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THE OTHER boys at the Gymnasium in Rheydt's Augusta Strasse, which Goebbels entered at Easter 1908, regarded him as a sneak and know-all.¹ He ingratiated himself with teachers, particularly with the scripture teacher Father Johannes Mollen, by telling on his truant comrades. 'My comrades,' he would confess, 'never liked me, except for Richard Flisges.'² He would find Flisges in the upper fifth (Obersekunda) in 1916. His closest friends were three 'Herberts'—Hompesch, Beines, and Lennartz.³ Herbert Lennartz, son of his father's boss, died after a minor operation, leaving Goebbels grief-stricken and shocked. It moved him to compose his first poem ('Why did you have to part from me so soon?').⁴

At first he was lazy and apathetic, numbed by the realization of his physical deformity. Then he overcompensated, and later he was never far from the top of the class. His love of Latin came faltering at first, then in full flood. With biting irony and sarcasm Christian Voss tutored him in German literature—and in sarcasm and irony as well. While his brothers Hans and Konrad had to leave school early, Joseph excelled.⁵ With clenched fists and gleaming eyes young Goebbels listened as history teacher Dr Gerhard Bartels taught his class about Germany's checkered past.⁶ His father and mother wanted him to become a priest—not just because the church would then pay for his higher education; they were a deeply religious family. When Joseph's little sister Elisabeth died in 1915 they all knelt around her deathbed and held hands and prayed for her soul.⁷ Joseph composed another poem for her, 'Sleep, baby, sleep.'

When the Great War came in August 1914 his friends all rallied excitedly to the Kaiser's colors; he too went to the local recruiting office, but the officer dismissed him with barely a glance. Back at school he wrote a thoughtful essay, 'How can a non-combatant help the fatherland in these times?' He argued in it that 'even those who are denied the right to shed their blood for the honor of the nation' could be of service, 'even if not in such a creditable way.' His teacher marked it 'Good.'⁸

The classroom emptied as the war dragged on. His pals Hubert Hompesch and Willy Zilles, now fusiliers, wrote him exciting letters from the western front.⁹ His brother Konrad was a gunner and Hans was soon in French captivity.¹⁰ As author of the best essay, Goebbels, now in the upper sixth (Oberprima), had the honor of delivering the valedictory speech when school ended on March 21, 1917. He spoke of Germany's

Nov 1922

u 12

HEINRICH HIMMLER

led by Hitler and Ludendorff; he had been made responsible for occupying the War Ministry in the centre of Munich. A photograph of Himmler survives in which he can be seen standing near Roehm holding the traditional Imperial standard and peering open-mouthed over the flimsy barricades of wood and barbed-wire. He had come specially from Schleissheim to take part in this exciting event, and its failure cost him his job though not his liberty.

The two days of the Munich *putsch* first brought together in a common action the future Nazi leaders, Hitler, Göring, Roehm and Himmler. But whereas Himmler stood in the background holding a flag, Göring, the former ace flier, marched beside Hitler and Ludendorff on 9 November, the day after Hitler's attempt at a *coup d'état* during a meeting addressed by leading Bavarian ministers in the hall of the Bürgerbräukeller, the great tavern of Munich. Roehm, by now a close associate of the Nazi movement, had agreed to march on the military headquarters of the Ministry of War on the Schoenfeldstrasse, where they barricaded themselves in with barbed-wire and set up machine-guns for their defences. It was the only successful action of the *coup*. Roehm and his men occupied the building and stayed there during the night of 8/9 November, while Hitler and his storm-troopers spent the hours of darkness in the grounds of the Bürgerbräukeller before the decision was reached to march on the centre of the city the following day and link up with Roehm, who alone among the leaders of the *putsch* did not behave like an actor in a melodrama. The march, which began around eleven o'clock, led by Hitler flourishing a pistol and Ludendorff looking grim and important, involved some three thousand storm-troopers crossing the River Isar and progressing for over a mile to the Town Hall in the Marienplatz. After this another mile had to be covered through narrow streets before the Ministry of War was reached. It was then that armed police finally stopped the march, and in the scuffle that followed Hitler was slightly injured and Göring badly wounded in the groin. Only Ludendorff strode on, oblivious of the bullets and sure of the iron weight of his authority. But he was arrested; Roehm and his men were forced to surrender some two hours later. They had been living in a state of siege in the Ministry since dawn, when infantry forces of the regular Army had put a cordon round the building.

The times were too uncertain for violent recriminations. The Nazi Party was banned; Himmler lost his job, and was forced to

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CHASTE-YOUTH

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Meanwhile Himmler had graduated on 5 August 1922. His studies at the Technical College had included chemistry and the science of fertilizers, as well as the generation of new varieties of plants and crops. His immediate need for work was relieved by an appointment as laboratory assistant on the staff of a firm in Schleissheim specializing in the development of fertilizers. Schleissheim is barely fifteen miles north of Munich; this meant that Himmler did not lose touch with the centre where Hitler was breeding his own particular form of nationalism which had already led to the formation of the National Socialist Party. Although Himmler could not have escaped knowing something of Hitler and his political activities in Munich, the first mention of him in what survives of the diaries does not occur until February 1924, five months after the *putsch*. Among the many rival or parallel nationalist groups of the period, Himmler, like Goebbels, was initially affiliated to a group that did not come immediately under Hitler's growing influence.

He was, however, already developing his anti-Semitism, a feeling common enough among the right-wing Catholic nationalists in the south. From 1922 anti-Jewish sentiment grows stronger in Himmler's diary, although on one occasion he softens a little towards a young Austrian-Jewish dancer he met in a night-club with a friend called Alphons, who had managed to persuade him to indulge in this most unusual expedition. He noted that she had 'nothing of the Jew in her manner, at least as far as one can judge. At first I made several remarks about Jews; I absolutely never suspected her to be one.' He made sentimental excuses to himself on her behalf, no doubt because she was pretty and gave him a pleasant shock by admitting she was no longer 'innocent'. He is less indulgent to a fellow-student and former fellow-pupil at school, a Jew named Wolfgang Hallgarten⁶ whom he calls Jew-boy (*Judenbub*) and a Jewish louse (*Judenlauser*) because he had become a left-wing pacifist. From now onwards there are occasional references to the 'Jewish question' in the diaries.

This was in July 1922, shortly before he left college and began to earn his living. Official records show that he did not formally apply to join the Nazi Party until August 1923, four months before the unsuccessful *putsch*, in which he was to play a minor part as ensign to Roehm's contingent, the *Reichskriegsflagge*.⁷ Roehm's men did not take part in the notorious march through the streets of Munich

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Jan 1922

CHASTE YOUTH

94

Himmler used his diary to castigate himself at those times when he seemed to fall short of his own very modest ideal. He complains that he talks too much, that he is too warm-hearted, and that he lacks self-control and a 'gentlemanly assurance of manner'. He enjoys helping people, visiting the sick and, occasionally, assisting and comforting old people, going home to visit the family: 'they think I'm a gay, amusing chap who takes care of things - Heini will see to it', he writes in January 1922. It is plain that, like many people, he sought recognition and a place in his social and family circle by involving himself as much as he could in other people's affairs. At the same time, a certain genuine kindness of heart has to be allowed him. But always he sought for popularity and for acceptance in student circles, though his primness of manner and his weak constitution, which prevented him from drinking beer without upsetting his stomach, led his fellow-students to look down on him and to make fun of his excessive diligence.

As a church-goer he remained regular in his habits at least until 1924, though the signs of religious doubt begin to appear much earlier in his diaries. 'I believe I have come into conflict with my religion', he writes in December 1919, 'but whatever happens I shall always love God and pray to Him, and remain faithful to the Catholic Church and defend it even if I should be expelled from it.' In February 1924 he is still attending church, but refers to his discussions of 'faith in God, religion, doubts (immaculate conception, etc.), confession, views on duelling, blood, sexual intercourse, man and woman'. The subject of sex exceeds even religion in its attraction, no doubt because of his conviction that abstinence from intercourse was morally binding before marriage. He seems to have remained virgin until the age of at least twenty-six, and he evidently experienced the pangs of unsatisfied sexual desire. After one of his frequent discussions of sex with his friend Ludwig, the bank clerk, he wrote in February 1922:

'We discussed the danger of such things. I have experienced what it is like to lie closely together, by couples, body to body, hot; . . . one gets all fired up, must summon all one's reasoning. The girls are then so far gone they no longer know what they are doing. It is the hot, unconscious longing of the whole individual for the satisfaction of a really powerful natural urge. For this reason it is also dangerous for the man, and involves so much responsibility. Deprived as they are of their will-power, one could

