Adolf Hitler
The Discovery of Antisemitism in Vienna

[Hitler precedes this early chapter on the Jewish question by an extended treatment of the Social Democrats which ends with the assertion: "Only knowledge of Jewry offers the key to grasping the inner and therefore actual intentions of the Social Democrats." Much of what follows in his account has been shown to be demonstrably false, particularly the claims regarding Hitler's innocence of antisemitism before his arrival in Vienna in 1907. Writing in 1925 and primarily to an audience composed of Nazi party members, he is intent on demonstrating his credentials as a leader of the antisemitic radical right. Source: Adolf Hitler, Mein Kampf (14th ed., Munich, 1932), pp. 54-70. Translated by Richard S. Levy.]

TEXT

It is difficult today, if not impossible, to say when the word, "Jew," first occasioned special thoughts in me. In my father's house, I cannot recall ever having heard the word, at least while he lived. I believe the old gentleman would have regarded special emphasis on this term as culturally backward. He had succeeded over the course of his life in becoming more or less cosmopolitan, an outlook that survived alongside a quite rough and ready nationalist sentiment and which even colored my own.

In school, too, I found no cause which would have led me to change this received image. In high school I did learn to know a Jewish boy, whom we all treated cautiously, only because various experiences had taught us to doubt his reliability. But we didn't care all that much one way or the other [about Jews].

Not until I was fourteen or fifteen did I bump into the word, "Jew," more frequently, mostly in the context of political discussions. I felt slightly averse [to this practice] and could not fend off a feeling of unpleasantness which always came over me when religious squabbles were unloaded in front of me.

But at that time I did not see the question as something special.

Linz possessed very few Jews. In the course of centuries their exteriors had become Europeanized and human-looking. Indeed, I even took them for Germans. The nonsense of this conception was not clear to me because I saw just a single distinctive characteristic, the alien religion. Since they had been persecuted because of it, as I believed, my aversion toward prejudicial remarks about them became almost detestation.

I did not yet so much as suspect the existence of a systematic opposition to Jews.

Then I came to Vienna.

Caught up by the fullness of impressions in the architectonic realm, downcast by the difficulty of my own lot, I did not at first grasp the inner stratification of the people in this gigantic city. I did
I don't wish to assert that the way I got to know them was particularly pleasant. I still saw only the religion of the Jews and for reasons of human tolerance held aloof from attacks on this religion, as any other. Consequently, the tone struck by the antisemitic press of Vienna appeared to me as unworthy of the cultural heritage of a great nation. The memory of certain occurrences in the Middle Ages oppressed me; I would not wish to see them repeated. Since the papers in question were not generally well thought of (for reasons I had not yet fathomed), I mainly saw them as products of anger and envy, more than as the results of a systematic, albeit false, perspective.

I was strengthened in my opinion by what appeared to me as the immeasurably more worthy form in which the really big newspapers answered these attacks or, what occurred to me as still more praiseworthy, how they simply failed to mention them at all, that is, condemned them through silence.

I zealously read the so-called world-press (Neue Freie Presse, Wiener Tageblatt, etc.) and was amazed by the scope of what it offered its readers as well as the objectivity of its individual articles. I respected the aristocratic tone but was often somewhat uncomfortable with the overstated style. Yet this might have been in keeping with the verve of the whole metropolis.

Since I then regarded Vienna in this way, I thought of this explanation of mine as a valid excuse....

[The Viennese press' fawning treatment of the Habsburgs and hypercritical treatment of the German Empire and Wilhelm II undermined Hitler's respect.]

It was this that gradually made me observe the big papers more cautiously.

When, on one such occasion, one of the antisemitic newspapers, the Deutsches Volksblatt, behaved more respectably, I was forced to recognize it.

Another thing that got on my nerves at this time was the way the big papers pursued an obnoxious cult of France. You would have to be ashamed to be a German when these sweet hymns of praise to the "great culture-nation" came before your eyes. More than once, this miserable truckling to the French caused me to drop these "world-papers." I then often picked up the Volksblatt which, while it was certainly smaller, appeared nonetheless somewhat purer in these matters. I was not in agreement with the sharply antisemitic tone, but once in awhile I read arguments which gave me cause to think.

In any case, I slowly came to know from these causes about the man and the movement which determined Vienna's destiny at that time: Dr. Karl Lueger and the Christian Social Party.
When I came to Vienna, I stood opposed to both.

The man and his movement seemed "reactionary" in my eyes.

My common sense of justice, however, moderated this judgment in proportion to the opportunity I received to get to know the man and his work. Slowly, my just judgment grew into unabashed admiration. Today I see the man, even more than before, as the greatest German mayor of all times.

