

PART ONE

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FROM KAISER TO HITLER

The year of Heinz Wolfgang Arndt's birth, 1915, was not a good year for a German boy to be born in. Such a boy would soon know that his country had been defeated in a great war, that the Emperor had abdicated and a republic had been proclaimed amid putsches, revolutions, assassinations, unemployment and malnutrition. By the time Arndt was seven, Germany would endure hyperinflation. When he was 10, the first volume of Hitler's *Mein Kampf* would be published.

In the 1920s there would be an economic recovery and the explosion of a dazzling 'Weimar' culture, which seemed to make Berlin the cultural capital of the world. But by the time Heinz was 14, the Great Depression would devastate the economy, and the year he turned 18, Hitler's National Socialists would begin a radical transformation of Germany. If he were a Jew or partly Jewish, he would be driven from his trade, business or profession. It would become prudent and even necessary to emigrate. Most of those who did not would be murdered.

Heinz was born in Breslau, then the most important city in eastern Germany. It had been a Polish town (Wratistawa) until Frederick the Great incorporated it into Prussia during the 1740s after the Silesian War. Two hundred years later, after Germany's defeat in World War II, it became Polish again. It was 'ethnically cleansed' and renamed Wroclaw. German Breslau disappeared as totally as had Pompeii.

Wilhelmine Breslau had been cultured, prosperous and progressive. Its universities, scientists, philosophers and musicians helped set international standards. It was also a tolerant city: its German-Jewish symbiosis was more advanced than anything in the United States or Australia. For many Germans it exemplified the civilising mission of the Second Reich: nothing like the Dreyfus Case, they believed, would have been possible in Breslau, and perhaps they were right.

The Arndts were good examples of this symbiosis. They were thoroughly assimilated, had long since Teutonicised their Jewish name (Aaron) and had adopted Lutheranism. Arndt's paternal grandfather, a Hanseatic merchant who had prospered in African trade, had married a tall, blonde

and beautiful 'Aryan' daughter of a Bavarian thespian family. The Arndts immersed themselves in German culture, especially science and music.

Heinz's father, Fritz Georg Arndt, moved to Breslau in 1911. He was a brilliant organic chemist, who took a position as an assistant in the University of Breslau when his Kiel Professor was appointed to a chair. This was still the Breslau of parades on the Kaiser's birthday, of Mahler concerts and breakfasts at Kempinski. It was also a place for work, not *savoir-vivre*. As Walter Laqueur, himself a child of Breslau, put it: 'There was no aristocracy or high society as in Berlin, no royal merchants as in Hamburg, no artists' quarter as in Munich.' But it produced a disproportionate number of leading scientists.

The anglophile Fritz Arndt joined the English Club and there he met Julia Heimann, whom he married in March 1914. (The name Julia was, in Heinz Arndt's amused opinion, ostentatiously classicist.) She was twenty-two. Both her parents were Jewish, although Julia was baptised before her Lutheran wedding. Arndt coolly described his mother as 'pretty (on the plump side), ostensibly studying archaeology at the University, but much more interested in riding, novels, dancing, tennis and social life'. Heinz's younger brother, Walter, was less detached: 'Mother was fragrant, soft, and round, all in pastel shades like the more lyrical chocolate-box tops; quite accessible but too full of energetic leisure time projects, and later, alarming educational or gymnastic schemes.'

When World War I began in August 1914, almost every able-bodied man in Breslau readily enlisted to fight for the Kaiser. Although the army rejected Fritz because of his varicose veins, the authorities used his amazing linguistic skills in propaganda and censorship. Then, in October 1915 at the age of 30, he was appointed to a newly created Chair in Chemistry at the Darülfünun (House of Science), known otherwise as the Islamic University of Constantinople. He had become a part of the technical aid that Germany gave to its ally Turkey. His mission was to establish the first chemistry department in Turkey, devise a Turkish technical terminology and write textbooks for Turkish students. He liked to say that he was selected as much for his gifts as a linguist as for his reputation as a chemist.

