

RISE OF THE HOUSE OF CHAMBERLAIN

As a young man he wore a top-hat in the tropics, as a business man he ran a huge firm at Birmingham, as a statesman he averted a world war.

Legends will grow up round the name of Neville Chamberlain in the future, as about Pitt, Disraeli and Gladstone. Meantime, the "Record" today publishes some of the facts.

One of the most interesting things of our modern times is the growth of the House of Chamberlain.

FATHER JOSEPH ("Old Joe") Chamberlain was the first of the three outstanding Chamberlain statesmen. He was perhaps the first progressive middle-class leader of his time.

The House of Chamberlain had snipped away in London making shoes for 130 years. Their babes were born and their old folks died in bed above their shoemaking or cordwaining shop.

Even today Britain's Prime Minister is an honorary member of the Cordwainers' Company.

Making Screws

The Industrial Revolution inspired cordwaining Chamberlains to leave London and leather, start making screws in Birmingham in the Midlands, which was for them like having taken a Covered Wagon in dangerous search of Opportunity.

In 1854, at the age of 18, the present Prime Minister's father, Joseph Chamberlain, moved from London to Birmingham to represent the family's new business interests there, and before he was half through his bold career he had made Birmingham what civic experts now recognise as "the first great municipality with an integrated and fully modern government."

Slum Areas

IN Birmingham, Joseph Chamberlain cleared slum areas, opened parks, cracked down on unsanitary dwellings and extortionate rents. The water and gas supply was municipalised, and in 1900 the University of Birmingham was founded by Joseph Chamberlain who had long since become a power in the House of Commons.

Never Prime Minister, but for many years a daring Colonial Secretary and a behind-the-scenes political power, Joseph Chamberlain brought to every conflict courage, the progressive humanitarianism and the trading (compromise) spirit of the Middle Class, an antidote to aristocrats and proletarians.

For three years (1898-1901) "Old Joe," through secret emissaries travelling between London and Berlin, tried to construct an alliance of the British and German Empires.

But Kaiser Wilhelm II would not concede Britain naval supremacy, and Foreign Minister Prince von Bulow insisted that Germany could yield nothing which would undercut her "destiny to rule the world."

NEVILLE CHAMBERLAIN was not brought up by Father Joseph to build for peace. It was always understood in the family that half-brother Austen would one day be Prime Minister and that Neville would look after the private business of the House of Chamberlain and the welfare of the City of Birmingham.

So at the age of 22 Neville is packed off by Father Joseph to manage one of his properties of 2000 acres in the Bahamas, in the West Indies, for cultivating the sisal plant. And a strange part of the world it is he finds himself in.

Andros Island is 100 miles long and 40 miles broad at points, its only claim to fame the sponges it produces. There are no white men on the island, and young Neville is glad he has with him Knowles, the English manager.

But the chief concern of the two men when they arrive is that there is no house for them.

For six weeks, while one is being built, they live in a shabby native hut with 15 native carpenters.

Neville finds he has to change his daily routine entirely. He rises at 5 a.m., hastily swallows a cup

While Neville oversaw negro workers, Austen sipped champagne with the Kaiser, was long the house guest of Prince Bismarck, learned almost everything there was to know about diplomacy—considered in Europe as something impossible to practise without years of special training, as for the law.

BUT the Islands venture failed.

There was a sickness in the plants and they would not mature. Neville came back to enter the family business at Birmingham.

It was at this Islands stage of his life that he made great friends with his young cousin, Norman Chamberlain.

The two were always together on Neville's leave. Later, at the outbreak of war, Norman is to go

HOUSE OF CHAMBERLAIN

JOSEPH ("OLD JOE") CHAMBERLAIN: Colonial Secretary. Died of a stroke, aged 77, in 1914.

SIR AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN: Foreign Secretary. Elder son of Joseph. Died of a stroke, aged 73, in 1937.

NEVILLE CHAMBERLAIN: Half-brother to Sir Austen. Prime Minister. Aged 69.

Every one of these three, after years of experience in civic, national and international affairs, reached the conclusion that firm peace between Britain and Germany was the cornerstone without which there could be no lasting peace in Europe.

of tea, then walks three-quarters of a mile to the fields to superintend the landing of lumber and to direct the natives clearing the ground.

Neville is a teetotaler at this time. He knows the dangers of malaria, and lives frugally, allowing no drink in his iron-hard constitution.

At 4 o'clock he walks back for tea. Then he goes to another small hut, steps behind a makeshift counter, and sells food and knick-knacks to the natives on his payroll.

