

Hans Bernd Gisevius is one of the few survivors of the group of Germans who actively plotted to do away with Hitler. In the early days of the conspiracy he was at the center of activities in Berlin. Then he became one of the foreign envoys of the conspirators, and that is how I came to know him in Switzerland.

We met there early in 1943. I was then in charge of the work in Switzerland of the Office of Strategic Services and attached to the American Legation in Bern. Gisevius was ostensibly a German Vice Consul in Zurich. In reality, he belonged to a small circle of men in the German counter-intelligence service, the Abwehr, who, under Admiral Wilhelm Canaris and General Hans Oster, were working against the Nazis. Our first secret conference took place in January of 1943, after I had taken careful soundings about the man I was to meet. Sources I trusted thoroughly had told me in strict confidence of the work he was doing, and that he was the one person in Switzerland who could tell me the inside story of the German underground.

He did that, and much more. As soon as mutual confidence was established Gisevius let me into the secret of the conspiracy, led by General Beck and Carl Friedrich Goerdeler.

Even before I met him Gisevius had completed roughly one-half of his present book. It is interesting to note that he had done this writing before the German defeat was apparent, in fact, when Germany was riding roughshod over Europe. After I had known him a few months he gave me the bulky German manuscript and asked my help in getting it translated, as even in those days he was looking forward to the time when he could make available to the English-reading world the story of what went on behind the scenes of Nazi Germany. Also, he wished

the manuscript to be in safe hands in the event that he did not live to finish it.

Gisevius's philosophy can be summed up in a few words. To him, a victory for Hitler meant the end of Christian civilization, and of Western culture in Europe and possibly in the world. He proposed to do ~~his~~ his bit to prevent it, and felt that in doing so he was only carrying out his duty as a German. Quite rightly, he did not consider that he was working against his country; he felt he was working for it. But he wanted the Allies to hurry, to destroy Hitler before all the foundations on which a better Germany could be built had been ~~destroyed~~^{done's head.}. He wanted to prevent Hitler from carrying on the fight "to the bitter end."

This was not to be, but not because Gisevius and his fellow conspirators lacked courage or the determination to risk everything in the attempt. Fate had ruled that Hitler was to carry on until Germany was in ruins.

It is hard to say whether or not it is better that the plot should have failed. If Hitler had been killed ~~the~~ German resistance would have collapsed and the war would have ended in 1944. But possibly the crimes of the Nazis were so great that nothing short of total destruction could have sufficed, despite the cost ^{to the Allies} and the loss to Germany of a group of men who are sorely needed now in the task of German reconstruction. At least one thing is clear. We have the evidence that there were some Germans who were willing to make the attempt to do away with Hitler and his regime, even though they received no encouragement from Hitler's enemies, and even though it was clear that if their effort was successful it would mean the total military defeat of Germany.

When Gisevius left Switzerland on July 11, 1944, to join in the final phases of the last plot, he took his life in his hands. The Gestapo had been trying to get him for a long while, and when the plot failed I hardly expected to see him again. Through underground channels he finally succeeded in getting word out to us that he was safe and in hiding in Berlin, and after careful preparation we were able to find a way to get through to him false papers, on which he traveled unmolested to the Swiss frontier. Thus he was able to write the last dramatic chapters of his book, and to add another touch of drama to a life already crammed with adventure.

In April, 1946, Gisevius appeared as a witness at the Nurnburg Trials, and during three days on the witness stand confronted Goring and his cohorts with damning evidence to add to the accumulated record of their crimes. In the course of his cross-examination of Gisevius Mr. Justice Jackson described him as "the one representative of democratic forces in Germany to take this stand to tell his story."

It is in this book that he really tells his story. It is one of deep human interest and of historical importance -- the inside story of what went on within Germany among those who plotted against the Nazis.