

(April 10, 1933)

Hitler's Challenge

BY RABBI MAURICE EISENDRATH.

PRESIDENT CHALMERS:—Rabbi Eisendrath and gentlemen, I should like to welcome to the Club to-day Dr. Coates, President of the Ottawa Canadian Club. I am only sorry Dr. Coates did not tell us he was going to be in Toronto to-day in order that we might have had him at our head table. Dr. Coates' club is one of the most important clubs in Canada and it is a pleasure to the Toronto Club to have him with us.

Throughout the eight or nine months during which I have been president of this club I have cherished the ambition of having as one of my speakers during the year Rabbi Eisendrath. I have felt he is one of the most brilliant exponents of the progressivism of the present day and yet he is a speaker and a thinker who holds the confidence not only of those of more advanced viewpoint but those who might be regarded by some people as reactionary in their viewpoint. Earlier in the year we had one or two addresses here by people who were somewhat advanced and I was asked by a number of people if we were turning the Canadian Club into a branch of the Third International. And then recently we had one or two people who were somewhat more Conservative and I have been asked if it is my intention to give the club nobody but stand-patters and reactionaries to listen to. Now, I am not putting Rabbi Eisendrath in either class because, as I said, he holds the confidence of those who were, justly or not, grouped in either one or the other class. This club is an open forum for the sensible expression of opinions by any people who are honest in their convictions and viewpoint, and Rabbi Eisendrath is both sensible and honest. I am delighted he

has selected as his subject, "Hitler's Challenge," because Rabbi Eisendrath is a young man of the present generation. He is particularly capable, particularly adept at discussing the 1933 movement of anything, social, political, or economic, and Hitler, it seems to me, is a 1933 movement. I have the greatest pleasure in introducing to you Rabbi Eisendrath.

RABBI EISENDRATH:—Mr. Chairman, Your Grace, and friends, I feel deeply privileged indeed to be addressing this most representative gathering of Toronto citizens. I have for some time past regarded this forum of opinion as being a most stimulating one and I feel complimented in very truth that you have permitted me this day to share this platform with the many distinguished visitors that you have had in the past and which we are anticipating together in the future. I especially welcome the opportunity at this particular time, most crucial in the life of my own people in particular and in the life of the world at a whole, to speak to you upon a problem with regard to which there is being disseminated to-day a great deal of misinformation and misunderstanding, but a problem upon the proper solution of which, however, depends not merely the salvation of the Jew in Germany but the very survival of the human race. And although you might think this statement a bit exaggerated, I believe before I am finished to-day that I will convince most of you that Hitler's challenge is one upon which depends the whole future of humanity.

I am going to try to speak to you to-day as dispassionately and as objectively as possible, because, when spirits are dismayed, when hearts are nigh broken, when cheeks are furrowed with tears, and souls are heavy laden, such is no time for anger and resentment, such is a time for understanding; when the fate of an entire people hangs in the balance it is not a time to clench fists and to shout one's wrath to the skies. It is rather a time to seek causes and to essay to find the proper remedy. Therefore I speak to you not out of anger toward the German people, but rather out of a sense of sadness and real pain as I behold a portion of that great and noble people reduced—yes, even to veritable

blood-thirsty beasts, following a small but powerful and unscrupulous minority who are striving to exploit the plight of their people for their own greedy ends. That the German people as a whole is a great and noble one I for one am firmly convinced.

In the first place my grandparents emigrated from that land and very early I learned to drink deeply of the lore of that particular culture, to drink deeply of its glory; not the glory, to be sure, of the Kaiser and his swaggering Potsdam gang, the glory of the arrogantly strutting junker, the glory of the arrant nationalist, seeking at whatever price his place in the sun, but the glory of a people that had given birth to a Beethoven, a Brahms, a Goethe, a Schiller, and a Kant, a people that has given to the world its sublimest symphonies, some of its greatest songs and poetry, some of its profoundest thought. And so, very early I learned to respect this people, as being a contributor to that which is among the best and most spiritual in human life.

