



Norman Stone -historian (1941-)

HITLER, 1980

Himmler's¹ background was of a kind drearily familiar among Nazi leaders – Bavarian, with a stiff, uniformed father and a Scholtz-Klink² of a mother, and a family socially pretentious but materially uneasy. Still, Himmler was such a freak that even this unappetizing pair can be excused of responsibility for warping him, the more so as he had an elder brother who seems to have been decent enough. Himmler did not do very well at school, and was just too young to fight in the First World War. He drifted into the anti-Red militia and in 1923 took a small part in the Hitler putsch because Röhm patronized him and took him in. Himmler had, from the start, a painful sense of order. He carried that housewifely mania of the Nazis to excess. Even as an adolescent, he noted down his every movement to the precise minute. He kept a list of books read, and one, too, of letters and postcards received and sent – down to Christmas cards. Again, he distinguished himself in subterranean intrigue from an early age. At school, he was the archetypal teacher's pet. Later, by heroic though invisible

¹ **Heinrich Himmler** (1900 – 1945) was *Reichsführer* of the SS, and a leading member of the Nazi Party (NSDAP) of Germany. Adolf Hitler appointed him General Plenipotentiary for the administration of the entire Third Reich (*Generalbevollmächtigter für die Verwaltung*). Himmler was one of the most powerful men in Nazi Germany and one of the people most directly responsible for the Holocaust.

² **Gertrud Scholtz-Klink** later known as Maria Stuckebroek (1902 – 1999) was a fervent Nazi Party member and leader of the National Socialist Women's League (*NS-Frauenschaft*) in Nazi Germany.

manoeuvrings, he broke up his brother's engagement. After 1919, he drifted, in the way so many Nazis did. He studied for a time at an agricultural college (and posted home to his mother the dirty washing that accumulated during the week), tried to learn Russian (and even to emigrate as an agricultural colonist), and finally ended up as a straightforward parasite on a divorcée eight years his senior who had a farm. The marriage did not last for very long and soon degenerated into an exchange of letters concerning chicken fodder. Early in the war years, Himmler took up with one of his secretaries, and for a time became quite human.

Throughout all of the horrors, Himmler thought that he was only doing his duty at the behest of his beloved Leader. He hated the sight of blood, and fainted on the only occasion when he saw an execution. Quite bizarrely, he reproved and sometimes even had executed SS men who were involved in corruption and unauthorized brutalities in the various camps. He wished the SS to be super-clean, and he busied himself endlessly with the tiniest details of its corporate life – prescribing how porridge should be consumed in the women's homes, for instance. It would have been utterly foreign to

Himmler's nature to stab in the back the man whose creed sanctioned his own ways and turned him, the insignificant, ugly little man, into a paragon of the race. Himmler worshipped Hitler. He stood to attention when the *Führer* telephoned; he told his masseur, who once answered the telephone when Hitler was calling, 'You should be proud! Write it down so that you can tell it to your grandchildren!' The most frightening thing about him, as with many other Nazi leaders, including Hitler, was that he never grew up. His whole life was simply the same note, repeated over and over again, with increasing shrillness.

(Norman Stone, *Hitler*, London: Coronet, 1982 [1980], pp. 82-83.)