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HEINRICH HIMMLER

recited Bavarian folk poetry rather badly, he avoided association with girls except those who expected to be treated with formality and politeness, and he never made love like his fellow students where love was to be found. He told his brother Gebhard he was determined to remain chaste until marriage, however much he might be tempted. Yet he was socially ambitious, putting himself forward as a candidate for various student offices for which he seldom received more than an unflatteringly small number of votes. The student society in which he tried most to shine was the Apollo club, which had a cultured rather than a sporting or merely beer-swilling membership. The members of Apollo were mostly ex-service men and senior graduates, and the president of the society at that time was a Jew, Dr Abraham Ofner. Although Himmler, a junior member of Apollo, was studiously polite to Dr Ofner and the other Jewish members, he was already strongly anti-Semitic in feeling, and he joined in violent discussions as to whether Jews should not be excluded from the society. In politics he is remembered as inflexibly right-wing, a natural if not very efficient member of the Free Corps formed to oppose the Communist infiltration into post-war Bavarian administration. We are left with a picture of a small man, prosaic and platitudinous, concealing his shyness under a certain arrogance. He disguised his fear of seeming unable to fulfil the hot-blooded life of a student by displaying excessive diligence in his work and making it quite clear he was determined to take part in the various right-wing, militaristic movements of that unsettled time. His exactness of habit seems to amount to a mania, for he never ceases to record when he shaves, when he has his hair cut, even when he has a bath. All these experiences take their due place alongside the duelling and the military exercises, and the serious discussions of religion, sex and politics. He notes down the comparative beauty of his dancing partners with exactly the same calm, meticulous cataloguing that he shows when he notes the cutting of his hair or the shaving of his beard:

'Dance. Was rather nice. My dancing partner was a Frau [lein] von Bück, a nice girl with very sensible opinions, very patriotic, no bluestocking and apparently quite profound . . . The girls were on average rather pretty, some close to beautiful . . . Mariele R. and I talked together for some time . . . Accompanied Fraulein von Bück home. She did not take my arm which, in a way, I appreciated . . . A few exercises, to bed.'

Nov 1921

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HEINRICH HIMMLER

do anything with these girls, and at the same time one has enough to do to struggle with one's self.'

Another tribulation was lack of money. He disliked increasingly being dependent on his family for his maintenance, though he learned how to eke out the allowances he received from his father, and measure most carefully his very modest expenditure on clothes and food. His letters to his parents that have been preserved show how he enumerated each small detail of what had to be done in the way of mending and repairs, as well as small needs for additional sums of money. His letters are always respectful, affectionate and formally gushing:

'your dear birthday letter . . . the tie should be mended on the left-hand side . . . unfortunately I must ask you, dear parents, for money; have only twenty-five of the last hundred marks, which included the monthly thirty . . . white shirts I never put on for work, so my things are really being saved enormously . . . the polka-dot tie I got for Christmas is torn in several places . . . heartfelt greetings and kisses.'

The character of the man is in everything he writes, as well as in the fact that these letters, like so much else from the period - receipts, lists, drafts, ticket-stubs, and so on - survived through his care the holocaust of Germany.

Correctness was all. On 5 November 1921 he attends in hired morning dress the funeral of Ludwig II of Bavaria; a few weeks later he calls formally on the royal widow, who was the mother of his godfather; on 18 January 1922 he takes part in a nationalist student ceremony to commemorate the founding of the German Empire. A week later, on 26 January, he attends a rifle-club meeting in Munich with Captain Ernst Roehm, who, he says in his diary, is 'very friendly'. 'Roehm pessimistic about Bolshevism', he adds laconically.

Roehm was still active in the Army. He was thirteen years senior to Himmler and was soon to become the principal influence in bringing him more fully into contact with politics. Along with his elder brother Gebhard, Himmler was to join the local nationalist corps led by Roehm and called the *Reichskriegsflagge*, the paramilitary contingent which was later, in November 1923, to join forces with Hitler in the Munich *putsch*.

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CHASTE YOUTH

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for a student organization known as *Allgemeiner Studenten Ausschuss*. His ambition to farm in the east has, however, changed; he considers Turkey now to be more suitable, and he travelled to Gmund, where he was later to establish his lakeside home on the Tegernsee, to meet a man who knew something of the prospects in Turkey. He is, however, still uncertain about his own character. In November 1921, in his twenty-second year, he writes: 'I still lack to a considerable degree that naturally superior kind of manner (*die vornehme Stöherheit des Benehmens*) that I would dearly like to possess.' *

His relations with girls are still platonic. He mentions meeting a girl from Hamburg on the train, and remarks in his diary that she was 'sweet and obviously innocent and very interested in Bavaria and King Ludwig II'. His friend Ludwig, who worked in a bank, tells him that Käthe thinks he despises women, and Himmler says she is right. Then he adds:

'A real man will love a woman in three ways: first, as a dear child who must be admonished, perhaps even punished, when she is foolish, though she must also be protected and looked after because she is so weak; secondly, he will love her as his wife and loyal comrade, who helps him fight in the struggle of life, always at his side but never dampening his spirit. Thirdly, he will love her as the wife whose feet he longs to kiss and who gives him the strength never to falter even in the worst strife, the strength she gives him thanks to her childlike purity.'

Although he mentions many girls in his diary, it is with increasing primness and resistance. He still attends church, and he moralizes after eating in a restaurant on how the beauty of the waitress will inevitably lead to her moral downfall and how, if he had the means, he would love to give her money to prevent her from going astray. He mentions a coolness, even a breach, in his relations with Frau Loritz and Käthe, whose 'feminine vanity' he considers a waste of his precious time. In May 1922 he notes in the diary how shocked he had been to see a little girl of three permitted by her parents to 'hop round in the nude' before his shocked gaze. 'She ought at that age', he says, 'to be taught a sense of shame.'

The recollections of certain fellow students complete the portrait of Himmler in his youth that his diaries contain.⁵ He is remembered as being meticulous in his studies and awkward in his social relationships. He wore his rimless pince-nez even when duelling, he

* aristocratic certainty of behavior
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on this earth, weighed seven pounds and two hundred grammes.¹²

The upbringing of the Himmler brothers – a third son, Ernst, was born in December 1905 – followed the routine of the period. With a schoolmaster for father, the masculine dominance natural in German households was all the more evident in their lives, especially when the boys attended their father's school in Landshut, the small town to which the family moved in 1913 on the Professor's appointment to a joint-headmastership.

Landshut is a pleasant place some fifty miles north-east of Munich with the water of the River Isar flowing through its centre. It had a castle and sufficient history to encourage young Heinrich's growing interest in national tradition and in the ancestral pictures and other mementoes his father collected to show their family's link with Germany's past. Professor Himmler did everything he could to encourage serious interests and self-discipline in his sons; he had a willing and assiduous pupil in Heinrich, who always remained devoted to both his parents in his own formal way. He was never to lose touch with them all their lives.

The first personal note by Heinrich to survive is a fragment of a diary he kept during 1910 in Munich. In a typical entry on 22 July he wrote: 'Took a bath. The thirteenth wedding anniversary of my dear parents.' It is a diary in which he simply adds up the smaller facts of his life from taking baths to going for walks, and he is careful always to show his respect for adults by entering their correct titles. The impression he gives already is that he has a painstaking primness of nature.³

The sections of Himmler's early diary that survive increase in length and scale during the later years of his youth, and so reveal more about his mind and character. The principal period they represent includes the first year of the war, when he was a schoolboy of fourteen in Landshut, and the period of his adolescence and young manhood in Munich, when he was from nineteen to twenty-two years of age, and then again when he was twenty-four. The total span of the diary covers ten important and formative years in his life, but the entries themselves are intermittent and survive in notebooks that cover only occasional periods of a few months in any detail. Nevertheless, they are of the greatest interest because they reveal so much of the nature of their author.

Although the war seems at first to have affected life at Landshut very little – Himmler's diary is full of the records of peaceful walks

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CHASTE YOUTH

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and church-goings, of working on his stamp collection and doing his homework – it is evident that the war news excited him sufficiently to make him enter up various events which he copied from the newspapers. Occasionally he bursts out into schoolboy slang. He notes on 23 September that Prince Heinrich has written to his father, and that the Prince has been wounded. But the initial German victories fill him with enthusiasm for the war, and on 28 September he says how he and a schoolboy friend 'would be so happy if we could go and slog it out' with the English and French. But principally he lives the normal life of a schoolboy – attending Mass, going out with his brothers to visit friends ('had tea with the Frau President, who was very gracious'), playing games and practising on the piano, for which it seems he had little aptitude. He pours scorn on the grumbling and timid people of Landshut who so dislike the war – 'all the silly old women and petty bourgeois in Landshut . . . spread idiotic rumours and are afraid of the Cossacks who, they think, will tear them limb from limb.' On 29 September he notes that his mother and father went to the railway station to help hand out refreshments to transports of wounded soldiers. 'The entire station was crowded with inquisitive Landshuters who cut up very rough and even began to fight when bread and water were given to seriously wounded Frenchmen who, after all, since they are prisoners, are worse off than our chaps. We took a walk in town and were frightfully bored.' On 2 October he is roused to enthusiasm by the mounting statistics of Russian prisoners. 'They multiply like vermin', he writes. 'As for the Landshuters, they are as stupid and chicken-hearted as ever.' 'Whenever there is talk about our troops retreating, they wet themselves,' writes Himmler, in an attempt to be vulgar, and he continues the following Sunday, after church, 'Luse dumb-bells every day now so as to get more strength.' On 11 October, a few days after his fourteenth birthday, he refers to an army exercise in his locality, and how he 'would have loved to join in'.

