

THE TOOL

BY G. K. CHESTERTON

I AM devoting three articles, of which this is the third, to a few aspects of Adolf Hitler, who has risen to such baffling and bewildering importance, or at least prominence, in the present problem of Christendom. The first article, which I called *The Crank*, was intended to suggest that he is not exactly a normal German, any more than a normal Austrian; but is a certain modern type produced by the shallow modern education combined with the drifting modern homelessness; the man who has a smattering of subjects in general, especially of one subject; some half-baked cultural crudity like the Swastika or the Aryan race. In the second, which I called *The Gangster*, I suggested that we must add to this something that may well make a type so naturally obscure turn into a type almost unnaturally arresting and arrogant; the vanity of the criminal; the bloodshot egoism that can actually brag of brutality. Having spoken so strongly against such weaknesses, and especially the weakness that may exult in wickedness, I may possibly cause some surprise, if I conclude the composite portrait by saying that in certain aspects, and under certain limitations, I do not believe that Hitler is altogether a bad fellow; and that he is almost certainly a much better fellow than the men who are going to use him.

It is a queer paradox that the word Socialist is still part of the very political title of the man who would destroy Socialism. But I do not believe that, at the beginning, this anomaly was ever a hypocrisy. He made his party out of contradictory parties, and his policy out of contradictory policies; but I think he did really intend to do something for the poor, and especially for the peasants; and that he would have done much more, if he had not preferred the name of Dictator to the very nature of Dictatorship. That is where it is still relevant to remember that, though he is a Prussianist, he is not a Prussian. That is where there is some remaining reality in the fact that he really was a common soldier, that he came of the common people, and that the common people he came of were originally of an old Catholic tradition. He did largely want to show popular sympathy, which is a very different thing from merely wanting popularity. He did, in some departments, really wish to see the weak things of the earth confound the strong, and the small men resist the pressure of plutocracy; as when he broke those chains which are so rightly recognised in the very title of Chain Stores. And if the Dictator did not do enough for his better ideas, and later did much more for his worst ones, the reason is not that he never really had any democratic ideas; nor that it is impossible to have any democratic ideas while wielding a Dictatorship. The reason is quite simply that he is not the Dictator.

Even Prussia the pachyderm, the prehistoric monster of the old grey slime, felt faintly in every fold of its heavy hanging skins and every wrinkle round its little blinking eyes, that the very air of this earth had some-

how changed after the Great War. With the simplicity of such brute beasts, it had only wanted a place in the sun. But it became vaguely aware that it had got into a place in the draught; that the atmosphere around it was troubled and the world had turned cold towards it. This is about as near as a rhinoceros commonly comes to repentance. For it is essential to the understanding of the whole story to remember that Prussia, and even Prussianised Germany, never made so much as a movement towards the mere General Confession, which all the other warring nations made, in some sort of sorrow for the sheer stark tragedy of the War. It did not really have even a reaction towards Pacifism, as did England or America. The Germans were quite impenitent. We were much more sorry for having been right than they ever were for having been wrong. We even mourned much more over our victory than they did over their defeat. Impenitent Imperialism remained the core of a conquered Germany; really ruling the Reich from Berlin through all the troubles; and any Pole or Belgian will tell you that he had quite as much to fear from German Socialists or German Radicals as from those who bore a party badge of being Royalist or reactionary. But even the most Nordic rulers, stupid as they were, had the sense to see that the whole world was changed, even if they were unchanged; and that the time was past when foreign correspondents and international enquirers could be impressed merely by an Emperor shouting about his shining armour and his mailed fist. They could not hope to make the world a world of one idea, as Bismarck had been a man of one idea. For the first time they had to bend their minds to make the best, not now of a happy absence of ideas, but at least of a fortunate confusion of lies. The spirit of barbarism could no longer work through a man like Bismarck, with his cold and automatic monomania; and it had to work through a man like Hitler, with his sentimentalities, his inconsistencies, his idealism gone wrong, his patchy popular sympathies, his scrappy popular science, born of a litter of pamphlets on anything from Anthropology to Abortion, his flavour of being modern, his suggestion that Fascism is the fashion, and (to be fair to him) his real claim to be young enough to have heard of some of the things the nineteenth century neglected, such as the virtues of peasants and the vices of usurers. All this hotchpotch of post-war social ideals, fads or follies, had to be embodied and satisfied in somebody like Hitler; somebody who looked at least a little more modern than a Potsdam drill-sergeant in a spiked helmet. The old despotism happened to be so situated that it must have a demagogue. Even Germany was too distracted to be ruled entirely by routine. Those who realised this did not mind if Germany found it less exciting to be ruled by a Kaiser than by a Dictator. They did not particularly mind, at least for the time being, the demagogue being called the Dictator. But the real relations with the man in the spiked helmet were not

altered. It was not the Dictator who dictated to the drill-sergeant. It was the drill-sergeant who drilled the Dictator.

