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Author(s): John Murray

Source: *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 43, No. 171 (Autumn, 1954), pp. 285-298

Published by: Irish Province of the Society of Jesus

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30098582>

Accessed: 22-03-2019 10:39 UTC

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Germany in Retrospect

20 JULY 1944

by JOHN MURRAY, S.J.

LITTLE more than ten years ago, the world at war was startled by the news of an attempt upon the life of Adolf Hitler. This had taken place in the very heart of German military headquarters on the Eastern front, and the man immediately responsible for the attempt was no Communist nor Western Allied agent but a German officer with a distinguished record of service, Claus Graf Schenck von Stauffenberg. Stauffenberg was a war hero who had more than once been severely wounded and had lost an eye, the whole of his right hand and two fingers of the left. He was a member of that class in Germany which Allied propaganda viewed with the gravest mistrust, that of the senior military officer. The attempt failed and Hitler escaped with slight damage. Its aftermath was a series of savage reprisals, to which a large number of Field Marshals and generals, the director of the military information and security services, and high ministers and officials fell victims. Included among these prisoners and scapegoats were men with names as famous in nineteenth-century Prussian history as Bismarck and Moltke.

Since 1945 much fuller information has been made available, both about this attempt of July, 1944, and various other projects hatched and in part implemented by members of a German opposition. Indeed, this more ample information has suggested various important questions. Could the Hitler regime, for instance, have been overthrown by internal opposition in the autumn of 1938, had there been no Munich agreement between the dictators and the governments of Britain and France? Was there in fact a genuine and effective resistance movement to Hitler in Germany throughout the war? What chances were there—or, if that be too definite an hypothesis—what chances might there conceivably have been that the war could have been brought to an end prior to 1945 with a negotiated instead of the unconditional surrender of Germany? And, had that been possible, to what extent could the present condition of post-war Europe have been avoided?

To questions of this kind no definite answer can be given. They are matters only of speculation; they belong to the realm of the 'might-have-been', an interesting but perhaps not very fruitful field of history. They do, however, suggest one preliminary remark. Whatever judgment be

passed upon the character and value of the German opposition to the Nazi regime during the war, its main centre has to be sought in conservative circles. The thesis that the second world war, like the first, was instigated largely by the German General Staff for the domination of the Continent is not borne out by the facts. Nor does evidence support the belief that the people of Germany, on the whole, welcomed or wanted the war. This does not of course do away with the responsibility either of the General Staff or of the people. It was Germans who began and wanted war ; Germans who continually widened its area and scope ; Germans who introduced methods of savagery and obscenity which have brought lasting shame on the people of Germany. However arbitrary and absolute a government, no people can escape condemnation for crimes committed in its name and by the hands of its own citizens. And in this matter, the General Staff stands exposed to the most severe criticism. If it be not true that they were the principal agents in bringing war about, they had nevertheless the solemn duty of preventing it, since they alone had the effective power to do so. There was considerable opposition among the ranks of German senior officers, but it was dilatory and spasmodic. They continually shifted responsibility from one to another, and from themselves as a class to others, including even the Western Powers. They rarely had the moral courage to face the implications of their convictions. Hitler outmanoeuvred them all the time, and even those who at heart remained enemies of the regime were lulled into a surly acquiescence, not least on account of Hitler's seeming triumphs in the teeth of their own professional forebodings.

Since 1945, a large number of books have appeared in Germany, written by former diplomats, soldiers and senior officials, and they deal with Germany under the Nazi government and in particular during the years of war. Such books, at first hearing, may appear suspect ; they are, in many cases, *apologias* for the authors, and it might seem surprising how many of them now claim to have disapproved of and even fought against the regime. The anti-Hitler movement embraced a large number of individuals and widely differing groups. Indeed, it is astonishing that it was not detected earlier and ruthlessly dealt with. One explanation of this is that certain Nazi leaders knew of the movement, and thought that it might serve their own purposes. Himmler, in particular, was privy to it and had, it is hinted, the intention of supplanting Hitler or, should Hitler be removed by the opposition, of taking his place, relying upon his own forces of the S.S. Goering's name was also mentioned, and at one period some opposition sections toyed with the idea of substituting Goering for Hitler.