The diaries of this earlier period already begin to reveal that, in spite of his frequent walks, his swimming, and other exercise, he is constantly complaining of heavy colds and suffering from feverishness and stomach upsets. He seems to have been a diligent, not brilliant, pupil at school; he refers frequently, among other subjects, to history, mathematics, Latin and Greek, and to the homework he has to do. He practised assiduously at the piano, but unlike his elder brother, he had no talent at all as a pianist; it was

will become clear that he means this only in the broadest sense.

HE was to study philology, Latin, and history. Desperately lonely, he lodged in a cold bare room. His aspirations were overshadowed by hunger, cold, fatigue, and ill-health. He had made one good friend in the law student Karlheinz Kölsch however and fagged for him as the *Leibfuchs* (freshman valet) in the tradition of all medieval universities. 'Pille' Kölsch, as he was known, remained his foppish, loud-voiced, jovial, staunch friend and rival long after their careers had drifted apart. With his modish headgear and yellow gloves, Kölsch became his first role-model.¹⁶ He roped Goebbels into the tiny Bonn chapter ('Sigfridia') of the catholic fraternity Unitas on May 22, 1917.¹⁷ Its half-dozen members spent the weekly meetings solemnly debating religion and quaffing beer in the local hostelry, the Cockerel. Goebbels had chosen the classical name of *Ulex* for himself.¹⁸

His funds ran out, which scarcely mattered as at the end of July 1917 he was briefly inducted into war service, and absolved his obligations by pushing a pen for a few weeks in a home auxiliary service (he wrote an excellent copperplate script). He was keen to continue at university, but his father could put up only fifty marks per month; Joseph earned a little more by tutoring. He frittered away that summer with Lene on vacation, spending at least one chaste night with her on her sofa at Rheindahlen, and committing to his memory that she 'stayed pure.' He left a number of unpaid bills at Bonn, which his father settled.

The winter semester began on October 1, 1917. He submitted a formal application to the diocese in Cologne, where the Albertus Magnus Society provided aid to promising young catholics. The documents¹⁹ supporting his application show that his father now earned 3,800 to 4,000 marks per annum, and had no liquid assets. His scripture teacher Mollen testified:

'Herr Goebbels comes from decent catholic parents and deserves commendation for his religious fervor and his general moral demeanor.'

Father Mollen would explain years later that he furnished this testimonial with the clearest conscience: 'He was a very promising scholar. For nine years he had taken scripture lessons from me and had always shown much interest, comprehension, and devotion. He regularly attended school church services and the monthly Communion. His attitude to me was confident, proper, and reverential.' The parish priest at Rheydt seconded him. Backed by these documents, Goebbels humbly submitted on September 5, 1917 his application to the Diocesan Committee of the Albertus Magnus Society for financial support for the winter term 1917-18.

'Because of a lame foot I am exempt from military service,' he wrote, 'and I should dearly like to continue my studies next term.'

Convinced that his was a worthy cause, the society sent him 185 marks

as a first interest-free installment of a loan finally totaling 964 marks. His address was now given as No. 18 Post Strasse in Bonn; he would return there in October 1917.

BY the time of his final Ph.D. examination in November 1921 he would have attended five different universities; this was not unusual in Germany. The reasons are obscure: sometimes he was pursuing a particular girl, sometimes a certain professor, sometimes a special course; frequently the lack of lodging space in one city decided that he should study elsewhere that term instead.

His speaking talents were already developed. Hompesch told him he was a born orator. 'Motor mouth!' joked Kölsch's brother Hermann in one letter. 'There you go, shooting it off again. Well, there's nobody can touch you on that score.' 'We really ought to open a stall,' Hermann joked in a letter two weeks later, 'and do the rounds of the church fêtes displaying you as the Man with the All-Round Mouth.'²⁰

Goebbels stayed on in Bonn after term ended on February 1, and moved into Kölsch's lodgings in Wessel Strasse. The April 1918 issue of the *Unitas* journal reported that the two friends, by now inseparable, had decided to study next in Berlin.

AT CHRISTMAS Goebbels discovers his pal's sister Agnes Kölsch, and his yearning for Lene turns to aversion. Agnes visits him one day and they exchange one passionless kiss on his sofa. She foolishly introduces him to her sister Liesel, and an informal triangle develops lasting well into the new year. Agnes visits him in Bonn, and they spend the night together—'Ulex' kisses her breasts. After this he spends weekends at the Kölsch family home at Werl, except once when Liesel her sister comes to Bonn and Agnes is all but forgotten.²¹ Goebbels recalls having been considerate to her, but he congratulates himself, with a certain smugness, 'She is all over me.' Mrs Kölsch encourages Goebbels' relationship with Agnes, although his immaturity is painfully evident.²² 'She is still a child,' he adds in his own writings. 'We are both children.'

Pille Kölsch meanwhile has dropped Berlin and opted for Freiburg in south-western Germany; Ulex sets off in his comrade's footsteps for the summer term beginning in May 1918. At Freiburg Pille embraces him, his eyes gleaming. 'Ulex!' he announces, 'I've already found this great girl. Anka Stalherm. She's a student—you've got to meet her.' ('And how deeply and completely I have done just that!' writes Goebbels six years later, still besotted with Anka.)

Female students are in 1918 still rarities at German universities, and Anka is a rarity among these. She is reading economics. She wears her blonde hair long with a few strands caught up in a knot on top;²³ her ankles are slim, and her legs are rumored to be equally divine. She is twenty-three, two years older than Goebbels. With her Ursuline convent education in Germany and England behind her, she has inherited class,

beauty, and wealth as well—her late father owned a distillery and cornmill in the Rhineland.²⁴

Kölsch and Goebbels become friendly rivals for Anka's affections. Among her effects will later be found a faded picture postcard showing Goebbels at some student revelry wearing a lampshade on his head.²⁵ Pille has penned a fond message on the back. And yet—let this be made clear in advance—sexually, Goebbels will get nowhere with her; nor she with him.²⁶

Since Anka is a regular at Professor Hermann Thiersch's seminars on classical archeology, Goebbels signs on for them too. Glowing reports reach the charity in Cologne about his interest in these three-hour lectures. And the miracle happens: Anka Stalherm, this goddess of the mysterious gray-green eyes, she who is coveted by half the males at Freiburg university, saves her smiles for when he walks in, or so it seems to him. She is fascinated by this swift intellect. They go out as a threesome for strolls up Freiburg's Castle Hill or into the Black Forest. Kölsch suffers torments of jealousy, which enhances Goebbels' sense of triumph. He serenades Anka on a rented piano, and one precious night he sleeps under the same Black Forest roof as her. The three students tour the sleepy towns along the shores of Lake Constance, with Goebbels dreamy-eyed in blissful anticipation.

Oppressing him despite these carefree moments are his poverty and his own jealousy when she spends days away with Kölsch. His 'uncle' Heinrich Cohnen, a wealthy insurance-director friend of his father's, twice wires loans to him. The catholics are less forthcoming. While the *Unitas* journal reports the unexpected revival of their Freiburg chapter thanks to Ulex and his pal, after August 1918 Goebbels' name vanishes from its pages altogether.

The delicious pursuit of the coquettish Anka continues. Goebbels serenades her on the piano but ascertains that she is, alas, 'chastity itself.'

His first letter to her is dated June 15, 1918, a wordy, Latin-garnished, solemn epistle addressing her formally as *sehr geehrtes Fräulein Stalherm*, embellished with four lines of carefully crafted verse and signing off 'with quite a lot of greetings, yours faithfully, J. Goebbels—Ulex.'²⁷ Persistence and intellect are rewarded. Up on Castle Hill one afternoon—it is June 28, 1918—he kisses her for the first time:²⁸ not on the lips, but on one cheek.²⁹ There is a problem: She is of far higher pedigree. There is an unholy row when she does not invite him to meet her visiting brother Willy. And he agonizes over her dalliances with Kölsch: which does she prefer? One evening she pleads with him on bended knee to declare *his* love for her, and he realizes that women too can suffer.

