

1946

C H A P T E R 42
PUNISHMENT WITH LENIENCY.

How did Germany come out of this war? The cities were destroyed beyond imagination. By the end of the hostilities the Germans had received 315 tons of explosives in retaliation for every ton of aerial bombs they had dropped on England. All bigger German cities were converted into heaps of rubble, some up to 80%. It was estimated that over 10 million Germans had lost their lives in that war. As to territory, about one fourth went to Poland and of the rest one third became East Germany with a communistic regime and two thirds became West-Germany. The Germans of the Polish part were expelled each with only a small bundle under their arms. The same happened to the Germans in Tchechoslovakia, from where they fled for their lives to West-Germany, many also to Austria.

Austria was considered a "liberated" rather than defeated country, a great injustice and falsification of history, and was treated with leniency by the Western Allies, who did everything in their power to hasten her recovery. The Soviet Union, on the other hand, after initial requisitions of livestock and

industrial equipment in Austria, made far-reaching demands for reparations from former German assets, thus seriously hampering Austria's economic reconstruction. Under these circumstances, the Austrian government was eagerly awaiting the conclusion of a final peace settlement and the withdrawal of the occupation forces. The division of Austria and Vienna into four occupation zones was completed. Karl Renner was unanimously elected President of the Republic by the National Assembly. The occupying powers officially recognized the Austrian Republic within its 1937 frontiers. This was one of the major injustices in the aftermath of the war. Austria was not a liberated country. Austria received the Germans with open arms, when they marched in, and participated with enormous enthusiasm during the "Anschluss" and activities during the war, contributing great military contingents to the German army. And what about the crimes, committed on the Jews by Germans and Austrians alike? 6 million Jews were put to death. Except for the few Germans put to death in Nuremberg, not a single of the German judges had felled a death sentence on the thousands of Germans brought to trial there. Most of the accused went free and only a small percentage received prison sentences. And still worse in Austria. Almost all of the accused went free, in spite of documented proof of their crimes. Some German leaders later recognized in speeches the terrible guilt and shame, brought upon the German name by the criminals, and Germany paid and is still paying sums of indemnity to those Jews, who had survived concentration camps, who had fled Germany and had lost property, also great sums of indemnity to the state of Israel, billions of dollars, in the form of material.

Still, nothing could be paid for loss of life, for those who had been murdered in the most inhuman and cruel way in concentration camps like Dachau, Bergen-Belsen, Auschwitz, Mauthausen, Majdanek, and many others, and later in gas chambers, where the process was greatly accelerated and the dead finally cremated. This is long common knowledge, put before our eyes in movie pictures, horror films, but true in every detail. There was no real punishment done to the thousands of German criminals, nor to the Austrian criminals.

But there were exceptions, as I had already mentioned before. It is true that great many Germans and also Austrians disapproved of the cruelties committed by the Nazis, but could not do anything about it. Many risked their lives by helping Jews, who were called U-boats, hiding them for years in darkened rooms in their houses and in cellars, providing them with food. One of them was Erika Weinzierl and I have mentioned her before. She was honored after the war by the government of Israel, and received a medal, on which were engraved the words: "Wer ein einziges Menschenleben rettet, rettet die ganze Welt", an old Hebrew proverb, which means: "He who saves one human life saves the whole world". Besides Erika Weinzierl the following Austrians received this medal: Ewald and Danuta Kleisinger, Julius Madritsch, Julius Natali, Johann Pscheidt, Anton Schmid, and Raimund Titsch. It should be mentioned here that many inmates of concentration camps survived, when the Russians advanced from the East and the Allies from the West. The Germans had emptied some of the camps, driving the people with them on their retreat, killing most of them by shooting them or by putting them in large barns and putting these barns on fire, shoot-

ing those who tried to escape, with their machine guns. One of Hedy's cousins, Erich Forster, was successful in getting out of such a burning barn, but received a shot wound in his pelvis. Other concentration camps were overrun by the Russians and the Americans and great many inmates were found alive and freed. The Germans did also some other horrendous things. They had in some cases not enough time to clear^a concentration camp, were unable to take the inmates along. They had the grand idea to poison the inmates. That happened to one of Hedy's cousins, Emmy Meisl and her husband Walter. They were given on the last day very good fresh bread. We have the story from their daughter René, who was with her parents in a concentration camp. As a good child, she did not eat the bread, wanted her parents to have her portion too, and gave it to them. They ate it and since it was poisoned, died shortly afterwards and René stayed alive. I know of more such stories, but that is enough.