

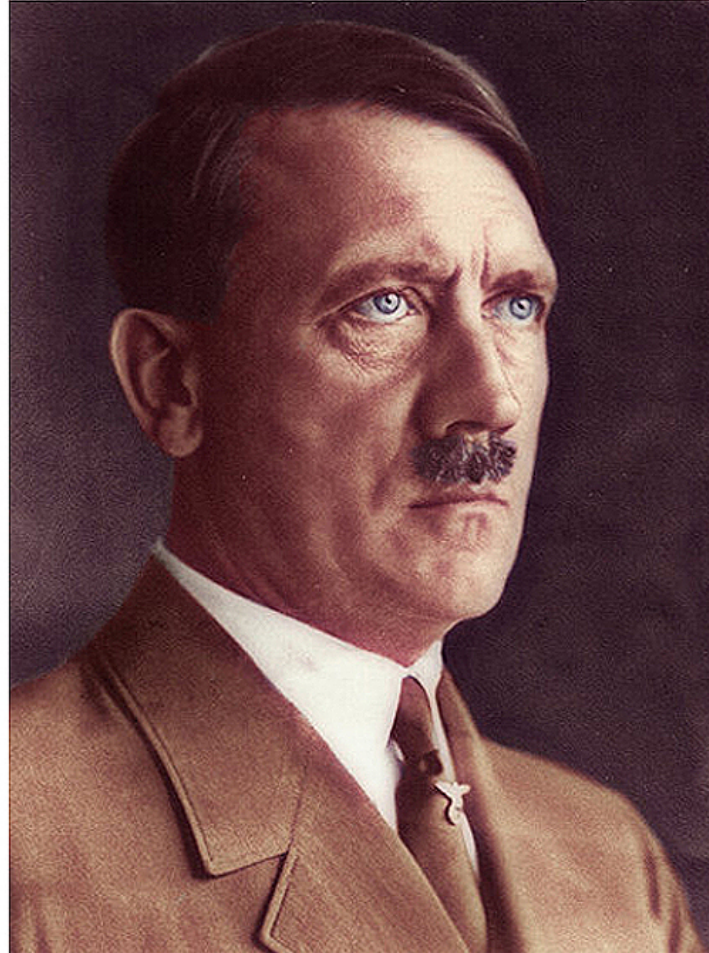
KEM

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THE KAISER ON HITLER

Silent for years on the subject of



What does the ex-Kaiser Wilhelm think of ex-house painter Hitler? "Nichts!"

It is the sixth time that the ex-Kaiser has received me at Doorn. As I enter his study, Wilhelm II is seated at his table before a book-rest containing the proofs of a treatise on which he is at work. A young woman dressed in grey rises and withdraws discreetly.

I recognize her as the Princess Henrietta von Schonaich-Carolath, daughter of the Princess Hermine who is herself seated in an armchair busy with her knitting.

The Emperor and his wife, the Princess Hermine, receive me with their customary graciousness. Wilhelm II is wearing a striped blue suit and white spats. He holds himself soldierly erect, carefully keeping the famous "withered hand" at his back out of sight. The snowy whiteness of his waved hair, his carefully groomed beard and moustache bear witness that, despite age, his vanity at least will never abdicate.

After the usual politenesses concerning his health, his archeological studies, etc., I venture to bring up a graver subject: the dramatic events of the moment (this was that tense last week of September). But it is really the Emperor who controls the conversation, and I, the questioner, find myself constantly questioned. He himself doesn't open up at all until I happen to say "Everything depends on Hitler . . ."

He agrees:

"Yes, everything depends on him. It's all clear . . . whereas in 1914 everything depended on a dozen men, and the confusion was such that one

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can't untangle, even today, the exact part each played."

Suddenly, sensing a chance I may never have again, I pose *the* question:

"And yourself, Sire, what do you think of him?"

"Nichts!"

This "nothing" is spoken in an (explosive) tone and the Emperor turns his back on me to begin pacing up and down the room. But I'm careful not to interrupt the ensuing silence, and he goes on as if only for his own benefit:

"There's a man alone, without family, without children, without God. Why should he be human? Oh, without a doubt, he's sincere: but this very excessive sincerity keeps him apart, out of touch, with men and realities . . . He builds legions, but he doesn't build a nation. A nation is created by families, a religion, traditions: it is made up out of the hearts of mothers, the wisdom of fathers, the joy and the exuberance of children . . . Over there" (here the good arm rose; pointing over Holland toward the Third Reich) "an all-swallowing State, disdainful of human dignities and the ancient structure of our race, sets itself up in place of everything else. And the man who, alone, incorporates in himself this whole State, has neither a God to honor nor a dynasty to conserve nor a past to consult . . ."

And the circle of those surrounding him?

"For a few months I was inclined to believe in National Socialism. I thought of it as a necessary fever. And I was gratified to see that there were, associated with it for a time, some of the wisest and most outstanding Germans. But these, one by one, he has got rid of, or even killed . . . Papen, Schleicher, Neurath—and even Blomberg. He has nothing left but a bunch of shirted gangsters!"

The Emperor held his silence for a long moment before resuming his monologue:

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“This man could bring home victories to our people each year, without bringing them either glory or (danger). But of our Germany, which was a nation of poets and musicians, of artists and soldiers, he has made a nation of hysterics and hermits, engulfed in a mob and led by a thousand liars or fanatics . . .”

The room darkens with the deepening twilight into the semblance of a dark grey backdrop against which, as bright points, stand out the white bearded head of Wilhelm II, the white arms and the pearl necklace of the Princess Hermine, who sits knitting away with a seemingly endless patience.

The Emperor breaks off brusquely, as if suddenly telling himself that he has talked too much, and addresses the Princess—

“Hermo, you’ve let us be overwhelmed both by darkness and by dark thoughts . . . Would you give us some light?”

With that, it’s over. I know that I shall learn no more. ●

KEN

April 6, 1939: p. 59

● The private estate of the former Kaiser, valued at \$17.5 million, yields an annual \$875,000, of which his Imperial Majesty receives \$42,000 by special permission of Adolf Hitler. The rest is used for the support of 17 princely families consisting of 49 people, all living in the Reich.