The infant Heinz was in Constantinople for two years. The family lived well in Ayas Pasa, near Taksim Square in Pera, beside the Bosphorus. They had Turkish servants and a German nanny. Heinz's brother, Walter, was born in Constantinople, but when his mother became pregnant with Bettina, it was thought best that she and the two boys return to Breslau

and to German medical services. (Heinz had contracted para-typhoid in Constantinople. It took him months to recover and it continued to affect his walking.)

The Germany to which they returned was dramatically different from the confident country they had left. It had become a land of strikes, mutinies, military defeats and political crises. In November 1918, Germany surrendered. In the same month the Anglo-French forces occupied Constantinople and expelled all Germans, including Heinz's father.

When the family was at last reunited in Breslau, it was a Germany of foreign occupation, revolution, inflation, an unpopular republic and shortages of all kinds, especially food. Heinz's father did not mourn the passing of the Hohenzollerns or the weakening of *Junker* traditions. He was *Republiktreu*, a Wilsonian liberal idealist who supported free trade, opposed nationalism and rejected the Social Democrats as the party of the uneducated. But he had only a minimal interest in politics (his wife had none). His devotion to research and his appointment as an associate professor relieved the stagnation of life in the once confident Breslau.

There was also a housing shortage. At first the family lived on the top floor of Heinz's maternal grandparents' mansion in Kaiser Wilhelm Square (later Adolf Hitler Square). Heinz's first memory was of this house—and of the Kapp Putsch, a monarchist uprising in March 1920 against the new Weimar Republic. One night during the abortive uprising, his mother moved his cot away from a nursery window that had been shattered by the fire of machine-guns.

The hyperinflation of the early 1920s drastically reduced the income from investments on which his grandparents lived, but they kept their art treasures and one or two maids. There was also an old liveried retainer, like Chekhov's Firs, fit for errands, stove-feeding and boot-polishing. Heinz's grandfather, Paul, began his day reading a liberal newspaper, the *Breslauer Neuste Nachrichten*. (His wife, Marie, read the arch-conservative *Schlesische Zeitung*.) He then devoted himself to browsing through histories, in various languages, of art and of the Papacy. He would occasionally take Heinz to a *Konditorei* café to stuff himself on cream cakes and ice-cream. He once took him to watch the 'six-day' bike race in the vast *Jahrhunderthalle*, built in 1912 to commemorate the liberation of Prussia from the Napoleonic yoke. Heavy, bald, with watery blue eyes, a huge nose and dangling lip ('one of the ugliest men I have ever known'), Paul was, Heinz said, 'my closest companion'. His grandmother was more distant. She reminded

the children of Britain's Queen Mary. They never heard her laugh loudly, speak quickly or raise her voice. She played golf.

Each afternoon Heinz would go to their apartment on Kaiser Wilhelm Square where, after kissing his grandmother's hand and shaking his grandfather's, he would do his piano practice. Then he would do the homework for his first school, the Weinhold Academy, a *Privat-Reform-Schule*, which he remembered best for his discussions with his schoolmates of the mark-dollar exchange rate in the era of the Great Inflation. He never forgot that at one point the US dollar was officially worth 4,200,000,000,000 marks.

The inflation ended abruptly after Chancellor Gustav Stresemann established the new mark. For young Heinz, however, an era of personal instability now began. The year 1925 marked what he called 'a great divide': the divorce of his mother and father. In an affectionate, unpublished tribute, Heinz presented his father as a loving parent, a kind friend, a distinguished scientist, a gifted linguist and an exuberant personality with a love of music, sport and jokes, which he recorded in a notebook. He was also a difficult man to live with: 'nervous, ready to give vent to minor anxieties, such as the punctual posting or safe arrival of letters'.

