

# Europe's Tragedy in Seven Acts

**SEVEN MYSTERIES OF EUROPE.**  
By Jules Romain. New York: Alfred  
A. Knopf. 1940. 253 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by  
WILLIAM HENRY CHAMBERLIN

**M**ROMAINS is internationally known as one of the leading novelists of modern France. It is only from his present book that one learns that he was privately taking a hand in international politics, going on confidential unofficial missions for the French Government and, sometimes on his own account, offering advice to the Quai D'Orsay and associating with Otto Abetz, one of the most persuasive of Nazi "goodwill ambassadors" in France before the outbreak of hostilities. Romain still regards Abetz as "a man of goodwill;" others may be more sceptical.

And Romain the novelist, the keen psychological observer makes a more favorable impression than Romain the amateur unofficial diplomat. The latter is sometimes confused in his thinking and naive in his reactions. The former is brilliant, searching, sometimes profound in his analysis of men and the mainsprings of their action or inaction.

M. Romain succeeds in making Daladier both credible and interesting as "a dictator hampered by a democratic conscience. Crushed beneath the weight of responsibility, he constantly hesitated and procrastinated when it was a matter of taking important decisions. At the same time he contracted some of the failings of dictators: a prima donna sensitiveness

to criticism, suspicion of others, a conviction that he was always right.

Equally subtle and lifelike is M. Romain's interpretation of Generalissimo Gamelin. Gamelin enjoyed a reputation for being a student of Bergson; and the author, on the basis of a long personal conversation, depicts him as a man of luminous intelligence, completely unmatched by a corresponding element of will. Gamelin, in his talk with Romain, foresaw both the general outline and even the timing of the German *blitzkrieg*; it would come, he thought, in May.

Jules Romain is inclined to select the failure to check Mussolini in Abyssinia as the fatal episode in modern European history. In his last chapter, "Who Saved Fascism?", he indulges in some interesting speculation on what might have happened if sanctions had been vigorously pressed, if the Suez Canal had been closed, if oil had been cut off from Italy. He cites the former Japanese Ambassador to Italy, Yotaro Sugimura, as authority for the statement that Mussolini was ready to blow his brains out in December, 1935, that he even showed the Japanese ambassador a revolver which he kept in his desk for this purpose.

Romain also asserts, on the basis of a talk with the well-known French Radical Socialist politician, Yvon Delbos, then Vice-President of the Chamber of Deputies, that the French Government on December 2 received a confidential appeal from Mussolini, asking that the oil embargo be applied, so as to give him a face-saving



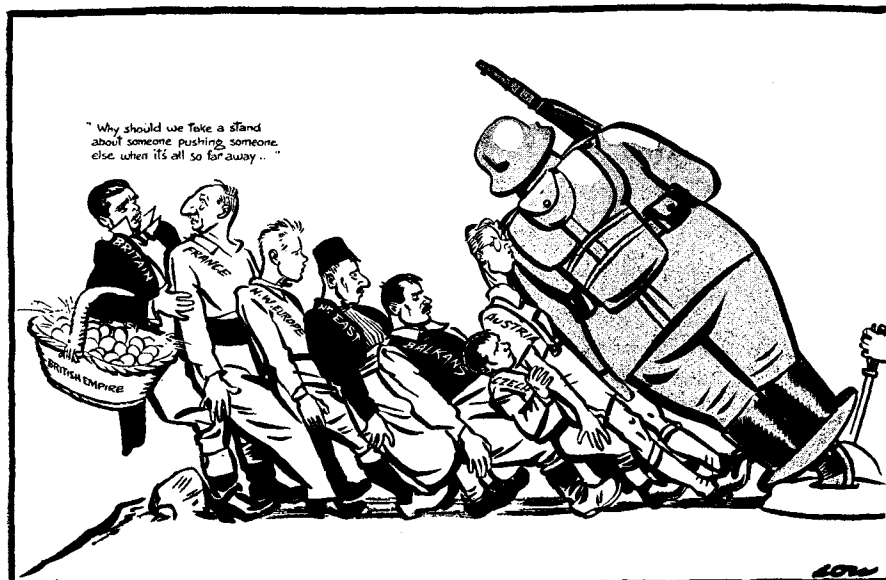
Jules Romain

means of withdrawing from the political stage. Delbos was overjoyed, foreseeing that the fall of Mussolini would soon be followed by the elimination of his fellow-dictator in Berlin. There was even concrete discussion of the conservative moderate government, supported by the authority of the Italian King, which was to take over when Mussolini withdrew.

This story is scarcely capable of documentary proof. It is not inherently improbable, however, if one recalls the portrait of Mussolini drawn by an associate of his socialist years, Angelica Balabanov, the Russian international revolutionary.

What then saved fascism? M. Romain places the blame on Pierre Laval, who had "given away" Abyssinia to Mussolini, perhaps without even knowing very well where the country was; on British conservatives who feared anarchy and communism after the fall of fascism, and on King Leopold of Belgium. The latter, according to M. Romain, made a secret personal appeal on behalf of the House of Savoy which carried considerable weight in London.

