

## Adventurous Young Women

*LADIES OF THE PRESS. The Story of Women in Journalism by an Insider. By Ishbel Ross. New York: Harper & Brothers. 1936. \$3.75.*

Reviewed by MARY LEE

THIS book is a collection of some two or three hundred biographical sketches of newspaper women, a collection which forms a valuable record of the part played by women in journalism in the United States. From Anne Royall, who sat on the clothes of President John Quincy Adams while he bathed in the Potomac, refusing to budge until he had answered her questions, and Nelly Bly who circled the globe for the *New York World* in 1889, through Imogene Stanley, who danced with the Prince of Wales for the *Daily News* in 1923 and Sonia Tomara, who handled the Ethiopian crisis from Rome for the *Herald Tribune*—practically every woman who has ever worked for a newspaper in the United States is there. It is an amusing story of that army of adventurous young women who come to New York, ninety-nine percent of them from the more provincial districts, land a job by either luck or skill, and stay to know New York a thousand times better than any New Yorker could possibly know it.

This is a book written in the style and after the manner of the daily newspaper rather than after the manner of the student or the historian. Ishbel Ross, for fourteen years a member of the staff of the *New York Herald Tribune*, covered many a big story from the Hall-Mills case through the Lindbergh kidnapping. She is a person who "knows her stuff" and in this book she has done her stuff pre-eminently well.

The book is a vast collection of anecdotes, a mass of historical sources hastily

thrown together rather than a coherent historical picture. The result is a certain tedium of effect, because like the kernels of corn in a popper each girl bobs up with liveliness and wit, yet in the last analysis each is more or less like the last. This is, perhaps, inevitable because, as Miss Ross shows ably in her first chapter, it takes a certain sort of woman to become a successful journalist.

The woman reporter [she says] must face harsh facts without any qualms. She must be ready for such hazards as may befall her; . . . endure fatigue and disappointment beyond reason; withstand rebuffs . . . meet abuse with equanimity born of self control. . . .

Miss Ross might have added that she must get down to the office a half hour ahead of the men reporters—even if that be at seven a.m.—and stay a half hour after they leave at night, and come back from lunch after twenty minutes while they are taking an hour and a half. The city editor, when he looks round for someone to cover a big story that has broken at the wrong time, must see her sitting ready, but not idle.

The average reader will no doubt lay down "Ladies of the Press" with a sense of fatigue. How can any woman choose such a profession? How can she want to rush from one end of a great city to the other two or three times a day, always under an intense physical and mental strain? Why does she do it? To the old newspaper hand, however, the book awakens a strange nostalgia. One aches to feel just once again the messy informality of a city room, the green eye shades, the rolled up sleeves, the clap of twenty typewriters, the click of tickers, the hiss of chutes, the yells of "Copy!", the tense excitement of the City Editor when big news breaks.

Mary Lee was for several years on the staff of the *New York Evening Post* where she covered assignments ranging from social functions to political and economic events.

## Kay Boyle's Sketch of a Likable Nazi

*DEATH OF A MAN. By Kay Boyle. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 1936. \$2.50.*

Reviewed by HENRY SEIDEL CANBY

KAY BOYLE is always brilliant. Her snow scenes in this novel are sharper and much more interesting than the picture on the dust cover. Yet, one feels that she has got a little out of her depth. Her purpose seems to be to bring together two national types—and then see what happens. Her Austrian doctor is an admirable servant of society, worshipped by his hospital, loved by children, whose inner life has become a flame of indiscriminating loyalty to the Führer over the border. On that altar he is gladly laying down his career. Her American girl is a discontented waster, spoiled in youth; objectless in the present, but shrewd and realistic. They fall in love in high altitudes. They carry out dangerous missions on skis in the mountain night. They sleep together in his hospital room, and turn the love of his devotees to rancour. His partisans beg her to let him alone for the sake of the cause. She tries but cannot. He tries to give her up, but fails. In the end he is proscribed, and whether they meet again depends upon the reader's guess.