My father would go to the lab around 8.30 a.m. on a two-stroke motorbike. (At no stage of his life could he afford to buy, or even consider buying, a car.) He would come home about 1 p.m. for lunch, lie down for a thirty-minute nap, and after another three hours at the lab, come home for dinner about 6.30 p.m. All his life he suffered from asthma, much aggravated by one of the chemicals on which he worked. For years he tried to combat it by breathing and shouting exercises, which reverberated through the apartment: later for years he would give himself anti-histamine injections. The asthma added to extreme sensitivity to noise which made him a very bad sleeper, one reason why, as long as I can remember, he slept in his own bedroom adjoining his large study. Constant admonitions that he must not be disturbed during his afternoon or early morning sleep punctuated our lives as children. He was an inveterate smoker, but only pipe and (black Brazil) cigars which he chewed nervously at one end as fast as he burned them at the other, leaving small plugs in ash trays all over the apartment.

Fritz Arndt came to believe that his wife was having an affair with 'Feo-Weo'—Wilhelm Furtwängler, the great conductor—and perhaps with other men. In any case, one day in 1925 he called the children together in the sitting room and informed them that their mother had decided she could not live without Freddy von Cramon, a Breslau businessman, and she wanted a divorce. (This was also the period of Fritz's greatest contribution to science, the Arndt–Eistert Reaction, a very useful procedure for synthesising certain classes of molecules and increasing the length of the carbon chain.)

Heinz, who took his father's side in this painful disruption of their lives, wrote of it with a brevity and coolness that conceals pain: 'We were shocked as much by the social stigma that attached to divorce in German middle class circles as by the prospect of separation from her.' Walter tells a more emotional and surely more accurate story: their mother left them, he wrote, 'maimed and numbed, his childhood blighted and his sense of worth destroyed. He had taken her part in the guilt reckoning. He still did. Yet he had felt abandoned. He belonged to her, but she was gone.' She wrote 'urgent, searching letters' but Walter's replies were merely 'polite, empty'. How could the children touch on 'the monstrous central topic'?

Fritz was deeply hurt by his wife's departure and never forgave her. (He later married his housekeeper.) The divorce, however, brought Fritz and Heinz closer to each other. They sat together around the HMV gramophone playing Brahms over and over again. The father took the children on holidays—to Budapest and Venice. They bathed together in the Lido. He played chess with the children. At Sunday lunch, he gave marvellously comprehensible little lectures on Albert Einstein's relativity theory or Niels Bohr's model of the atom (he translated Bohr into German from Danish). He also took pains to develop Heinz's mastery of English. At some meals conversation was permitted only in English. There were also English reading evenings. The children saw their mother once a year in the summer.

This great divide in Heinz's childhood coincided with his enrolment at the Kaiser Wilhelm Gymnasium. The school found him a difficult young man: 'I got the worst marks that had ever been known in my Gymnasium for behaviour,' he said. A student who behaved even moderately received a first, and very bad students received a second. Some boys guilty of atrocious behaviour received a third. Heinz received a fourth.

Sibling rivalries exacerbated the tension produced by the divorce. The younger brother and sister ganged up against the first-born. 'My brother was extraordinarily clever,' Heinz said. 'He was much so better at everything than I was. That worried me all my school life. I was intensely lacking in self-confidence because of this. In my last years at school I got better.'

Walter recalls a typical quarrel. Heinz was devouring the works of Leonhard Frank, whose popular and revolutionary novels depicted the struggles (usually doomed) of a free-spirited young man against the repressive ethos of school, society, capitalism and militarism. Walter picked up Frank's *Das Tor zur Welt* and flicked through its pages derisively. An enraged Heinz seized the book from his hands and tore it up.

These schoolboy rivalries soon gave way to the wider political tensions created by the rise of Adolf Hitler. The family's Jewishness meant nothing to them. They were all part of the German-Jewish symbiosis. They had no wish to be considered Jewish, but it would have been vulgar to have been ostentatiously non-Jewish. Both of Heinz's parents professed Lutheranism and he had been baptised in the Lutheran Church. None of his grandparents was a practising Jew, although his Breslau grandfather occasionally made a donation to the synagogue. 'Religion played no part in our home. After a short religious "crisis" induced by a fashionable and persuasive young parson during my "confirmation lessons" when I was about 15, I turned my back very firmly on religion and have never since quite rid myself of a now old-fashioned atheist zeal.'

