



The Kingdom of Evil

By Anthony Angarola

## In Review

"THE KINGDOM OF EVIL." By Ben Hecht. Pascal Covici, publisher.

Macabre forms, more dank and putrescently phantasmal than any of Hecht's former imagining, grope blindly and crazedly in the poisonous fog out of which loom the rotting fancies that people his "Kingdom of Evil."

This, Ben Hecht's latest book, is a continuation of the journal of Fantazius Mallare, the uncouth figure that stalks darkly across the varicolored vistas of the author's conjuring. Here the sonorous note of his former work is replaced in a measure by a frailer, yet a more poignant, strain of a most strange and lyrical nature.

Hecht has, perhaps unwittingly, resorted at times to the devices of the sensationalist, the dauber, the splurger in colors too blazing for his understanding, but through it all there seems a basic sincerity too often notoriously lacking in his writings.

Mounting in its pellucid and rounded melliflence in passages to a poetry in prose to be likened only, perhaps, to the more artificial tales of Edgar Allan Poe, his fancies take on richly and darkly tinted hues. Most notably toward the end, where is pictured the debacle, the decay of the Kingdom, is the tempo powerful and the imagery colossal. A passage:

"As the tremendous stalk wilts, toppling into an ever deeper and more sinister arc, its walls blaze with a continual sunset. Phosphorescent seas appear to run down its broken sides. The flames and banners of decay creep out of its roots and spread in slow and ghostly conflagrations toward its summit. Daily the spectacle of its dissolution increases. Alkaline pinks and excremental yellows, purples and lavenders like tumerous shadows; browns that float like colossal postules through seas of lemon; reds that ferment into wavering islands of cerise and salmon, that erupt into ulcerous hills of scarlets and magentas—these revolve about the walls, mounting into vast patterns and dissolving one into the other. Slowly death postures in its coquetish shrouds."

Recurring in persistent refrain throughout "The Kingdom of Evil" is seen Ben Mecht's phallic symbolism—sometimes exhausting the sexual vocabulary in lecherous blatancy, sometimes shrouded in veils of obscure yonic characterization.

The black-and-white illustrations by Anthony Angarola, which accompany the text, are massive and gauntly superb, though they are obviously forced in order to harmonize with the grotesque theme of the fantasy.

With almost animate pigments has Hecht painted this monstrous dream of Mallare's, and with delicate and meticulous craftsmanship has he fashioned its cadaverous and perverse beauty.

*George Hill Hodel.*