How much of my basic outlook was changed by this altered position toward the Christian-Social movement!

If by this experience my views with regard to antisemitism also fell to the passage of time, then this was surely the most significant transformation of all for me.

It cost me the greatest inner struggles of the soul, and only after months of wrestling between sentiment and reason did reason begin to emerge the winner. Two years later sentiment fell in line with reason and from then on became its most reliable guardian and sentinel.

During this period of bitter wrestling between inner education and cold reason, the visual observation of Vienna's streets had rendered invaluable services. There came a time when I no longer as before wandered blindly through the mighty city. Now with eyes opened I looked at people as well as buildings.

As I was once strolling through the inner city, I suddenly happened upon an apparition in a long caftan with black hair locks.

Is this a Jew? was my first thought.

They surely didn't look like that in Linz. I observed the man stealthily and cautiously. But the longer I stared at this alien face, examining it feature for feature, the more my first question was transformed into a new conception:

Is this a German?

As always in such cases I began to try to remove my doubts with books. For a few hellers I purchased the first antisemitic brochures of my life. Unfortunately, they all proceeded from the standpoint that in principle the reader was conversant with or even understood the Jewish question to a certain degree. Moreover, their tone was in most cases sufficient to recreate doubts in me, particularly because of the shallow and extraordinarily unscientific support for their assertions.

I had a relapse for weeks, on one occasion for months.

The matter seemed so monstrous, the indictment so immoderate, that, tortured by the fear of doing an injustice, I again became anxious and uncertain.
But, certainly, I could no longer be in doubt that it did not concern Germans of a peculiar religion but rather a people in itself. For since I had begun to concern myself with these questions and become aware of the Jews, Vienna appeared to me in a different light than previously. Wherever I went, I now saw Jews, and the more I saw, the more sharply they were distinguished from other men in my eyes. Especially the inner city and the areas north of the Danube Canal swarmed with a people who even externally no longer bore a similarity to Germans.

However, if I still had doubts, these hesitations were finally removed by the position of a segment of the Jews themselves.

A great movement among them, which was quite extensive in Vienna, came out most emphatically for the confirmation of the racial character of Judaism: Zionism.

It might look as though only a section of Jews approved this position and that the great majority condemned such an affirmation, indeed inwardly rejected it. But upon closer examination this appearance dissolved in an evil vapor composed of pure expedience and pretext, not to say lies. For the so-called Jewry of liberal disposition did not reject the Zionists as non-Jews, but only as Jews of an impractical stamp, whose public confession of their Jewishness might even be dangerous.

In their inter-relatedness nothing had changed.

In a short time this phoney struggle between Zionist and liberal Jews nauseated me. It was thoroughly false, based on lies, and little in keeping with the always asserted moral superiority and purity of this people.

The cleanliness of this people, moral and otherwise, is a point in itself. Just looking at their exteriors, even with your eyes closed, you can tell they are not lovers of water. Later the odor of these caftan wearers often sickened me. Added to this were their unclean clothes and less than heroic appearance.

All this is far from appealing. But you must be even more offended when you look beyond the physical uncleanness to discover the moral stains upon the Chosen People.

Nothing affected me in so short a time as the slowly mounting insight into the kind of activity carried on by Jews in specific areas.

Was there any kind of filth or brazenness, particularly in cultural life, in which there was not at least one Jew participating?

As soon as you cautiously cut into such an abscess, you would find, like a maggot in a rotting body, blinded by the sudden light, a little Yid!

Jewry had much to answer for in my eyes when I got to know its activity in the press, art, literature, and the theater. All their unctuous reassurances were no longer of any use. It was
sufficient to observe a billboard, to study the names of the intellectual producers of the horrible trash they advertised for the movies and theater, to become hardened for a long time. This was the pestilence, intellectual pestilence, far worse than the Black Death of long ago, with which the people were being infected. And in what quantities was this poison being produced! Naturally, the lower the intellectual and moral level of such art fabricators, the greater his fertility until the rogue like a garbage sorter splashes his filth in the face of humanity. Just think, for every Goethe, Nature can easily come up with ten thousand such polluters of the environment, who now poison the soul like germ carriers of the worst sort.

It was horrifying, but undeniable, that just the Jew in abundant numbers seemed chosen by Nature for this shameful destiny.

Is this the chosenness of the Jews?...

I now began to examine my beloved "world press" from this viewpoint.