As she leaves Freiburg at the end of July 1918 after one last night of stifled passion, he visits their old haunts. He sits in the forest hut high above the university city, listening to the rain beating on its roof, and imagines himself all alone on earth. He begins to compose a five-act play, 'Judas Iscariot.'³⁰

As the Freiburg term ends he dreams of moving to Munich, but the

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lack of lodgings there thwarts him and he returns home. During the summer vacation he exchanges scores of letters with Anka, sometimes twice a day. His letters to her reveal a young man still physically frail and lonely; they suggest that he has elected to enter the church. Romancing Anka occupies every other waking hour. His catchword is *wahnsinnig*—crazy: That is what he is, he confesses, about her. He scrawls that word in the corner of letters, or leaves it unfinished just as *waaa*—. He is untroubled by the wail of rage that comes from Agnes Kölsch: 'I thought far too highly of you, too noble and too mature,' she writes him on August 15, 1918: 'Farewell, it was not meant to be.'³¹ Much ink is expended trying to arrange various trysts with Anka, which Goebbels sometimes prudishly cancels because her worried mother (unimpressed by this parvenu) and her sisters disapprove.³² Once she gives him a red rose. It graces his desk at Rheydt beneath a carved Black Forest heart she has given him earlier.³³ His soldier brother Konrad, home on leave, jokes to him that he will probably be able to greet him as a cardinal later on; he inquires about the carved heart on the wall. 'A gift from the Archbishop of Freiburg?' he asks ironically. 'From his lady housekeeper,' replies Joseph with a salacious wink.³⁴

Joseph beavers away on 'Judas'.³⁵ Anka incautiously shows it around and in no time the clergy of Rheydt are asking him angry questions about it.³⁶ On August 27 he is summoned to his former scripture teacher Father Moller, who draws his attention to the pernicious nature of such writings. 'I was so furious I would have torn "Judas" into a thousand shreds if I had had it with me,' writes Goebbels. The priest requires him to undertake to destroy even his own copy of the script. Has all his toil been for nothing? 'What shall I do?' he appeals to Anka. 'I am in despair.'³⁷ (The play survives among his papers.) It marks his first break with the church. He declines the summons by Unitas to attend their general assembly in Münster to report on the summer semester at Freiburg. Instead, he carouses with his pals in Düsseldorf.

Kölsch has been thrown out of their catholic fraternity. Goebbels supports the ouster, explaining to Anka: 'My best friend turned out to be a scoundrel.' When Anka ironically calls him a puritan he responds that Unitas has principles.³⁸ By this time he has learned from her that Kölsch has sexually propositioned her.³⁹ To seal their friendship, she loyally shows him the letter concerned. Of her solely maternal interest in him there seems no doubt. 'Do you know what I should like now?' she writes to the pint-sized student Goebbels. 'Just to stroke my fingers through your hair and clasp you so tight that you look quite desperate.'⁴⁰

Her widowed mother's disapproval grows. He records in dismay that she regards him as a *homo molestissimus* and clearly frowns on any notion of them both attending the same university next term. He stiffly asks Anka to inform him where she will be studying, 'so that I can cross that university off my own list.'⁴¹

ON September 3, 1918 Konrad Goebbels returns to the western front.

He accuses his younger brother Joseph of not taking any interest in the war and finally extracts from him a promise to read at least the daily war communiqués. Konrad declares that he is proud to be fighting for his fatherland. 'As you will realize,' Joseph dryly informs Anka, 'he is Mother's darling. While I claim that privilege, remarkably, more of my father.' But he adds, 'I believe my mother is the best at understanding me.'⁴² He advises Anka to read his version of the Last Supper, where Judas—with whom he thus identifies—talks about his mother, how he sulks and does not eat, and she just shakes her head and murmurs, 'Judas, Judas;' and how bitterly he weeps thereafter.⁴³

He hopes that Anka's mother will relent and agree to them studying together at Munich. His father prefers Bonn or Münster, both nearer to the parental home. 'The decision is in your mother's hands,' he writes to Anka.⁴⁴ A friend tells him that she has boasted to his fiancée about her last evening with Goebbels at Freiburg.⁴⁵ Goebbels scolds her for having so rudely dragged in the dust the memory of these, 'the most sacred and beautiful hours of my life.' In the same letter he repents and asks, 'May I today for the first time press a tender kiss upon your rosebud lips?'⁴⁶ In her reply, she mocks his stern morals. She has decided to study that winter at Würzburg. He therefore chooses Würzburg too, and finds lodgings on the fourth floor of No. 8 Blumen Strasse—'A wonderful room right beside the river,' he tells his friend Fritz Prang.⁴⁷

Ecstatic that she is so close, he sends her a note as soon as he settles in, perhaps justifying his lack of physical ardor. 'If love is only in the mind,' he explains, 'it might be called platonic; if only physical, it is frivolous, ugly, unbeautiful. It is the noble union of these two factors that creates the ideal love.'⁴⁸

At Würzburg his studying begins in earnest. He plows through *Crime and Punishment*, he regularly attends the seminars on ancient and modern history and on German literature. The Armistice of November 1918 makes little mark on him. His father writes pleading with him to come home if things get too dangerous, what with the revolution, in Würzburg.⁴⁹ Goebbels notices the returning troops, the popular sense of dismay, the establishment of enemy zones of occupation; he sees Anka weeping, he hears of communist mobs rampaging in Bavaria.

'Don't you also feel,' he asks Prang in a letter on November 13, 'that the time will come again when people will yearn for intellectual and spiritual values rather than brute mob appeal?'

More letters go to Anka. He writes her the kind of letter that romantic females long to receive.⁵⁰ In her replies she frets about his frailty, and swears undying love. 'I hope you've gone to bed long ago,' she writes in one, 'and are dreaming that I am pressing the tend'rest kiss upon your forehead to dispel your gloomy thoughts for all eternity.'⁵¹ For the first time in his life he misses the carol service on Christmas Eve; he spends the hours in Anka's room, and watches entranced as she kneels at her bedside to say her prayers. He sleeps in her chaste embrace—but that is all.⁵²

By the time they both leave Würzburg for their respective homes on January 22, 1919, the Belgians have occupied Rheydt. An Allied iron curtain has descended across the Rhineland. Sick and hungry, Goebbels writes her at four-thirty A.M. on a deserted platform, waiting for the slow train to Cologne.⁵³ At Cologne he has to wait all night—'the whole station milling with Englishmen, Blacks, and Frenchmen.'⁵⁴ Anka writes to him in Rheydt that she misses Freiburg; her sisters, shown Goebbels' photographs, prefer his head to the full figure, she candidly writes.⁵⁵ He looks desperately ill: He is suffering from chronic headaches, for which the university's professor of medicine has found no cure.⁵⁶ A ten P.M. curfew is in force. The Belgian censors will not pass letters written in German script; gradually his handwriting deteriorates. Without a frontier permit, travel to Recklinghausen (Anka's home town) is impossible. Her mother wants their relationship ended anyway; upon her return home, Anka is dragged off to church to confess her sins. She tells Goebbels she has prayed for him. He sets up her three latest photos in his room, including one on a sunlit Castle Hill.⁵⁷

THE post-revolutionary government in Germany ordered elections to be held on January 26, 1919. On the election eve he heard his old teacher Dr Bartels speak for the Democratic Party. 'I was strengthened,' wrote Goebbels, 'in my opposition to the Democrats.' All his former school-mates would vote for the catholic Center or the more right-wing German Nationalist party; already, Goebbels inclined toward the latter—'There are still Germans in the German fatherland, thank God.' He envied those living outside the occupied territories like Anka in Recklinghausen. 'God grant,' he wrote her, his letters displaying political fervor for the first time, 'that our fatherland will once more become the way we knew it as children.'⁵⁸ In the election Joseph and his brother Konrad both voted for the German Nationalists.⁵⁹ 'Grim times,' he predicted a few days later, 'lie ahead for us Germans.'⁶⁰ A talk with organised workers at Rheydt convinced him that they might have a real case against their capitalist oppressors.⁶¹

That May of 1919 Anka returns to Freiburg. Kölsch is down there too. Goebbels hurries to join them. A French Negro soldier lets him through the checkpoint at Ludwigshafen. Anka seems cooler, and confesses one morning that she has slept with Kölsch. Goebbels forgives her and kisses away the tears of contrition welling in her eyes. For an instant of happiness she is willing to accept an eternity of perdition, he will write in July 1924; a truly divine female, but not one for him to marry, he decides.⁶² They would destroy each other. Yet every time he sees her in the years that follow, his knees knock and his face runs crimson just like the first time.⁶³

One afternoon in 1919 there is a knock at his door in Freiburg and Richard Flisges walks in, rain dripping from his demob trenchcoat. An ex-lieutenant, he is back from the wars, decorated and embittered, his arm in a sling.⁶⁴ He has failed the university entrance examination and will now turn into a pacifist and agitator against the established order.

Goebbels listens eagerly to this rootless, ill-educated, disillusioned soldier. He has always had a respect for the lower orders. Writing to Willy Zilles in 1915 he has discounted the poet Horace's theme of *odi profanum vulgus et arceo* ('I hate the vulgar mob and keep them at a distance'), preferring instead the romantic poet Wilhelm Raabe's motif: *Hab' acht auf die Gassen!* ('Pay heed to the street!').⁶⁵ Flisges introduces him to the socialism of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels and Walther Rathenau and implants further trace-elements of the anti-bourgeois class struggle in Goebbels. Thus, while Goebbels attends the seminars on Goethe and on the era of *Sturm und Drang*, he begins to think more about the social and political issues scarring defeated Germany. In the evenings he argues about God; he is beginning to have serious doubts about his religious beliefs.