Among these post-war publications I should like to select a number for commentary.

Dr. Hjalmar Schacht, former President of the Reichsbank, has contributed two of them: *Abrechnung mit Hitler* and later a lengthy autobiography, *76 Jahre meines Lebens*.¹

Schacht is certainly a person of firm and definite character. He rose to national prominence from modest beginnings, and, as a relatively young man, was instrumental in stabilizing the German currency after the debacle of the early and middle twenties. He was a man of clear vision and expert knowledge of economics and finance and was placed in a position of great responsibility because of his undoubted gifts. Never a politician, though he played some part in founding the German *Demokratische Partei*, he approved of the original invitation to the Nazis to join a coalition government on the grounds that in any system that claimed to be democratic the party with the majority of seats and votes could not be permanently excluded from power. His financial policy made possible German rearmament, but only—he argued convincingly—to provide for German defence after the Disarmament conference had strikingly failed. His defence of himself both at the Nuremberg tribunal and in his autobiography stands effective. There is no special pleading in it and no emotional appeal. In personal contact with opposition leaders though it is not quite clear how far he was committed to any actual plot, he was arrested after July, 1944, and escaped death at the Nazis' hands only through the advent of the Allied troops.

Karl Heinz Abshagen's biography of Admiral Canaris, director of the *Abwehr*, the information and security services for the *Wehrmacht*, introduces one of the most intriguing figures in the German war-time background.²

Canaris was a naval officer who had fought in 1914 at the battles of Coronel and the Falkland islands, had escaped from internment in the Chilean island of Quiriquina and made his way back to Spain, where he engaged in espionage, and thence to Germany, and was subsequently commander of a submarine. Much travelled and playfully affecting at times a Greek origin, for which there was no other justification than his not very German family name, and also an expert linguist, he was put in charge of the *Abwehr* or security service for the German forces, when this was reconstructed in 1935. His biographer, Herr Abshagen, and others who have written of him are fascinated by his many-sided personality. Loyal to friends and subordinates, he did all he could to shield them from the suspicions and interference of Himmler's S.S. All the time he was aware of the anti-Hitler activity that went on inside the *Abwehr*: he did nothing to check it but did not take an active part,

¹ The second of these, a volume of 700 pages, was published by the Kindler und Schiermeyer Verlag, Bad Wörishofen in 1953.

² *Canaris: Patriot und Weltbürger*. Published by the Union Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft, Stuttgart, in 1949.

though his sympathies were with the opposition. He was too subtle in mind and disposition to have been an effective leader, and the picture built at the Nuremberg trials of Canaris as the arch-plotter at the centre of opposition was somewhat unreal. As the war progressed, he became more and more elusive and wove a network of project and counter-project around *Abwehr* activities, so as to bemuse and dazzle his enemies in Himmler's organizations. He steered a highly difficult and dangerous course between a Scylla of loyalty to the *Reichswehr*, for which he provided a first-rate information service, and a Charybdis of resistance to many even of Hitler's direct orders. He became an adept in dissimulation, just as concerned with sabotaging the more savage and barbarous suggestions of Hitler, e.g. for the murder of General Weygand, as with counteracting enemy espionage. Throughout, he judged the military and political situation with clear-headed realism, and he was convinced from the beginning of Germany's ultimate defeat. Not that he wished for this, but he considered that a Hitler victory would have been the most terrible of tragedies. After the July attempt Canaris was arrested, though he had played no part in it, and was later executed. Weizsäcker, Under-secretary at the German Foreign Office, has left the following tribute to his friend, Canaris :

