

► *Wherever there's trouble, there's
Von Papen —*

HITLER'S GENTLEMAN OF INTRIGUE

By S. L. SOLON

AMONG the ghosts of the past stalking the haunted house of Europe today, the loneliest and, in a sense, the most fearsome is lean, cadaverous Franz von Papen. Hating Hitler and fearing him, Von Papen has served him now for seven long years. The well-groomed aristocrat, lover of classical music and collector of fine porcelain, has found his master in the Austrian plebeian. Von Papen has had but one real passion in his life—political power. For this he has been ready to sacrifice friends, family and honor. An admirer of Bismarck and of Plato's *Republic*, first blueprint of a totalitarian world, he has kept faith only with the iron fist.

From the days when, as military attaché in Washington and Mexico City, he directed espionage and sabotage activities against the Allies to the present, the tall, stoop-shouldered Junker who looks like a cross between a college professor and a headwaiter has served those in power, whoever they happened to be. An avowed monarchist, he shelved his monarchism for repub-

lican office. A Catholic, he has intrigued against his Church. Pledging obedience to the Weimar Constitution, he betrayed it to dictatorship. An officer and *confidant* of old Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg, who made him Chancellor, he double-crossed his chief to deal with Adolf Hitler. A leader of the Catholic Center Party, he deserted Heinrich Bruening in 1932 and behind the scenes sold his political party for office. Today, in the twilight of a lifetime of political somersaulting, he labors to justify his reputation as Germany's star intriguer.

Several times Gestapo bullets have winged close to Von Papen's severe face and cropped skull. Within the Nazi party he has no friends. Goering regards him as an effete aristocrat for sale to the highest bidder in the coin of power. Dr. Goebbels fears him and muffles his publicity whenever possible. To Himmler he is "that damned traitor" — more than once Hitler has had to pull on the leash to keep his chief bloodhound from the

throat of his chief intriguer. Von Ribbentrop and Von Papen do not conceal a mutual contempt; as officers in the first World War they shared a tent in Jerusalem and together made a humiliating getaway from the advancing British. Von Papen is aware that Ribbentrop's *von* is phony and views the ex-champagne salesman as a low *arriviste* without merit or background. The Foreign Minister, in turn, looks on Von Papen as an interloper who did not "earn" his place in the Nazi apparatus.

Von Papen knows that Hitler stands between him and the other leaders. They are kept at bay only because the Führer values this wily son of the Junkers as the last bridge between the old-time reactionaries and the new-style totalitarians. Von Papen is also the connecting link between Hitler and the traditional diplomatic families of Europe who count him one of their own. He is able to intrigue for Hitler where other Nazis find doors barred to them. His career fitted him perfectly for the special role required of Hitler's diplomatic triggerman. Von Papen is at home in the diplomatic drawing-rooms, but he can also discuss intimately the latest techniques of dynamiting bridges. He knows Papal protocol by rote, but can also pull off a neat

kidnapping job, as Kurt Schuschnigg, now in a Nazi prison, can testify. As he rides with his daughter, Isabella, through Berlin's Tiergarten on a summer morning, he is the personification of the well-bred, retired Uhlan officer. But he is also an adept at the appeasement confidence game who rarely returns to Berchtesgaden empty-handed, and has sold Hitler's gold bricks at various times in London, Paris, Vienna, Budapest, Rome, Moscow and Ankara.

It was Von Papen whom Hitler assigned to organize the Saar campaign which finally added that region to the Third Reich in 1935. Hitler sent Von Papen to Austria to dupe the unhappy Schuschnigg into making the fatal trip to Berchtesgaden in February, 1938. The Fifth Column in Belgium and France was in large measure organized by Von Papen, who used his wide family connections among wealthy and aristocratic circles in those countries. He used his position as a Papal Chamberlain to persuade the Holy See that reports of Nazi persecution of Catholics in Germany were false. He helped sell Naziism to British Tory circles before the war and worked as Hitler's emissary-at-large throughout Scandinavia. Perhaps his crowning achievement was the negotiation of

the Nazi-Soviet Pact under the eyes of the British-French military mission in Moscow. He is now trying to make Turkey safe for the Swastika. Von Ribbentrop may get the publicity and Goering the medals, but it is Franz von Papen whom Hitler summons when he smells blood in the wind.

