

Campbell Bennett Has the Autographs of Ex-Kaiser Wilhelm, Anthony Eden and Mr. Savage, And Now . . .

HE HAS WRITTEN FOR HITLER'S AUTOGRAPH

By J. GIFFORD MALE

AT this very moment, somewhere in Germany, Adolf Hitler or his secretary, or his secretary's secretary, may be perusing a letter from far-away New Zealand. The address on the letter is just Adolf Hitler, Germany, but few German letter sorters, even working under the stress of Christmas mails, would make a mistake about that address. After whatever salute one greets a dictator with the letter reads something like this (it is written in German): . . . "I have a fairly extensive collection of autographs of great men, and I would be honoured if you would add your signature to my collection. Trusting you will be able to grant my request . . ." And the New Zealander who thus beards by letter the man before whose frown all Europe trembles is 25-year-old Campbell Bennett, of Wellington, who, like many other young New Zealanders, has made a hobby of collecting autographs. He has probably the finest collection in New Zealand.

It all started in 1918—principally as a collection of autographs of musical celebrities, and the first signature was that of the great violinist Zacharewitsch, of whom Tschai-kowsky wrote, "He has a colossal talent that eclipses all celebrities of the time. His technique is almost incredible. . . ."

That autograph was secured personally by his brother James Bennett, who was playing in a Glasgow orchestra at a symphony concert at which the great violinist was also playing.

Since then, well, the collection has just "grew." Celebrity after celebrity has added to it. Some he has secured personally, some through friends, some by writing away.

The collection is a remarkable one as it is, but Campbell has the zeal of the true autograph hunter. He is having compiled at the present moment a list of celebrities of all sorts throughout the world—plain and coloured—and he's going to chase them up systematically.

But it is the autographs of musicians that Campbell especially covets, because he is keenly interested in music himself, and is a member of the Wellington Choral Union. It was when he was singing with the Choral Union at a concert conducted by Dr. Sargent that he secured the doctor's autograph.

Campbell is always a little diffident about publicising his collection—he even feared that mention of his letter to Hitler would start a flood of letters to the Fuehrer, but he reckons he must have a good start on most other collectors in New Zealand, anyway.

Loose Leaf Ledger

BUT to browse through Campbell's collection. He scorns the usual leather-bound book, with pink, cream and white pages, in which your Aunt Emily inscribed (circa 1911),

"Lives of great men oft remind us."

Instead, he has a loose-leaf ledger system; each signature is on a separate page, often with a photograph, sketch or some biographical details, and signatures are carefully classified under such sections as "Authors," "The Opera," "Australian Songbirds," "Film Stars," "Vaudeville," "Famous New Zealanders."

Names? Well, just to mention a few. In "Modern Composers" he has Vaughan Williams, Franz Lehar, Avril Coleridge

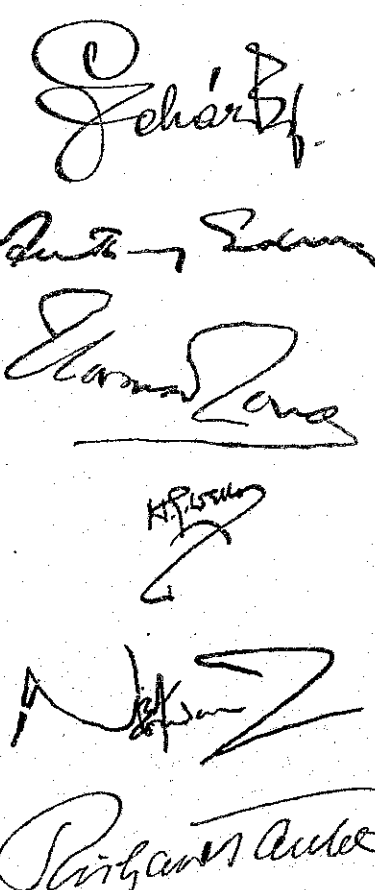
Sir Hamilton Harty, Sir Landon Ronald, Sir Adrian Boult, and Sir Thomas Beecham; in "Opera" he has Aopolo Granforte, Franco Izal and Cesarina Valobra; in "Singing" he has Galli Curci, Dusolina Giannini, Blanche Marchesi (who discovered Melba), Richard Tauber, Chostakoff, Tibbett, Chaliapin, Alexander Kipnis, Peter Dawson, Nellie Melba, Florence Austral and Elsa Stralia.