The more fundamentally I probed the object of my erstwhile admiration, the more it withered. Its style became ever more unbearable. The content I had to reject as inwardly corrupt and superficial. The objectivity of the reporting seemed to me now to partake more of lying than the honest truth. Ah, but the authors were--Jews.

Thousands of things I had scarcely noticed before now appeared noteworthy to me; other things that I had thought about I now learned to grasp and understand.

I now saw the liberal slant of this press in a different light. Its aristocratic tone in the answering of attacks as well as their condemnation to silence were revealed to me now as clever and shabby tricks. Encomiastic theater criticism was always reserved for Jewish authors, and their rejections never fell upon any but the Germans. In the needling of Wilhelm II could be discerned the constancy of its methods, exactly in the same way as the commendation of French culture and civilization. The kitschy contents of the novellas now became unacceptable [to me], and in their language I detected the sounds of an alien people. However, the sense of the whole was so inimical to Germandom that it could only have been intentional.

But in whose interest was this?

Was it all an accident?

Gradually, I became unsure.

However, the process was accelerated by insights which I gained in a series of other events. I refer to the general conception of ethics and morals, as openly exhibited by a large part of Jewry and which could be visibly substantiated.

Here again the streets offered a frequently and truly evil instructional lesson.
The relationship of Jewry to prostitution and still more to the white-slave traffic could be especially well studied in Vienna, as in no other city of Western Europe, with the possible exception of the ports of southern France. Walking of a night the streets and alleys of Leopoldstadt, you witness everywhere, whether you want to or not, encounters which remained hidden from the greatest part of the German people until the war presented soldiers on the Eastern Front occasion to see similar things, or, more aptly put, forced them to see such.

The first time I recognized the Jews directing this disgusting traffic in vice, shamelessly and in ice-cold business fashion, a cold shudder ran down my back.

But then it inflamed me.

Now, I no longer avoided discussion of the Jewish question. No, now I welcomed it. But as I had learned to look for the Jew in all the areas and manifestations of cultural and artistic life, I suddenly happened upon him in a place where I least expected to do so.

When I discerned the Jews as leaders of the Social Democrats, the scales fell from my eyes. The long struggle of the soul thereupon concluded.

Even in the daily relations with my fellow workers I saw an astonishing adaptability, how within the space of a few days or even a few hours they adopted altered positions on the same question. It was difficult for me to understand how men, who when spoken to privately still had some reasonable views, immediately lost them as soon as they came under the spell of the masses. This happened often enough to make me despair. When, after hours of persuasion, I was convinced that this time I had finally broken through the ice or that I had cleared up some nonsense and rejoiced in having done so, I would on the next day, to my grief, have to begin all over again. It had all been in vain. Like an eternal pendulum, their views seemed to swing back again and again to madness.

This much I could comprehend: they were dissatisfied with their lot and damned the destiny which hit them so often and so cruelly. They hated the employers who seemed to be the heartless executioners of that destiny. They cursed the authorities who, in their eyes, possessed no feeling for their situation. They demonstrated against the price of necessities and carried their demands into the streets. All this could be understood without reflection. What remained inexplicable, however, was the boundless hate which they laid upon their own nationality. They defamed the greatness of the nation, sullied its history, and dragged its great men into the gutter.

This struggle against their own kind, this [fouling] of their own nest and homeland was equally senseless and incomprehensible. It was unnatural.

It was possible to cure them of this vice, but only temporarily, for days or, at most, weeks. If, however, you met the same supposed convert a little later, he had returned to what he was.

He was again possessed by the Unnatural.
Gradually, I realized that the Social Democratic press was conducted predominantly by Jews. But I did not put any special significance on this circumstance because the conditions were exactly the same in the other papers. Only one fact was obvious: there was not a single paper with Jews present on it that could be designated as truly national, at least according to my education and conceptions.

When I mastered myself enough to read these kinds of Marxist press productions, the aversion grew to such proportions that I now sought to get to know about the manufacturers of these thrown together villainies.

From publishers on down, they were all Jews.

I gathered all the obtainable Social Democratic brochures and sought out the names of their authors: Jews. I noted the names of almost all the leaders: they were in by far the greatest part also members of the "Chosen People," whether acting as members of the parliament or in the secretariats of the trade unions, heads of organizations, or street agitators. It was always the same uncanny picture. The names Austerlitz, David, Adler, Ellenbogen, etc. will remain eternally in my memory.

One thing had become clear to me: the leadership of the Party, with whose petty members I had been carrying on a violent battle for months, lay almost exclusively in the hands of an alien people. For that the Jew was no German I now knew to my inner satisfaction and with finality.

Only now did I learn to know the seducers of our people completely.

