

MASTER - INDEX (P - Scheme)

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3. Form and Contents: The architect John GREIFENHAGEN owned a house at the Kurfürstendamm, BERLIN. During the night of the 10th November shops in the house were demolished and plundered. G. went to DRESDEN to stay with an Aryan friend who had invited him, this 'friend', however, betrayed him and he was arrested and kept in prison until his emigration plans materialised.
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Some of my experiences in Nazi-Germany following the program
of November 1938.

The program of 9th to 10th November 1938 or as the Germans now call it euphemistically and bashfully 'the Crystal Night' had started but I did not know of this, I was at home and went to bed with the same feeling as before. Not that I was lulled into an optimistic condition. I had stretched out my feelers to this country and had been visiting England and especially London in January and February 1938 with the intention to get the permission to work as an independant architect in this country. But negotiations were protracting although the late Otto Schiff to whom I had the best recommendations exerted himself on behalf of mine.

Nevertheless, I slept well and had no presentiment of what happened during this night. Early in the morning the housekeeper of one of our houses which was situated in a prominent position of Kurfuerstendamm in Berlin W called by phone and told me in his true Berlin slang that I should come and have a look at the destructions done in the early morning between 5 and 6 o'clock. When I followed his call at about 9 a.m. I had heard in the meantime what was going on in the streets. Coming to our house I saw that the 3 Jewish shops had their windows shattered to pieces and the displays robbed. How ingenious of Goebbels to order some months ago that all Jewish shops should have the names of their owners written on the window-panes. This preparation made it easy for the gangs. The housekeeper, an old socialist, who was in our service for 25 years told me the following: 'I awoke in the night in consequence of a terrible noise and went about to see what was happening. When I came to the front I saw some men armed with iron bars who pushed in and broke the costly plate-glass windows of some shops. I approached and asked them what they were doing there. They answered that was not my business and I should be off quickly, otherwise something would happen to me. Thereupon I went straight to the Police and saw there the commanding officer. When I told him of the occurrences he said the Police cannot do anything in this matter. Thereupon I went away.'

I personally went into an outfitter's shop where the 3 female assistants received me weeping. Then I went into another shop where the manageress warned me to leave at once because a crowd had gathered in front of the house ready to storm the shops and rob them. I looked at the street. In the first row were the typical criminals of the SA, in mufti of course, waiting for a signal to storm all Jewish shops, to throw out all the articles and to rob what they could. Behind the first row there were standing well dressed citizens who wanted to participate in the robbery. The manageress showed me out by a side-door and seeing that I could do nothing to help I went away. Later the housekeeper told me the other incidents of this day. After the crowd had robbed the 3 Jewish shops completely they went up the staircase to the offices and flats. In the first floor they destroyed the windows of a Jewish tailor and threw out all his coats and suits, finished or not finished, and all the textiles. The marauding and plundering went on for a while and most of the spoil was grabbed by the good citizens. Then the crowd went up the staircase to look for other Jewish offices and flats to be robbed. About 200 people were standing on the staircase when a door in the second floor opened where the offices of true blue 'Arians' were situated. One of these Arians, a lawyer, accosted the crowd: 'Do you believe our beloved Leader will think it appropriate that you want to destroy all what is in the house?' Whereupon some of the crowd replied in a threatening tone: 'Disappear at once or something will happen to you!' He disappeared. In the meantime one of the tenants in the first floor, an engineer who in his office was working on secret plans for the War Ministry sent an urgent call to this Ministry that valuable plans would be lost if and when the house would be damaged by fire or other incidents. The Ministry induced the Nazi Party to send some SS-men who evacuated the crowd and set up a kind of sentry at the entrance of the house. With this comparatively reasonable arrangement the incident was finished.