We cannot pass over this extraordinary person without a word of commentary. He was one of the most interesting figures of the period—one that a dictatorial regime may bring to light and full development, even in a land such as Germany, in which cunning and rare innocence are not frequently found together. Cunning as serpents and simple and innocent as doves—with us in Germany that is indeed an unusual combination. Canaris as a young naval officer was rich in a spirit of enterprise and adventure. He had commanded his submarine with distinction. He was an expert in foreign languages ; he had friends everywhere. Whether he had Greek blood or not, I do not know but he had the reputation of being a most ingenious Ulysses. This at least Hitler must have realised or he would never have entrusted the military information services to a naval man. But into the mind and heart of Canaris Hitler had never been able to penetrate. Even the Gestapo for years did not understand him. Canaris had the gift of getting men to talk to him without ever giving himself away. His sea-blue eyes did not allow you to reach into the depths of his mind. Only very seldom and then through a tiny chink could you see into his character clear and firm as a bell, only very occasionally could you sense the profoundly moral and at the same time tragic quality of his person.¹

A book of a very different kind is that of Hans Bernd Gisevius, once a member of the Gestapo, then of the *Abwehr* and one of the conspirators

¹ cf. *Geist der Freiheit*. By Eberhard Zeller. Verlag Hermann Rinn, Munich. 1952. Pp. 26–7.

against the regime.¹ It is a fascinating book, with vivid descriptions of life in Germany and acute judgments upon the German situation. Other writers have questioned the accuracy of some of Gisevius's statements but in the main his account of the opposition activities is reliable. His verdict upon the hopelessness of his opposition colleagues deserves quotation :

The same was true—he states—of the Germans in opposition. Once caught in the circle, they were unable to find their way out. Again and again they entangled themselves in their own arguments. One time they clung to the 'lesser evil' ; then they wanted 'to avert something worse' ; then they waited for 'the proper time'. Or else—so they imagined—the 'others' were not willing to act ; or—so they alleged—they could do nothing. Sometimes they were loath to break their own oath of allegiance, or they feared the stigma of having dealt 'a stab in the back'. Finally, when they had run out of reasons and could no longer evade the issue, they groaned that it was now too late ; that in the meantime we had all become 'collectively' guilty and there was nothing left for us Germans but to win the war or be ruined.²

The Hassell diaries, written by the ex-Ambassador to Italy, also arrested and executed after the July attempt, are of another calibre : personal reflections of a diplomat of the old school, honourable and Christian in mind.³

A more recent publication is *Das Spiel um Deutschland*, by Fritz Hesse.⁴ From 1935 till 1939 he was an official German Press representative in London and from 1939 till 1945 he was a *Legationsrat* and specialist in British questions at German headquarters. He worked in fairly close contact with Herr von Ribbentrop and his judgment of Ribbentrop is milder and more sympathetic than that of the majority of post-war writers. In his assessment of the British situation before the war he betrays a considerable naiveté ; he is inclined to lay a large measure of blame upon a supposed anti-German group in London and to exaggerate the tension and strain in pre-war England. He agrees, however, that Hitler's conduct and his continual changes of attitude made the British attitude an inevitable one. With certain reservations, his book is a valuable commentary upon the pre-war and war years.

Finally, one further work calls for mention. This is a study by Eberhard Zeller on the various groups in the opposition movement.⁵

¹In an English version, *To the Bitter End*, published by Jonathan Cape, 1948.

²op. cit. Pp. 269 sqq.

³*Vom Andern Deutschland*. By Ulrich von Hassell. Atlantis Verlag, Zürich. 1947.

⁴Published by the Paul List Verlag, Munich. 1953.

⁵*Geist der Freiheit*, already mentioned. Among other books of similar nature may be noticed : *Wahn und Wirklichkeit* and *Nicht aus den Akten*, by Erich Kordt, for seven years secretary to Ribbentrop ; also *Statist auf diplomatischer Bühne*, by Paul Schmidt, official interpreter for the German Foreign Office, who attended many international meetings of individuals as well as conferences.

