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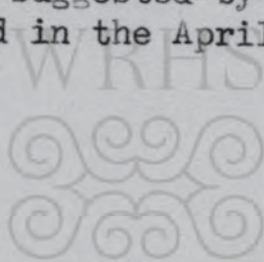
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My favorite assassin, 1943.

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"MY FAVORITE ASSASSIN"

Some thoughts suggested by the remarkable story
which appeared in the April issue of Harper's
magazine.



By
Dr. Abba Hillel Silver

At
The Temple

On
Sunday morning, April 18, 1943

The story, "My Favorite Assassin" concerns two people: one the most outstanding Jew of Germany before its collapse; and the other, the man who killed him. The Author, George W. Herald, who wrote "My Favorite Assassin" in this month's Harper's Magazine, vouches for its authenticity, and as such it is the strangest and profoundest story which this mad and tortured age of ours has produced. It reads like a legend, a religious legend of olden days. It touches the mystic borders of what is deepest and most unpredictable in the spirit of man. In the religious literature of mankind which records the stories of great conversions and reformations, one comes upon such tales. They are stirring and uplifting and humbling.

The Jew who was assassinated was a Foreign Minister of the German Republic in 1922, Walter Rathenau. First a word about him. He belonged to that galaxy of great Jews which Germany produced in the last one hundred years or so, Moses Mendelssohn, Heinrich Heine, Albert Einstein and many others. And Rathenau, had he lived, might have averted many of the tragedies which overtook Germany after his death, the inflation and economic ruin. His program, when he became Foreign Minister of Germany, was built upon reconciliation with the Allies, ~~with~~ closer cooperation with the Soviet Union and the peaceful settlement of war reparations. He believed in reconciliation, democracy and social justice. He might have led Germany, given enough time, along the hard but peaceful road of reconstruction, reparation. But unfortunately the forces of rabid nationalism, and the Junkers overwhelmed him and destroyed him.

The notorious Hugo Stinnes, who was the foremost financial wizards and capitalists of Germany during that historical period didn't like Rathenau. He said of him - "He is Germany's greatest industrial genius in the Technological field." At the time of the first World War, Rathenau was the leading figure in the direction of no less than 86 German and 21 foreign industrial enterprises - electrical and mining industries, mining, railways, chemicals, textiles, etc.

He came by his industrial interests historically.

His father, Emil Rathenau, was a famous industrialist and engineer. He founded the great "Allgemeine Elektrizitäts Gesellschaft", the General Electric Company of Germany. It was he who introduced into Germany the telephone, the incandescent lamp. It was Emil Rathenau, the Father, who laid the foundations for the system of large-scale industrial combines and mass production which became so characteristic of the whole industrial life of Germany.

Walter Rathenau rendered historic service to Germany during the first World War. Germany was not prepared in an economic sense, although it was completely prepared in a military sense for the first World War. It had no adequate supplies of raw materials for a long war. Its economic system was weak. Germany could not have lasted as long as she did with the Allied blockade but for the organized genius of Rathenau which transformed the entire economic and financial system of Germany and organized supplies of raw materials from all parts of Europe to meet the emergency of war.

The London Times writing during the first World War in 1915, said in an editorial: "It is an extraordinary story, this miracle of industry. It is a story which explains the fall of Warsaw and the great Eastern offensive and the impregnable Western line. And when the Falkenhayns, the Mackensens, the Hindenburgs are thought of as great German soldiers, one person must be set beside them, the German business man, Dr. Walter Rathenau."

Dr. Rathenau did not wish the world war. He deprecated it. He deprecated the spirit of aggression and chauvenism in Germany and was responsible for the war. He was pessimistic about its outcome, but like a patriotic German he threw himself into the work of his country and he helped as no man in Germany helped.

Walter Rathenau was more than a great industrialist, a great industrial and financial genius. He was a highly cultured and a most versatile man. He

was a great linguist. He was at home in the culture of Europe. He was a writer of note, a painter, a musician, a philosopher, a student of social problems. He was a man of great intellectual attainments and greater spiritual insight. Though he himself was a tremendously wealthy man, he was a critic of the capitalist system in the industrial set-up in which he found himself. He called attention to the gross injustices. He counselled reorganization, not on the Marxian system, not only of Germany. He advocated a fairer distribution of goods of the world not only to Germany, but to mankind. He believed in peace and disarmament. He was a great advocate of a United States of Europe.

