

**The Knowledge Bank at The Ohio State University**  
**Ohio State Engineer**

**Title:** The Engineer's Bookshelf

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**Issue Date:** Mar-1936

**Publisher:** Ohio State University, College of Engineering

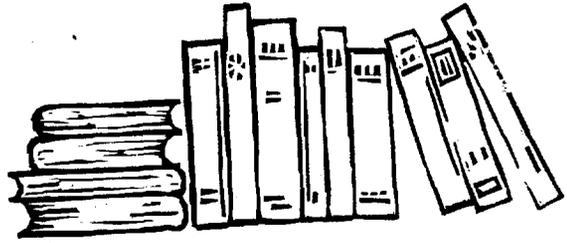
**Citation:** Ohio State Engineer, vol. 19, no. 5 (March, 1936), 4-5, 15.

**URI:** <http://hdl.handle.net/1811/35279>

**Appears in Collections:** [Ohio State Engineer: Volume 19, no. 5 \(March, 1936\)](#)

# THE ENGINEER'S BOOKSHELF

By WILSON R. DUMBLE



**THE LORENZO BUNCH**—by Booth Tarkington—  
(Doubleday Doran.) (\$2)

**THE ROLLING YEARS**—by Agnes S. Turnbull—  
(Macmillan.) (\$2.50)

**THE GENERAL**—by C. S. Forester (Little, Brown &  
Co.) (\$2.50)

## Cyrano

This is the gray dawn of the morning after—the morning after I saw Mr. Walter Hampden play the title role in Edmond Rostand's heroic comedy *CYRANO DE BERGERAC* at the Hartman theatre. And while the memory is still fresh in my mind it might be best to take my type in hand and see what can be done with a record of the three and one-half hour performance. To say that I did not enjoy it would be sheer folly; yet to say that I was thoroughly pleased would be a falsehood of the first order.

To begin with, in this year of 1936, take a play written by a Frenchman in 1897 about a situation in 1640 and produce it in 1936 America . . . and see what you get. I realize, of course, that we live our lives even in 1936 by the illusions of the world; also I acknowledge the fact that Cyrano is the finest theatrical example of the man who made life a perfect art. Yet I failed to be swayed by the performance. Is it that I lost my illusions in 1914-1918? Is it that I demanded a better supporting cast than the one Mr. Hampden had with him? Is it that the appearance of flesh and blood strutting across the stage has lost its appeal since the onslaught of the cinema? Is it that I am judging the realm of romanticism in terms of the realm of our present day realism? Is it . . . but I admit I do not know. I do not know why that grand French classic, a splendid reaction against naturalism, should have been so distasteful.

Of course the performance had its high lights. The famous balcony scene in the third act was indeed well done; the dueling, the costumes, the settings were all quite adequate. But then, there was the artificial atmosphere of the battle scene in the fourth act; and there was the horrible acting of the supporting cast, showing up so pronouncedly in the last act. When Roxane said:

“I never loved but one man in my life,  
And I have lost him—twice . . .”

she might just as well have remarked:

“I never take lemon in my tea  
But I'll take sugar—twice . . .”

All of this may be very harsh criticism, but it appears to be a truth that there are a great many people in this country who know what good acting is. We have seen flawless Broadway productions, both at Times Square and on the road; we have seen good work turned in by splendid actors on the cinema screen. Then, why, oh why, will such a supporting cast as that which appeared in *CYRANO* be perpetrated on the audience in the provinces? Again, I do not know!

## Announcement

The announcement comes to me from the Argus Book Shop in Chicago that Hervey Allen, the famous author of *ANTHONY ADVERSE*, is to publish a new novel late in the Spring. It is to be called *RICHFIELD SPRINGS*, and probably will be vastly more important than even *ANTHONY*. First editions of *ANTHONY*, by the way, are now selling for ten dollars.

Other fascinating Spring publications include a James Truslow Adams book about Thomas Jefferson, which should be splendid. It is to be called *LIVING JEFFERSON*. Still another interesting volume should be that containing Captain Bligh's diary; yes, the same Captain Bligh you met in *MUTINY ON THE BOUNTY*. This reissue was first published in 1792 and never reprinted, chiefly because the general opinion was that Bligh was a scoundrel, and no one would listen to his side of the case.

## Poyeye and Company

The New York art world has been thrown into an uproar. It seems that the famous Ferargil Galleries has been showing comic strips as art; and where the walls were once lined with great masters of oil and water-color paintings, are drawings of Popeye and Barney Google, The Little King, and other strip cartoons over which adults and youngsters pore in daily and Sunday newspapers. Although original shows have been given in past years for political cartoonists, this is the first well-known New York gallery to open its walls to the comic strips.

“In recent years the comic strip has changed its form,” writes Gilbert Seldes, art-critic, in a preface to the exhibit catalog, “and sentimentalists are constantly crying out that the strip isn't what it used to be. What they

really are crying for is the moon—their own youth—and the strip artists, magical though they may be, aren't capable of restoring the years to us.

"As for artistic merit and interest—after seeing some 'legitimate' shows, the observer might return to the comic strip for examples of classic dignity, good draftsmanship, and normal vision."

## Cinemapraise

Columbus has had an unusually good showing of moving pictures during the last month. **AH, WILDERNESS!** was a nice version of the O'Neill play with Wallace Beery doing top work; the lively tunes of **ANYTHING GOES** with Bing Crosby and Ethel Merman were decidedly pleasing; Leslie Howard and Bette Davis in **THE PETRIFIED FOREST** gave a worthy and honest performance of the Robert Sherwood play; and Charlie Chaplin in **MODERN TIMES** demonstrated the old model with modern conveniences. The new Astaire-Rogers picture, **FOLLOW THE FLEET**, probably was not up to par, despite the splendid music by Irving Berlin. Yet, one never tires of that dance team who works as easily and gracefully and much more honestly than did the famous Vernon Castles of days past.