THE GERMAN ARMY

The advent to power in 1933 of Hitler's government brought several obvious advantages to the German army. Henceforth, a larger military budget was secured and the army would rapidly grow. However, there were some disadvantages. The introduction of conscription flooded barracks and camps with a host of new recruits with whom the officers and non-commissioned officers of the von Seeckt army of the twenties were quite unable to cope. The *esprit de corps* that had been a feature of the small force permitted by the Versailles treaty was lost in a vast citizen recruitment. Large numbers of the recruits were enthusiastic Nazis, and one of the reasons which held back senior officers from later action against the government was the uncertainty whether junior officers and the men would support them.

For the time being, army prospects were most promising, though it was ominous that Hitler altered the military oath which officers and men had to take, so that their loyalty was now centred personally in himself. The senior officers, on the whole, thought little of the new government and no doubt imagined that they could influence and control it, entirely misreading the character of the new Chancellor. They also disliked and resented the existence of other armed groups within the Nazi party, and Hitler's liquidation of Roehm and the leaders of the S.A. no doubt seemed to the military men to eliminate unpleasant rivals.

From the military standpoint it is reasonably clear that the General Staff were not in favour of military adventures. Its chief was General Ludwig Beck, a man of high character as well as great professional competence. Beck issued several warnings against too active a foreign policy, from his professional point of view. In May, 1934, he deprecated too rapid an extension of the armed forces lest this should provoke counteraction from the French. Two months later, he wrote that Germany's international position was hopeless, that everything had been endangered by Nazi activity in Austria, and that all the Powers of importance were against Germany. In May, 1937, when the staff had been ordered to prepare offensive plans for a sudden attack in the South East, he again protested that Germany, so far as her army was concerned, was not in a position to run the risk of a war in Central Europe, and that German material resources were 'altogether inadequate' for making war, 'either now or in the near future'. In May of the year following, in a memorandum to General Brauchitsch, Beck once more argued that the French army was still the strongest in Europe. And two months subsequently, when the Sudeten crisis was being inflamed, he presented a further memorandum:

On the basis of the above data I now feel in duty bound to ask insistently that the Supreme Commander of the *Wehrmacht* (Hitler) should

be made to stop the preparations he has ordered for war, and to postpone his intention of solving the Czech problem by force till the military situation is basically changed. For the present I consider it hopeless, and this view is shared by all my Quarters-General and departmental chiefs of the General Staff who would have to deal with the preparation and execution of a war against Czechoslovakia.¹

That was a professional judgment, as late as the summer of 1938, on Germany's unreadiness for war and therefore on the unwillingness of the General Staff to undertake such a military responsibility.

In the meantime there had occurred the Blomberg-Fritsch scandal which was used as an occasion for more complete Nazi control over the armed forces. General Blomberg, the War Minister, had contracted an unfortunate and, for a man in his position, a scandalous marriage which would have meant his retirement even in pre-Nazi days. General von Fritsch, commander-in-chief, was victim of one of the meanest and filthiest possible intrigues, almost certainly directed by Himmler and Goering. He was eventually exonerated by a military tribunal but the mud had stuck, as it was intended it should. Fritsch was replaced by General Brauchitsch, a more compliant character. Hitler took over the post of War Minister.

It was to Brauchitsch, in his new capacity, that Beck addressed a protest of quite a different sort on 16 July 1938. The protest raised the significant question of a senior officer's moral responsibility in the event of an unwarranted war. I give the decisive paragraph in full :

It is a question of the most fundamental decisions that concern the nation's welfare. History will lay the guilt of blood upon its leaders, if you do not act now in accordance with your professional and political knowledge and conscience. *Your obedience as soldiers has eventually its limits, namely there where your knowledge, your conscience and your sense of responsibility forbid the carrying out of a command.* Should your advice and warnings in such conditions find no response, then you have both the right and the obligation, before the people and before the judgment of history, to resign from your offices. If you act together with a determined purpose, the pursuit of a policy of war would be made impossible. You would then have saved your country from the worst consequences of all, its defeat. It shows a great want of character and of consciousness of duty, when in times like these a soldier in the highest possible position views his responsibilities only within the narrow framework of his military competence, without making himself aware of the very high responsibility which he bears before his own people as a whole. Exceptional times like these call for conduct that is exceptional.²

¹c.f. Sir Lewis Namier, *In the Nazi Era*, 1952. Pp. 28-30, in comments on books by Friedrich Hossbach and Wolfgang Foerster.