In the troubled days which overtook Germany after the war, during the days of the Weimar Republic, he was called on to help in the rehabilitation of Germany, and in numerous conferences with Allied powers. In 1921 he became Minister of Reconstruction in the Wirth Cabinet. In the following year he became Foreign Minister. No Jew ever occupied such an important position in Germany before. No Jew under the Kaiser in Germany could hold even a commission in the Army. Rathenau became the foremost political leader in Germany, and at a time when Germany was a seething cauldron of passion, of bitter economic strife, of rabid anti-Semitism. Lightning was sure to play about that exalted post, and it did, and finally struck him down.

During the short time he occupied as Foreign Minister he succeeded in negotiating the Wiesbaden agreement for payment of reparations. He also carried through the Rapallo Treaty with the Soviet Government. Both acts were clearly for the benefit of Germany but made him bitter enemies among the Rightists. Those elements, the extreme nationalist groups, resented the reparation to the Allies. And the Yunkers hated Rathenau for having negotiated the peace treaty with Russia. All those who hated communist Russia came to pour out their bitter

denunciation against Russia for having consummated this treaty with Russia.

Some others began to whip up passion and hatred against Rathenau. And of course the Achilles heel of the man, the weakest point in his armor, that point upon which his enemies most quickly concentrated and which they most quickly detected and concentrated upon, was the fact that he was a Jew. Rathenau was only nominally a Jew. He wasn't particularly anxious to be a Jew. He was an assimilationist in Germany like so many others. He was not different from the rest of the Jews of Germany. He out-Germaned the Germans in adoration for Germans, and for the German race. He admired Prussianism extravagantly. In his youth he subscribed to those nonsensical doctrines upon which the Nazis came to concentrate later on. Dr. Rathenau wrote the following -- and when translated it reads like a page out of Mein Kampf:

"The essence of history is the tragedy of the Aryan race. A beautiful people arises and develops in the north. They overflow their borders, conquer the south and absorb Roman culture. Their ethics of courage oppose the Oriental religion, which overwhelms them. And in our day it is endangered by the technical culture of fear, intellect, and shrewdness represented by democracy and capitalism." There you have it. Rathenau regarded himself as exclusively German. He didn't believe that the Jews were a nation or a people. He was opposed to Zionism. Race didn't matter much of course in his eyes -- except the Aryan race to which he wanted to belong. He wasn't a religious Jew. Here and there he would speak of the race of the Jewish people in a vague way....Suggested that the mission of the Jews was to be scattered in the world so that it could serve some kind of purpose..

He himself was a would-be Prussian. He wrote and said: "I do not possess and I do not know of other blood than German -- no other tribe, no other people than the German people. Should I be expelled from my German soil, I would still remain German and nothing would be changed...My ancestors and myself have been nourished

by German earth and German spirit, and we have repaid to our German people everything to the best of our abilities. My father and I never had a thought that was not German and for Germany...The Jews are to my mind a German tribe such as the Saxons, the Bavarians, and the Wends."

Unfortunately it takes two to make such a bargain. As far as the Jewish people was concerned, he advised them to assimilate: "Conscious adaptation of a race," he writes, "to the demands of others is indispensable; adaptation, not in the sense of protective coloration as in Darwin's mimicry, but equalization in the sense of elimination of qualities, which, good or bad, are detestable to their countrymen. The qualities eliminated are to be replaced by others more fit -- In the end they will become not imitation Germans, but Jews of German way and education."

Be it said, to the credit of Dr. Rathenau that he never became converted, although conversion might have helped him in gaining certain position before the world war. He regarded conversion as a contemptible thing. He did not wish to countenance the wrong done to the Jews, so throughout his life there was bitter conflict in his soul, something of self-hatred. He was never quite happy. That state of mind was quite characteristic of many eminent Jewish philosophers and scientists in Germany. Stefan Zweig and Jacob Wasserman, for example were torn by this inward conflict which they could not rectify. He wanted to be a ~~Pr~~ Prussian. But it was as a Jew that he was killed. That anti-Semitism which was to culminate into Nazism was well on the way, and the Jews were being used in his day, in 1921-22 as the scapegoat and the whipping boy. The militarists who had lost the war wanted someone to blame for their military debacle, so they blamed it on the Jews of Germany. The German industrialists and capitalists seeing the rising tide of hatred in Germany to divert the hate needed someone upon whom they could load the responsibility of their failure. And toward whom could they channel all the hatred? Of course there was a Jew ready for such an emergency.