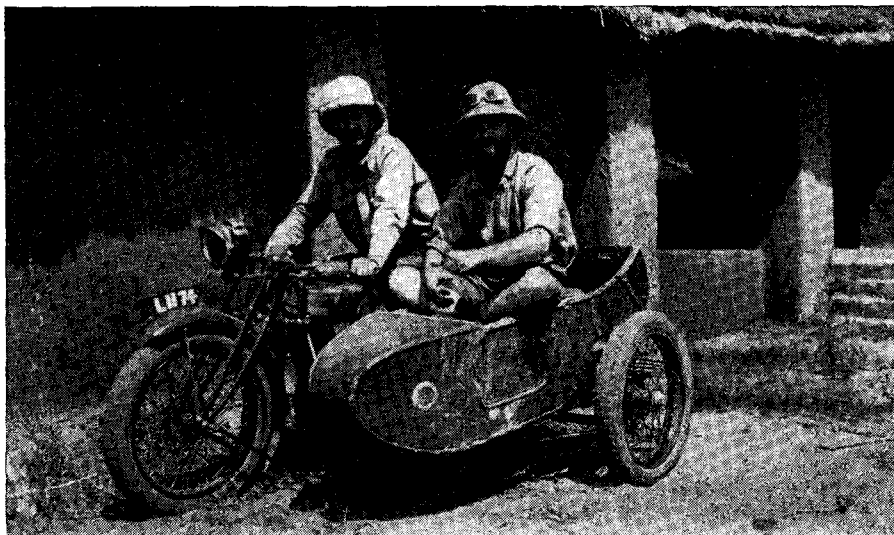
It is an old theme, but a good one for this moment, when Europe is so inflamed with a new passion to obey, and America so dissatisfied with drifting. But it is a theme which used for current problems requires an unusual scope, a nicety of analysis, and a completeness of definition which Kay Boyle's rather impressionistic method does not serve. One feels her acuteness, one feels that the Tyrolean beer girls, and innkeepers, the nuns and children, the lonely hut keepers, are all factors in building up the psychology of a distressed nation. And on the other side, there is much that is typical of the American rich in the girl Pendennis's broken life, with its morbid sexual repressions, and its violent reactions against its own freedom to wreck or to raise. Much typical of the American, also, in the girl's sharp retort to the Nazi faith:—"Climbing the mountain they tell you to do, believing what they tell you just as it's told you, how can you go on swallowing it?" But in spite of a good Austrian background, and in spite of Kay Boyle's pungent dialogue, and in spite of her real contribution of a believable and likable Nazi, it is all incomplete, unconnected, impressionistic, partial. The reader swings from the love theme to the nation theme and back again, uncertain which to pin his interest to, and losing grip on both. This book would have made a marvellous short story. As a novel, one can call it only a sketch for a picture. It seems outside the range of Miss Boyle's powers.



ISHBEL ROSS AND HER HUSBAND, BRUCE RAE

Mr. Rae is night city editor of the *New York Times*. They met when they were covering the Stillman case.

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THREE-WHEELING THROUGH AFRICA: Francis Flood and James C. Wilson.

## Crossing Africa on a Motorcycle

*THREE-WHEELING THROUGH AFRICA. By James C. Wilson. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company. 1936. \$3.50.*

Reviewed by JULIAN W. FEISS

WERE a friend to approach you and state that he was planning a trip across Africa, undoubtedly you would be interested. Were he to state that he was planning to traverse it from west to east via the southern Sahara you would probably become slightly worried. Then if he were to state that his equipment would consist of a movie camera and a banjo you would unquestionably make a dash for the nearest brain specialist. Yet this is exactly the journey and the equipment used by Mr. Wilson and Mr. Flood in their crossing of the Dark Continent.

Landing at Lagos in Nigeria the Flood-Wilson Trans-African Motorcycle Expedition traversed the jungle hinterlands of Nigeria through the steaming fever tangles to the borders of French West Africa. Heading eastward across the country of the Tauregs and the arid desert north of Lake Chad, after many adventures they succeeded in reaching the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan and eventually the Red Sea by way of Eritrea. Once they were lost in the maze of sand dunes north of Lake Chad and, wandering about nearly out of petrol, almost died of thirst. They reached little desert outposts under control of the French Army and at one found gasoline priced at \$4 a gallon.

