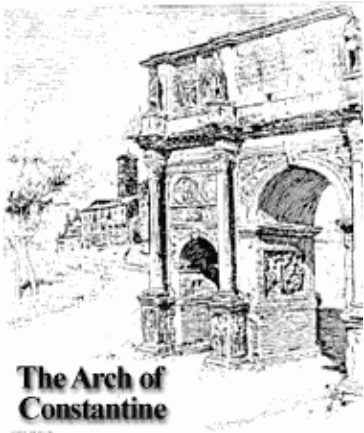




## Chapter 6

### A New Alaric From the North

#### Adolph Hitler



German Minister Franz von Papen, who came to see Mussolini in 1933, later wrote of the Italian leader, *I found the Italian dictator a man of very different calibre to Hitler. Short in stature, but with an air of great authority, his massive head conveyed an impression of great strength of character. He handled people like a man who was accustomed to having his orders obeyed, but displayed immense charm and did not give the impression of a revolutionary. Hitler always had a slight air of uncertainty, whereas Mussolini was calm, dignified, and appeared the complete master of whatever subject was being discussed. I felt he would be a good influence on Hitler, he was much more of a statesman and reminded one of a diplomat of the old school rather than a dictator.*

The two leaders met for the first time in Venice on June 14, 1934, after careful diplomatic preparation and two postponements. Prior to this meeting, Mussolini had tried and was rebuffed in his proposals for a four-power consortium with England, France and Germany. As a result, he was not ready to commit himself and Italy to Germany's new National Socialist government. Hitler represented an unknown quality and Mussolini viewed the resurgence of German military power with misgiving. In the two days in Venice, Hitler and Mussolini spend two to three hours a day talking in German without aides or interpreters. Hitler left Venice on June 16. Those close to the two delegations described the talks as being more of a collision rather a meeting of mutual interests. They quote Mussolini as saying Hitler talked too much and what he had to say was disquieting and repugnant. At this point in his career Mussolini deplored the fact that, in his view, there was not a single real statesman in the government of England. The two European leaders would not meet again until 1937, in Berlin.

Hitler made much of the importance to Germany of the plight of three million Germans who lived in the Sudetenland of Czechoslovakia. In this matter Mussolini advised the British to return this territory to Germany as Czechoslovakia was only the creature of Versailles and that the matter was not important enough or worthy enough to risk going to war. He also advised that they should approve the plebiscite Hitler wanted for this land and people. Again, Britain refused to agree to this proposed plebiscite and, so, the die was cast. Hitler moved into the Sudetenland in March of 1939 and set the stage for another Great War after only twenty years of European political adjustments.

He knew that certain people in the West wanted and needed a war, and that in Adolph Hitler, there existed a prepared and anxious contestant in the political problems then facing Europe and the Far East. Given the horrific economic conditions then existing in most capitals of the world due to the protracted and unprecedented Great Depression, an all out war was not only inevitable, but imminent and desired. It was the emergence of the legitimization of the newly born Zionist movement by the English parliamentarian, Lord Balfour with the passage of the Balfour Declaration which placed, on the European scene, another antagonist at this critical time in European and world history. These European disputes had been simmering since the Treaty of Versailles and were now no longer capable of being placated or ignored. Where was Italy to go in this scheme of things? To remain neutral, while others prepared for war, seemed to Mussolini to be a dangerous stop-gap measure. Also Italy was too important to both the Western powers and to Germany, its modern navy controlled the Mediterranean waters and its airforce, one of the world's best at this period of history, the skies.

The only real enemies Mussolini's Fascist movement had faced since 1922 were the Russian Bolsheviks, secret societies and the Internationalists of the world.