Adolf Hitler, to complete his portrait, is said to have been a brave soldier in the field, and doubtless lived the hard life of soldiering with firmness, patience and obedience. His drill-sergeant will soon give him his marching orders again.

To The Beach

By F. Keston Clarke

I COULD stay with them as far as Peterboro', said the guard; then I must make my way along to the Derby coach before the train should leave Saxby—or I would be trundled along to the West Midlands. And though the West Midlands are neither sodden nor unkind, I did not want to go there on that Friday night.

So we chatted and dozed, and woke laughing, and drank tea from a Thermos, and dozed again; and through the small hours East Anglia rolled slowly by, field after field dark and silent as sleep. We thought Peterboro' at three in the morning would be one unanimous snore testifying to the health and innocence of the yeomen of England; and even now I am puzzled to think what they do all night in a town that should be the heart of tranquillity. No evil, I hope; but they whistle and shout, and burn great lamps. Factories are lit, and demon engines drag interminable lines of trucks away to dark forgotten villages, screeching and clanking in the night.

Then the town was gone and we were in the black and dead hour, three to four. I said goodbye. They grunted happily: at last they could have half a compartment each. That coach was the first in the train, and the Derby coach was the last. Now I perceived that the three of us had been the one nucleus of society in a universe of dim trembling lights and hideous noise. Cattle-vans, mail-vans, guards' vans were empty boxes rattling into chaos. Endless corridors, gloomier and gloomier. Outside, the long wail of lost winds; inside, the cold chattering of loose windows and the cheerless crashings of unlatched lavatory doors.

After a long time I found one other traveller, an old man asleep with his hands on his chest like an effigy, a departed knight on his way to Paradise by way of Northampton. Then the heaving corridors again, and at last nothing forward but a wild blackness and the noise of worlds crashing into ruins; and my friends had gone and the only other traveller was dead and I was a ghost, forgotten in some eddy of Space where never again would there be silence or light.

Towards four a.m. one begins to feel better. Endless night is ending. At Saxby I found the Derby coach, black as the pit but emitting human voices. Officials waved lanterns and poked between wheels, but could produce no lights. The train pulled out; we sat grumbling in the last hour before dawn; and soon we were at Derby, it was Saturday, and there was a morose youth with tea on a waggon. I found a vast and lofty waiting-room containing two sleeping

sailors, and lay on a hard bench waiting for the day to begin.

That day, I determined, should carry me to the High Peak. The High Peak, you should know, is not a crag but practically a county; it is the vast tumbled rockery that was Nature's brilliant afterthought when she had finished the Yorkshire moors. It lies roughly between Manchester and Sheffield on the north, and, say, Belper and the Potteries on the south. I tell you this not to display my own knowledge, but to redeem yours. You might travel a dozen times from Birmingham to Manchester on the west, or Leicester to Sheffield on the east, hating your journey, and never guess that between those two tracks, beaten grey by industrialism, there lies a country of green pastures and high stone villages where pubs have fires in the bar-rooms on August nights and men drink diligently, sitting two thousand feet above the sea.

I had no business then with Derby; for there, as in Northampton and all those East Midlands, the people are flabby and fatheaded, being great eaters of boiled puddings; but from the same cause they are guileless and polite, and deserve better towns than they have. So I went to Ashbourne, and from there through Dovedale, where water cold as steel wanders between green lawns refreshing to feet hot and tired from the road. Here I saw cows steering themselves easily along narrow paths verged by frightful precipices, and marvelled to see the sagacious beasts more cool and agile than I was, though much less educated. In humility therefore I tramped on through that dale and Manifold Dale where the mountain-railway has been abandoned and the stock sold off, they say, because it showed no profit; and it showed no profit because the owners would run no trains on Sunday or on Saturday evening. Others say it is because one of the directors was pursued and eaten by a thing that lives in the hole they call Thor's Cave. Anyway the little stations are deserted, and long coarse grass grows between the rusty rails. A distressing sight. I hurried to Buxton and drank deeply of the waters; not because they are good for any disease from which I have ever suffered, but because they are handed up from a beautiful sunk fountain of marble, by a beautiful girl. I doubt, indeed, whether Buxton waters cure anything, looking and tasting as they do much like any other water; so different from the hell-brew of Leamington which would cure anything, the spa habit first of all.

What it feels like to stand on top of the Peak itself I cannot tell you because it is preserved by a rich man for a grouse moor; and though I don't mind trespassing I do mind being shot; and from a distance I am rather like a grouse. Nor will I tell you of Mam Tor or Brown Knoll or Axe Edge or the Kinder-scout, because if you have read your Ruskin you know he was delighted with the Dales but didn't give a hoot for the Peaks. He had reason; for one cannot imagine the author of *Sesame and Lilies* feeling at all happy stumbling up Rushup Edge in his topper and tails, or toiling through the Winnats against a south-westerly gale. The Winnats is a desperate pass the like of which you will not find elsewhere in England. There, which you will not find elsewhere in England. There, which you will not find elsewhere in England. There, wind and rain are frantic devils fighting back the traveller from a path that winds uphill all the way.