Even at school, the Jewish question had never been important. One or two Jewish boys would leave class during the religious instruction period. So did a couple of Catholic boys. It was all a bit mysterious. ('What were they up to?') But these boys looked like everyone else and no one thought much about it. Just as Catholics had missed out, it was assumed, when Luther reformed the Church in the sixteenth century, so, it was also assumed, Jews had missed out at the time of Jesus. No doubt in God's good time they would all catch up and become sound Lutherans. The students heard or read nothing of Russian pogroms, Viennese anti-Semitism, even the Dreyfus case. The murder of Walter Rathenau in 1922 or Rosa Luxemburg in 1919 could have happened in Outer Mongolia for all they heard about them from their teachers.

Yet there was space in the textbooks for combating 'foreign lies' about Germany's war guilt and for recording the sufferings of ethnic Germans in the 'lost' territories, for whom each month the school collected

compulsory dues. The teachers were nationalist and *revanchist*, and some of the schoolboys, who had little feeling for the old soldiers' *Fronterlebnis* (experience of the wartime front), even mocked their wooden limbs, iron crosses and pot-bellied appearance that would afterwards be made world-famous by Erich von Stroheim.

The Great Depression, however, weakened the appeal of this sort of Weimar irreverence—or turned it against itself. Walter Laqueur tells of a typical incident one Sunday on his way home from a family outing on the Oder. As his steamer's little orchestra played *Nun ade, du mein lieb Heimatland* ('Now adieu, you, my beloved homeland'), a swimmer climbed on to the ship and wiped his bottom with the Black-Red-Gold flag of the Weimar Republic. There was a great roar of laughter.

Yet there was no laughter among the Sunday crowds of unemployed workers in the Breslau streets when their quarrels culminated, as they often did, in murder. When Hitler spoke in Breslau, from the ramp of the castle in Kaiser Wilhelm Square, he began to draw vast crowds. His speeches were anti-capitalist, anti-bourgeois, anti-monarchist, anti-Semitic, anti-Slav, populist, nationalist, socialist and, above all, *revanchist*. Anti-Semitic riots followed his visits. The local papers published lists of Jews and sponsored anti-Semitic petitions. One by one, Heinz's fellow students joined the Hitler Youth. The teachers began to speak of a new dawn coming: bliss was it in that dawn to be alive.

Many liberal or conservative Germans still clung to a determined, almost neurotic, optimism. Even in January 1933 when Hitler was appointed Chancellor, he swore allegiance to the Weimar Constitution. There was a Nazi torchlight procession through Berlin's Wilhelmstrasse (and another in Breslau), but there was at first little indication of a radical Nazi revolution. Some conservatives thought they had captured the National Socialists. Hitler would not last very long, they said. 'We have hired him!' declared the Prussian aristocrat Franz von Papen. (The populist Nazis despised 'the vons'.)

But the optimism was short-lived. Hitler announced an election for March 1933 and Nazi terror dominated the campaign. The National Socialists broke up meetings and shot opponents. Nazi postal workers opened letters and Nazi technicians bugged telephones. Nazi journalists, civil servants, academics and trade unionists demanded the abolition of the 'Jewish republic' and the purge of the media, civil service, universities and trade unions.

The National Socialists won only 44 per cent of the vote (they did better in Breslau with 50.2 per cent), but the Reichstag granted Hitler dictatorial powers for four years. All parties except the National Socialist German Workers Party were dissolved. Workers deserted their trade unions and joined the Nazi *Betriebszellen* (factory cells). The Nazi Labour Front became the voice of the working class. The national flag and national anthem were abolished, so were the federal Constitution and states' rights. The persecution of the Jews began. Social democrats, communists, Catholics and nationalists joined the National Socialists in singing the Horst Wessel Song on public occasions.

Sebastian Haffner, then a Berlin lawyer and later the author of *Defying Hitler* (2000), recalled the tale that every Prussian schoolchild knew—of the miller of Potsdam. Frederick the Great wanted the demolition of a windmill that spoiled his view. He offered to buy the mill. The miller did not want to sell. Frederick threatened to seize and destroy it. 'Just so, Your Majesty,' said the miller, 'but I still have the High Court in Berlin.' The mill, writes Haffner, can still be seen to this day.

