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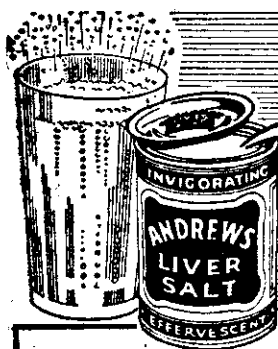
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Film Reviews by G.M.

SPEAKING CANDIDLY

KINGS ROW

(Warner Bros.)

MANY of us in New Zealand have had to wait a very long time for this picture—it is at least three and a-half years since it was made—but it was worth waiting for. Though censorship requirements have made some toning down of the original novel inevitable, with the result that at least one important character loses clarity, this screen version of Henry Bellamann's story is still thoroughly adult melodrama, not recommended to the squeamish or the mentally immature.

Kings Row is a long, ugly, complicated, but very fascinating chronicle of insanity and heartbreak in a small American town of the 1900's. A noticeboard outside the place as we enter it informs us that this is "A Good Town, A Good Clean Town. A Good Town to Live In, and a Good Place to Raise Your Children." And on the surface everything about *Kings Row* does look respectable and serene, especially in the semi-idyllic childhood sequence at the beginning. But appearances soon prove deceptive.

Almost all the characters suffer sadly during the course of the story, but the medical profession in particular gets it in the neck: of the town's two doctors one, Dr. Tower (Claude Rains), commits murder and then suicide, and the other, Dr. Gordon (Charles Coburn), is a sadistic moralist who performs unnecessary operations, without anaesthetics, for the good of his patients' souls! It is left to the hero, Parris Mitchell (Robert Cummings) to take up psycho-analysis and try to repair some of the mental damage that has thus been caused. Since it was his boyhood sweetheart (Betty Field) who was killed by her father, and his best friend (Ronald Reagan) who has had both legs amputated to suit Dr. Gordon's sadistic fancy, the young psychiatrist finds plenty of material in *Kings Row* to work on. But with the help of the plucky Irish girl, Randy Monaghan (Ann Sheridan), who has married the cripple; he succeeds better than might have been expected. And his methods, though simple, are probably logical.

What is not logical, even in a distraught man, is the behaviour of Dr. Tower in an earlier episode. The film presents him as a highly enlightened person whose enthusiasm for psychiatry inspires the young hero to specialise in that new branch of healing. Why then should such a man's treatment of his own mentally-sick daughter deviate so far in practice from what he expounds in theory? What happens is that, recognising in her the earlier symptoms of dementia praecox, he simply keeps her under lock and key and finally kills her lest she ruin his protégé's career. The explanation for this discrepancy in Dr. Tower's character is that pressure from the American medical authorities and the Hays Office has forced the screen version to omit something which the novel included: the fact that this doctor

had incestuous tendencies. The story is grim enough without this added unpleasantness. All the same its omission does destroy the coherence of the drama in one episode.

Looking at this picture is, in some ways, about as agreeable an experience as turning over a boulder and finding nasty things underneath. Yet there can be a keen fascination even about that sort of research. And *Kings Row* is by no means all ugliness and despair. It contains some very fine and very moving characterisations (particularly that of Maria Ouspenskaya as the French grandmother); the director, Sam Wood, steers his excellent cast through difficult and involved situations with such skill that the interest seldom flags and is often keyed to a high pitch; and the ending, though over-sentimental, should send you out in a much more cheerful frame of mind than you may have thought possible half-way through.

This is a powerful film and a rare one. If you like it at all I think you should like it a lot. I know I did.

THE WOMAN IN THE WINDOW

(International-RKO)

MORE psychology, this time in a very gripping thriller which would be even more effective than it is if the producer were not compelled by the Hays Office ban on unpunished crime to treat the audience as if they were a bunch of children. A quiet little middle-aged professor (Edward G. Robinson) is involved, quite accidentally and almost innocently, in a glamorous encounter with a demi-mondaine (Joan Bennett). He has been relishing her portrait in a window, his relish being tempered with regret that he is too old and too respectable for such emotions, when the original of the painting appears at his shoulder, engages him in conversation, and quite literally invites him up to her apartment to look at her etchings—that and nothing more. But in the apartment her hot-headed lover suddenly appears and proceeds to choke the professor to death. He blindly grabs a pair of scissors in self-defence and the next moment finds that he has a corpse on his hands as well as an incipient scandal, if not a murder charge.

As the unhappy professor tries to dispose of the body and cover up his tracks, while continually making mistakes that keep bringing him to the verge of disaster, the director (Fritz Lang) stretches the tension of the story and the nerves of the audience almost too tight for comfort. Eventually it begins to look as if he will either have to give the story an unhappy ending (by the suicide of the professor), or else one that you realise on second thoughts would be contrary to the censorship code (by pinning the killing on a blackmailer and letting the real culprit go free). Instead, the director evades the issue by assuring the audience that the whole thing was just

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