Later, when his house is built, with its wide well-screened verandas, he is able to sit in the evenings and read his favourite naturalists, Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace—and, of course, William Shakespeare.

Conventionality

NEVILLE'S reputation grows in the islands. The other white planters and officials respect him for the way he works, even though he does not mix and drink with them.

They laugh a little at the young man's strict adherence to the conventions: when he makes the 35-mile sea journey to Nassau for an occasional official function he is always dressed in a formal frock-coat and hat—not usually included in the wardrobe of a West Indies planter.

The natives, too, respect this cold, austere Englishman, and come to him with their ailments. He bandages their wounds and gives them medicine.

to France. Neville is to receive a letter: "I know now what fear—naked and absolute—means, and it isn't pleasant."

Missing

ON December 7, 1917, he is to be posted missing. In February, 1918, he is to be identified—lying far ahead of his men and facing the enemy.

And from that date Neville is to have a profound, a lasting horror of war—of war which drinks so deeply of the sweet, red wine of youth.

It was a dispirited Neville Chamberlain who had returned to England in 1907.

But he found that the resources of character developed on lonely Andros Island—the gift of patience, the attention to detail, the handling of men—were invaluable in business.

He had shown little interest in politics in his early life, but a good deal in civic administration.

MOVE on to 1911. Neville is married now, married to the lovely Ann Vere Cole whom he met in 1906 at his brother Austen's wedding. Circumstances are changed.

His wife is the daughter of an old Irish sporting family, half-Irish herself, a great-niece of the poet, Aubrey de Vere, a cousin of Lord Montagu.

She is full of Irish charm, has progressive ideas about running a household, cooks superbly—and is ambitious for her husband.

Thus when Neville is asked to



become candidate for a seat on the city council it is she who persuades him to accept.

Twenty-one years later, when he is receiving the freedom of the city, he is to say: "I firmly believed the council chamber would see not only the beginning but the end of my public career. Man proposes but the disposition is in other hands."

He is to do well to alter the quotation. The hands might well belong to his wife.

THE civic and business and moral problems of Birmingham were grappled with by Neville Chamberlain for many long years.

He, too, gave the city a progressive administration. During his mayoralty a Birmingham municipal bank, first institution of its kind in England, was established.

He was chairman of the extremely active Birmingham Town-Planning Committee. He reached the House of Commons in 1918 fighting against the liquor traffic and for the Gothenburg (control) system.

The prestige of the House of Chamberlain, added to Son Neville's mainly municipal achievements, entitled him to become Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1923.

This exalted and showy office, which he was later to hold from 1931 until he became Prime Minister, displeased him at first because he was still engrossed in civics.

Unshowy Office

HE soon chose the unshowy office of Minister of Health in 1924, because he could push pensions for widows and orphans, the Milk and Dairies Order, pure food laws, and most of all, British housing—which became the "British Housing Boom."

Nobody suspected in those days that one Adolf Hitler would smash the Law in Germany and substitute a Government of one man; or that in a few years four men would be as important as they were recently at Munich.

LEAVING WESTMINSTER ABBEY—Even in the tropics of the West Indies, Neville Chamberlain wore his top-hat as he does here in the company of his wife, daughter of a well-known Irish sporting family.

But by the time Germany had found her man, the House of Chamberlain was ready with a man who is no product of Europe's old-school diplomacy. Today, many old-school Britons are aghast at the "shirt-sleeve diplomacy" and "American methods" of Neville Chamberlain.

The British aristocracy sniff at his Middle-Class, unheroic conviction that more is always lost by fighting than by trading. It is largely the aristocracy—not the proletariat—who now pose the question: will Adolf Hitler trade, will he give a quid pro quo in the long run? Or must both the Fuehrer and Il Duce ultimately be fought—at any cost—because they are not traders?

So vast were the issues broached at Munich that no man can say with firm assurance whether history will record the Munich Agreement as a first great stride on the road to peace or as a first great slip toward world war.

Not a Trade

ANY man could see, however, that in itself the Munich Agreement was not a trade. To give a man a sixpenny bit to watch your car because you believe he will slash the tyres unless you do is not a trade.

At Munich it was impossible to call the police, as Neville Chamberlain would have done in the Municipality of Birmingham, if Adolf Hitler had offered to slash tyres. There are no international police.

"It is good to have a giant's strength," Neville Chamberlain noted several weeks before the Czechoslovak Crisis arose: "It is tyrannous to use it."

If only the world can be made quite definitely more like Birmingham, the House of Chamberlain will consider this much better than if one of its sons had turned out to be a Napoleon or a Lenin—or an Eden.