

Victor Klemperer (1881-1960) was a German Jew who survived the Holocaust because he was married to a non-Jewish German—in other words, he owed his life to his wife, Eva. Almost all the German Jews who were still alive at the end of World War II were from such “mixed marriages.” The majority of these marriages, like Victor and Eva’s, were between Jewish men and German or “Aryan” women. The Nazis exerted enormous pressure on the “Aryan” spouses to divorce their Jewish partners, by making the lives of these non-Jewish Germans hellish as well, but for the most part these marriages endured. If the German spouse in a mixed marriage died or did decide to divorce, the Jew would immediately be placed on the deportation list, which meant death.

Victor Klemperer’s career had been that of a literary journalist and then, beginning in 1920, a professor of Romance languages and literature at Dresden Technical University. He was dismissed from his university post in May 1935 and started to receive a pension that continued until late 1943.

In February 1945, toward the very end of the war, Klemperer realized that his mixed marriage was no longer going to protect him from deportation; some of his fellow Jews in mixed marriages around Dresden had been summoned to appear for labor duty on February 15—duty that would entail deportation, and Klemperer expected to be called very soon as well. Ironically, what saved him, along with other remaining Jews, was the intense and fiery Allied bombing of Dresden that began on the evening of February 13. In the chaos that followed, Klemperer removed the yellow Jew’s star from his clothing, and he and Eva went on the run for three months, after which the war was finally over and they were safe.

Though not particularly well known in his own time, Klemperer is now famous for the diary he kept during the Nazi years, which lasted from 1933 to 1945. This diary was not published even in German until 1995, as Klemperer had never prepared the manuscript for publication, but when it did appear it was a huge success. For Germans it quickly became a key text through which the Third Reich and the murder of Jews are understood. And for all of us, in the words of Martin Chalmers, it “is notable in being a chronicle by a Jew of all twelve years of the Nazi Reich” and “is an essential annotation of the criminal nightmare, which Nazi Germany was...” Below are some choice excerpts from the diary.

Victor Klemperer Bears Witness

(I Will Bear Witness: A Diary of the Nazi Years, 1933-1941, by Victor Klemperer, translated by Martin Chalmers, Modern Library, 1999, pages 11, 13-4, 41-2, 80, 109, 165, 167, 174, 184-5, 233-4, 237, 274, 284, 291-2, 427, 433, 440, 443. I Will Bear Witness: A Diary of the Nazi Years, 1942-1945, by Victor Klemperer, trans. by Martin Chalmers, Modern Library, 2001, pages 28-9, 34, 46, 52, 57-8, 68, 84, 113, 163, 196-7, 235, 295, 304, 371, 473.)

April 3, 1933: Everything I considered un-German, brutality, injustice, hypocrisy, mass suggestion to the point of intoxication, all of it flourishes here.

April 12, 1933: ...we really are entirely at the mercy of the Party dictatorship, of the “Third Reich,” that the Party no longer makes any secret of its absolute power. ...Power, a

tremendous power, is in the hands of the National Socialists. Half a million armed men, all offices and instruments of the state, press and radio, the mood of the inebriated millions. I cannot see where salvation could come from. ...The Spanish Ministry of Education has offered Einstein a professorship at a Spanish university, he has accepted. This is the strangest joke of world history. Germany establishes *limpieza de la sangre* [cleanliness of the blood]—Spain appoints the German Jew.

November 14, 1933: On Sunday I voted “No” in the plebiscite... That was almost a brave deed, because the whole world expects the secrecy of the ballot to be violated... I do not believe that it really was infringed. It was anyway unnecessary for two reasons: (1) It is enough that everyone *believed* in the violation and was therefore afraid; (2) the correctness of the result as announced was already guaranteed, since the Party dominates everything without opposition. I must acknowledge that millions were made drunk by the weeks of boundless mendacious “propaganda for peace,” which was countered by not a single printed or spoken word. ...93 percent vote for Hitler! ...I was laid low, I almost believed the figures and held them to be the truth. And since then we have been told in every possible key: this “election” is recognized abroad, “all of Germany” is seen to be behind Hitler, [the foreign powers] admire Germany’s unity, will be conciliatory toward it, etc., etc. Now all of it makes me drunk, I too am beginning to believe in the power and permanency of Hitler. It’s dreadful. ...If I have no choice but to read and hear something everywhere, it is forced upon me. And if *I* can hardly guard against believing it—how shall millions of naive people guard against it? And if they believe, then they are indeed won by Hitler and the power and the glory are really his.