Were Heinrich Barth alive today he would probably consider the entire tale as one of fiction. Three quarters of a century have made great differences in travel through the country first traversed by the old explorer but essentially the roads and caravan routes are the same.

The roads are merely "projected" and the caravan routes are mere tracks in the sand.

It is a tribute to modern mechanics that both Mr. Wilson and Mr. Flood are alive today. Also it is a tribute to their own intelligence for all the ingenuity of a dozen motor mechanics plus the facilities of a modern machine shop would be required to enable the average man to make a similar trip. "Three-Wheeling Through Africa" is a most amusing and entertaining narrative. The book is profusely illustrated and the story does not drag. There are no scientific discussions and no pretensions regarding "exploration." It is a pity that more books on travel are not written in this spirit and it is pleasant to see that both Mr. Wilson and Mr. Flood had genuine regard for the natives who helped them along the road to the Red Sea.

*Julian Feiss is a mining engineer and geologist who has spent much time in Africa in pursuit of his profession.*

## Many Andersons

*KIT BRANDON: A PORTRAIT. By Sherwood Anderson. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1936. \$2.50.*

Reviewed by HOWARD MUMFORD JONES

ACCORDING to Mrs. Malaprop, Cerebus was a literary gentleman with three heads. "Kit Brandon" may be described as a book by three novelists: Sherwood Anderson I, Sherwood Anderson II, and Sherwood Anderson III. Sherwood Anderson I took charge of the first third of the fable, which, in the familiar Andersonian vein—that is to say, by apparently random revelations of the character's personality—gives a vivid impression of the heroine. Sherwood Anderson I then handed the typewriter over to Sherwood Anderson II, the indignant reformer determined to fight all over again the battle of the textile mill

worker in the South. Sherwood Anderson II introduced Agnes, a huge and masculine lady, but he allowed Sherwood Anderson I to play about with a character whose eccentricity it is to gallop through the moonlit meadows on all fours like a horse. Finally Sherwood Anderson III appeared, and finished the volume. Barring cuss words, this portion of the story might appear in the chaste pages of *Collier's* or *The Saturday Evening Post*. Its principal personage is Kit Brandon the Queen of the Rum Runners (all this was before Roosevelt), who, after various hairbreadth escapes, murders, gangster meetings, and other Hollywood items, resolves to chuck it all and Go Straight. During the last one hundred pages the reader is tempted to look back at the title-page to discover whether he hasn't picked up the wrong book.

That there are several personalities tucked away in the owner of *The Marion Democrat* has long been known, but the heterogeneity of the authors of "Kit Brandon" springs, not only from a profound disharmony in Sherwood Anderson, but also from a profound disharmony of artistic methods. Anderson the amoral psychologist, curious about people, approaches his problem of interpretation from the inside; that is to say, he tries for a time to become the person he is presenting; and since all persons are amazingly interesting from the inside, the problem of social injustice is, in a sense, irrelevant. But Anderson the reformer is an observant sociologist; he looks upon the behavior of people in social patterns from the outside. He sees, for example, that southern mill-workers are poorly housed and badly paid; and, in his indignation, he abandons the method of Anderson I to indict the social system. And finally there is the fiction-writer finishing off his book—Anderson III, whose main purpose is to get the story done. Perhaps both the psychologist and the reformer wanted a vacation. They got it.

I am tempted to add a footnote on swearing. The characters in "Kit Brandon" go in for profanity, and very feeble profanity it is. Damn, God damn, and hell have been long accepted in polite circles; and our more advanced publishing houses are now referring typographically to the male descendant of a female canine. The result does not improve literary art. Unless authors can invent some better way of indicating the bawdy or profane moments of the lives of their characters, it is difficult to see what the new liberty has accomplished. One receives a richer esthetic experience from Mark Twain's description of the more lyric moments in the life of a Mississippi River pilot—a description conspicuously lacking in four-letter words—than one does from the literal phrases of Miss Brandon's friends.

But I was supposed to be reviewing Sherwood Anderson. "Kit Brandon" is a highly readable novel, but I still prefer "Tar."