He and Anka leave Freiburg early in August 1919. He borrows one hundred marks from a friend, and pawns his watch to a waiter to pay for supper. He has to spend the autumn break at Münster as his identity papers will not get him back into the occupied Rhineland. Anka phones him every day in the local café, but he can barely afford the obligatory cup of coffee. He begins to write his own life story as a novel, *Michael Voorman*, in which Anka is identifiable as the heroine Hertha Holk. He gets home to Rheydt, crossing the frontier illegally in an overflowing train at Düsseldorf. On September 19 he posts to the Albertus Magnus Society a fresh application for funds.

Later, heading south to Munich with Anka, he pauses briefly at Frankfurt where he visits Goethe's house. But why tarry in this Jewish city, he asks himself, when Munich beckons from afar? He borrows 1,200 marks from yet another school friend and finds lodgings in Munich on the second floor of Papa Vigier's at No. 2 Roman Strasse, out in Neuhausen. On October 29, his twenty-second birthday, Anka writes in his diary, 'National Holiday!' He sends two more postcards to the catholic charity; the stamp on one is overprinted with the legend People's Republic of Bavaria, because the communists are now in power.

The charity makes him a final loan of 250 marks. At Munich he studies under the Swiss art historian, Professor Heinrich Wölfflin; he studies music under Professor Hermann Ludwig Baron von der Pfordten and catholic theology under Professor Joseph Schnitzer. But his real intellectual nourishment is from what he takes in at the galleries and museums—the paintings of Arnold Böckling, of Carl Spitzweg, and of Anselm Feuerbach. He reads voraciously, devouring Sophocles' drama *Antigone*, August Strindberg's *The Red Room*, Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*, and assorted works by Henrik Ibsen and Leo Tolstoy.

He auctions his suits, sees Anka pawn her own gold watch, and hocks his own watch for a pittance to—he recalls in 1925—an 'insolent Jew.' Such stereotyped references are rare in his early letters. On the contrary, he sends Anka a gentle rebuke. 'As you know, I can't stand this exaggerated antisemitism,' he writes, in a reference to their teacher Gerhard Bartels. 'I can't claim that many of my best friends are Jews, but my view

Scorpio

* is you don't get rid of them by huffing and puffing, let alone by pogroms—
and if you could do so that would be both highly ignoble and unworthy.¹⁶⁶
There is still little trace of his later murderous antisemitism.

* D.T. I do not know who
became his presence, but who
can say that nothing effective
was taking place

2: Prodigal Son

WHILE at Freiburg university in 1919 Joseph Goebbels turned his back on the catholic church. Perhaps the suffocating catholicism of the diocesan city of Würzburg had contributed to his restlessness. Certainly he was deeply troubled by the nature of God and what he saw as the falsification of the true faith by idolatrous priests. In his novel *Michael* he allowed his hero to brood upon this dilemma. The result was much portentous, empty rhetoric, but there was one proposition of substance: 'It hardly matters what we believe in, so long as we believe in something'—the essence of the later Joseph Goebbels.

In July 1919 the *Unitas* journal reported that 'Herr Göbbels' had seceded from the fraternity. He continued to waver, and wrote to his father on October 31 about this torment ('But if I should lose my faith ...'). He spoke of the diligence with which he was persevering in his studies and—be it noted—stressed that he had not compromised his morals. But he added: 'Why don't you tell me that you curse me as the Prodigal Son who has left his parents and gone into the wilderness?'¹

On November 7, his father sent him an angry reply, followed two days later by a more reasoned epistle setting aside his son's doubts. Many a young man was tormented by doubt, he wrote. He challenged his wayward son to answer this question: 'Do you intend writing books that are not compatible with the catholic religion?' Then he reminded him of how they had prayed together at the deathbed of Elisabeth: 'What was the one consolation in our grief then? It was this: That the dear little soul had been properly provided with the last rites of our Holy Church, and that we could pray for her together.'

Scripture teacher Father Johannes Mollen would recall that after leaving university Goebbels continued to speak at catholic conclaves: 'I myself always stayed in touch with him.' Years later, his parish priest would tersely justify his original recommendation to the Albertus Magnus Society: 'None of us could see into the future.'

UNDER the influence of Flisges and his own study of Dostoyevsky Goebbels became politically aware. He was now twenty-two and leaning ideologically to the left. When the student Anton Count von Arco-Valley was sentenced for the assassination of the extreme left-wing prime minister of Bavaria Kurt Eisner (alias Isidor Kosmanowski), Goebbels became curious about socialism. Being as yet more of a literary than a political

*Hypotheses
Lead
to
examination
+ knowledge*

inclination he explored his ideas in a drama, scribbled in an exercise book, entitled 'The Working Classes' Struggle.'² Again he pawned his watch and set off, alone, for home. In a few days during the Easter break he sketched another socio-political drama, *The Seed* (later *Blood-Seed*).³ He tried to get employment as a teacher in East Prussia or in Holland (he had a smattering of maternal Dutch).⁴ As the communist revolution swept across the Ruhr, Goebbels decided to make his home run for that Ph.D. degree; he chose Heidelberg for the attempt.

That Christmas he found himself alone in Munich, prevented by the Allied occupation authorities from joining his family at Rheydt for the festivities. He stayed in the Bavarian capital, as Richard Wagner's *Ring* cycle was to be performed at the National Theatre; he found himself strolling through the cobbled, snowswept streets on Christmas Eve, entirely deserted save for a police constable wrapped to the ears against the cold. From somewhere came the sound of children singing; and then of a piano—Franz Schubert, the melodies borne through the air, he would later write, as though on angels' hands. 'I know not how long I stood there,' he recorded. 'Only that I sat that evening in a quiet, dark corner of the church of Our Lady and celebrated Christmas alone, as though in a dream. On December 29 I went to the Tyrol, going up into the eternal mountains satiated with the sounds of Wagner.'⁵

HE and Anka have drifted apart since that Christmas of 1919. As recently as December 19 they have mooched along the shores of Lake Starnberg and Anka has sketched in his pocket diary a room with two (single) beds. She has given him a gold bracelet. He has given her Heinrich Heine's *Book of Ballads* with a fulsome dedication. But she begins to make possessive scenes; he takes refuge in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, he alternately fights with her or forges fantastic plans of marriage, then sees them shipwrecked on her bourgeois attitudes. He 'runs into' her in Freiburg and finds that she too is making for Heidelberg. He persuades her to study elsewhere—'What an idiot I am,' he recalls later, perhaps rationalizing his own failure to hold on to her. They have entered that cruel phase in an overlong affair when each partner derives more pleasure from making the other suffer.

When he next sees her it will be Whitsun. He reads from *The Seed* to her, but she, the wealthy miller's daughter, is alienated by its left-wing political message. The rift widens. She begins to see Theo Geitmann, a close friend of his.⁶ Chagrined, he returns the bracelet. He offers her formal engagement ('If you don't feel strong enough to say yes,' he writes, 'then we must each go our separate ways'); she turns him down.⁷ After one unsatisfactory night, with him on the chaise-longue and her in bed, he pencils a four-page letter of farewell, a romantic torrent of pleas to return to his embrace. 'I rest my fortune in your lenient hand,' he concludes. 'Cast the first stone if you must. May it then dash me to pieces, and may you never come to regret it.' Satisfied by this literary effort, he leaves the letter unsent (the four sheets show no folds).⁸

Spending the autumn break at home he reads Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, and suffers a nervous collapse. He pens a testament, dated October 1, 1920, in which he allocates his books, his alarm clock, his inkwell, and other pathetic chattels to his friends: they are to sell off clothing to repay his debts, to his father, Director Cohnen's wife, a Bonn jeweler, and the Albertus Magnus charity. He wills his poetry and novellas to Flisges and his mother (in that order). 'Miss Anka Stalherm is to be urged to burn my letters.... May she be happy and not brood upon my death.' The final sentences hint unmistakably at suicide: 'I depart gladly from a life which has become just hell for me.'⁹ He folds this into a small envelope, but takes no further action.