So when the first anti-Semitic literature appeared in Germany the German masses were inflamed against the Jews and since Rathenau, the Jew, was way up at the pinnacle, at the top, that hatred was directed against him. And one day when he was on his way home from his office in a n open car, he was shot at by a group youths and killed. Two of the young men who killed him escaped and later on, when trapped, they committed suicide. One of the men who drove the car, Ernest Tessier, was arrested, tried and sentenced to fifteen years of hard labor. In 1933 when the Nazis came to power they declared the two assassins who committed suicide saints. The memorial tablet which had been erected in honor of Dr. Rathenau was removed by order of the Nazis. Tessier, after serving five years of hard labor was set free, and he disappeared. And the story, "My favorite Assassin" answers the question of "what became of Ernest Tessier. It is a very brief story and can perhaps best be told in the author's own words. It is a strange, amazing, profoundly moving story. (Quote entire story which appeared in April, 1943 issue of Harper's Magazine)

There is the story, friends, a heart-warming story, one that revives one's faith in humanity, one that suggests that all is not lost, even in so dark and brutal a land as Germany has become. An act of forgiveness which brought about an act of redemption. Man can be redeemed, and they ~~xxx~~ wish to be redeemed if given the opportunity. The act of Frau Rathenau will undoubtedly outlive the story of the assassination of her beloved son. But it is one of those great acts to which the spirit of man rises in moments of extreme urgency and tragedy -- an act which shows that man is made in the image of Him. It is like a healing balm in these days when one reads of the mass murder on the part of Nazis, the wholesale slaughter and execution of unleashed brutality, sadism -- it is like a healing balm to read of some lost soul, some lost Nazi soul which reclaimed by some great and noble deed.

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1/ Story concerning 2 people - one ^{the} most famous Jew of J. before to collapse & and - the man who killed him. Author verifies for its authenticity. and as such it is the sharpest and profoundest story which this mad and tortured age has produced. It reads like a legend and touches the border of what is deepest and most unfathomable in the spirit of man. In the rel. liter. of mankind, where the stories of conversions and reformation are common after such tales they are as rare as they are stirring and uplifting.

2/ The Jew who was assassinated ~~is~~ was the Foreign Minister of the Ger. Republic, in 1922. Walther Rathenau. and first a word about him - category - Mundwunder - Herr - Einstein.
② He ~~was~~ Had he lived, had he not been assassinated, he might have averted the tragedies of reoccupation and inflation which fell after J. after his death. His program (a) Reconciliation with Alles (b) closer cooperation with Soviet Union (c) Peaceful settlement & war reparations. He might have led f. along hard but peaceful road of reconstruction - but the force of radical nationalism, and the will to murder - overwhelmed & defeated him.

③ Hugo Stanger: "Is a greatest industrial genius in the Tech. field." at the time of first world war he was the leading figure in the direction of no less 786 fact. & 21 major enterprises - electrical & metal ind. mining railways, chemicals, aviation, textiles etc. Built first electro-chem works & power stations.
His father, Emil R., also born in Berlin, was also a well known industrialist & engineer. He founded the great "Allgemeine Elektrizitäts Gesellschaft" - the "Gen-Electric Corp" - and introduced it into for the telephone, the incandescent lamps etc. He laid the foundation for the system of large-scale industrial combination & mass-production - char. feature of Ger. industry.

④ ^{W.R.'s} ~~His~~ services to Ger. during First World War - second to none. (c)
Unprepared! no adequate supplies of raw materials for long war
econ. system weak - Could not have lasted ^{allied blockade} 4 yrs - but for
org. genius R. - Transformed the entire finan. & econ.
set-up - 1. uses (2.15)

He did not wish the war - deflected it - persuaded the old
to attack - but like a patriot he gave of his energies

⑤ Was more of a great intellect. & financial genius. A highly cultured
& most versatile man - a great linguist at home in the culture
of Europe - a writer, ^{& a philosopher} - a student of social
problems - a man of great intellect, attainments and greater
sp. insights. an aristocrat, the mind & the spirit. ^{Reformer}
U.S. & Europe ^{in the 19th & 20th} ^{the}

⑥ In the troubled days of Weimar Republic - shortly after the
war - he was called in to help in the rehabilitation, the currency
and in the negotiations with the allies. In 1921 he became
Minister of Reconstruction in the Weimar cabinet, & following year
Foreign Minister. No Jew ever occupied such an official
position in Ger - No Jew could hold a commission in the army
in the Kaiser's Ger - And Ger. was a belting cauldron -
lightning played around that pot - & soon struck him down

① negotiated Wiesbaden agreement for payment of Reparations

② Rapallo Treaty with Soviet.