II

Von Papen is the tall, bookish, reflective Junker who has discarded the monocle in favor of horn-rimmed spectacles. In private life he affects the studied formality of the British country squire — a type he has always admired — and the flashy nervousness of the Monte Carlo gambler. His wife once remarked that after years of married life she still felt it necessary to address him as Herr von Papen. Von Papen is an expert horseman, and even when well into his fifties he rode as a jockey in gentleman races. In his dress he has a penchant for broad checks and loud colors. Like most wealthy Germans he claims to be something of a gourmet. The ribald story is told in Berlin that in the June, 1934, purge Goering wanted to kill Von Papen so he might "inherit" his cellar of fine old wines.

Von Papen can hardly be con-

sidered a brilliant conversationalist, being dull, precise and too self-conscious of his *herren* rank. His fellow-officers regarded him as rather a prig. As a public speaker he is at his best when talking to an audience of his own kind. He is an expert spokesman of the mixture of pompous romanticism and blood-and-iron realism which is served up in Germany as *Weltpolitik*.

"I like danger and invite it," he likes to remark.

His early life is a stereotype of his class. He was born in the dull, Junker burg of Werl, in the shadow of an ancient monastery, but with the great black blast-furnaces of Westphalia on the horizon. The monastery and the furnaces are a dual symbol of the faith of the Von Papens, a blend of Catholicism and industrialism. They belonged to the famous *Salzjunker* group which controlled the salt mines of Germany. The Von Papen salt-rights go back to the days of Charlemagne, and Von Papen stock has always been in the army, though it also numbers clergymen, scientists and industrial leaders. Little Franz, under the influence of his mother, wanted to become a priest, but changed his mind and decided to follow his father's footsteps as a soldier. He was impressed by his father's stories of the Seven Weeks

War of 1866, which smashed Austria and paved the way for the North German Confederation. At seventeen he joined the Fifth Uhlans, which had more of a reputation for horsemanship than for brains.

At twenty-two the young cavalry officer married Martha von Boch, daughter of Geheimrat Boch, porcelain king and partner in the powerful combine of Villeroy and Boch which ruled in the Saar like feudal barons. The Boch family extends through Germany, Belgium and France.

The outbreak of the World War found Von Papen in Washington as military attaché of the German Embassy in charge of Count Joachim von Bernstorff. His American career would have wrecked any representative of a democratic power. To him Americans were "idiotic Yankees" who were not to be taken seriously. After 1914 Von Papen in America started his private campaign to win the war for the Central Powers. With more patriotism than subtlety he distributed army badges to German nationals in this country. One Werner Horn proudly stuck the insignia on his sleeve and set out to bomb a bridge or two between the United States and Canada. The bombings were complete failures

but Horn was soon nabbed and sent off to prison.

Von Papen detested Ambassador von Bernstorff as only the Prussian officer detests the civilian official. The ambassador believed it was more important to keep the United States from entering the war than to gain some minor successes in espionage and sabotage, which only inflamed Von Papen's passion for intrigue. He formed a network of secret agents responsible to himself alone. The pathetically inept Ambassador Dumba was in charge of the Austrian embassy in Washington. Von Papen shrewdly used Austrian officials in his secret work in order to cover up the Germans in case of exposure. Should the need arise the Austrians, with Ambassador Dumba at their head, were to be made the scapegoats.

In December, 1915, Von Papen and the naval attaché Boy-Ed were ordered to leave America. When the British searched his luggage at Falmouth it was found crammed with documents that involved many German nationals and sympathizers who had been left behind. An interned German colonel inquired angrily of Captain von Rintelen, who had also been arrested as a result of Von Papen's failure to get rid of incriminating evidence, "What regiment does

that fool come from?" "Fifth Regiment of Uhlans of the Guard, sir," Von Rintelen replied. "That explains everything," said the colonel.

Three years later, when Von Papen ran from Palestine, he left his possessions intact in Jerusalem. The British found, as one commentator put it, "all the confidential documents that Von Papen had not lost at Falmouth." A wire to London inquiring as to the disposition of the find elicited the immediate reply: "Forward papers. If Papen is captured do not intern. Send him to a lunatic asylum." Throughout his unsavory career there is this strange mixture of master-mind and stupidity, with his real gifts for chicanery and political mayhem saving him from the consequences of his mistakes.

After the war Von Papen became active in the aggregation of industrialists devoted to military glory and larger dividends that called itself the Herren Klub. He was smart enough by this time not to put all his money on one horse. Keeping the way open to the Republic, he remained in touch with the monarchists. His politics were simple: back to the good old days! But his tactics were dizzily intricate. The mélange of post-war German politics, with some fifty

parties in the field, was a challenge to his innate sense for intrigue, which grew sharper and more practised with every year.

