The book that first established William Shirer as the foremost chronicler of Nazi Germany re-creates with vivid precision the train of events from Hitler’s accession to Chamberlain’s Munich capitulation through the fall of Poland, Belgium, Paris, and the government of France.

My Personal Review:
Berlin Diary is a classic in reportage. Shirer was a journalist stationed in Berlin from 1934 to 1940 and thus an eyewitness to the growth of Fascism in Europe, especially the Nazi regime in Germany. He observes and reports on the events leading up to World War II and the stunning German victories during the first year of the war. Shirer seems to have been about everywhere that anything happened and his eye-witness accounts are priceless as background to the gathering storm in Europe.

This is a diary which Shirer admits in his introduction was written with the thought of publication. Thus, like others I was irritated by the ethnic slurs he directs at Germans and by his obvious political partisanship. For example, he bemoans the defeat of the Republic in Spain with the statement, our side has lost. I can only interpret that remark to mean that he personally identified with the Spanish Republic. His remark about our side certainly would make me suspicious about the objectivity of any of his reporting on Spain. Clearly, however, Shirer saw his diary (published before the US entered World War II) less as a balanced piece of reportage than as an anti-Fascist manifesto backed up most impressively by his personal experiences. Read in that context, Berlin Dairy can be appreciated as one of the essential books on the origins of World War II.

Politics aside, Shirer paints an interesting picture of the life of young Americans in Europe during the 1930s with capsule descriptions of who he met, what he ate and drank, and his day to day life. Throughout the book is the atmosphere of impending doom. Shirer sensed it early and is thus one of the prophetic voices coming out of the 1930s.