Both these made him bitter enemies among Rightists

① Rebuild military machine. ② Communism - New Deal
Soon indulgent, Stinnes - formed up hated of him
and Comm. - Adolf hate - Jew

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"I do not possess and I do not know of other blood than German -- no other tribe, no other people than the German people. Should I be expelled from my German soil, I would still remain German and nothing would be changed . . . My ancestors and myself have been nourished by German earth and German spirit, and we have repaid to our German people everything to the best of our abilities. My father and I never had a thought that was not German and for Germany . . . The Jews are to my mind a German tribe such as the Saxons, the Bavarians, and the Wends."

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MY FAVORITE ASSASSIN

GEORGE W. HERALD



ORAN newspapers recently celebrated the feat of Adjutant Ernest Tessier, a French Foreign Legion officer, who had captured twenty-four Nazis on the Tunisian front by simply shouting orders in German at them. But the papers did not disclose the hero's real story—one of the most dramatic true stories of our times.

I met Tessier in February, 1940, after I had joined the Legion as a war volunteer. At that epoch he was adjutant-chief in Fort Flatters, a desert *bordj* near the Libyan border. The captain in command of this outpost suffered from speech troubles, so that it was Tessier who practically ran the place. He was a tall, slender man of thirty-nine with a brutal jaw and savage gray eyes. But, oddly enough, he had a voice as soft as that of a priest and he used to behave with an ironical politeness. He spoke both French and German without a trace of an accent—a fact he ascribed to his Swiss origin. Only occasionally he forgot to play his part and started all of a sudden to hurl the lowest invectives at us. Afterward he always seemed to regret these outbursts. We soon began to wonder who he really was.

Many of my comrades were Jewish refugees from Central Europe who had enlisted to fight for France. But as the majority came from bourgeois families, they had some difficulty in adapting themselves to the rude life of legionnaires.

After retreat they used to play bridge under the palm trees, much like vacationists in some tropical pleasure resort. One late afternoon I was absorbed in a game with three of them when suddenly someone behind us shouted:

"Well, well, well! Keep seated, gentlemen! Why should you bother to salute me? After all I am only the adjutant-chief here!"

It was Tessier on a surprise inspection. We jumped to our feet and fell to attention, but he added with a threatening look:

"You four will report to my quarters at nine P.M.!"

We saw ourselves already in the guard-house for eight days, yet when we presented ourselves that evening Tessier showed us into his cool, mosquito-proof cabin, where he had installed a bridge table. He offered us a drink and said:

"You are the first civilized people I've seen in this Sahara hellhole for a long time. It's good to meet you. Come, let's sit down and play!"

We were a little intimidated and decided to let him win in order to keep him in good humor, but we quickly found out that it took no effort to let him win. He played a very resourceful game and beat us easily. After a few rounds, however, he abruptly stopped and said in a grave voice, as if he wanted to confess something:

"I know you fellows think I dislike

you, as most non-coms around here do. But that isn't true. I love all Jews. In my opinion they belong to the finest and most gifted people in the world."

And, to our stupefaction, Tessier began to set forth at length his ideas about Jewish history, art, and literature, revealing a much deeper knowledge of the subject than any of us possessed. That was not all though. When he learned that we had in our group a fellow by the name of Ullmann who before the war had been a noted Paris caricaturist, he assigned him to repaint the walls of the officers' mess in a gay night-club fashion. He paid the costs out of his own pocket and seemed to be very proud of being a patron of the arts. A week later he discovered that little Gerson was a philologist of Oriental languages in private life. Tessier immediately asked Gerson to teach him Hebrew and decided to take a lesson every day; and Gerson had an even bigger surprise when he found out that his pupil was already well versed in Hebrew and merely wanted to perfect himself. The case puzzled us more and more. How on earth had this adventurer, who could swear like a gangster, become an erudite scholar of Judaism?

Then came the night I shall never forget. I had brought an old friend of mine to one of our bridge parties with Tessier. My comrade had just arrived at Fort Flatters, and he introduced himself:

"Légionnaire Rathenau, mon adjudant-chef!"

Thereupon, Tessier jumped up as if he had been stung by a tarantula and exclaimed:

"Rathenau? Are you by any chance a relative of the late German statesman?"

"I was his nephew, sir," my friend answered.

There was a dead silence. No muscle moved in Tessier's face, but I saw him grow pale. After a while he said in a toneless voice:

"Rathenau, I have to tell you something. You stand in front of one of the murderers of your uncle."

"I beg your pardon, sir?" my comrade asked, not trusting his ears.

"I was one of the three men who killed your uncle on June 24, 1922, in the Königsallee in Berlin," Tessier declared in

German: "My real name is Ernst Werner Techow."