That autumn of 1920, learning that she is in Munich, he borrows money from his brothers and sends his trusty friend Flisges to find out more. Flisges writes that Anka has been seen escorted by a gentleman in a flashy waistcoat 'with many gold knobs and pins.'¹⁰ Distraught, Goebbels hurries from Heidelberg to Munich, to Anka's address in Amalien Strasse; while he waits outside, Flisges stomps upstairs. But she has left for Freiburg the day before, 'with her fiancé.'¹¹ She has fallen for Georg Mumme, a young, stodgy law student five years older, and with better financial prospects, than the crippled esthete Goebbels.¹² In a daze, Goebbels pens a vile letter to her which gives him brief satisfaction. He writes again in remorse. Her reply is the last for several years. She is 'very unhappy,' she confesses, as she knows that he is the first and last man who has ever loved her with such intensity. 'I will always be your true Anka,' is her final empty salutation.¹³

To the interloper Mumme—whom she shortly marries—he writes what he calls a 'rather categorical' letter. In the new year he will ask her to return all his poems and love letters. 'Anka, thou murderess!' he reproaches her memory, and eight years later her betrayal will still fester in his mind. 'Anka walked out on me,' he will write. 'And my entire relationship with women has suffered ever since.'¹⁴

HE had hoped to study for his degree under the distinguished Friedrich Gundolf, professor of literary history at Heidelberg. Gundolf (Gundolfinger) had written the definitive biography of Goethe. When Goebbels arrived at the university for the summer term of 1920 however Gundolf directed him to Professor Max Baron von Waldberg, a fellow Jew who had authored many a work on the history of literature. Waldberg assigned as his doctoral topic the obscure playwright Wilhelm von Schütz (1776-1847). In his competent dissertation Goebbels made perhaps over-frequent use of the first person (as in 'As far as I can see ...') and carefully praised the opinions of Gundolf and Waldberg.¹⁵ Later he would have the university's records doctored to imply that his dissertation was more concerned with the political undercurrents of the Early Romantic Period; and when in 1943 the university ceremonially renewed his degree they tactfully omitted Waldberg's name from the festivities.

He did not ignore the other sex entirely during these last months of

his formal studies. He would later refer cryptically to perhaps a score of females. As for Anka, Mumme had now threatened legal sanctions if he did not stop pestering her, so Goebbels took his revenge by rewriting *Michael* to make the heroine suffer as much despair as he.¹⁶

Back at Heidelberg after Christmas 1920 Professor Waldberg told him to study another term before submitting his dissertation. Goebbels returned to Rheydt in March 1921 to draft and redraft the masterpiece while Flisges kept him company. An unwary comrade loaned him his fiancée, Maria Kamerbeek, to type the dissertation. He dedicated the completed 215-page opus to his parents. Waldberg was impressed and offered a few suggestions for improvement ('But it's already typed,' wailed Goebbels in his notes before submitting it unchanged). He attended the oral examination in the prescribed top hat on November 18, 1921. The four professors included Waldberg himself. At that evening's seminar party Waldberg addressed him with a knowing wink as 'Herr Doctor'.

Thus he had made it. He now had the coveted title which opened doors to class, wealth, and authority.¹⁷ He shared his triumph with his rowdy friend Richard Flisges; they caroused all night long, then traveled tipsily north to Bonn still wearing their top hats. Their friends, also sporting top hats, were waiting on the platform. Then on to Rheydt: the humble house in Dahleener Strasse was bedecked in flowers as the Prodigal Son returned, haggard but well spoken, educated, and, as always, Latin in his looks. If there had been a fatted calf to hand, old Fritz Goebbels, eyes awash at this visual proof that he was pulling his family through into a better future, would surely have slaughtered it.

3: 'A Wandering Scholar, I'

JOSEPH Goebbels cherished that doctor's title. He asked to be called 'Herr Doctor' and used it even when just initialing—'Dr G.' But for the next four years he remained perforce a nihilist doing nothing. To the quiet despair of his parents he squandered the pittance that he did earn from his meager writings or tutoring. Germany meanwhile slithered into economic chaos. The marching resumed: the Poles into Silesia; new parties in Germany; Mussolini on Rome. And on January 11, 1923 the French marched into the Ruhr. President Friedrich Ebert called for a campaign of passive resistance, and the French put the twenty-nine-year-old Albert Leo Schlageter before a firing squad for sabotage.¹ Later that year a young malcontent called Adolf Hitler, aged thirty-four, staged a *coup d'état* in Munich, was double-crossed by the Bavarian politicians, and ended up in prison at Landsberg. Berlin undertook to pay reparations to the Allies at the rate of 2.5 billion marks a year. Economic ruin faced Germany.

Goebbels neither noticed, nor protested, nor cared. His head was in the clouds. He even laid plans with Flisges to emigrate to India. But that would cost money too, so he stretched out on his bed at home instead and soaked up Oswald Spengler's writings on the decline of the west.

The truth about his middle twenties was therefore unedifying, and in later years he would skirt around it in ever-widening circles. Later he allowed legends to circulate about his heroic undercover activity and early commitment to the Nazi party. Clad in what looked like infantry battledress, he was heard beginning one speech in Frankfurt in the winter of 1924–5 with the words, 'Those of us who have our injuries from the war ...'² He later claimed to have attended his first party meeting during his months at Munich university. (Reworking his drama *Michael*³ he would elaborate: he had heard an unnamed speaker of extraordinary magnetism speak—'Hope shines on gray faces ... A miracle.') He had applied there and then to join the party, he claimed. In 1927 the Goebbels legend would maintain that he had actually advised Hitler in 1919 when the party program was drafted. All of this was quite untrue. He would also suggest that in 1923 Hitler had commanded him to infiltrate into the occupied Ruhr, where under an assumed name he had led a resistance cell not far from the martyr Schlageter himself, until the French had deported him. 'If we had been too refined,' he would brag in 1943, 'none of us would have survived the year 1923.' Goebbels too was behind the

'letter' which would circulate in later years and which he had allegedly sent to Hitler in Landsberg jail ('Like a meteor you soared aloft before our astonished gaze... Your address to the court in Munich was the greatest speech in Germany since Bismarck').

These legends endured even in the obituaries printed by his enemies.⁴ 'I am not a little astonished,' wrote his fellow Nazi Karl Kaufmann in June 1927, 'that Dr Goebbels portrays things so differently. The rumor I have heard in Berlin, that Dr Goebbels was already advising Adolf Hitler in Munich on the program of the N.S.D.A.P. [Nazi party] in 1919, is also totally untrue.' Dr Goebbels had neither joined the passive resistance in 1923 nor taken any active part in it, said Kaufmann: Goebbels was not even an early party member.⁵ True, he would somehow wangle a low number, 8762, for himself, but he did not in fact join until early 1925.

Fortunately Goebbels utilized idle hours in July 1924 to jot down a memoir of his early life. Hitler is mentioned only once, in a passing reference to 1923: 'Bavaria. Hitler.'

Goebbels was rootless, restless, and now friendless too: Richard Flisges had left to work in the mines. Challenged by the Albertus Magnus Society to give due account of his progress, Goebbels replied grandly on January 10, 1922 that he was looking out for a position in the press or theatre. After carrying half a dozen of his pieces, the *Westdeutsche Landeszeitung* published no more, although he heard that they had attracted much attention. He worked briefly as the newspaper's art critic but was made redundant just before his birthday in 1922.⁶ A few days later he delivered a public lecture on Oswald Spengler and contemporary literature; he praised Spengler's critical remarks about the Jews, which in his view had gone to the root of the matter and 'must inevitably bring about a spiritual clarification of the Jewish problem.'⁷ His mother's suitcase would hold clippings of just a dozen newspaper contributions by Dr phil. Joseph Goebbels.⁸ Among the literary products of these otherwise idle years were another drama entitled 'Heinrich Kämpfert'⁹ and manuscripts with titles like 'Gypsy Blood,' 'Those Who Adore the Sun,'¹⁰ and 'A Wandering Scholar, I.'¹¹ One of his poems was called 'At Night.'¹²

I awoke one night.

You lay by my side.

The pale moon played on your left hand,

And it was white as snow.

But your right lay on your heart,

And rose and fell,

As your breast did rise and fall.

THE hand, the breast in question belong to a pretty girl in Rheydt. Herbert Hompesch whispers to him that she is Else Janke, a schoolteacher and orphan. She is well built and motherly, he so slight that, seeing him from the rear once, she thinks him only twelve years old.¹³ He will later

describe her variously as 'a rare mixture of passion and prudence'¹⁴ and as 'a lovely, sweet-tempered chatterbox.'¹⁵ Interestingly he will write: 'I often think of her as my mother.'¹⁶

What strikes her most, she relates years later, are his expressive eyes. She and Fritz Prang's girlfriend Alma Kuppe both teach at the Rheydt school attended by Goebbels' young sister Maria. Else teaches needlework and physical instruction. They make up a foursome, go sailing or on excursions together to places like the local Rheydt castle.¹⁷ He will later recall an evening with her in the summer of 1922: He kisses her, she tries to slap him, he makes as if to leave, she detains him, and they walk out all night long while they talk about their lives. 'I tell her about Anka,' he will write, adding with a trace of disappointment, 'She remains demure.' Rebuffed again!

From Baltrum, a Frisian island resort, she wires him not to come: He borrows money and disobeys. Up in her room he swears his love for her. 'I kiss her to my heart's content. She resists no longer.' Inspired by seeing Else nude for the first time ('just as God created her') he will rewrite his long-suffering *Michael* to include a scene where the eponymous hero struggles to conjure up the Muses on a Frisian island. But to his annoyance Else will not admit to their relationship in public. The crippled Dr Goebbels has much to learn about the mysterious fluids and capillaries that, mixed together, make up the female brain.

