a credit to his profession. He willingly agreed to undertake the operation on any basis I suggested. After examination he concurred in my belief that Frau Hitler had very little chance of surviving but that surgery offered the only hope.

It is interesting to note what happened to this generous man nearly three decades later—after Anschluss with Germany. Because of his political connections he was forced to abandon his position at the hospital. His son, who pioneered in brain surgery, was likewise forced from several offices.

Frau Hitler arrived at the hospital one evening in the early summer of 1908. I do not have the exact date, for my records of the case were placed in the archives of the Nazi party in Munich. In any case, Frau Hitler spent the night in the hospital and was operated on the following morning. At the request of this gentle, harried soul I remained beside the operating table while Dr. Urban and his assistant performed the surgery.

Two hours later I drove in my carriage across the Danube to the little house at No. 9 Bluetenstrasse, in the section of the city known as Urfahr. There the children awaited me.

The girls received the word I brought with calm and reserve. The face of the boy was streaked with tears, and his eyes were tired and red. He listened until I had finished speaking. He had but one question. In a choked voice he asked "Does my mother suffer?"

Hitler's Worst Moment

As weeks and months passed after the operation Frau Hitler's strength began visibly to fail. At most she could be out of bed for an hour or two a day. During this period Adolf spent most of his time around the house, to which his mother had returned.

He slept in the tiny bedroom adjoining that of his mother so that he could be summoned at any time during the night. During the day he hovered about the large bed in which she lay.

In illness such as that suffered by Frau Hitler, there is usually a great amount of pain. She bore her burden well; unflinching and uncomplaining. But it seemed to torture her son. An anguished grimace would come over him when he saw pain contract her face.

My Patient, Hitler

There was little that could be done. An injection of morphine from time to time would give temporary relief; but nothing lasting. Yet Adolf seemed enormously grateful even for these short periods of release.

I shall never forget Klara Hitler during those days. She was forty-eight at the time; tall, slender and rather handsome, yet wasted by disease. She was soft-spoken, patient; more concerned about what would happen to her family than she was about her approaching death. She made no secret of these worries; or about the fact that most of her thoughts were for her son. "Adolf is still so young," she said repeatedly.

On the day of December 20, 1908, I made two calls. The end was approaching and I wanted this good woman to be as comfortable as I could make her. I didn't know whether she would live another week, or another month; or whether death would come in a matter of hours.

So, the word that Angela Hitler brought me the following morning came as no surprise. Her mother had died quietly in the night. The children had decided not to disturb me, knowing that their mother was beyond all medical aid. But, she asked, could I come now? Someone in an official position would have to sign the death certificate. I put on my coat and drove with her to the grief-stricken cottage.

The postmaster's widow, their closest friend, was with the children, having more or less taken charge of things. Adolf, his face showing the weariness of a sleepless night, sat beside his mother. In order to preserve a last impression, he had sketched her as she lay on her deathbed.

I sat with the family for a while, trying to ease their grief. I explained that in this case death had been a savior. They understood.

In the practice of my profession it is natural that I should have witnessed many scenes such as this one, yet none of them left me with quite the same impression. In all my career I have never seen anyone so prostrate with grief as Adolf Hitler.

I did not attend Klara Hitler's funeral, which was held on Christmas Eve. The body was taken from Urfahr to Leonding, only a few miles distant. Klara Hitler was buried beside her husband in the Catholic cemetery, behind the small, yellow stucco church. After the others—the girls, and the postmaster's widow—had left, Adolf remained behind; unable to tear himself away from the freshly filled grave.

And so this gaunt, pale young man stood alone in the cold. Alone with his thoughts on Christmas Eve while the rest of the world was gay and happy.

A few days after the funeral the family came to my office. They wished to thank me for the help I had given them. There was Paula, fair and stocky; Angela, slender, pretty but rather anemic; Klara and Adolf. The girls spoke what was in their hearts while Adolf remained silent. I recall this particular scene as vividly as I might recall something that took place last week.

Adolf wore a dark suit and a loosely knotted cravat. Then, as now, a shock of hair tumbled over his forehead. His eyes were on the floor while his sisters were talking. Then came his turn. He stepped forward and took my hand. Looking into my eyes, he said: "I shall

My Patient, Hitler

be grateful to you forever." That was all. Then he bowed. I wonder if today he recalls this scene. I am quite sure that he does, for in a sparing sense Adolf Hitler has kept to his promise of gratitude. Favors were granted me which I feel sure were accorded no other Jew in all Germany or Austria.

The second of Dr. Bloch's articles will appear next week.