But not merely do I place my valuation of the German people upon this heritage of mine from the past but likewise upon my own experience, because two summers ago, as I wandered through that country, I must admit, rarely have I encountered so gracious, so generous, so hospitable, so gallant, so charming a folk. Especially its youth. For three days we lingered at a youth hostel, where away up in the mountains the German government has taken hold of some of the old aristocracy's castles and turned them into hostels where the young folk, youths and maidens, wander through the countryside and mountains, singing folk-tunes and coming at the end of a weary day's trek to the haven awaiting them on the summit of the mountain, there to tarry, there to play their simple wholesome games, there to listen to a Mozart or Beethoven sonata, there to sing their songs, than which there are none more sublime. And I grew to love the youth of this country and I was filled with a great hope that this youth would show humanity the way.

Unfortunately, however, one did not have to be in

Germany very long before one noticed quite clearly that there was something deep within the hearts of youth and elders that was beginning to burn and seethe and, if something were not done soon, would perhaps very shortly boil over. One could look into the eyes of these young people and read a sense of hurt fringing on a spirit of resentment and revolt. One learned very quickly that here was a people which as a whole had suffered so poignantly as no other people in the annals of the past. Here was a people that not only endured the grim and ghastly toll of the great world war but likewise was faced thereafter with a virtual revolution, a revolution which threw the monarchy out of power and replaced it with a Republic, to be followed by a merciless food blockade and its attendant famine, and then that period of inflation when respectable and hard-working and thrifty families, that had saved and scrimped for a lifetime, saw their savings disappear from before their glance. Then the occupation of the Ruhr and the heavy burden of reparations. Yes, and the heavy debt that lay over them without any hope, it seemed, of ever making ends meet. One realized then how sad was the lot of these people.

And yet one knew that even all of this could have been easily and perhaps even gladly borne, especially by the youth, if it had not been for a certain sense of shame, a certain stigma, a national disgrace which hovered over the entire land like an overshadowing cloud. For these people were restive under that finger of scorn which was pointed at them and at them alone as being the sole culprits responsible for the havoc, the tragedy and the sorrow which the world war had brought in its wake. Because written into the Treaty of Versailles there was that incriminating article 231 which stated: "The allied and associated powers affirm and Germany accepts the sole responsibility for the loss and damage which the allied and associated powers have suffered as a consequence of the war imposed upon them by the aggression of Germany and her allies."

Now I say even if this particular clause were absolutely true, and there certainly was a group in Germany of which

it might have been all too true, but even if this had been the Gospel truth, then a new generation, none the less, would have had a right to have revolted against that stigma inflicted upon them. What had these youths to do with these generals which had been driven into exile? What had it to do with all that mad scheming and conniving for world power? They were innocent; their hands were clean. Yet they were doomed, so it seemed, to live for generations under the stigma of that national guilt. Small wonder then that those youths felt they would have to right this great wrong. And so I say, even if that clause were correct, one would have expected such a spirit of resentment among the youth of Germany. But that German youth soon discovered, as all Germans knew at the time they signed that clause at the point of the sword, as all intelligent men know to-day, that that clause was a misrepresentation, a vilification of the facts of history, as any one of you can discern if you will only take the time and the trouble to read a few of the war documents which have come to light since the year 1918.

I cannot go into the details of the causes and complex origins of the war. May I however commend to you two books written by great English historians and scholars, first Dr. Gooch's "Recent Revelations in European Diplomacy." Dr. Gooch you will remember was the official editor appointed by His Majesty to edit the official war documents of Great Britain in the year 1926; and if you will also read G. Lowes Dickenson's "This International Anarchy," you will discover that every single continental power was equally guilty of that Mephistophelean striving for power which brought men into that mad frenzy from 1914 to 1918. I say these things not to condone the monarchy of Germany. I say it merely to condemn all those continental powers equally and to say that at the Hall of Mirrors in Versailles every one of them ought to have fallen upon his knees and begged forgiveness for the blood-guilt which was upon his hands. But instead they forced Germany to sign that clause. They imposed upon her a treaty which an eminent scholar has

said was so impractical and so inhuman that "no self-respecting nation would have accepted it any longer than it would take time and strength to alter it."

Knowing all this, therefore; it was not a surprise to discover that even a young maiden in Germany, to whom I talked, told me that if she had a chance she would most assuredly go to war. "Against whom?" I asked her. "Against France." A determined generation was arising, consecrated to what seemed to them to be a holy crusade to right a historic wrong, and especially when they saw France, despite the fact that Germany lies prostrate and helpless, arming herself frantically, building that "fence of steel," as Clemenceau put it, pouring millions of francs into the coffers of Czekoslovakia and Poland and Roumania, surrounding Germany with a fence of steel. When they saw this then these particular people became fodder in truth for anyone who came along to exploit them.