But judges who kept the law against Frederick the Great did not stand up to Hitler. When Nazi thugs entered the law courts shouting '*Jude verrecke!*' ('Death to the Jews!'), court officers announced: 'Jewish gentlemen would do well to leave the building.' Nazi lawyers sniggered as the Jews left. The student revolution extended to Christians. In Munich, Friedrich Reck-Malleczewen observed a Hitler Youth, his soft face contorted in fury, rip a crucifix from a classroom wall and fling it out of the window, shouting, 'Dirty Jew!'

Still, for many Germans, life went on normally. They strolled the streets or danced in the open air. Cafés, cinemas and dance halls were full. Aryan journalists, film-makers, actors, singers and musicians saw career opportunities and took them.

Heinz's Breslau grandmother died as Hitler took power. Years afterwards, Heinz wrote of her husband

A few days later, in his seventy-seventh year, clearly believing that whatever purpose his life might have had was now gone, he took a huge overdose of sleeping pills. To the horror of my mother who had come to take charge of the situation, the dose was barely sufficient. For seven days she and the family doctor dreaded that he would wake up. Fortunately he died and thus saved himself the fate that befell most of his Jewish relatives in the following years.

In a matter of weeks, Heinz's father was dismissed from the University of Breslau. However widely honoured he had been for the Arndt–Eistert Reaction, he still, as far as the Nazis were concerned, had a Jewish grandfather.

At the end of March 1933, the English economist Lord Beveridge, of the London School of Economics (LSE), was chatting in a café in Vienna with fellow economists Ludwig von Mises and Lionel Robbins. Someone opened an evening paper listing the names of leading German professors being purged under racial laws. The list included Fritz Arndt. Beveridge and Robbins decided immediately to set up an organisation, based in the LSE, to help all German scholars dismissed by the Nazis to find academic work in Britain.

Soon afterwards, the LSE teachers and administrators agreed to contribute deductions from salaries to an Academic Assistance Fund. Beveridge then persuaded the nuclear physicist Lord Rutherford to be its president. The Council of the Royal Society, the oldest and most respected of British societies of scientists, then provided offices in Burlington House, London.

On 22 May 1933, a sombre letter was sent to *The Times* announcing the formation of the Academic Assistance Council. It was drafted in a low key in clear awareness that, in this pre-Holocaust period, public concern about the careers of German Jewish academics was serious but limited. The Royal Society had strongly urged that any appeal be based on academic freedom and liberal civilisation, and not be specifically Jewish. It also suggested that no signatory of any appeal be Jewish.

The letter of appeal was signed by 41 famous scholars, but only the Australian philosopher Samuel Alexander was Jewish. The signatories included Lord Rutherford, the economist John Maynard Keynes, the poet A.E. Housman, the historian H.A.L. Fisher and the Australian classicist Gilbert Murray. It is a historic letter and can be quoted at length

Many eminent scholars and men of science and University teachers of all grades and in all faculties are being obliged to relinquish their posts in Universities of Germany.

The Universities of our own and other countries will, we hope, take whatever action they can to offer employment to these men and women, as teachers and investigators.

But the financial resources of Universities are limited and are subject to claims for their normal development which cannot be

ignored. If the information before us is correct, effective help from outside for more than a small fraction of the teachers now likely to be condemned to want and idleness will depend on the existence of large funds specifically devoted to this purpose. It seems clear also that some organisation will be needed to act as a centre of information and put the teachers concerned into touch with the institutions that can best help them.

We have formed ourselves accordingly into a provisional Council for these two reasons. We shall seek to raise a fund, to be used primarily, though not exclusively, in providing maintenance for displaced teachers and investigators, and finding them work in universities and scientific institutions.

We shall place ourselves in communication both with Universities in this country and with organisations which are being formed for similar purposes in other countries, and we shall seek to provide a clearing house and centre of information.