²*Geist der Freiheit*, p. 9. The original text of the sentence above italicised is as follows : *Ihr soldatischer Gehorsam hat dort eine Grenze, wo Ihr Wissen, Ihr Gewissen und Ihre Verantwortung die Ausführung eines Befehls verbietet.*

When no action was taken after this protest, Beck resigned his post as chief of the General Staff. But the effect of this resignation was smothered by a Nazi policy of silence ; it was not made public, and then in a most casual manner, until after the Czech crisis had been temporarily settled at Munich. Beck remained one of the central personages in the military opposition, and committed suicide after the failure of the July plot.¹

How is it possible, you may well enquire, that these professional verdicts came so to be belied in the event in 1939 and 1940 ? Beck, the best military brain in Germany, considered in 1938 that the German forces were not strong enough to fight the Czechs. But a year later, they swept through Poland in devastating campaigns. He rated the French army as the finest in Europe. Yet the Germans held their Western frontiers with slight forces during the Polish war and then overwhelmed France. Canaris, usually so accurate in his estimates, thought that the German attack upon Norway was a wild adventure which would receive severe punishment from the British Navy. In all these cases the expert forecasts were quite wrong, at least when seen from a short-term point of view. Hitler, the adventurer and gambler, acting in defiance of professional advice, proved right. This had the effect in the long run of investing him with an aura of invincibility and of further diminishing the influence and power of the General Staff. General Jodl, one of the military Yes-men whom Hitler attached to himself, declared at Nuremberg that Hitler would listen to no advice and that it was impossible to discuss or argue with him. Nor were the generals able to inform him of what was really happening at the front. Life in Hitler's headquarters, he stated, was a pure martyrdom : it was not a military headquarters but a civilian office, in which soldiers were tolerated as guests, for the most part as unwelcome guests.

STAGES IN OPPOSITION

The controversy over the Munich agreement has never been satisfactorily settled and maybe never will. Its opponents insist that the agreement, coming on top of the West's acceptance of a remilitarized Rhineland and the *fait accompli* of Austrian annexation, convinced

¹On Beck, Gisevius writes thus : "One man understood this (namely the real situation and the real aims of the inner circle of the Nazis) : General Ludwig Beck, the chief of the German General Staff, and therefore he voluntarily resigned his post. This decision should have been a warning signal to all the others, for Beck was by general agreement considered the supreme intellect among the generals. He was a man of great ability who had risen to his high position by virtue of his indubitable excellence. To the members of the general staff he represented the true heir to the traditions of Moltke and Schlieffen. He set extremely high standards for his subordinates. He looked upon the general staff, not as an élite corps of military technicians, but as the conscience of the army. Consequently, every thinking officer could not help reflecting upon the significance of the step when such a man as Beck resigned at so critical a juncture." (op. cit. p. 279).

Hitler that he could make further demands, when it should suit him, and only whetted his appetite for even wider aggression. It would have been better—they urge—and far more honourable to have fought against Germany with Czechoslovakia, which occupied a strategic military position, and for a cause to which France at least was committed by treaty obligation. Some of these critics believe that Russia was genuine in her offers of military aid to Czechoslovakia. Those who defend the settlement point out that the German complaints against Czechoslovakia were not without foundation and that in any case one last supreme effort had to be made to preserve peace. Hitler was given this final opportunity of showing that other countries could live with him.