His girls are bowled over by the literary style and the intensity with which he woos them. He sets Else and Alma to copying out his articles and verses. But his writings are universally rejected by the big Jewish publishers like Mosse and Ullstein in Berlin. He remarks to Else that you cannot get ahead unless you are 'one of the boys.' Else makes no response.

'My creativity is zero,' he writes. 'Why? Am I a failure?'

Else visits her family's friends in the banking world and finds a clerical job for him at the Dresdner Bank in Cologne. He does not rejoice—indeed his mood seems to darken. In a somber letter to Else at Christmas he lays bare his tortured soul at such length that we must ask where true emotion ends and conscious posturing begins. His letters ramble on, half sermons, half diatribes, acres of blank verse and poetry scattered at the feet of his admiring if tiny audience.

Else firmly considers herself engaged to him, and even discusses with Alma whether his deformed foot might be congenital and affect their children. Goebbels has a quarrel with her about his deformity: whereupon she mentions a minor drawback of her own—she is half Jewish. This has not dawned on him until now. The magic goes out of his life, to be replaced by a nagging skepticism about her.

Starting at the bank on January 2, 1923, he sees at first hand the unpalatable side of capitalism, and reacts with repugnance to the 'sacred speculation' by the rich and affluent. The country's banks, he finds, are nearly all Jewish. He begins to ponder upon the relationship between *das Judentum* (roughly, Judaism or the Jewish community) and the Money Problem. The more he looks around the more he perceives the Jews—

young Otto Klemperer, whom he hears conducting a Gustav Mahler symphony, turns out to be a Jew; so does Mahler himself. He studies Houston Stewart Chamberlain and he finds himself troubled by the Jewishness of Else.

He cannot ignore the contrasts. He himself has to set out from Rheydt each morning at five-thirty and gets home at seven or eight each night, while his pay packet shrinks in value through the galloping inflation that has set in. 'Cologne is ad nauseam,' he writes. 'Pay check worthless.' (On March 27 he sends the Albertus Magnus Society a ten-thousand-mark banknote; it is worth less than one gold mark.) From his grim lodgings in No. 77 Siebengebirgsallee in a southern suburb he writes endless letters to his 'little rosebud' Else. He yearns for her. 'Why have we two, so much in love, been born into so wretched a time?' And yet: 'I am firmly convinced that the time will come for me to use my real strength.'

LYING in a deckchair on Baltrum island one July afternoon in 1923 trying to avoid Else's tedious sister Gertrud, he received the shattering news that Richard Flisges had been crushed to death down the mines at Schliersee.¹⁸ He would dramatize his grief, wallowing for months in self-pity; and he rewrote the ending of *Michael* to send his hero down the mines to his death despite his landlady's premonition of doom. He has Michael die on January 30: that date is a kind of premonition too.

Upon his return from Baltrum, the bank fired him. Keeping the truth from his parents, he continued to commute to Cologne, but barely troubled to scan the newspapers for vacancies, although he assured Else that he did.¹⁹ During his six weeks away on Baltrum the mark's value had dwindled to almost nothing. The U.S. dollar bought three million marks on August 1 and 142 million eight weeks later. Else's savings shrank. From his lodgings in Cologne he wrote to his father pleading illness—a nervous disease which must be congenital, he said—and his father begged him to come home, going so far as to send the fare.²⁰ Fritz Prang found him a new job as a caller on the floor of Cologne's stock exchange. He wrote an essay about Flisges which the local newspaper published at Christmas.²¹

Trapped in his lodgings, Goebbels' brain fevered on. He brought forth a new drama, 'Prometheus,' and in September another play, *The Wanderer*, in which a Traveler guides an often despairing Poet across the heights and sloughs surrounding the German people.²² He witnessed from afar the collapse of passive resistance; he lived sometimes in an alcoholic haze, because one guilder would buy fifty beers. The words *Judentum*, *Qual* (anguish), and *Verzweiflung* (despair) whirled kaleidoscopically around his jottings.

Else had given him a notebook and on October 17, 1923 he resumed his famous diary.²³ 'I can't stand the anguish any longer,' he wrote. 'I've got to set down all the bitterness that burdens my heart.' For Goebbels, writing the diary became something of a fetish, an advance programming of his brain for great things to come. He was aware of a messianic sense of mission. In July he asked in its pages: 'Who am I, why am I here, what

is my task and what my purport? Am I a wastrel, or an emissary who is waiting for God's Word?' And he added: 'Again and again one shining light escapes the depths of my despair: my belief in my own purity, and my conviction that some day my hour will come.'

'WHERE are you now, my dear deceased?' he appealed on the first anniversary of Flisge's death. 'Why don't you give me some portent of where we must go and what we must do to obtain deliverance. . . . Leave me not in despair!'²⁴ Friendless and jobless, he sank to a low point of mental decline that bordered sometimes on suicide.²⁵ As inflation roared out of control his father became increasingly monosyllabic. 'Why must so many give me up as beyond hope,' Goebbels had asked Else in a letter in June 1923, 'and consider me lazy and unreasonable and unmodern?' Overshadowing their whole relationship is her Jewishness, from which there is no escape: in November 1923 she writes to him, 'Our whole row recently about the racial problem kept coming back to me. I just couldn't stop thinking about it and saw it really as an obstacle to our future relationship. In fact I think you're far too obsessed about the whole thing.'²⁶ So he stayed at home, whiling away the hours in the summer house which his parents had built, his powerful thoughts riding on ahead of his frail frame.²⁷ He dreamed of launching his own journal in Elberfeld; but where to raise the capital?²⁸ He fancied himself winning the literary prize offered by the *Kölnische Zeitung* with *Michael* and traveling the continent as a much acclaimed scholar.²⁹ 'But nobody pays me anything for what I write,' he moaned in August 1924.³⁰

He yearned helplessly for Anka and her glittering green eyes, and spent days sorting out the letters they had exchanged.³¹ 'Just one day together,' he wrote in his notes, 'and we would understand each other again.'³² A deep, unremitting despair had seized him. He bemoaned the God that had created him a crippled weakling. 'Despair, despair!' he lamented. 'I can't bear to live and see all this injustice. I must join the fight for Justice and Freedom! Despair! Help me, O Lord, I am at the end of my strength!!!'³³

The more the products of his festering intellect were rejected by unseen editors, the more he saw the Jews behind his torment. He wrote at length on January 23, 1924 to Mosse's *Berliner Tageblatt*, applying for a job as sub-editor and boldly asking for 250 marks per month. The curriculum vitae which he appended to this application was more than economical with the truth: he claimed to have studied modern 'theatre and press history' from November 1921 to 1922 at Bonn and Berlin—in fact he had never visited Germany's capital; more recently, he said, he had become familiar with 'broad areas of modern banking' at the Dresdner Bank. 'In consequence of minor nervous problems caused by overstrain at work and an accident'—he had been set on in the street a year before—'I was obliged to give up my employment in Cologne.'³⁴ Theodor Wolff, Mosse's editor, who turned him down, was Jewish.³⁵ The diaries for the next years show him in a painful light—introspective to the point of

obsession, scribbling plays, articles, and critiques for a public no larger than himself and, sometimes, the woman in his life. With dwindling hope but dull obstinacy he kept submitting the typescript of *Michael Voorman* to new publishers.³⁶ Why even get up in the morning? 'Nothing awaits me—no joy, no suffering, no duty, no job.'³⁷

HE had already tried his hand at public speaking—his notes refer to a November 1922 talk in Rheydt, well received in the local press.³⁸ Once in June 1924 he and Fritz Prang visited a local communist meeting. Invited to speak, Goebbels was interrupted immediately: 'Capitalist swine!' He rounded on his heckler. 'Here is my purse,' he challenged. 'You show me yours. The one who has the most is the capitalist swine!' The miners and textile workers roared with laughter and allowed him to speak on.³⁹

In the wake of the failed Munich putsch the Nazi party had been banned; with Hitler imprisoned, its former members had splintered into factions like the Völkisch-Sozialer Block, a coalition with the former Deutsch-Völkische Freiheitspartei (German Folkish Freedom party) founded by landowner Albert von Graefe.⁴⁰ The charismatic leader of the Nazis in northern Germany was Gregor Strasser, a wealthy pharmacist from Landshut in Bavaria. These right-wing groups had fared well in the election of May 4, 1924, attracting 6.5 percent of the votes. On June 29 Goebbels looked in on one pettifogging meeting of Graefe's party at Elberfeld. He was not impressed. 'So these are the leaders of the "folkish" movement in the occupied zone,' he scoffed in his diary. 'You Jews, and you French and Belgian gentlemen, don't have much cause for worry.' He had evidently heard more positive word about the Nazis in Bavaria because he added: 'If only Hitler were free!' The local folkish chieftain was the politician Friedrich Wieggershaus. He was worthy, obliging, and good-natured. 'This notion of a "folkish" Greater Germany isn't bad,' wrote Goebbels, 'but we lack any capable, hardworking, and high-minded leaders.'⁴¹ Germany, he concluded in a typical Goebbels phrase, was crying out for a leader, like the thirst of parched summer earth for rain. 'One man!!! Bismarck *sta up!* My brain and heart reel with despair for my fatherland.'⁴²

