

Berlin Was Not Birmingham

FAILURE OF A MISSION: Berlin 1937-1939. By Sir Neville Henderson. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. 1940. 334 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by LINDSAY ROGERS

PROFESSIONAL diplomats are thought of as forming a reticent, even secretive, caste. Ordinarily their "revelations" do not come until the persons they mention are comfortably dead and the events they record are no longer contemporary history. Sir Neville Henderson breaks with this tradition and the world will applaud. He does so, he says, because on a cold morning when he was waiting at Grantham for a London train (and that can be a cold experience) the station master invited him "into his office where there was a fire." The train was late but the only conversation reported is the remark of the station master that "he and people like him knew nothing of the facts" of why England had gone to war. This is strange, because there is much evidence that the station master "and people like him" forced the British government to declare war on Hitlerism.

One of Sir Neville's recent predecessors as British ambassador in Germany published an account of his mission, but for another reason. Lord d'Abernon was not of *la carrière*. He was drafted for the post because, during the early years of the Weimar Republic, economic questions were to the fore and in respect of these he had special competence. The three volumes of the diary of "An Ambassador of Peace" (1920-1926) appeared so promptly because of his belief that "the more rapidly follies and misdeeds become known the less the temptation to commit them." Lord d'Abernon was philosophical and quotable. Sir Neville Henderson is severely factual. He gives a straightforward account of his mission and its failure and enlivens it by sketches of the leading Nazis.

Goering is the only one in whom viciousness does not predominate. Sir Neville was able to see Hitler only on official occasions and usually their discussions were heated. On the basis of what he observed and what he heard from men in the Führer's entourage or on the fringes of it, the Ambassador has pieced together a rather convincing sketch of a neurotic gambler who has been intoxicated by the magnitude of his successes, and who will doubtless be a case study in many monographs. There is an old story of a child asking his professorial father what God did after he created the world. The answer was that He had



The principals of Mr. Henderson's narrative, Goebbels, Ribbentrop, and Mr. Hitler himself, make peace with Moscow and discover a new tune.

to sit for His portrait to be painted by the metaphysicians. Hitler will have many portraits painted by the psychologists and psychiatrists, and for their accuracy Hitler's behavior before, at, and after Munich will be of great importance. On this Sir Neville Henderson is an authority.

The British Ambassador was no lamb among the lions. When he left his Buenos Aires post to go to England en route to Berlin he took along two copies of "Mein Kampf"—one the unexpurgated edition. He knew the Nazi blueprints for dominion. He was already aware of the earlier of the long series of broken promises. He knew that the sword was throwing its shadow. His reports, which he cites, show a realization of the kind of man Hitler was, of the machine which he had built and which had to keep moving to prevent it from toppling over. Rarely is there any suggestion of whether Sir Neville advised his government to have a different attitude. Loyally he followed instructions. Properly he endeavored to understand the regime and deal with it. There are, indeed, occasional intimations of myopia in respect of certain phases of that regime. He was not horrified by

internal excesses. He wanted to see the "good" in dictatorships: Hitler would have been "a great German if he had known when and where to stop, even for instance after Munich and the Nuremberg decrees for the Jews." Mr. Chamberlain, in journeying to Munich, apparently thought that he could transact business as he had done with elderly solicitors in Birmingham: after an interval of bluff, reasonable people must reach an agreement and Mr. Chamberlain was certainly willing to be reasonable.

Sir Neville knew that they were dealing with gangsters, but never suggests that he did not see eye to eye with his Government's policy. His professions of optimism as of different dates must have been the result of keeping his courage up. Occasionally he confesses to doubts. He remarks rather sententiously that "history will be the final judge of the Prime Minister's airplane journey" carrying an umbrella rather than a sword. He expects it to be argued in the future "that since war between the Western democracies and dynamic Nazi Germany was inevitable it would have been wiser to accept the chal-

(Continued on page 10)



From the jacket of "Kings Row"

The Spice of Mid-West Life

KINGS ROW. By Henry Bellamann.
New York: Simon & Schuster. 1940.
674 pp. \$2.75.

Reviewed by STERLING NORTH

"A REALIST," says one of Henry Bellamann's oracular characters, "is a man who is willfully blind. Or—what is just as lamentable — a man whose senses function only on a low grade of perception."