Several of these post-war authors have stated that the Munich agreement frustrated a planned German coup against the Nazi government. They claim also that information on this matter was passed to Lord Halifax and other prominent Allied personalities. All that was required, they argue, was a stiff attitude on the part of France and Britain and, in the event of war, they could and would have taken the initiative. Their plan, if one can trust Gisevius, would have been to stage a military action on the grounds that they were anticipating a *putsch* by Himmler and his S.S. of whom and which the majority of the German people would have believed any villainy. The official pretext would be that the army had to protect the person of the commander-in-chief (Hitler) and they would in addition have welcomed the opportunity of settling old scores with the S.S. How much credence is to be given to this is in grave dispute but there is evidence of plotting, and Halder, the new Chief of Staff, and General von Witzleben, a victim after July, 1944, were concerned with it. Witzleben then commanded the troops in Berlin and was apparently ready to occupy the Reich chancellery with the Potsdam garrison. Halder, according to Gisevius, was slow to move and hesitated to sanction any direct army action for fear of giving rise to another 'stab in the back' legend. His own suggestion was that, in the event of war, Hitler should be removed through a bomb attack.¹

Among other military men who opposed the German war plans in 1939 and afterwards played their part in the opposition, were General Thomas, chief of the *Wehrwirtschaftsamt*, who on more than one occasion exposed to General Keitel Germany's military and economic position, warning Keitel that an attack on Poland would mean a world war, which

¹Some notion of the curious relations between the principal men in Germany may be glimpsed from Gisevius's account of a conversation he had at this time with Halder. "Knowing," he writes, "the oath-complex of the generals as I did, I had deliberately left it an open question whether the dictator actually wanted war or was being carried along by the current, but Halder would not agree to this. He held that 'this madman', 'this criminal', was consciously steering Germany into war, possibly because of his 'sexually pathological constitution', which created in him the desire to see blood flow. 'A blood sucker'—this was the term the chief of staff used to describe the chief of State". (*op. cit.* Pp. 289-90).

Germany would certainly lose ; General von Stülpnagel, afterwards commander of the German forces of occupation in France ; General von Leeb ; General Erich Hoepfner ; General Wagner ; and later General Rommel.

With these may be linked Colonel Hans Oster, a member of Canaris's *Abwehr*, one of the most active of the opposition intermediaries ; Hans von Dohnanyi, closely linked with Oster ; Justus Delbrück, again in contact with Oster.

Prominent among civilian figures in this general movement was Karl Friedrich Goerdeler, who at one time had been *Oberbürgermeister* of Leipzig, a post which he gave up in 1937. He was a man of tireless energy and continually changing projects. But so important did the Nazis consider him as an opponent that at one period a reward of a million marks was offered for his capture. He travelled far and wide in the interests of the conspirators, and his code name was *Wanderprediger* or itinerant preacher. Johannes Popitz was another of the civilians of prominence. He had been Finance Minister in the Prussian government but resigned because of the Nazi racial laws against Jews. Both were executed after July, 1944.

Although most of the members of these groups could be termed more or less conservative, there were a number of men associated with them, from the ranks of Social Democracy. Of these Wilhelm Leuschner is important. A carpenter by trade, he had been for a long time a public official in Darmstadt and subsequently Minister of the Interior in the Hesse local administration. Arrested and imprisoned before the war, he settled in Berlin where he managed a small factory, which in its turn was made a centre for anti-Nazi activity. Until 1939 Leuschner had thought it might be possible to organize a rising against the Hitler government from below, but with the war he realized that the regime could be upset only through army action. He was in contact at first with General von Hammerstein and, during the war, with Canaris and Oster. Theodor Haubach was another associate who came from the ranks of the Socialists. A journalist, he worked in Hamburg in the Institute for Foreign Affairs and was foreign editor of the *Hamburger Echo*. In 1933 he became Press officer of the head office of the Berlin police and even prior to 1939 suffered lengthy imprisonment. Selections from his letters have been published and they reveal a man of wide and independent outlook. He was finally arrested before the July attempt in 1944 and executed afterwards. Other names of Left-wing associates are those of Carlo Mierendorff, a turbulent and gifted character, who was imprisoned for four years after the Nazi advent to power and during the war lived as a manual labourer. In contact with some of these members of the opposition, he was killed in 1943 during an Allied air raid on Leipzig : Adolf Reichwein, a much

travelled naturalist and explorer who, despite his political background, was summoned in 1939 to Berlin to rearrange the Museum for local history and culture : Ernst von Harnack, son of the famous professor and church historian ; and Julius Leber, at one time a member of the Reichstag and after four years of imprisonment from 1933 to 1937 a coal merchant in Berlin ; despite his Socialist convictions, he belonged to the school that insisted that the Eastern front against the Russians must be defended at all cost, while pourparlers should be instituted with the Western Powers.