What were his politics at this time? His reading had vested him with some surprising inspirations. The memoirs of August Bebel (1840–1913), the founder of the Social Democratic party, had taught him not to lose heart.⁴³ The real workers, Goebbels concluded, were in fact nationalist to the core. The Jews, intellectually head and shoulders above Bebel, had run rings around him. Goebbels for a time even described himself as a German communist; but this was more for the Russian origins of communism than for what it said as a creed. He read the diaries kept by Henri Alexandre de Catt as private secretary to Frederick the Great and three times afterward quoted the monarch's dictum: 'Life becomes a curse, and dying a duty.' When he plowed through Richard Wagner's autobiography he identified painfully with the maestro's angu-

ished struggle to survive in Paris, and with his physical suffering. He saw Wagner as a wage-slave enchained by the 'filthy Jew' Schlesinger.⁴⁴

Looking around, he scowled at his smug, shallow-minded, pinstriped contemporaries, their lives dominated by the pay packet, football, and sex, and he understood why the communists hated the bourgeoisie.⁴⁵ In July 1924 he began holding little political meetings at his house (in his parents' absence), at which he described the great socialist experiment in Russia—'the glow from the east,' he called it in Latin in his diary: *Ex oriente lux*. Only the Jewish nature of the Bolshevik leadership bothered him. 'Men of Russia!' he wrote. 'Chase the Jews to the devil and put out your hand of friendship to Germany!'⁴⁶

He was not however an international socialist. The great Germanic works inspired him. He immersed himself in Johann Sebastian Bach's *Saint Matthew's Passion*, and discovered Wagner's *Meistersinger*.⁴⁷ His antisemitism was reinforced by reading the book *Prozesse* (Trials) by Maximilian Harden—he recorded afterward that Harden was not a German at all but a Polish Jew, Isidor Witkowski.⁴⁸ 'What a hypocritical Schweinehund this damn Jew is,' he wrote; and then, broadening his aim: 'Rogues, blackguards, traitors: they suck the blood out of our arteries. Vampires!' Harden, he decided, was a dangerous man precisely because he gave his writing all he had—pungency, a caustic wit, and satire. 'Typical of how the Jews fight,' he assessed.⁴⁹ 'Our worst enemies in Germany are the Jews.'⁵⁰

Everywhere he detected their baneful influence. If he, Goebbels, were in power he would pack them all into cattle trucks and ship them out of Germany: so he wrote on July 2, 1924. However, reading the prison letters of Rosa Luxemburg⁵¹ he was surprised at the idealism and warmth of this militant leftist's letters. He sensed that perhaps he was doing her an injustice. 'You can't change your nature,' he realized guiltily. 'And my nature is now rather biased toward the antisemitic.'

THE right-wing parties announced a two-day rally to be held at Weimar in mid-August 1924 to agree upon strategy for the next elections, due on December 7.

Weimar! What visions of Goethe and Schiller the name evoked. In the privacy of his diary Goebbels sometimes seriously compared himself with one or the other, particularly Schiller.⁵² So when his former schoolfriend Fritz Prang suggested they go to Weimar together he was delighted. It would be his first foray into the heart of Germany.

The Weimar meeting was a milestone in his career.⁵³ He gained immediate inspiration from the well-attended rally at the National Theatre and the shouts of Heil. He saw for the first time the swastika—this sinister four-elbowed symbol—and inked it into his diary. All these young people who are fighting alongside me,' he wrote. 'It does my heart good.' He saw them sporting the same swastika emblem on their helmets—Hitler's elite guard, the Highland League (Bund Oberland)—as they paraded to hear an address by the war hero Erich Ludendorff,

patron of the folkish movement. Sizing up the others, he saw Albert von Graefe, a tall gangling ex-major in a black frock-coat, as a man of culture, and Gregor Strasser as a warm human being. He also encountered here the Nuremberg Nazi Julius Streicher, who had founded his own Party for the Struggle against International Jewry: this fanatic with the pinched lips was too intense for his liking, but he reflected that every movement needed the occasional man who went berserk as well.

With Hitler still in prison, the Weimar rally was *Hamlet* without the Prince of Denmark. Ludendorff was no Führer; he was not the messiah that Goebbels was seeking. He spent that Sunday on a quiet pilgrimage through the homes of Goethe and Schiller. Sitting in the former's favorite chair he dashed off a few lines to Else before strolling over to Schiller's large yellow-ochre house. That afternoon, still an outsider, he watched the flags and swastikas parading—some thirty thousand marching men in his estimate. The tumultuous roars of Heil when Hitler's name was mentioned made a lasting impression. For a while he sat with Fritz Prang in a bar, Chemnitz. Fritz wanted to relax but Goebbels was so keyed up that he talked only about politics, ignoring the come-hither glances directed at him, he claimed in his diary, by girls seated all around him. He had found a new passion. 'I have begun to think völkisch,' he wrote. 'It is a Weltanschauung, a philosophy of life.'

Pure chance had decreed that he emerge from his hibernation here on the far right, and not on the left. On August 21, 1924, nervous lest the Belgian authorities suddenly show up, he and Prang founded the local (München-Gladbach) branch of Graefe's movement (the prefix 'National Socialist' was still forbidden). Several friends joined at once. He made a ninety-minute speech and saw how the eyes of one youngster in front began to glow.⁵⁴ These first meetings were held in Batze-Möhn's historic beerhall or at Caumann's in Augustastrasse.⁵⁵ At least once in 1924 the Belgian occupation authorities did take him in for questioning. Shown the interrogation record years later he would pride himself on his foresight: 'It's all just as I think today. Nearly fifteen years ago, as a little agitator.'⁵⁶

Shortly after, he moved from Rheydt to Elberfeld. He later put it about that the occupation authorities had expelled him from their zone.⁵⁷ He began, despite misgivings, to work for Wiegershaus, who had been subsidizing a political weekly called *Völkische Freiheit* (Folkish Freedom) since March 1924. Around this time Else returned to his life, arousing God and the Devil in his catholic loins. 'Next to money,' he ruminated, 'Eros is what makes the world go round.'⁵⁸ More usefully, a typewriter also arrived, a machine whose intricacies seemed more easily mastered than those of women.⁵⁹ The first contributions signed by 'Dr G.' appeared in issue No. 24 dated September 13, 1924.⁶⁰ One was an article examining the concepts of National and Socialist (it concluded: 'We are nothing. Germany is everything!'). It was followed a week later by 'The Führer problem.'⁶¹ On October 4 his name appeared in the imprint for the first

time, as 'Dr Paul J. Goebbels'—a clue therein that he disliked the taint of 'Joseph.'

Hitler was still incarcerated in Landsberg prison. Meeting Gregor Strasser, the Nazi leader's burly viceroy, at Elberfeld on September 13 Goebbels asked him whether Hitler would soon be released. 'We are all missing him,' he confessed to his diary. In Hitler, whom he had yet to meet, he saw the unifying concept of the movement—'The fixed pole around which all national socialist thinking revolves.'⁶²

He was still flexing his muscles as a public speaker. He recognized in himself the elements of a 'ripe old demagogue' and set about refining his delivery.⁶³ Over the next year he would deliver no less than 189 speeches, learning to cast off all cant and phony philosophizing, becoming preacher, apostle, and agitator alike.⁶⁴ In his hands, he would write, he found that the soul of the German working man was as soft as wax, and he could knead it and mold it as he desired.

He soon fell out with Wiegiershaus. His proprietor wanted his little weekly to emphasize German nationalism. Goebbels preferred to put the socialism first. Soon three-quarters of the weekly was being written by Goebbels. By threatening to quit he bluffed Wiegiershaus into appointing him managing editor as from October 2, 1924. It was another rung up the ladder. 'Since yesterday,' he wrote the next day, 'I am quite a different person. At home too'—and what measure of relief lies in these words—'they look at me with quite different eyes.' He had his own mouthpiece. Upward to the stars, onward to freedom for Germany, God be at our side! These were the thrilling phrases that he inscribed in his diary.⁶⁵

Under Dr Paul J. Goebbels the weekly became readable and hard hitting. He was not happy with his writing style, but practice made perfect and his thoughts flowed fast and free. He installed a sub-office in his parental home. As his twenty-seventh birthday came and went his parents were astounded by the change. He still lounged around unshaven, but he had a sense of purpose. He increased his literary intake still more: he digested ten newspapers each day, and dealt with correspondence until two or three A.M. He began a new article, 'The basic problems of Jewry.'⁶⁶ His parents stopped nagging. His fame as orator and writer was noised across the Rhineland. True, he was not being paid, but this fame was gratification enough.