These were the conditions then, accompanied by that burning sense of injustice, together with poverty, unemployment, bank closings, inflation, loss of property, loss of honor and national prestige—these were the things which saw Germany gradually slip to the very edge of destruction, to a hysteria nigh unto insanity itself, then precariously near the brink of chaos, slipping dangerously and swiftly into the foul morass of helplessness, sullen, weary, despondent, desolate. Germany reached out a hand for a straw of hope, like Israel in the days of Roman tyranny; Germany sought some Saviour. And in the midst of these circumstances a little Austrian would-be Messiah, a dapper little quack doctor, nominated himself for the role of Divine healer of the German Reich.

Now who was this man? His name, as you all know, was Adolph Hitler. Born in Austria in the year 1889, as a child his one ambition in life was to become an artist. This did not please his humble customs-officer father, who wanted him to have a different career. But Adolph wanted always to be an artist and when his father and mother died he took his paintings to Vienna and submitted them to some master who cast them aside as worthless and suggested that

Adolph try to be an architect. For a while he essayed this course. But here he met with disappointment, and then with a sense of deep frustration he became a house-painter, a concrete-mixer instead, and always there was that sense of suppressed desire by a will that had been frustrated, always there was that will to power.

Then came the year 1914 and the war. Here was Adolph's chance to distinguish himself. He was a most reckless and daring soldier, taking all manner of ridiculous risks in order that he might gain the plaudits of his companions, in order that he might earn distinction and be distinguished from the mob, which very early he learned to detest and despise. But the most he could get out of the war was the rank of corporal. However, this was not too bad, because he said to himself, "I am little; and I am a corporal. Aha! Another Little Corporal: another Napoleon; another Caesar; another Alexander; another Bismarck; another Frederick the Great." Already he began to feel himself a man of destiny.

Following the war he returned to Munich where he came into contact with a group of six men, the members of which were known as the German Working party. These men met in a cellar in Munich, plotting the overthrow of the Republic and the restoration of the system that had been destroyed. Adolph became "Number Seven" of this little group and immediately and quite naturally, because it could not have been otherwise for him, he became the leader of this little party. By the year 1923 this party grew to 30,000 members. And Herr Adolph Hitler, believing implicitly he was the man of destiny, plotted a "putsch," a raid upon the capital whereby he would seize possession of power. This proved miserably abortive, however. He was brought to trial and sentenced to five years in prison. During the eight months that he served, he devoted himself to the writing of his autobiography, "My Struggle." And anyone who will take the patience to plough through these pages will soon get a clear comprehension of the stature of the man.

However, when he was released from prison he rejoined

his party and he began to make speeches. Now he found his true *métier*. He discovered he was a born orator, not of the finished, dignified and balanced style of a Gladstone or a Burke or a Disraeli, but the cheap and vulgar pyrotechnics of a Bill Thompson! He began to draw great crowds. He was a master showman and as his latest biographer Mowrer, who served in Germany for ten years as foreign correspondent of the *Chicago Daily News*, describes him, he would have been a perfect ring-master in a circus. And as the crowds began to drift to hear this gesticulating, ceaselessly sputtering and most voluble clown, he developed a certain technique. He began to use uniforms, flags, bunting, banners, bands, parades—always in the same pattern. The largest hall in every community was rented for his meetings and they were always packed, even if they had to pay the audiences to attend, because the capitalists of other lands, some of them, were pouring money into his coffers day after day. It took, in later years, \$8,000 a day to maintain his organization.

Always there was present a clique, a well prepared clique, and always the same routine was followed. One of the most faithful and capable and eloquent lieutenants would precede him to the rostrum, after having arrived late, and he began to describe the great plight of the German people, the terrible affliction which had befallen, the darkness which had descended upon the land. And then suddenly he would stop. And then in a changed voice he would say, "Who is going to save us?" And with one accord the paid clique would respond, "Adolph Hitler." And then, with the cries of "Hail Hitler" ringing through the audience, this perfect prototype of the little man, this man with his suggestively receding forehead, with his hyperthyroid eyes, with his Charlie Chaplin moustache, would mount the rostrum, and for a few moments, perhaps ten or fifteen, he would improvise, like a pianist running his hands casually over the keys. Then suddenly he would change, as if he had become possessed by a spirit. His eyes would flash. His arms would gesticulate and then his tones would change into a short

staccato. Then he would launch forth into an hour, two hours, three hours, and even four hours of endless tirade; never any constructive program, only abuse of the Billingsgate type.

