

The Knowledge Bank at The Ohio State University

Ohio State Engineer

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THE ENGINEER'S BOOKSHELF

By WILSON R. DUMBLE

A GENIUS IN THE FAMILY—by *Hiram Percy Maxim*—*Harper's*—\$2.50

NOT UNDER FORTY—by *Willa S. Cather*—*Knopf*—\$2.00

FIRST LADY—by *Katherine Dayton and George S. Kaufman*—*Randon House*—\$2.00

NOT SO DEEP A WELL—by *Dorothy Parker*—*Viking*—\$2.50

A Genius

One of the most interesting and amusing lectures I ever heard in my life happened to me some twenty years ago when I was a student at a "prep" school in Maryland. I recall it as if it were yesterday. Then, as now, heads of private schools believed that in order to keep the young minds out of mischief it was necessary to entertain them. The result was that on that particular evening—I feel sure it was Saturday evening, for study hours were rigidly employed all other evenings in the week—with a group of other youngsters I plodded through a misty rain across the campus of Tome School for Boys to hear one Hiram Percy Maxim. To my untutored mind the name Maxim registered nothing; but since then I have frequently thought about the personal and entertaining talk that I heard.

Only recently, however, have certain features of that evening, no doubt still retained somewhere in the gelatin of my memory, come to me. In full force, one night last week, they swooped down upon me when I was reading *A GENIUS IN THE FAMILY* by Hiram Percy Maxim. Only then did I distinctly recall how Percy Maxim told the small group of students gathered before him about his famous father renting a vacant room in an obscure section of London, and by means of a bean shooter pelting the nightly meetings of the Salvation Army, only to have the Army glance about wonderingly, and then slip away to another street where they might conduct their meetings less disturbed.

For that was one of the odd antics of Hiram Stevens Maxim, the inventor of the Maxim rifle, one of the most brilliant engineers and inventors of his day, "the genius in the family." And his son, Percy Maxim, inventor of the Maxim Silencer, is the very one to tell the same story in the splendid book about his father recently published by Harpers.

A GENIUS IN THE FAMILY has all the verve to keep you reading until you have finished, regardless of the hour hand on the clock; and embryo engineers

will long remember many of its pages after the book has been finished, or I miss my guess.

Even Mr. Maxim's preface is amusing: "Most of us men become fathers at one time or another. As far as my information goes, none of us has very much experience in the business when he embarks upon it. I am sure my father merely blundered into fatherhood without giving the matter any serious consideration. He gave every evidence as conceiving fatherhood to be a means provided by nature for perpetrating humorous misconceptions upon young and inexperienced offsprings. As the first of these offspring I was the butt of a host of most amazing undertakings."

And these undertakings, I might add, make up the contents of the book, a most entertaining volume about an extraordinary man, his bewildered wife and son, and their irregular household. *A GENIUS IN THE FAMILY* is worth anyone's time; there will be no regrets when the book is finished.

Cather Essays

Miss Willa S. Cather has broken into the field of essay writing with the publication, apparently for Christmas sale only, of *NOT UNDER FORTY*. Several months ago when I read in the *Saturday Review of Literature* that Miss Cather was promising a new volume in December, my heart leaped with expectation. I recalled so vividly how she had recaptured a phase of American history in *DEATH COMES FOR THE ARCHBISHOP*; how delicately she had sketched the life of Myra Henshaw in *MY MORTAL ENEMY*; how perfectly the pioneer days of the West had been placed before me in *A LOST LADY* and *MY ANTONIA*. Somehow I had expected another tale like the one of Claude Wheeler in *ONE OF OURS*, never stopping to notice, that the original announcement of *NOT UNDER FORTY* failed to say that it was not a novel.

But *NOT UNDER FORTY* is a collection of studies of literary personalities and certain aspects of literature that Miss Cather admires. Of the six in the volume, the most interesting concerns Miss Katherine Mansfield, known chiefly, at least to the students in my classes, by two short stories, *MISS BRILL* and *FOOTBALL GIRL*. Miss Mansfield, of course, affords a very interesting study, far more interesting, indeed, than the only other essay in the volume worth reading, the one about Sarah Orne Jewett.