When I came home from Kurfuerstendamm I heard of arrests and hunting of Jewish looking passengers. I deliberated with my wife if I should stay at home or go into hiding. We resolved that I should stay at the home of a friend of ours, noblewoman and arian, who was a gifted paintress. She was at once prepared to accommodate me. On the evening of 10th of November after Goebbels had stopped by Radio the program and the fury of the German people I rode by taxi to our friend. On the way I saw some people destroying window-panes in spite of the revoking of Goebbels. I slept one night in the home of our friend. But as she was living in a house of flats I was not sure that she would not incur inconveniences if not

worse things. So the next day I decided to leave Berlin for some days. Somebody had advised me to get to Weimar where I formerly interrupted often my journeys to the South to visit the places of the greatest German poets. My advisor and I did not think of the neighbourhood of the ill-famed camp of Buchenwald. I went to Weimar and put up at the Hotel Kronprinz where I was well treated apparently because the people there did not think me a Jew. Rather close to the Hotel Kronprinz was the newly rebuilt Hotel of the Nazi Party where was much traffic and noise. Apparently the Nazis celebrated the victory over the Jews. Moreover, on my walks there I saw too many black and brown Nazis swaggering round the places of Goethe, Schiller and Liszt. I was disgusted and fed up with the fuss of these people. Besides this I had the feeling that an arrest would irrevocably lead me to the ominous Camp of Buchenwald. After two days in Weimar I decided to travel to Dresden, a city I knew very well and which was always attractive to me. I had there many friends, arian and not arian. When I was waiting for the train on the platform in Weimar I had a horrid aspect which mad me thanking that I had resolved to leave Weimar. Hundreds of Jews were unloaded from a train standing on another line of rails. Like cattle they were driven by police armed with carbines, and this not too gently. All destined for the Buchenwald camp. I looked down on these unlucky fellow-sufferers and did not say any word although I wanted to cry to the Nazi-Police the real criminals are those who arrest innocent people only because they are Jews. While the Jews were driven to vans to take them to Buchenwald, 3 persons, two men and a woman standing near to me, looked at this spectacle, obviously with pleasure. Then I heard the woman say in a Thuringian dialect: "Weapons had been found with them. So they will rejoice the 'Buchenwaeldche'." The Goebbels' lie had apparently found an echo in the minds of many people.

I went to Dresden and put up at the famous Hotel Bellevue situated directly at the river Elbe. The hotel was full of black and brown uniforms. When I went to dinner or morning-breakfast next to nothing than Nazis in uniform. This sight made me sick especially because the Nazis behaved in a provoking manner. The next day I made a walk to the 'Weisser Hirsch' where I took my lunch because I was fed up to see nearly only Nazi-uniforms. The personnel of the hotel was quite correct although they saw me without any distinguished mark of Nazi sympathy. But I had the dumb feeling that something could happen to me any moment. Therefore, I wanted to see some friends, mostly Jewish but I did not succeed to see them. When I asked which time I could do this I got an evasive answer.

So I concluded that all have been arrested. On my walk I saw the blackened ruins of the Great Synagogue. Already in Berlin I had heard and read of the burning-down of most Synagogues in Germany. Firemen and workers were just about to pull down the remains of the Synagogue and the site was nearly levelled. On the windows of many shops there were fixed printed placards with the inscription 'Judah is conjointly responsible'. Later I went to an 'arian' friend. He said: 'Why did you go into this Nazi hotel? Why not coming to me and stay here as long as this spell of terror has not gone?' So after having spent 2 days in the Hotel Bellevue I moved to my friend. Here I thought to be in hiding but it turned out to be worse than in the hotel or even in my Berlin home. This friend was in financial difficulties and his wife, a person of dubious character, as I later had occasion to state, persuaded her husband to be treacherous. I was there one night, the next day was what the Protestants call 'Penitentiary Day'. My friend and I made a walk to the 'Grosser Garten' and when we arrived home - he came and told me that 2 Gestapomen, one a relative of his wife, had come to take me to the Gestapo because I had fled from Berlin to evade possible arrest. My friend told me the improbable fib that one of these men had seen me and at once realized that I was a Jew. The tale about me was probably betrayed and inspired by the wife of my friend, and being in straits he ~~had~~ and his wife thought they could get a lot of money from me in case I would be spared the arrest. So my friend fell into line. It was an outspoken conspiracy. I did not fall into this trap to pay for my liberation. This was the greatest disappointment I had in my life. 'Deutsche Treue!' The Gestapo-men took me to the Headquarters where a young man -- SS, of course -- abused me and at last sent me to eh Mathilden prison. On the way I had a talk with the Nazi who escorted me. I asked him what I was arrested for? In civilized countries there is a law protecting all people not accused of a crime from arbitrary arrest. The Nazi shrugged his shoulders and said nothing. In the prison I was assigned to a 'Justizhelferwachtmeister', a former N.C.O. who was very harsh as he felt it his duty with prisoners but au fond he had a little bit of sympathy with people who were no criminals. At first I should have solitary confinement but when I told him I would get mad there he put me in a cell with 2 other Jews of Dresden. One was a Jewish butcher and 6 or 7 years my senior. He was dismissed 3 days later because being not quite sound and ready to emigrate at once. The other was a student of the Technical High School,