There was a small group that has come to be known as the Kreisauer circle from the name of the estate of Helmuth James von Moltke, where they were in the habit of meeting for discussion. The second name 'James' recalls the fact that Moltke had an English mother, and he was a great nephew of the Prussian chief of Staff during the Austrian and French wars in the eighteen sixties and seventies. Moltke was an eminent lawyer for international cases and causes and was also a judge. During the war he worked as an adviser with the armed forces and interested himself in cases of ill treatment of war prisoners. Arrested in January, 1944, he died in prison a year subsequently. With him was closely linked Graf Peter Yorck von Wartenburg, bearer of another honoured German title, whose grandfather's name is not unfamiliar to the student of nineteenth-century Germany thought. Yorck von Wartenburg was a cousin of the two Stauffenbergs, one of whom took the bomb to the Führer's headquarters on 20 July 1944.

One final name is that of Graf Fritz-Dietlof von der Schulenburg, not important in himself, but more significant for his connection with his namesake, and presumably kinsman, Graf von der Schulenburg, who had been Ambassador in Russia during the period prior to 1941 and who had worked hard and continually to prevent a break between Hitler and Soviet Russia.¹ The younger Schulenburg was politically, it appears, not a very stable individual. He had joined the Nazi party in 1932, at which time he had links with Gregor Strasser, who afterwards seceded from the movement ; and in 1937 he was made second in command of the Berlin Police. From this office and from the party he was dismissed in 1940 as politically unreliable. He had relations with various members of these opposition groups.

This list of groups and of individual names will show, I think, how widespread was the sentiment of resistance to the Nazi regime and how at the same time it involved an attitude of mistrust of the German war effort. On this second point some reservations have to be made. Many

¹A considerable account of the diplomacy of Graf von der Schulenburg in Moscow is given in Gregory Gafencu's book, *Préliminaires de la Guerre à l'Est*, a remarkable work, published during the course of the war by an ex-Foreign Minister of Roumania.

Germans who recognized that their own nation and, in particular, the Nazi government were responsible for the war, and that the war they were committed to was unjust and aggressive on Germany's part, were now put into a very difficult position. And especially so, once the Russians had turned the tide and had begun to drive the German forces back upon their own homeland. A German defeat would involve not only the end of the war, which they would in itself have cordially welcomed, but also defeat at the Russian hands and occupation of their country or part of it by the Communists, a prospect which they regarded with at least as much abhorrence as the continuance of Hitler's regime.

What were they to do? They were not powerless; indeed several of the active commanders of army groups were among their number, and there must have been few high ranking generals who were unaware of the plot. Most of them, at least in 1944, were too heavily engaged in defending Germany to have much energy left for inner political affairs. Yet it is clear that contacts were maintained and that negotiations continued. They were thorough enough—one is tempted to add 'German enough' to be making plans in advance, before the obstacles had been cleared out of their way, and had drawn up a list of ministers for a future government. According to this scheme or to one variety of it, Rommel was to be head of a government to be set up after Hitler's fall, on the grounds that his name would, more than any other, command the ready allegiance of the troops. Beck also was given prominent office and Schulenburg, the ex-Ambassador, envisaged as Foreign Minister.