Unfortunately Dr. Tower (the prophet by whom our author swears) thoughtlessly compromises his literary criticism by murdering his wife so that he may have incestuous relations with his daughter, whom he kills in turn, romantically climaxing the act with well-deserved suicide. Undeterred by what would seem the perfect answer to the Great Romantic Tradition, Mr. Bellamann proceeds on Dr. Tower's theories of good writing for another six hundred pages. And to give the devil his due no great romantic writer since Ben Hecht has so vividly described a continuous season of mating. "Kings Row" is the story of two decades in a Midwestern town of four or five thousand where the Jazz age evidently began in the 1890's. Critics of modern morals who swear that the decline of virtue began with the closed automobile obviously never owned a rubber-tired buggy.

The reviewer struggled to maturity in a town boasting twenty-six saloons and five churches—a model of sanctity and decorum compared to the hell-hole Mr. Bellamann must have known—a community literally overrun with modest young things who throughout the book habitually say "yes" before they say "hello." Mr. Bellamann has other interests (when he can keep his mind on them) including music, psychiatry, and the real estate business. The central character, Parris Mitchell, becomes a psychiatrist during the course of the book which furnishes the author an excellent device for examining the dark

motivations of all the other characters.

American fiction has recognized the convention of the Caldwell-Faulkner South, the incestuous Kentucky mountains, and off-side desire under the New England elms. But until recently the Middlewest has been less interested in sex. Mr. Bellamann, however, introduces into his story three fathers who fall in love with their daughters, a surgeon whose only form of infidelity is practised with the scalpel, a hangman who goes about lusting for new throats to throttle, a woman who stands in the willows and moos, the usual village homo-sexual (a trifle too passionately described), two village idiots whose love seems to be for the soil, and a rich assortment of frustrated daughters, wives, and mothers. Just for a dash of the unusual, however, he adds one or two normal and intelligent human beings. Parris, his friend Drake, and Drake's devoted wife Randy are as wholesome as applejack. The old lawyer, the sentimental newspaper editor, and the Catholic priest could have stepped right out of a romanticization by Bellamy Partridge.

Critical readers may ask how this picture of mid-Western life squares with Frederick J. Turner's theory that the mid-Western frontier was the liberal force which shaped American democracy. Both Turner and Bellamann have hit upon essential truths.

One of the most fortunate incidents in the history of the Westward migration was the meeting and blending of the New Englanders and northern European immigrants (who swept into the Middle West by way of the Erie Canal and the Great Lakes) with the traders, frontiersmen, and scattering of slave holders who floated down the Ohio. By 1890, however, many a mid-Western town was already a stagnant backwater breeding the sort of interesting slime which Henry Bellamann puts under his powerful microscope. The rich were already too rich, the

poor too poor. The creedless frontier had developed a spate of bitter little creeds. A good deal of philandering, incest, and wife beating was tolerated or even quietly encouraged. And anything short of an interest in poetry or atheism could be forgiven in the son of the village banker.

Your Literary I. Q.

By Howard Collins

ENTER, THE VILLAIN!

Briefly described below are ten of the most unpleasant personages that ever stalked through the pages of literature. How many of them do you recognize? Allow 5 points for each one you can call by name, and another 5 points if you can name the book in which he appeared and its author. A score of 70 is par, 80 is good, 90 or better is excellent. Answers are on page 20.

1. Sherlock Holmes termed this scholarly mathematician the Napoleon of crime.
2. This pirate engineered an unsuccessful mutiny on the good ship *Hispaniola*.
3. This clammy-handed lawyer plotted the financial ruin of his employer in order to marry his daughter.
4. A drunken, brutal slave driver.
5. This celebrated highwayman provided his victims with an iron bed to sleep on and took pains to see that they fitted it.
6. A villainous old Jew, he ran a school for crime in London.
7. By means of a stolen handkerchief, he stirred a husband's jealousy to the point of murder.
8. He caused plenty of trouble when he moved from Transylvania to England for a change of diet.
9. Home-brew changed this respectable physician into a deformed and demented brute.
10. This Italian nobleman proved to be anything but noble when he conspired to defraud a woman of her fortune and her identity.