In "Pianists" he has Eileen Joyce, Pouishnoff, Ignaz Friedman, Moiseiwitch; in "Violinists" Joseph Szigeti, the Serbian violinist Bratza, and, of course, Zacharewitsch. In "Authors" he has H. G. Wells, Hugh Walpole, Beverley Nichols, Noel Coward, Osbert Sitwell, Naomi Mitchison and Zane Grey.

In "The Dance" he has La Meri; in "Explorers" Sir Hubert Wilkins; in "The Footlights" C. B. Cochran, Sybil Thorndike, Ruth Draper and all the principals of the Gilbert and Sullivan company which toured New Zealand in 1927; in "Variety" George Wallace, Billy Costello, ("Pop-eye") and Ella Shields; his "Film Stars" include Charles Chaplin, Conrad Veidt, Pauline Frederick, Norman Long, Gracie Fields and George Formby; in "Famous New Zealanders" he has sculptress Margaret Butler, Eileen Duggan, Ngai Marsh, Alfred Hill, Metropolitan Opera star Francis Alda, Madame Winnie Fraser, famous flutist John Amadio, cartoonist A. S. Pateron, Shiela ("Sally in Rhodesia") Macdonald, Gloria Rawlinson, James Cowan, and a bunch of Labour celebrities including Mr. Savage, Mr. Nash, Mr. Webb and Mr. Lee.

"Unclassified"

FINALLY, a few celebrities who are unclassified for some reason or other. They include George Bernard Shaw, Bruce Bairnsfather (plus sketch of his famous character, Old Bill exclaiming "Struth! All the way from New Zealand"); Anthony Eden, Lord Bledisloe,



SIGNATURES of the great. In case you can't decipher them, they are, from top to bottom: Franz Lehar, Anthony Eden, Norman Long, H. G. Wells, Noel Coward and Richard Tauber.

Taylor, Percy Grainger, W. H. Squire, Dame Ethel Smyth and Eric Coates.

In "Conductors" he has Dr. Sargent, Sir Henry Wood,



CAMPBELL BENNETT, of Wellington. His hobby, collecting autographs, is not a novel one, but his collection is.

and, believe it or not, ex-Kaiser Wilhelm II.

Smallest signature is that of H. G. Wells, whose autograph is microscopic; largest is Eileen Joyce's, who uses up a space

The letter Campbell received in reply to his request for an autograph is worth quoting. It reads:

"As — is ill with the flu, she has asked me to reply to your letter. She is sorry to disappoint you, but she never gives her autographs or any inscriptions to any but personal friends. As it would seem from your enclosed card that you might intend some commercial use of her Press photograph, she wishes me to point out that it is illegal to use the photograph of any writer or artist, even when it has appeared in the public Press, for even the newspapers could not use it for any commercial purpose without permission."

The truth was, of course, as this New Zealand authoress probably knew, Campbell intended to make no commercial use whatever of the photograph or the autograph.

Chiang Kai-Shek

SEVERAL of Campbell's most interesting autographs have been secured personally by a friend, Eric Cook, formerly of Wellington, who is now in London doing newspaper work. Recently Mr. Cook was commissioned to go to China as special correspondent for a London paper, and he hoped to secure Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek's autograph while he was there.

But undoubtedly the toughest luck Campbell has had was with a request he sent to Rudyard Kipling. He received a letter from Kipling's secretary regretting that Mr. Kipling had died two days before. Campbell always refers to it as the one that got away.

AUTOGRAPHS

And Unsolicited Comments

LETTERS Campbell Bennett receives from celebrities from whom he has requested an autograph sometimes have comments added. Said Osbert Sitwell in a letter dated October 2, 1938: "I have no words in me after the international crisis; so you must forgive an utter absence of thought." Wrote Naomi Mitchison: "Things in England are depressing and . . ." (Profanity deleted). Observed Comedian Don Nicol: "People have more fun than anybody."

almost three inches by four for her signature.

One of the easiest autographs to secure was that of Mr. Shaw, who, although reputedly rather difficult in such matters, responded readily. Campbell confesses that he resorted to an innocent ruse, however. He sketched the great playwright from a young and a very flattering photograph, and sent him the sketch. Sure enough, Mr. Shaw sent back his autograph with a curt note, "Slightly out of date to-day."

Greatest difficulty Campbell had was with a certain moderately well-known New Zealand authoress, who shall be nameless.