Of course he did have a program, after a fashion. Not that Hitler himself wanted it, because Hitler in his autobiography says, "it is not what appears in print, but rather the effect upon the audience while one is speaking, that really matters." And so Adolph had little use for the printed word. But his adviser, Herr Feder, counselled him to adopt a platform and so they did take over a certain hodge-podge of principles written by his counsellor—twenty-five planks in all, as any economist would admit, a tale told by an idiot. It was all things to all men. To the capitalist it promised protection from the threat of the Marxist. To the unemployed it promised jobs to be paid for in script. It offered credit to the farmer. It pledged each household a comfortable home and a piece of land unencumbered by the bond-holder; and to the many unmarried women, which the war had left in its wake, it promised husbands, even if it were necessary, according to one of Hitler's aides, to resort to polygamy. Above all things Hitler promised freedom from those blue soldiers, those blood-thirsty ones, the French, salvation and freedom from the "nigger nations" and the "blood-suckers" of France, and relief from the "leprous Jewish rats," upon whom one could blame all the troubles which had descended upon the Reich.

Did the merchant lose his store? Then blame the Jewish competitor. Did any girl go astray? Then blame the sensual Jew. Did anything whatsoever happen? It was laid at the door of the Jew, because, please bear in mind, my friends, who have been somewhat startled, somewhat amazed at what seems to have been a sudden reversion to the middle ages, be assured that this anti-Semitic program of Hitler is not coincident with the appearance of the tales in the press of the past few weeks. For ten years now the press of Adolph Hitler, the platform of Adolph Hitler, has spewed forth the most venal attacks upon an entire people, known in the history of mankind.

I am not going to talk about certain definite and distinct detailed atrocities, as some of you may have expected. I do not know whether Van Paassen's tale about the four Jewish intellectuals who were chained together and starved until one of them died; and the three remained fettered to the rotting corpse of their fellow, is true or not. I suspect that it is a bit too lurid. I would hate to believe that anything so barbarous is possible, even to the barbarian Hitlerites. And so I will not say anything about specific atrocities. About these I do not know. I do know that there have been atrocities. I do know upon the reliable evidence of scrupulous Jewish and non-Jewish witnesses that Germany has become unsafe for any Jew, that we have bands of armed hooligans, who do roam the streets of the city and countryside to search out some helpless and harmless and innocent and defenceless Jew to bait and badger and then mayhap sadistically to torture him. I do know Dr. Einstein is a refugee from the land which he loves, and which he has served. I do know his resignation—the resignation of one whom George Bernard Shaw has characterized as one of the six greatest men of all times—I think you know his resignation was accepted without regret. I do know that his private property was pillaged. I do know that refugees are standing at the gates of Germany, trying to escape and even that will not be permitted them, as they are hunted down like rats, are hunted down to become, I suppose, a second class category of citizens, "hewers of wood and drawers of water" for the proud Aryan whom they are to serve. And I know furthermore these things are the fulfilment of a promise which for ten years now has been held out by Hitler.

I have in my hand a verbatim copy of Hitler's platform. Seven of these twenty-five planks are frankly, brutally and bluntly anti-Semitic.

"A citizen can be only one suited to the state. The latter can be only one who has German blood without regard to his confession. No Jew, however, can be a person suited to the state."

No Jew! Jews have dwelt in Germany since the time

of the Romans. For thousands of years they have lived upon that soil they have learned to love. They have watered it with their tears and blood. They have enriched it with culture and scientific achievements, and this platform, set up by a man who became a German citizen only one year ago, this platform dares to say no Jew can be a person suited to the state. Anyone not a citizen can live in Germany only as a guest, and must remain only upon sufferance. Jews can be only guests! Jews can remain only upon sufferance in Germany, despite the fact that while some of Hitler's lieutenants were disporting themselves in Paris between 1916 and 1918, 95,000 Jews, one-tenth or more of the entire population almost, every able-bodied man, were in arms for Germany and 12,000 sacrificed their lives. And they are to remain only as guests!