The issue raised at the moment is not a Jewish one alone; many who have suffered or are threatened have no Jewish connection. Our action implies no unfriendly feelings to any people of any country; it implies no judgment on forms of government or on any political issue between countries. Our only aims are the relief of suffering and the defence of learning and science.

The Academic Assistance Council's rooms in Burlington House became an academic labour exchange and dispensary of honoraria to dismissed scholars. One of the first to be helped was Fritz Arndt, who was appointed to the Department of Organic Chemistry at Oxford.

At the very time, in 1933, when German professors were being dismissed under the Aryan Laws, a new University Law in Turkey was converting the old Islamic Ottoman University of Constantinople into the secular University of Istanbul, with new faculties of Medicine, Law, Science and Letters. President Kemal Atatürk seized his opportunity. A tragedy for Germany became an extraordinary stroke of luck for Turkey, as Kemal recruited some 50 German (and Austrian) scholars to his new university.

They included such famous figures as the economist Wilhelm Roepke, who inspired Ludwig Erhard's 'economic miracle' in postwar West Germany; Fritz Neumark, who reformed Turkey's income tax system and later became Rector of Frankfurt University; the philosopher Hans

Reichenbach, who founded the Berlin school of logical positivism; the mathematician Richard von Mises; the sociologist Gerhard Kessler; the surgeon Rudolf Nissen; and Fritz Arndt, who returned to his old chair.

Arndt lectured in Turkish, became a Turkish citizen and was known as modern *kimya'yi Turkiye'ye getiren adam*—the man who brought modern chemistry to Turkey. He held the chair until he retired in 1955.

As the Arndt family began fanning out across Europe, Heinz's brother, Walter, joined his father in Oxford and enrolled in Oriel College. He later moved to Poland, where he planned to learn his uncle's business in the sugar mill, but found himself in the Polish Resistance before escaping to Istanbul. Their sister, Bettina, finished school in Oxford before moving to Vienna to study art, escaping back to England the day before German troops arrived. Heinz's mother remained in Berlin with her second husband until they too moved to Istanbul, where her husband died. She was later married again to a Czech diplomat and lived in Prague before fleeing with her husband to London.

Heinz remained in Germany for most of 1933. He finished his written examinations under Weimar and did his oral examinations under Hitler. He then joined a labour service set up by the Social Democratic Party to arrange work for the young unemployed. This gave him time to see if the Nazi madness would be as short-lived as many still thought it would be. For six months, he lived in an idle textile mill near Górlitz, chopping rocks six hours a day for use in road repairs. For the rest of the day, he and his companions played chess, hiked, painted or did fatigue duty. In August, they were billeted in villages to help farmers with the harvest.

It was soon clear that Hitler was no flash in the pan. While Heinz was chopping rocks, his fellow students in Berlin built a ceremonial bonfire, onto which they hurled books by Jewish writers, in the enthusiastic presence of the Minister for Culture, celebrated editor and orator Dr Goebbels. In the same month, the famous philosopher Martin Heidegger delivered a rectorial address in the University of Marburg, calling on all German intellectuals to repudiate the old discredited liberalism and rally around Hitler. 'German students are already on the march!' were Heidegger's own words. In August the first list of *émigrés* to lose German citizenship included the satirist Kurt Tucholsky, the dramatist Ernst Toller and the novelists Heinrich Mann and Lion Feuchtwanger. The surge of Nazi popularity was becoming irresistible.

The old Germany was almost dead. German civilisation had submitted to the German Reich, as Friedrich Nietzsche had predicted. The Prussia of Kant, of truthfulness, humanity, honour and selfless service, had been taken over by the *canaille*. The Bavaria of Catholic faith and tradition had given way to a fanatic racism. Conservatives of the old Germany fled or became internal *émigrés*.

By October, Heinz decided to follow his father to Oxford. His earlier ambition to become a German diplomat was now ridiculous. Any idea of attending a Nazified German university was unthinkable. The prospect of an Oxford education offered some hope. The young German said goodbye to his Hamburg grandparents, turned his back on the New Order and took the ferry to England with a sense of liberation.