My one film disappointment of recent weeks was Katherine Hepburn in **SYLVIA SCARLETT**, that story taken from the Compton Mackenzie novel of a few years back. Just why Miss Hepburn should be cast in such a role is beyond belief, and is a distinct disappointment. The Katherine Hepburn of **LITTLE WOMEN** and **MORNING GLORY** was not there. Miss Hepburn is really the very essence of the theatre, possessing a magnetism which is more than a creation of a director or a skillful photographer. I recall so well seeing her **MORNING GLORY** several years ago in a small theatre in New London, Conn., and discovering that her brilliance almost passed belief as a genuine actress. As I recall there was not a single false note, not a gesture that was less than perfection. She created for the screen, at least, a new design for acting. Her **MORNING GLORY** was followed by her **LITTLE WOMEN**, and there, too, she upheld her earlier reputation. Realizing these features, I don't know why she should have been given the lead in **SYLVIA SCARLETT**; she was decidedly miscast.

## A Tarkington Cocktail

In **THE LORENZO BUNCH**, Booth Tarkington deals with a group of smart young married folk, the kind who inhabits smart apartment houses in the larger western cities and are seen at certain leading cocktail bars on certain evenings of the week at certain hours; at the exact minute, in other words, when they can be viewed and can make an impression. The women pay regular visits to beauticians, do regular attendance at the movies, and utter conventional words of gossip about Mrs. So-and-So's new fur coat. Their men work in offices all day and devote their evenings to the city night life. They

are a futile, hardy bunch, these Lorenzo people, who will die early of liver complaints from mixing Scotch sodas with gins and cordials and trying to "get by" with it.

Although the book may present an accurate picture of a certain segregated group of Americans, it is not a good Tarkington story. Where there is no reason for sin, it is difficult for the reader to accept it as such. There is nothing appealing, for instance, in the garden variety of American going to pot for no reason at all.

## The Good Earth Again

If you are interested in rural western Pennsylvania you might be interested in Agnes Sligh Turnbull's new novel, **THE ROLLING YEARS**. It is a kind of saga of God-fearing Presbyterians in the 1850's who get worked up because one erring brother proceeds to harvest his wheat on Sunday. That, you know, is not done even in 1936 America. It is interesting, however, to watch the off-springs of these good folk some years later and to see what excites them into a white heat. The story which ends just before the outbreak of the World War in 1914 is splendidly written, and makes very entertaining reading.

## A War Novel

One of the best books I have read recently is **THE GENERAL** by C. S. Forester, which demonstrates conclusively that a biography can be written in novel form. Actually it is the life story of Lieutenant-General Sir Herbert Curzon, a professional soldier and a splendid hero, and a man in high command in the British service during the World War. Yet, at the same time, it is a novel of commanding force about a military man with a military mind, caught in the military caste system of a great country. If it does not rekindle in the reader's mind a hatred of war and an indignant rage against mass murder I miss my guess.

The style of the writer is splendid, and through page after page he moves his story with incredible speed to an inevitable close. Tragedy stalks through the story like death sweeping across a battlefield. It is A No. 1 reading.

## Strollers

Strollers Dramatic Society, after more than a year of waiting, gave **A BILL OF DIVORCEMENT** by Clemence Dane for their Winter Quarter production last weekend; and under the able direction of Alun O. Jones, they presented a splendid performance. That strangely fascinating story of the return of World War shell-shocked Hilary Fairchild who returned after fifteen years confinement at a private asylum to discover that his wife had divorced him and was planning to re-marry, and that his daughter had grown into young womanhood, probably will ever remain a fine vehicle for amateur performances.

At the Saturday evening performance, top honors,

*(Please turn to page 15)*

## LAMP LIGHTED BY EEL - ELECTRICITY

Instead of lighting a lamp by means of a switch, it is now possible to illuminate the lamp by disturbing an electric eel. This power of the eel to discharge high-tension currents has been successfully demonstrated by officials of the New York Aquarium.

Into the tank containing the six-foot eel, was arranged a pair of terminals which were connected to a neon lamp. When the snake-like fish was disturbed, it discharged a current and the lamp glowed. This shock-giving power is used by the eel for capturing prey by stunning it, and for defense against enemies. It is said that the shock is powerful enough to incapacitate a horse.

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## WISCONSIN

Professor H. F. Janda, University of Wisconsin, spent part of the summer making tests of the effects of steel reinforcement in slabs of concrete placed in different types of soil. These tests were made in three localities in the state—on Bayfield sand, on Colby silt loam, and on Superior clay. The results of the tests are being used to determine whether steel reinforcement has any effect on the cracking of slabs of concrete.

*(Wisconsin Engineer.)*

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Before marriage a man yearns for a woman. After marriage the "Y" is silent.

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## THE ENGINEER'S BOOKSHELF

*(Continued from page 5)*

I believe, went to Miss Kathryn Ann Faulder in the role of the daughter, who understandingly surrendered her own life of marriage with Kit Pumphrey (Robert Sherman), to care for her father (Frank Hill).

Even higher honors, I feel, should be placed for Mr. Jones, for his sympathetic direction of the piece. With two well directed performances to his credit, we hope that Mr. Jones will continue to give the campus more drama.