December 31, 1933: ...I equate National Socialism and Communism: both are materialistic and tyrannical, both disregard and negate the freedom of the spirit and of the individual.

August 4, 1934: Hindenburg dies at nine o’clock on the 2nd of August, one hour later a “law” of the Reich Government of August 1 appears: The offices of the President and the Chancellor are united in Hitler’s person, the army (Wehrmacht) will give its oath to him... The people hardly notice this complete coup d’état, it all takes place in silence, drowned out by hymns to the dead Hindenburg. I would swear that millions upon millions have no idea what a monstrous thing has occurred... But yesterday Hitler’s letter to the Minister of the Reich: He had been entrusted with his offices in a “constitutionally legitimate” fashion, but all true power must come from the people, and so a plebiscite will take place. Since when does he emphasize constitutionality? Since when does one swear in the army and have an “election” afterward?

January 16, 1935: Deepest depression, even deeper than in August at Hindenburg’s death. The 90 percent vote in the Saar is really not only a vote for Germany, but literally for Hitler’s Germany. ...After all there was no lack of information, counterpropaganda, free ballot. Presumably, when we talk about disaffection, we take our pipe dreams for truth and utterly overestimate the actual opposition. In the Reich too 90 percent want the Führer and servitude and the death of scholarship, of thought, of the spirit, of the Jews...

May 16, 1936: The foreign affairs situation is completely confused, but it undoubtedly presents the Hitler government with the greatest opportunities. The huge German army is feared and used by every party: perhaps Germany will do a deal with England, perhaps with Italy, but a deal will certainly be done and to the advantage of the present government. And I certainly no longer believe that it has enemies inside Germany. The majority of the people is content, a small group accepts Hitler as the lesser evil, no one really wants to be rid of him, all see in him the liberator in foreign affairs, fear Russian conditions, as a child fears the bogeyman, believe, insofar as they are not honestly carried away, that it is inopportune, in terms of Realpolitik, to be outraged at such details as the suppression of civil liberties, the persecution of the Jews, the falsification of all scholarly truths, the systematic destruction of all morality. And all are afraid for their livelihood, their life, all are such terrible cowards. (Can I reproach them with it? During my last year in my post I swore an oath to Hitler, I have remained in the country—I am no better than my Aryan fellow creatures.)

May 27, 1936: They [the Hirsches, a German couple] are not well-disposed to the Nazis, but even they repeat the nonsense that is hammered into everyone and is current among Jews as well: But after them [the Nazis] would be the Communists and that would be even worse!

July 5, 1936: Ellen Wengler [a German acquaintance] said recently: “If the regime falls—will things be any different for us? Perhaps a little less false—but otherwise?” The saddest thing about it is that everyone now reckons only with extreme governments: NSDAP [the Nazis] or Communism—as if there were nothing in between.

August 16, 1936: If one day the situation were reversed and the fate of the vanquished lay in my hands, then I would let all the ordinary folk go and even some of the leaders, who might perhaps after all have had honorable intentions and not know what they were doing. But I would have all the intellectuals strung up, and the professors three feet higher than the rest; they would be left hanging from the lampposts for as long as was compatible with hygiene.

August 20, 1936: The powers of Liberalism, i.e., basically of reflective reason—France and England—are too weak to ward off both radicalisms, Bolshevism and National Socialism, by their own efforts; they have to gain the support of one of the two, in order to stand firm against the other, and must at every moment ask themselves, which of the two is the lesser evil. England and France do not at every moment give the same answer to the question, and that, in turn, leads to friction between the two powers. So there is a constant guessing game as to what is going to happen, which alliances are being formed...

August 17, 1937: In the *Stürmer* (which is displayed at every corner) I recently saw a picture: two girls in swimming costumes at a seaside resort. Above it: “Prohibited for Jews,” underneath it: “How nice that it’s just us now!” Then I remembered a long forgotten incident. September 1900 or 1901 in Landsberg. In the lower sixth we were 4 Jews among 16, in the upper sixth 3 among 8 pupils. There was little trace of anti-Semitism among either the teachers or the pupils. More precisely none at all. ...I knew only that a Jew could

become neither a fraternity member as a student nor an officer. ...So on the Day of Atonement—Yom Kippur—the Jews did not attend classes. The next day our comrades told us, laughing and without the least malice (just as the words themselves were also only uttered jokingly by the altogether humane teacher), Kufahl, the mathematician, had said to the reduced class: “Today it’s *just us*.” In my memory these words took on a quite horrible significance: to me it confirms the claim of the NSDAP to express the true opinion of the German people. And I believe ever more strongly that Hitler really does embody the soul of the German people, that he really stands for “Germany” and that he will consequently maintain himself and justifiably maintain himself. Whereby I have not only outwardly lost my Fatherland. And even if the government should change one day: my inner sense of belonging is gone.