For ten years Herr Hitler's official instructions have been that hatred for the Jew must be fanned into frenzy. For ten years his followers have chanted this song, taken at random from their songbook. "Here stand the shock battalions, ready for the fray; only when the Jew lies bleeding, will we be truly free." For ten years Herr Hitler has promised to his followers a night's freedom. For ten years he has promised them that thing which occurred Saturday a week ago, that thing, my friends, which they have the audacity to say is reprisal for Jewish protests. After a program such as this! Mark you the predicament. The Jew is maimed and mutilated in Germany. He dare not even cry out for help. He must march to the microphone with a pistol pointed at his head and broadcast to the world that he is well or he will be held as hostage if any single whimper be heard. This is the crowd which is at the helm of government in Germany. This is the crowd that asks the world to suspend judgment until the days of chastening are over. This is the crowd that wars upon the Jews, who have given to the world at least four of its great personalities: Moses, Jesus, Spinoza, Einstein, all from the loins of Jews.

Don't think for a moment that this is only a Jewish problem. May I say to you that Christianity stands in the balance in Germany? Not that Herr Hitler is officially

against Christianity. No. He will nationalize the church. He will force his followers to attend its services. But Christianity, the spirit, the soul of Jesus of Nazareth, will be as ruthlessly destroyed, as rooted out in Germany, as ever it was in Russia. Russia may have made martyrs by her opposition to the church. Germany will pollute the entire principle and purpose of Christianity if the Nazis continue to have sway. Listen to the cry of the Nazi. "Who is my brother?" they ask. And the answer, "My brother is he who shares my blood and my race. He who loves a German must despise the Jew." A new "Christianity" they would proclaim, expurgating the finest passages of the Bible, converting Jesus into some kind of a Nordic figure, whose mother they say was a Persian and whose father was a German who drifted into Palestine in those early years! I predict that if the Hitlerite remains in power he who cleaves to the principles of the Prince of Peace will be massacred as surely as were those upon St. Bartholomew's Eve. That is the second aspect of the problem.

The third is Hitler's challenge to the entire world. Here is militarism rampant. Hitler scoffs at peace principles. Hitler says it is a silly dream, peace is the silly dream of children, old maids and Jews. No peace would Hitler have unless it be the peace maintained by a sovereign state that has conquered all others. "Follow me," he cries, "and I will lead you once more into your place in the sun." Once again the clank of spurs is heard. Once again plough-shares and pruning hooks are being beaten into swords. And once again Junkerism is on horse-back and Mars is in the saddle once more, plunging recklessly ahead into another world conflagration which can only end in the pulverization of civilization itself. That is Hitler's challenge. It is a challenge first of all I should say to rescue the Jew from Germany, to speak forthrightly and firmly that Germany, if it ever will be entitled to the respect of the world, must behave itself as a civilized nation, to provide some haven of escape; perhaps in Palestine for some. Here is Britain's great opportunity to prove the sincerity of the Balfour declaration, promising to facilitate

the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. I hope I am not too radical when I suggest that likewise Canada should open her arms to some of these enterprising and industrious Jews who can only enrich our commonwealth. And I say further, of course we must remove those causes of Hitlerism which are the unjust provisions of Versailles. Those in truth must be revised in order that the seeds of bitterness upon which Hitler has worked will be forever removed. And finally, I should say, a firm and courageous reaffirmation of those great principles of brotherhood and peace and fellowship for which we stand. And only with those nations which live up to these principles will we have dealings.

That is Hitler's challenge to you. Upon how it is answered depends, as I said at the outset, chaos or deliverance, not merely for the Jew but for Christianity and all mankind. May we acquit ourselves as men, as true sons of Britain, mother of Parliaments, promulgator of the Magna Charta, custodian and champion of the rights of men! Let us acquit ourselves then as men and as loyal sons of Britain, and finally as loving children of the universal father of all human creatures in order that more speedily and shortly God's will be done on earth!

PRESIDENT CHALMERS:—Rabbi Eisendrath, I am in a very difficult position. I feel that anything I will say would add absolutely nothing to this occasion. I want to thank you personally for one of the great hours of my time. I want to thank you on behalf of the Canadian Club for one of the truly great addresses in the history of this club. It is the greatest pleasure to me to feel that we have in Toronto a person of such brilliance, of such sanity of thought, of logic, as yourself. I am certain that succeeding presidents of this club will want you to come and speak, because there are a number of subjects on which you could bring to bear great intellectual force and on which these gentlemen here, and other members of the club and the large audience of thousands outside, who listen to these addresses throughout the province, would like to hear you. On behalf of the club I thank you.