Their general hope was to make contact with the Western Allies and in the meantime continue the defence against the Russians. They found it difficult to realize that, at this particular period, it was impossible to drive a wedge between these Allies and the Russians, for Germany was the common enemy of both East and West. They did not understand how the realities of the Hitler regime, which they themselves abominated, had brought West and East together in a common crusade, and had made the Western Powers too little conscious of their potential differences with Russia and of the likely consequences of their common victory. The policy of unconditional surrender, to which the Western Powers had committed themselves, practically ruled out negotiations between any German groups and themselves, even had these groups been able to assert their authority inside Germany.

THE LAST EFFORTS

The story of the actual attempt made by Claus von Stauffenberg has been often told. It was not by any means the first attempt of its kind. A bomb had previously been placed by two senior officers in

Hitler's private plane prior to a flight but it had failed to explode. Stauffenberg's expedient was simple but clumsy ; and it failed in its effect. The failure, and the unexpected news a few hours afterwards that Hitler was still alive, paralysed the movements which the conspirators had set in motion. The entry into action of Himmler's S.S. put an end to these spasmodic measures almost before they had begun.

Why, it may be asked, was the attempt made just at that moment ? Some interesting suggestions are made in Fritz Hesse's recent book.¹ He was, he tells us, in Berlin on 16 July and on the next day travelled by train to Hitler's headquarters. On the train he met the ex-Ambassador, Schulenburg, with whom he had a cryptic conversation, as he says, *à l'orientale*. At headquarters he heard that Oshima, the Japanese Ambassador, had asked some days previously for an interview with Hitler in which he wished to communicate to him a message from the Emperor of Japan. The message consisted in this, that the Emperor was ready to act as an intermediary between Germany and Russia. Mussolini was to be summoned to headquarters. Ribbentrop was told to consult with some of his advisers on foreign questions. Among those consulted by Ribbentrop, according to Hesse's statement, were Schulenburg and himself. According to Ribbentrop, Hitler was sceptical about the proposed mediation but thought it ought not to be rejected out of hand. Schulenburg declared that it was in keeping with Stalin's character to be in contact with both the opposition inside Germany and with Hitler : but he added that, if Stalin actually made an agreement, he would keep it.

The account continues. Schulenburg spoke on the telephone to Stauffenberg, telling him that Hitler was on the point of reaching an agreement with Stalin. This forced Stauffenberg's hand. Those who thought as he did could not tolerate the idea that Hitler might once again stabilize his position by means of such an agreement.

In Hesse's opinion, Stauffenberg belonged to an opposition group, consisting in the main of Prussian officers, who aimed at a rapprochement between Soviet Russia and the German opposition movement. They realized that, in making overtures to Russia, they were risking the status and privileges of their special class. But they considered this risk was worth taking, for they hoped that association with Soviet Russia might do for a defeated Germany what association with Czarist Russia had done for a defeated Prussia after the Napoleonic campaigns in Central Europe. It was no accident therefore that many members of this group bore distinguished Prussian titles. Hesse finds it strange that Stauffenberg, who was a South German, should have been affected by this particular *mystique*. What this group could not view with equanimity was a possible

¹*op. cit.* Pp. 356 sqq.

agreement between Soviet Russia and the Hitler regime, which would have confirmed the belief, once widespread, that Hitler was the man to extricate Germany and its people from its and their terrible position : and his rule would thereby have been further consolidated.

CONCLUSION

It is interesting to reflect that, behind what seemed to the outside world during the war years a closely-knit front of the German people, confident in its armed might and flushed with its many victories, there existed all the time these currents of unbelief and opposition. It is encouraging to reflect that there were many men who on grounds of conscience and moral decency held out against the Nazi regime, in spite of the terror suspended always above their heads and the threat of the death to which in the end many of them actually succumbed. It is a strange and macabre story—that of German history behind the seemingly united front of a people at war : a story of valour blended with brutality abroad and at home of terror and deceit, shot through with glimpses of individual courage and resistance to great evil. The grim story is a commentary upon totalitarian rule and system, with its denial of all moral principle and every standard of human decency, and its disregard for the rights of men and for spiritual and religious values. May it be a warning to other tyrants and other tyrannies.

JOHN MURRAY, S.J.