September 12, 1937: Everywhere on my way I see the sign “Jews Unwelcome!” and now, during the Fifth Party Rally, hatred of Jews is being whipped up again. The Jews are murdering Spain, the Jews are the criminal people, *all* crimes can be traced back to *the Jew*. And the people are so stupid that they believe everything. ...Certainly, everybody grumbles; but nobody makes a move, and in the end the masses believe everything. The very decent, intelligent and far from innocent Frau Kemlein in Strausberg says to me: ...there is so much starvation and murder in Russia—after all less blood is spilled in this country.” There is no doubt that 99 out of a hundred think like that. And the intelligentsia and the scholars prostitute themselves.

September 20, 1937: In the present situation I see nothing at all on which one could pin hope of a change. Hitler’s speech in Nürnberg about the morally and intellectually inferior Jewish race—no matter how thick my skin has gradually become and how lunatic the accusation (and the assertion that Bolshevism is purely Jewish), I nevertheless find it painful to have to spend the rest of my life here. And I am ever more convinced that Hitler truly speaks for more or less all Germans.

November 25, 1938: ...I had just heard...that the night before the synagogue here had been “spontaneously” burned to the ground and Jewish windows smashed. I do not need to describe the historic events of the following days, the acts of violence, our depression.

December 6, 1938: The frightful hints and fragmentary stories from Buchenwald—pledge of secrecy, and: no one comes back from there a second time, between ten and twenty people die every day anyway—are awful.

December 25, 1938: Yesterday for the first time in the Third Reich the Thought for Christmas in the newspaper was completely dechristianized. Greater German Christmas—the rebirth of light of the German soul, signifying the resurrection of the German Reich. The Jew Jesus and everything relating to the spirit and humanity in general excluded. It has undoubtedly been ordered for *all* newspapers.

January 10, 1939: There is no German or West European Jewish question. Whoever recognizes one, only adopts or confirms the false thesis of the NSDAP and serves its cause. Until 1933 and for at least a good century before that, the German Jews were entirely

German and nothing else. Proof: the thousands upon thousands of half and quarter etc. Jews and of Jewish descent, proof that Jews and Germans lived and worked together without friction in all spheres of life. The anti-Semitism, which was always present, is not at all evidence to the contrary. Because the friction between Jews and Aryans was not half as great as that between Protestants and Catholics, or between employers and employees or between East Prussians...and southern Bavarians or Rhinelanders and Bavarians. The German Jews were part of the German nation, as the French Jews were part of the French nation, etc. They had their place in German life, and were in no way a burden on the whole. Their place was very rarely that of the worker, still less of the agricultural laborer. They were and remain (even if now they no longer wish to remain so) Germans, in the main intellectuals and educated people. ...There is only one solution to the German or West European Jewish question: the defeat of its inventor. What must be treated separately is the matter of the Eastern Jews, which again, however, I do not regard as a specifically Jewish question. Because for a long time those who are too poor or hungry for culture...have been pouring from the East into western countries and forming an underclass there, out of which vital forces crowd upward. Which does no harm to any nation, because race, in the sense of pure blood, is a zoological concept, and a concept that long ago ceased to correspond to any reality... The solution of the Jewish question can only be found in the deliverance from those who have invented it. And the world—because now this really does concern the world—will be forced to act accordingly.

August 22, 1941: Frau Paul...talks in despair about her mother, 89, who is showing signs of senile dementia. "I cannot put her in a hospital, she'll be killed there." There is widespread talk now of the killing of the mentally ill in the asylums.

September 17, 1941: I have had no more news from Änny Klemperer [sister-in-law] for months. Perhaps she took offense at a remark I made. I wrote, I was not very enthusiastic about emigration. I had suffered enough in my youth from financial dependence on family.

September 18, 1941: The "Jewish star," black on yellow cloth, at the center in Hebrew-like lettering "Jew," to be worn on the left breast, large as the palm of a hand, issued to us yesterday for 10 pfennigs, to be worn from tomorrow.

October 25, 1941: Ever more shocking reports about deportations of Jews to Poland. They have to leave almost literally naked and penniless. Thousands from Berlin to Lodz.

