

The Knowledge Bank at The Ohio State University

Ohio State Engineer

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The Engineer's Bookshelf

By Wilson R. Dumble

WORK OF ART—*Sinclair Lewis*—Doubleday Doran (\$2.50).

OIL FOR THE LAMPS OF CHINA—*Alice Tisdale Hobart*—Bobbs-Merrill (\$2.50).

THE BIRD OF DAWNING—*John Masefield*—Macmillan (\$2.50).

THE THIN MAN—*Dashiell Hammett*—Alfred A. Knopf (\$2.00).

Design for Living

As I sat through Noel Coward's "Design for Living" several days ago at the Palace Theatre, I could not help but think what a splendid job Ben Hecht had done in transcribing the original script into the movie version. I remember reading the play when it was first produced on the Broadway stage early last Spring, and later learning that it was to be placed in the movies. I wondered at that time just how some of the situations might be changed so that they might "get by" Mr. Will Hayes and his committee on morals. But Mr. Hecht has done the job well, and anyone who has read the play and seen the screen version will understand how it was all accomplished. It was the most entertaining evening I have spent in the movies since "Little Women," and in case anyone missed it during its run down town, they should look it up when it comes to the "neighborhood."

But that is beyond my point. I am wondering why the transcription of stage plays for movie audiences cannot always be as well handled as this one was. I recall so well, not many months ago, seeing one of W. Somerset Maugham's plays on the silver screen, and how I had looked forward with keen anticipation to the production, and how, finally, I was completely amazed at the lack of intelligence in the transcription. The movie version lacked complete continuity just because of a situation, beautifully and delicately handled in the original script, but hopelessly omitted for the screen. The entire play lacked sense, just because too many liberties were taken with the Maugham script, with the result that the average movie fan could not understand what the play was about. If, however, the transcription had been in the hands of a person of intelligence, the situation in question would have been handled so that even our Aunt Emma, who objected strenuously to the Soglow Christmas card we sent her, could not be offended.

Strollers

I hope that when the Strollers show their Winter Quarter production in University Hall, March 9 and 10, they receive hearty support from the students. The Strollers this quarter are producing "The Bill of Divorcement," one of the smartest English plays that has ever been shown in America. It will be remembered that it was produced in the movies last April with John Barrymore in the role of Hilary and Katherine Hepburn as the daughter. In fact, Mr. Barrymore, at the time, introduced Miss Hepburn to screen audiences, and we all know where Miss Hepburn has gone in the movie world since that time.

I had the pleasure of sitting in as a member of the casting committee for this play, and it was what might be called a "tough job." But I was amazed at the splendid line of talent that presented itself at that time, and I have the most sincere convictions that under the direction of Professor Herman Miller, the play will be a success.

Sinclair Lewis

I suppose the book of the day and the week and the month is none other than Sinclair Lewis' new novel, "Work of Art." Although I have not finished reading it, I confess that I do not like it. In the sense that "Ann Vickers" was biographical, it, too, is a biographical novel. It really is the life stories of Ora and Myron Weagle, two brothers, sons of a third-rate hotel-keeper in Black Thread Center, Connecticut. With Lewis precision the story starts at 6:02 o'clock on a July morning in 1897, and records in terms of hotels, the history of America from that hour to this. In reading it one is reminded of Arnold Bennett's last novel, "Imperial Palace," published three years ago, and as a story as well as a compendium of hotel activities I prefer the Bennett novel.

Mr. Lewis, however, is a splendid recorder of conversation, and if you do not believe me turn to the poker party given by Mr. Hector Warlock or the cocktail party with Mrs. Koreball as the hostess. Yet, even at that, I do not know but that I prefer George Babbitt's conversation with his wife while he is in the act of shaving, or the dialogue between Mr. and Mrs. Dodsworth on their trans-Atlantic voyage, or Mr. Schmaltz's high powered salesmanship in the smoker of a Chicago-bound train after he and the wife and the daughter had visited President and Mrs. Coolidge at the White House. I fancy, however, that many will read and like "Work of Art."

Standard Oil?

A book that would be of interest to Engineers, I believe, is "Oil for the Lamps of China" by Mrs. Alice Tisdale Hobart. Although the books from Mrs. Hobart's pen are new to me I found out that she is the author of three more or less popular travel and biography volumes about China; and surely I was delighted to read her most recent one. It is the story of Stephen Chase and his young wife and their experience in the interior of China. Stephen is the American representative of a large oil company, and with his wife Lucy, he carves for himself a name and fame during his Chinese wanderings in behalf of his company. His life, apparently, grows into a ceaseless campaign to do the will of the company and at the same time maintain a sense of personal dignity against his growing realization that he is but a cog in the machine. It really presents a powerful picture of the impersonal corporation which in its efficiency takes little count of its individuals.

Adventure

I have before me a copy of John Masefield's new adventure story, "The Bird of Dawning," a swift moving story of sixteen men crowded into a life boat put out from a sinking steamer. For those who care about this kind of a story of danger and starvation and thirst and madness, I feel sure they will not be disappointed.

Murder

The great flood of detective stories which has swept the book stalls in the last few years left me so bewildered that I did not read any of them. But in a recent copy of *Vanity Fair* when I read that "The Thin Man" by Dashiell Hammett deserved praise I immediately looked it up. And I must admit that I was well repaid. It is the most exciting and tense story of its kind I have ever read, with a style that almost reaches perfection with its machine-gun like qualities. Certainly one could never forget Clyde, the half-mad father, nor any of the full gallery of interesting and exotic characters he meets, ranging all the way from Aunt Alice, who just cannot remember names, to delightful Harrison Quinn, the broker who drank himself to death just to forget that his wife did not like his drinking. If anyone desires a wild and exciting evening let me suggest that he curl up in a comfortable chair on a windy, blustering night with "The Thin Man."

"Anthony Adverse" Again

In *Saturday Review of Literature*, January 13, Hervey Allen has written an interesting article on the sources he employed to gain his material for "Anthony Adverse." If any one has had the time to read this worth while novel, it would also be valuable to read this article about it. To me it is almost more interesting than the novel itself. That, however, is another story.