We were all looking for seats. Long-forgotten scenes suddenly came to life again before our eyes. I had been a small Berlin schoolboy in 1922 but I clearly remembered that warm June morning when news criers distributed special editions announcing that Walther Rathenau, the Reich Minister of Foreign Affairs, had been killed on the way to his office two hours earlier. Rathenau had been a Jew, the first and the last Jew ever to represent Germany before the world. At the time the whole nation was shocked by the statesman's assassination. Over a million citizens honored him on his last journey down the Unterden Linden. And yet the murder was to become the signal for the rise of Nazism throughout the country!

Two of the assassins, Kern and Fischer, committed suicide when the police trapped them shortly after the crime. To-day there are monuments built in their honor in many German cities. Ernst Werner Techow, however, who then was twenty-one, was surrendered to the authorities by his own relatives. He came from a distinguished magistrate's family; his grandfather had been one of the heroes of the liberal revolution of 1848. Witnesses described him as a "decadent and rather effeminate boy" who had been entirely under Kern's influence. The judges sentenced him to fifteen years in jail.

While all this was going through our minds the adjutant-chief searched in his desk for some document to establish his identity. He finally produced a sheet of paper turned slightly yellow on which a few lines had been written in a fine hand. It was the letter Walther Rathenau's mother, conquering all her desires for revenge, had addressed to Techow's mother a few days after the murder. "In grief unspeakable," she had written, "I give you my hand, you, of all women the most pitiable. Say to your son that in the name and spirit of him he has murdered, I forgive, even as God may forgive, if before an earthly judge he make a full and frank confession of his guilt and before a heavenly one repent. Had he known my son, the noblest man earth bore, he had

rather turned the weapon on himself than on him. May these words give peace to your soul. Mathilde Rathenau."

At the time of the trial these pathetic lines had been read in open court. The public had wondered what effect they would have on the boy. But only now, after eighteen years, as we met him a mature man cast adrift in the world like ourselves, Techow at last told his story. He had been released from jail in 1927 on account of his good behavior and had at once enlisted in the Foreign Legion. Here he had made a rapid career, serving in Morocco, Syria, Indo-China. In 1934 he had been naturalized by the French Government and decorated with the Médaille Militaire.

"But you see, Rathenau," he explained now, "my most precious possession is still that letter. It opened a new world to me. In prison I began to read the works of your uncle, one after the other. Later, in the Legion, I continued to study Jewish problems in my spare time. I learned Hebrew in Syria. I discovered that the Nazis had falsified all the facts about the Jews in order to get a pretext for committing excesses. I know how strong their barbarian impulses are, as I too was once obsessed by them. But for eighteen years now my whole life has been a constant struggle to suppress the evil forces in my soul. Just as Frau Rathenau conquered herself when she wrote that letter of pardon, I have tried to master myself. I only wished I would get an opportunity to right the wrong I've done!"

The adjutant-chief stopped. In the light of the candle his features seemed to have lost their brutality. He suddenly looked old and tired. There was not much left for us to say. Rathenau silently squeezed the hand of his uncle's murderer, and we went back to our tents.

After the Armistice of 1940 we returned with Tessier to Sidi-Bel-Abbes, the Foreign Legion headquarters. All officers and men of German origin were now free to break their contract with the Legion and to return to the Reich. Seventy per cent chose to do so, many of them people who owed everything to France. Tessier, however, declined Hitler's offer and quit the service.

In February, 1941, I met him again in Marseilles. He was dressed like a dock worker and invited me into a cheap harbor *bistro*. His clothes were obviously a disguise. I had already heard that he acted here as an observer for a power at war against Germany. But all that he asked me was:

"Don't you know any Jews I could help to get out of here? You see, I can procure exit visas, Casablanca permits, and so forth. My specialty is to bring people across the border to Spain."

"Well, I know quite a few people who would be interested," I answered. "But I suppose it is a question of money."

"Don't let that bother you," he replied. "To be sure, those who are rich will have to pay a reasonable fee. But for every rich man I sponsor there are three penniless I help to escape for nothing."

My inquiries established that by that time Techow had already saved more than seven hundred persons. He was known in Marseilles refugee circles as the "one-man relief committee." Wherever his name was mentioned it was in a tone of gratitude.

Thus, Frau Rathenau's pardon had at last borne its fruits. The first German to murder a Jew because of his race had become the first one to redeem his crime. I hope he told his story to the twenty-four Nazis he took prisoner at Medjeb-el-Bab!

Never as convenient. Hope for the man Roe!

① Redeemed from their sufferings

② "Masked" himself.

③ Right - wrong -

Help doing Nazis
" save victims, N."