



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.

Science of Modern Blood-Letting

SIEGE. By Julien Bryan. New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co. 1940. 64 pp. \$2.75.

Reviewed by MARGARET BOURKE-WHITE and ERSKINE CALDWELL

THE siege of Warsaw will probably go down in history as a full chapter in the science of modern aerial warfare. Unlike the slow blood-letting of Madrid and Barcelona, or even that of Helsinki, the bombardment and subsequent capture of *Blitzkrieg*, in a few short days revolutionized modern war in theory and in practice. The German army's strategy of lightning-like thrusts and strokes proved to the Polish army, to their allies, and to the world at large, that the age of marching men, unsupported by aviation, has suddenly become as obsolete as cavalry charges on the battle field. And until it can be proved that any other theory, including economic strangulation, is more effective as a means of conquering an enemy, the lesson of Germany's three-week campaign against Poland will stand as a persuasive argument in favor of *Blitzkrieg*.

Whatever the humanitarian arguments against war may be, and it is not at all difficult to marshal them by the score, the fact remains that war as a national policy has returned to scourge the people and blister the earth. In returning, the onrush was so swift and unlooked-for that the civilian populations of warring nations were unprepared to protect themselves. In the race to follow the leaders, smaller nations found themselves hopelessly unable to protect their homes and cities as well as their civilians. It may be many years before the world will be able to provide the new balance between defense and offense that the new order demands.

Julien Bryan's work and picture record of the eventful days of Warsaw's siege will open the eyes of many to what may be expected in all corners of the earth during the days to come. Mr. Bryan's narrative, which occupies the first half of "Siege," is so swift-paced and eventful, so lean and sinewy with action under war's stress and strain, that under certain conditions it could well stand alone.

There is something of the photographic eye in his attention to detail in the narrative which gives each page the effect of a sharply delineated print. The conductor who forgot to take up the railroad tickets during the early bombings, the American negro who sang "Bombs Keep Away from My Door," the child who wept because her sister's face after being machine

gunned was no longer beautiful. These bits have the sharpness and symbolic quality of good photographs.

As for the photographs of Warsaw and its people, which make up the second half of the book, it is difficult to consider them merely as pictures. The cumulative effect of these photographs, because of their content, is strong. It is not often that a photographer is able to catch such genuine emotion on the faces of his subjects as Mr. Bryan records in the pictures entitled "Women Look at War," and "Women Look at Death." Unfortunately, he was forced to work under great handicaps, while taking and developing his pictures. The feeling derived both from the pictures and from the text is that Mr. Bryan was very close to these people, and that his ability to enter into their lives has greatly enriched the quality of his book.

All photographers who cover news events or countries during crises are

faced with obstacles which impede their work; but seldom does a photographer have to contend with such difficulties as these: running out to work in half hour stretches between bombings, carrying equipment through streets made almost impassible by barricades, and finally, continuing to work through air attacks, rather than taking refuge in dugouts, because activity was easier to endure than inaction.

Maurice Hindus, who is greatly responsible for Julien Bryan's early development as an observer, has written an illuminating introduction to "Siege." He has also contributed captions for the forty-eight pictures in the book. Mr. Hindus's thorough knowledge of eastern Europe qualifies him to speak authoritatively about Poland, and his introduction is a vivid commentary on Mr. Bryan's work.

Margaret Bourke-White and Erskine Caldwell are the authors of "North of the Danube."

Footnote to a war: Mr. Bryan's camera focuses on a Warsaw group in a lull between bomb storms.