November 1, 1941: ...we heard from several sources that a complete ban on all emigration has just been decreed on the German side. ...we must wait here and see what our fate will be.

March 16, 1942: The fear of the Gestapo, 90 percent of all conversations among Jews revolve around the house searches. Everyone knows of new cruelties and robberies. ...In the last few days I heard Auschwitz...mentioned as the most dreadful concentration camp. Work in a mine, death within a few days. ...Buchenwald...is said to be not necessarily and immediately fatal, but "worse than prison." "Twelve hours work [a day] under the SS" ...

Now a *ban on Jews buying flowers* has come out. Not a day without a new decree against Jews. We are in great need of bread, potatoes, and coal.

March 27, 1942: What shakes me in Elbogen's *History of the Jews in Germany*, which I have now plowed through to the end and will make notes on, is the precariousness of my position as a German. Equal rights for Jews not until 1848, restricted once again in the 1850s. Then in the 1870s anti-Semitism already stronger again and, in fact, all of Hitler's theory already developed. I knew very little of all of that—and perhaps did not want to know anything of it. Nevertheless: I *think* German, I *am* German—I did not give it to myself, I cannot tear it out of myself.

April 29, 1942: In the newspaper, summing up the Reichstag session, it was stated once again, that the Führer henceforth has the right, approved by the Reichstag and therefore by the people, not to adhere to articles of law, [and the right to] intervene directly in everything. From that and from the Jewish aria a path leads straight to the methods of the Gestapo.

May 15, 1942: Jews with the star and anyone who lives with them are, with immediate effect, forbidden to keep pets (dogs, cats, birds), it is also forbidden to give the animals away to be looked after. This is the death sentence for Muschel, whom we have had for more than eleven years and to whom Eva is very attached. He is to be taken to the vet...so that he is spared the fright of being fetched and put down together with others. I feel very bitter for Eva's sake. We have so often said to each other: The tomcat's raised tail is our flag, we shall not strike it, we'll keep our heads above water, we'll pull the animal through, and at the victory celebrations Muschel will get a "schnitzel from Kamm's" (the fanciest butcher here). It makes me almost superstitious that the flag is being lowered now. Recently the animal, more than eleven years old now, had been particularly lively and youthful. He was always a support and a comfort to Eva. Her powers of resistance will now be less than before. [Four days later Eva had Muschel put to sleep.]

May 23, 1942: I left at a quarter to five to visit Steinitz...I came back at half past seven. The raiding squad had appeared here [at the Jews' House] at five and departed shortly before my return. First of all, I saw the chaos on the ground floor through the open front door. Friedheim showed me the side of his neck and chin, black and blue from blows, he complained of a kick to his body that struck a hernia scar. Frau Kreidl and Frau Pick had also been beaten. In our rooms I found Eva, who was completely calm. Everything had gone according to the familiar pattern. "You're Aryan? You Jew's whore, why did you marry the Jew? In the Talmud it says: 'To us every non-Jewish woman is a whore'..." She was sent downstairs, where she got a couple of slaps—"stage slaps rather than anything serious," she said, whereas Ida Kreidl, for her part, complained of ringing in her ears. But they repeatedly spat in Eva's face and on her head. In our apartment, and likewise in that of Frau Voss, who like myself arrived after the event, I found exactly the same chaos, the bestial devastation by cruel, drunken apes, which I have often heard described, but the reality of which nevertheless appeared monstrous. Even now we are still sitting in this chaos, which has hardly been cleared at all. Contents of cupboards, drawers, shelves, of the

desk, all over the floor... My manuscripts were hardly out of their folders... The diary manuscript would unquestionably have cost me my life.

June 7, 1942: The bathroom here is served by a gas boiler. One lights a tiny flame. If one then turns on the water, in a moment a whole row of flames lights up explosively and very quickly heats up the water flowing through.—The image has been going through my head all day today. *Every* idea is present in almost every age as a tiny individual flame. The racial idea, anti-Semitism, the Communist idea, the National Socialist one, faith, atheism—every idea. How does it come about, that suddenly *one* of these ideas grips a whole generation and becomes dominant?—If I had read Rosenberg's *Myth* in 1930 [Alfred Rosenberg was one of the principal ideologues of the Nazi Party], when it appeared, I would certainly have judged it to be a tiny flame, the crazy product of an individual, of a small unbalanced group. I would never have believed that the little flame could set anything alight—set anything alight in Germany!

June 23, 1942: I can no longer believe in the completely un-German character of National Socialism; it is homegrown, a malignant growth out of *German* flesh, a strain of cancer, just as there is a *Spanish influenza*.