Students of the German Republic have often been puzzled by Von Papen's steady rise. The German people turned away instinctively from his clammy political maneuvering. Party leaders distrusted him. How, therefore, did he work his way to the Chancellorship in 1932? How did he survive thereafter, when political heads fell all around him? The answer is that his seeming weakness was really his strength. His lack of popular sympathy recommended him to leaders who thought they could use him for their own ends. To the Catholic Centrists he was a Catholic with access to the government. To monarchists he was a believer in Kaiserdом with influence in the Republic. To Republicans he was a bridge with the Junkers and industrialists. To President von Hindenburg he was an officer and gentleman, someone a war lord could chat with, different from the Social Democratic rabble whom he despised. Thus he was everything to everybody, a man of myriad faces, in the end uncertain himself which face was real, an intriguer without genuine joy in his devious multiplicity and chameleon politics.

III

Von Papen's big chance came in 1932. It meant the betrayal of his own Catholic Center Party, but that was a trifle under his private code. Dr. Bruening had proposed that a number of bankrupt estates be turned over to the landless peasantry. Hindenburg almost exploded at this symptom of "agrarian Bolshevism." All that was needed was for Von Papen to double-cross his Party chief and offer to form a new government. He grabbed at the chance, promising everybody everything. Together with General von Schleicher he persuaded the senile President to form a "Presidential Cabinet" responsible to himself alone. On his way out Bruening bitterly remarked: "The old Field Marshal sees no difference between changing German Chancellors and changing his Chiefs of Staff in the war."

No sooner was Von Papen in charge than he forgot his pledge to stop the Nazis. He induced Hindenburg to offer Hitler the post of Vice-Chancellor and soothed the Austrian by pointing out that the Vice-Chancellorship was "the same post that Mussolini obtained in Italy after his march on Rome." The pretty scheme collapsed after Hindenburg met the Nazi Führer.

"That man wants to be Chancellor!" the old man thundered. "I'll make him postman."

Shortly thereafter Von Papen was succeeded by Von Schleicher and behind the scenes a tangled web of intrigue was being spun: Von Schleicher against Von Papen, Von Schleicher with Hitler's erstwhile lieutenant Gregor Strasser, Von Papen with Hitler. In Hitler, however, Von Papen had met his equal in the talents of conniving. Characteristically, Von Papen sought to get him into his power by buying up, through his paper, *Germania*, a number of notes signed by Hitler to get funds. If Hitler balked at compromise Von Papen would blackmail him by threatening to present these overdue notes for payment. The Nazi rabble-rouser would be compelled to come to terms, and Von Papen would be assured of Nazi support while currying favor with the Catholics and the Republicans as the savior of Germany from Hitler. A neat trick if it could be turned! But Hitler, with a sea of Nazis at his back, could afford to challenge the Junker Canute who sought to stop the Nazi tide by financial blackmail. The Junker capitulated to the Nazi. Sixty days later Hitler rose to absolute power from the embers of the Reichstag building.

Von Papen scrambled to make his peace. He spoke in Essen and in his clipped, nervous voice declared, "God must love Germany, for in her greatest need He sent her Adolf Hitler." After secret negotiations with Hitler, he made his infamous Marburg speech. His seemingly anti-Nazi utterances on that occasion were intended to give Hitler an added excuse for purging the radical elements from the Party. Von Papen posed as a representative of the Army conservatives. But after Hitler had killed off Roehm and Heines and others who were talking about a "second revolution," it was necessary to show that Von Papen did not, after all, represent a real opposition. The problem was easily solved; Von Papen repudiated his speech and cast the blame on Jung, his secretary. He stood aside while the Gestapo slaughtered his aide.

Soon Von Papen was speaking familiarly about "our revolution." For a long time the radical elements in the Nazi set-up wanted to simplify affairs by killing Von Papen. Hitler had other plans. He wiped out Von Papen's friends and collaborators: Bose, Schotte, Werner von Alvensleben, Jung, Von Schleicher. But he could use Von Papen. In the quick-witted and unscrupulous Junker the new

master of Germany saw an agent who would stop at no degradation. Dependent directly on Hitler for his very life, he would be faithful as long as Hitler held power. With a gesture of supreme contempt, the new Chancellor offered the ex-Chancellor the post of Ambassador to Austria. "I accept with pleasure." Von Papen snapped to attention eagerly. In the village of Wallerfangen in the Saar Basin where Von Papen has his home, the villagers expressed their feelings by deserting the streets when Von Papen went for a walk.