Miss Cather admits, and for the life of me I do

not know why, that Miss Jewett influenced her writing more than any other American writer. I always have preferred to think that influence on Miss Cather's style came from the Edith Wharton's *ETHAN FROME* brand of New Englandism than from the Sarah Orne Jewett *POINTED FIRS* type.

Some few years ago I wrote a letter to Miss Cather concerning a special study I was making at the time for graduate work in the Department of English. In the letter I asked her to what extent Mrs. Wharton had influenced her writing. The answer I had to my letter was not from Miss Cather but from a secretary who said, in part, that Miss Cather had frequently remarked that it was Miss Jewett and not Mrs. Wharton after whom she has tried to copy a style of writing. So I am not surprised to find in *NOT UNDER FORTY* an essay about Miss Jewett.

For college students who are under forty *NOT UNDER FORTY* will not be interesting, with the exception of the essay about Miss Mansfield. But anyone who is acquainted with the short stories in Miss Mansfield's volume, *THE GARDEN PARTY*, will like the article about her.

Official Gossip

During the first week in December you may have seen Miss Jane Cowl in *FIRST LADY* at the Hartman theatre. If you did not have that pleasure, I know you will want to read the stage version in book form. If you happen to be familiar with George S. Kauffman and his *OF THEE I SING*, his *DINNER AT EIGHT* and his *ROYAL FAMILY*, I feel even more sure that you should read *FIRST LADY*. Then, too, if you happen to be interested in the social doings and teacup battles of Washington, I insist that you hasten to the nearest bookstall and get a copy. Read it and watch Sophy Prescott hide the jade ash trays when the souvenir hunters call for tea at the home of the Secretary of State. Watch Mrs. Creevey, Mrs. Louella May Creevey, "every inch a club woman, all bust and flowers, and blue and gold sash," swoop down upon the tea as president of the Women's Peace, Purity and Patriotism League. Watch official Washington's wives fighting over cooks, treaties, Congressional Records and purple pasts.

In writing *FIRST LADY*, Mr. Kauffman had the help of Miss Katherine Dayton, and what he lacks in the way of official gossip Miss Dayton supplies. As to the exact identity of the chief characters in the comedy, make an honest effort while you are reading it to fix personal identity with the Washington you read about in the daily newspapers. You'll find it more fun than *Monopoly*.

Poetry by Parker

And now comes Dorothy Parker publishing all her poetry in one volume called *NOT SO DEEP AS A WELL*. Everything that she had in *ENOUGH ROPE*,

SUNSET GUN and *DEATH AND TAXES* is contained in the new book, plus, of course, a few new poems. Miss Parker is a master of ironic humor, and if you think that life is just one bed of roses after another I do not advise you seeing the book. If you believe that final examinations are exciting and thrilling and adventurous you have no business reading Dorothy Parker.

Let me quote her *SANCTUARY*:

"My land is bare of chattering folk;
The clouds are low along the ridges,
And sweet's the air with curly smoke
From all my burning bridges."

Here is her *FLAW IN PAGANISM*:

"Drink and dance and laugh and lie,
Love, the reeling midnight through,
For tomorrow we shall die!
(But, alas, we never do.)"

One more; her *TWO-VOLUME NOVEL*:

"The sun's gone dim, and
The moon's turned black;
For I loved him, and
He didn't love back."

Nobel Nobility

As a person always interested in the theatre, and with my mind ever fresh with the memory of many, many happy evenings spent in front of the footlights, let me offer an orchid or two to the Nobel Prize Committee for awarding the Nobel Prize for Literature to the American dramatist, Eugene O'Neill. Since his days in Provincetown where he wrote those splendid one act plays of the sea to his more recent Broadway successes, *STRANGE INTERLUDE* and *MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA*, Mr. O'Neill has successfully placed America first and foremost in the drama of the world. France may have her Rostand; England may have her Shaw; but America, at long last, has her O'Neill, who surely in recent years, has revealed a striking ability to produce both good theatre and good drama. The world is his stage and man pitted against the universe is his theme, whether it be *EMPEROR JONES*, *BEYOND THE HORIZON* or *STRANGE INTERLUDE*. Life's shabby tragedy stalks his boards, and when his characters get sewed up in a situation, they crash through with an oath. With color and atmosphere, daring and originality, Eugene O'Neill far exceeds any other American dramatist. More power to the Nobel Prize Committee!