There are many mysteries of Europe besides the seven which M. Romain poses. When and how, for instance, did Hitler and Stalin come together? What evil genius prompted Neville Chamberlain to give the British guaranty to Poland without even taking out the dubious insurance which a preliminary understanding with Russia would have represented? No one is now in a position to solve all these "mysteries" satisfactorily; perhaps a future generation will have interesting revelations in the memoirs of Hitler, Stalin, and Mussolini. What M. Romain offers, however, is a candid record of the experiences and impressions of a man of letters who has dabbled extensively in contemporary politics, lit up with occasional silhouettes of individual personalities which bear the imprint of authentic genius.



From "A Cartoon History of Our Times"

Prophecy? This cartoon by Low appeared in February, 1938.

# Broken English

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY

THE great anthology of literature of which I have dreamed so long under the title of "Broken English" will, I suppose, never be accomplished. It would contain as much bad grammar as good and almost as much comedy or ribaldry as beauty. When I think of it as "Broken English" I mean our language broken apart to reveal its multitude of moods and uses. An F.B.I. Notice on the Post Office bulletin board describing a fugitive bandit (there is one at this present in a Long Island Post Office telling how he may be recognized by a peculiar tear in the back of a leather zipper jacket) would be not less eloquent to my purpose than Milton's description of his dangerous tall angel. Casual or indignant letters from friends, memoranda left on the kitchen table by the maid, bond-sellers' allocutions, conversation overheard in the subway, Western Union form telegrams—and so forth. Humanity struggling to express, impress, or repress would cry its whole gamut in my imagined scrapbook. I realize of course that such an album-nigrum would be embarrassment of riches; it would be life itself.

But even to suggest it can do no harm.

For my momentary parallel I go to one of the most interesting enlargements of classroom technique, the supreme example of a kind of literary teaching, viz., the problem of the director rehearsing a theatrical company of young actors. In any other field of the arts discipline may break down, as it has so widely broken down in later years. It cannot do so in the theatre without artistic catastrophe. It is the director's job not only to teach the performer what he is thinking, but every mortal symptom of that thought. The actor may possibly be more sensitive or intelligent than the director (or the author) but for the moment discipline is paramount. The director has made it his business to form a picture and plan; every individual impulse must be subordinate to the not impossible audience.

In such a task one learns how slovenly the English teaching of this generation has done its work. The mere presence of a group of young actors in the theatre might imply that they

at least have ambition, yet four out of seven can scarcely read English text above the guttural and intellectual frontier of the tabloids. Any word not frequent in Winchell seems unknown to them, and they have little conception of the thousand discriminations of accent, posture, physiognomy, and enunciation which are the tit-tat-toe of the stage. What conclusion can there be but that their English teachers never gave them the prime idea that human feeling is the punctuation of literature?

Is it possible, I say to myself, that so many readers do not realize that almost every piece of writing which can stand as an integer is consciously or unconsciously plotted as warily as a stage play? Look through any anthology of verse and see how many formal lyrics have three stanzas, just as the modern play has tried to crystallize itself in triplicate. They have three stanzas because they must: as the commonest form of musical rhythm embodies three impulses in a four-time frame. It is not unknown that most enduring forms of folk art, whether fairy tales or vulgar anecdotes, build their crescendo in three steps. For compromise with the necessities of occasion this pattern will often be evaded, but instinctively it is usually there. In the case of the theatre the entrepreneur considering the physical convenience of the customers allows them time out at comfortable intervals. But this is equally necessary in literature too. Poe's paradox about there being no such thing as a great poem more than one hundred lines long, viz., that high fidelity reception in the mind is limited and

brief—is worth remembering. So I remind myself that the first lesson in our literary paradigm is to consider human communication as a part of human biology. In every written text which deserves print there were reasons for its being done the way it was. To examine and relish some of those reasons gives the student his godlike purview.

There is an old theatrical supersti-

tion that it is well before a play opens to sprinkle salt on the stage. These notes of ricochet are an attempt to sprinkle a little salt on the noble drama of teaching English.



AT this moment I feel as though the only textbook necessary for freshmen in the English language would

be *Hamlet*. Its very second speech — "Answer me: stand and unfold yourself" — is the text of freshman year. And every student sensitive enough to deserve the name is probably in *Hamlet* mood.

College education maybe is partly in pretending to be the same so that one has private freedom to be different. You will not too hastily condemn the tradi-

tional comedy of "What did the author have in mind?" because some consideration of his struggle is good practice for one's own. One value in examining routine journalism is to learn that the angel does not always come tiptoe on a path of fire but is a hodiernal brute beset by deadline and bacillus.

You will never have so much time or fewer agitations than now.



EVERY other education can be yours too if you wish. I am thinking of Hogg's extraordinary description of Shelley's short time at Oxford. I am thinking of the upstairs room in a London lodging—now perhaps fallen in splinters—where a young man came upstairs and found his medical-student roommate sitting at the window lost in thought as he watched dust motes sparkling in one of London's scanty slants of sunshine. The medical student started from his reverie and remarked casually, "A thing of beauty is a joy forever." I am thinking how young Coleridge, a boy at Cambridge, was captivated by the magic of a word. That word, as was his habit, he magnified and illuminated with all his private dreams. The word was *Susquehanna*. Nearly a century and a half later you will find, if you care to, the downward valleys of that stream all the more lovely because Coleridge—however absurdly—had dreamed them.

In all the intricate mechanism and