A year of my sojourn in Vienna had sufficed for me to become convinced that no worker could be so stubborn as to be beyond better knowledge and better explanations. Slowly I mastered their doctrine and employed it as a weapon in the struggle for my own inner convictions.

Almost always now I was victorious.

The great mass was to be saved but only after the heaviest sacrifices of time and patience.

Never, however, was a Jew to be freed from his viewpoint.

I was still childlike enough at that time to want to make the madness of their doctrine clear to them; I talked my tongue sore and my throat hoarse and thought that I must succeed in convincing them of the harmfulness of their Marxist insanity. In fact, I achieved just the opposite. It seemed as though the mounting insight into the nihilistic effect of Social Democratic theories and their realization only served to strengthen them in their determination.

The more I argued with them the more I learned their dialectic. At first they calculated on the stupidity of their adversary. Then, when they could find no other way out, they played stupid themselves. ...Whenever you attacked one of the apostles, your hand closed around slimy matter which immediately separated and slipped through the fingers and the next moment reconstituted itself. If you struck such an annihilating blow that, observed by the audience, he had no choice
but to agree with you, and thus you thought you had taken one step forward, the next day your amazement would be great. The Jew knew nothing at all about yesterday and repeated his same old twaddle as though nothing had happened; if you angrily challenged him on this, he could not remember a thing other than he had demonstrated the correctness of his assertions on the previous day.

Many times I stood there astonished.

I didn't know what to be more amazed at: their verbal agility or their art in lying.

Gradually, I began to hate them.

All this had but one good side, that to just the extent I identified the actual bearers or at least the disseminators of Social Democracy, so the love for my own people had to increase. Who could curse the unhappy victims of these devilishly skillful seducers? How difficult was it for even me to master the dialectical lying of this race! And how vain was such a success against people who twisted the truth in your mouth, who brazenly denied the words they had just spoken and in the next minute took credit for it anyway.

No, the more I knew the Jews, the more I had to pardon the workers....

...It was the duty of every thinking man to push himself into the forefront of the cursed [Marxist] movement, in order to perhaps avert the worst....But the instigators of this disease of the peoples must have been real devils. For only in the brains of monsters--not men--could such a plan and organization assume palpable form, the actions of which would have as their final result the collapse of human culture, thereby leading to the desolation of the world.

In this case the only salvation remaining was war, war with all the weapons the human spirit, reason, and will could muster, without regard to which side of the scales destiny might throw its blessing.

Thus I began to familiarize myself with the founders of this doctrine, in order to study the principles of the movement. That I came to the goal more quickly than I had at first perhaps dared to think, I owed to my newly won, though still superficial, knowledge of the Jewish question. It alone enabled me to compare the reality with the theoretical sham of the founding apostles of Social Democracy; it taught me to understand the language of the Jewish people which speaks in order to hide its thoughts, or at least to veil them. Its real objective is not to be found in the lines but rather slumbering, well hidden, between the lines.

It was for me the time of the greatest inner upheavals I had ever had to endure.

From a weak cosmopolitan I had become a fanatical antisemite.

Just one more time--it was the last--I was visited by the deepest anxiety and oppressive thoughts.
As I scrutinized the effects of the Jewish people over long periods of human history, suddenly there arose the fearful question: did an unknowable destiny, for reasons unbeknownst to us poor men, perhaps wish with eternal and immutable decision that the final victory go to this little nation?

Could it be that this people, which lives only for the earth, will be granted it as a reward?...

As I calmly and clearly deepened my knowledge of Marxism and thus the effects of the Jewish people, destiny itself gave me the answer.

The Jewish doctrine of Marxism rejects the aristocratic principle of Nature and sets in its place the eternal privilege of power and strength of the mass and the dead weight of its numbers. It therefore denies the value of the human personality, contests the significance of nationality and race, and therewith withdraws from humanity the basis of its existence and culture. As a foundation of the universe this [doctrine] would bring about the end of any intellectually comprehensible order. And thus as in this the greatest recognizable organism, the realization of such a law could result only in chaos and, ultimately, death for the inhabitants of this planet.

If the Jew with the help of his Marxist creed is victorious over the peoples of this world, then his crown will be the funeral wreath of humanity; then this planet will travel through the ether as it did millions of years ago, devoid of men.

Eternal Nature avenges itself mercilessly on the transgression of its commandments.

Thus I believe today that I am acting according to the will of the almighty Creator: when I defend myself against the Jew, I am fighting for the work of the Lord.

END OF TEXT

NOTES


[2] Vienna's second district, the former ghetto, was still heavily populated by Jews.