July 31, 1942: The kind [of German], of whom there are many, who always maintain the Führer does not know what bad things are happening, others are to blame for everything wicked.

November 6, 1942: He [Glaser, a friend] told me about a speech, which a legal big gun, Rothenberger or something, had given in Vienna: At a time when so many of our best were falling in the field every day, we could not "go on keeping the asocial elements in the prisons" here at home. That is: we would murder whoever didn't suit us, Jews above all, but also plenty of Aryans.

January 30, 1943: I borrowed the handcart at the Jewish cemetery from the custodian, Jacobi; he is very well disposed to me, ever since I described his funeral oration for the murdered Arndt as "very dignified." He gives me a little tobacco and makes refined conversation, when I visit his apartment at the cemetery. He told me there will be seven funerals next Wednesday, of which six have to be kept secret. They were brought to Dresden for execution. In the county court building on Müncher Platz, there is an electrically powered guillotine, a head every two minutes; not just Jewish ones; the main killing time is 6 p.m., often as many as twenty-five heads fall one after the other. I unhesitatingly assume that "often" and the number are exaggerations, but even if only half of it is true... Jacobi also maintains that a kind of state of siege has been declared and announced on the radio, and sentence of death by shooting has been placed on every act of insubordination and every act of sabotage of the new labor law.—Strange, and to me inexplicable, how the government's measures combine public intimidating terror with secret brutality. Jew-baiting knows no bounds—but the worst measures against them are concealed from the Aryans. Even people who are close to the Jews are not aware of the petty bullying or the brutal murders. Annemarie [family friend] does not know that we are not allowed to sell any furniture, that everything has been confiscated—she wanted to buy

a bookcase from us. The mayor in Dölzchen [hometown located near Dresden] did not know that I am restricted to the city limits and am forbidden to use public transport. Recently Frau Eger said: "The most terrible thing for me is that people always say: 'But your husband *must* have done something; they don't just kill someone for no reason!'" (I know something even more terrible, that in such a case even Jews say: "He must surely have done something, covered the star or been on the street after eight.") ...The same inner submission.

June 4, 1943: Again and again I observe the comradely, easygoing, often really warm behavior of the male and female workers toward the Jews [who all work together in the factory]; there will always be an informer or traitor somewhere among them. But that does nothing to alter the fact that, as a whole, they are certainly not Jew-haters. Despite that, some of us [Jews] cling to the idea that *all* Germans, including the workers, are, without exception, anti-Semites. An all the more nonsensical thesis, as its advocates are all in mixed marriages.

February 10, 1944: I really have made headway with *Mein Kampf* (the first 250 of 800 pages); it is as interesting as it is vile and depressing—this book was available, and yet this man was made leader and has been allowed to lead for eleven years now! The German upper class can never be forgiven for that.

March 19, 1944: This man [Foreman Hartwig], who is undoubtedly not a Nazi, most certainly believes that Germany is acting in self-defense, is completely in the right, and that the war was forced upon it; most certainly he believes, at least in large part, in the guilt of "world Jewry," etc., etc. The National Socialists may have miscalculated in their conduct of the war, but certainly not in their propaganda. I always have to remind myself of Hitler's words, that he is not making speeches for professors.

October 24, 1944: On Sunday evening Konrad was here for a couple of minutes. He spoke very pessimistically—and there is a great deal of probability behind his assumption and evaluation—about the fate of the Jews fallen into Hitler's hands, those from Poland, Hungary, the Balkans, and those deported to the East from Germany and Western Europe. He believes (to judge by soldiers' reports) that before the retreats everyone was murdered, that we shall see no one again, that six to seven million Jews have been slaughtered (more exactly: shot and gassed). He also considered that the prospects of us, the small Jewish remnant left here in the clutches of the desperate beasts, remaining alive were also very slight—and his judgment is largely shared by Dresden Jewry as a whole.

May 4, 1945: Yesterday they [two German soldiers] had listened to a radio, *everything*, including Berlin, had capitulated, and Hitler was dead. ...[One soldier] declared: If anyone had told me that, even four weeks ago, I would have shot him down—but now I don't believe anything anymore..." They had wanted too much, they had overdone things, there had been atrocities, the way people had been treated in Poland and Russia, inhuman! "But the Führer probably knew nothing about it," the Führer was not to blame; they say that Himmler was in charge of the government. (Still the belief in Hitler, he undoubtedly had a religious effect.)