son of a Dresden physician. He studied electrical engineering and was a very gifted young man who held me lectures for what I reciprocated with lectures about architecture. One day I had an idea. The toilet paper was very thick more like cardboard than paper. A piece of chalk was lying about. So I drew playing cards to play with them as a pastime. The fare was not too bad but small even for an old man like me (at that time 59). Every second day 2 Gestapomen appeared. We had to stand to attention. One of them asked everybody each time: 'How old?' And then: 'Do you emigrate?' The first question was easy to be answered. As to the other question I was fortunately able to give the reply: 'Yes, all is prepared for my emigration.' This was ~~max~~ as follows: I had an English son-in-law, at that time engaged to my elder daughter. He flew over to Germany when he heard of the Jew-baiting and from Berlin phoned to a friend in London, a clergyman of the High Church, to go at once to an English aunt of my wife picturing all what has happened and induce her to give a guarantee for my wife and myself. I had known this fact by a lawyer of Dresden, doubtless a pure Arian, who at the suggestion of my son-in-law visited me in the prison and told me this. The aunt thus gave the guarantee. After a fortnight I was ordered to have a shave and on the same day I was released.

Back in Berlin it took, however, a long time till I had together all what was necessary for my emigration because the German seized my passport. I could only get a 'J-stamped' passport if I paid the wellknown tax, called euphemistically 'Emigration duty'. This extortion at the end of being a German was worthy of the lawlessness in Germany. At last we got the permission to emigrate on the last day of March 1939. In the beginning of April there was another incident with the Nazis concerning my wife. She got a summons to the Gestapo at Hegelplatz, near the University, where men like Humboldt, Mommsen, Virchow, Dilthey held their lectures. This branch of the Gestapo handled all defraudations of money etc. by Jews. A letter arrived before saying why she has given the price of a sale of a house as low as she did whereas in her tax declaration the price inserted was essentially higher. They asked where the difference had remained. For me it was an easy matter to be cleared up. But my wife was not up to date in these matters which usually I executed and settled. However, after my experiences I did not like to go to the Gestapo. So I asked my former secretary of long years standing to accompany my wife and instructed her tell the official that the amounts

declared in the 'Judenvermoegensabgabe' in summer 1938 had unfortunately not been realized. The official was not very efficient, he ought to know what was going on with Jewish property. He asked for an answer in writing which he never received as we meddle of April left Germany to settle in this country. This was the last incident in Germany. A funny incident as I might call it was when we were going on board of the American Liner. Before passing the line we had to show our luggage and passports. The official asked for my name to compare it with my passport. I said: 'Johann Greifenhagen'. He replied: 'Your name is as in the passport "Johann Israel Greifenhagen"'. He said it with a twinkle in his eyes. Whereupon I answered: 'Israel is a nice name in itself but it is not my name and only forced upon me. When I pass the line there my name is again "Johann Greifenhagen". He smiled and gave me back my passport.

On the American liner we felt in freedom and were treated as human beings and not as pariahs subjected to the law of the jungle.

(gez.) John Greifenhagen.