Hitler sent Von Papen to Rome to negotiate a concordat with the Pope at a time when persecutions of Catholics were in full swing. He brought the concordat home to Hitler and persecutions promptly increased. More sordid work was to come, in Von Papen's virtual abduction of Chancellor Schuschnigg of Austria to Berchtesgaden. As "one Catholic to another," Von Papen assured the Austrian Chancellor of Hitler's good intentions. "Go to Berchtesgaden, Herr Bundeskanzler," Von Papen told him, "and you will talk to our Führer and Reichskanzler as one brother to another." With a straight face Von Papen told the unhappy Austrian, "You will have then the protection of Adolf Hitler's glitter-

ing and immaculate word of honor behind which everyone who obtains it feels secure." A few days later Nazi forces invaded Austria.

Von Papen's most important assignment as Hitler's diplomatic Man Friday was the one that precipitated the war: the negotiation of the Nazi-Soviet Pact. Von Papen the Junker intriguer and Stalin the Georgian despot understood each other. It was in Moscow — where he is believed to have visited secretly — that Von Papen received the Kremlin's guarantees that Turkey would not enter the war on the side of the Allies. The full weight of Russia, bearing down on Turkey from the north, was to keep Turkey neutral. At this writing the neutrality seems in danger of cracking.

Von Papen has an affection for only one person in the world, his daughter Isabella. He has tried to rear her on the orthodox Junker pattern. She is the last link between Von Papen and the scuttled world of Kaiserdom. Aside from Isabella there is little left of Von Papen's ambitious hopes. He is tied to Hitler's chariot, a hostage from a forgotten time, and despises his Nazi captor. Yet Hitler's ruthless fanaticism has much in common with Von Papen's cold scheming. The two men are beginning

to understand each other. Hitler's dream of world conquest was once a madman's fantasy to him, but now he begins to wonder if the madman wasn't right. But the world that Von Papen envisions differs from Hitler's projected Nazi Empire. Von Papen's élite would be the Junker monarchists with a Kaiser at their head, not the coterie of Nazi plebeians that now rules the Third Reich. Hitler, aware of this, keeps a careful eye on the graying Junker. He knows that Von Papen will be on hand to serve any new master. Von Papen dreams of a restored Potsdam under a Kaiser for whom he would play Bismarck. Should Hitler begin to slip, Von Papen would be the first to intrigue against him.

In his last meeting with Charles Maurice de Talleyrand, Napoleon on the eve of surrender to the Allies summed up his opinion of history's most famous intriguer. Shaking his fist in the face of the ex-chamberlain of the Empire, Napoleon exclaimed: "You are a coward, a traitor, a thief. You do not even believe in God. You have betrayed and deceived everybody. You would sell even your own father." Will Hitler one day address similar words to his own little Talleyrand, Franz von Papen?

THE THEATRE

BY GEORGE JEAN NATHAN

Lament for Irish Playwrights

IF critics were paid their present disproportionately munificent wage to ask questions rather than to answer them — ah, rosy day! — I should begin this month's cheque-cadger with the query: What has happened to the Irish playwrights? — and should thereupon under the new dispensation promptly demand a raise. But the world being what it is today, what with capitalism in the saddle and us poor slaves still forced to work for our hire, I am, alas, driven to pursue the inquiry. Baring myself to the waist and mopping my brow, I accordingly go to work.

It was only a very short time ago that I, along with other drama critics, stoutly believed and vociferously affirmed that in the Irish playwrights, if anywhere, rested the hope and glory of the contemporary theatre. And for that belief and that affirmation there seemed to be ample justification. Surely what imaginative and poetic life our stage enjoyed in more recent seasons was largely the gift of the Irish. And equally surely it was the

Irish in the antecedent years who could usually be relied upon to bring to the drama of our hungry theatre that blend of wonder and humor and fancy and delicate rhythm that for long has been their peculiar blessing.

But now something seems to have happened. Except for O'Casey, whose *Purple Dust* was originally scheduled for this season but has been postponed until next, the quondam rich vein appears to have run dry. Carroll, who gave us *Shadow and Substance* and *The White Steed*, has collapsed utterly in both *Kindred* and *The Old Foolishness*. Ervine, who began so auspiciously with plays like *John Ferguson*, *Jane Clegg* and *Mixed Marriage*, has wound up with a succession of weak minor comedies, the one most recently exhibited here, *Boyd's Daughter*, being so shockingly inferior that it was hard to associate Ervine's name with it. Denis Johnston, whose *The Moon in the Yellow River* was a thing to treasure, has since then turned out *The Bride and the Uni-*