The only voice of disapproval in their selection that I have either read or heard appears in the November 21 issue of *THE SATURDAY REVIEW OF LITERATURE*. The editor, Bernard DeVoto, claims, on speaking of Mr. O'Neill that "whatever his international importance, he can hardly be called an artist of the first

rank; he is hardly even one of the first-rate figures of his own generation in America."

I cannot understand Professor DeVoto's statement, and here would like to inquire of him just whom he would pick as first-rate dramatists in America today. It seems to me that O'Neill more nearly hits the mark than any dramatist we have produced. Professor DeVoto's article, however, is well worth reading if anyone is interested in what may terminate in a literary squabble.

Pen and Brush

I noticed through an article in *The Lantern* several weeks ago that the Pen and Brush Club is making it possible for fraternities and sororities on the campus to borrow paintings to hang in their houses for the period of one month. At the end of that time the painting is removed, taken to another fraternity house, and is replaced by another work of art. Indeed this is a splendid idea, and the members of the Pen and Brush Club should be congratulated for starting the idea. The pictures are of standard size and suitable for the walls of the houses where they will hang.

MGM's Shakespeare

For the second time, several weeks ago, I saw the talking version of *ROMEO AND JULIET*, that star-crossed tragedy of William Shakespeare. I first saw it in Washington at the National theatre the first week in September, and was so thoroughly delighted with the performance that I was perfectly willing to attend again.

On second sight I thought more of Leslie Howard as Romeo than I did on the first showing. He made a fine Romeo, with Norma Shearer as a close second as Juliet. At times when Miss Shearer read her lines I caught glimpses of her Elizabeth Barrett; at other times there were traces of her Nina Leeds. Yet this was not noticeable enough to disturb. Undoubtedly highest honors go to Edna May Oliver as the Nurse and to Basil Rathbone as Tybalt. It was a splendid production, probably the best that Hollywood has given us.

FOR ENGINEERS

Nine Suggestions for Christmas Book Buying

STORIES FOR MEN—*Edited by Charles Grayson*—Little, Brown—\$2.50.

Here is a volume containing 35 short stories that are world-beaters. They are all modern, too. This is an ideal gift for one's masculine friends.

SCORPION—*by Will James*—Scribners—\$2.50.

This is a story of a good bad horse by the author of "Lone Cowboy." It's Western and it's good.

WILLIAM BLIGH—*by George Mackaness*—Farrar—\$5.00.

Do you remember "Mutiny on the Bounty?" This book concerns the same Mr. Bligh and is based largely on unpublished documents.

LIFE WITH FATHER—*by Clarence Day*—Knopf—\$2.00.

This is not exactly new, but buy it for Dad; mother will get a kick out of it too.

SKI TRACKS—*Edited by Charles and Percy Olton*—Morrow—\$3.00

If you are interested in the sport that has recently taken America by storm you yourself should own this one. It has 150 action pictures that are action pictures.

YANG AND YIN—*by Alice Hobart*—Bobbs, Merrill—\$2.50.

This may sound like a new drink, if you know what I mean, but its "kick" is even better. It concerns the adventures of an American doctor in China.

ENJOYMENT OF LAUGHTER—*by Max Eastman*—Simon, Schuster—\$3.75.

If you like the Marx Brothers, Chic Sale and W. C. Fields you will like to read this volume. This is a book about humor that is funny.

THE LIVES OF TALLEYRAND—*by Crane Brinton*—Norton—\$3.00.

Here is a readable biography about an interesting French figure. Any good book about Talleyrand is witty; this is extremely witty.

THE MELANCHOLY LUTE—*by Franklin P. Adams*—Viking—\$2.50.

Here are the favorite poems of one F. P. A. You can't go wrong on this book, even if you want to.
