

## The Knowledge Bank at The Ohio State University

### Ohio State Engineer

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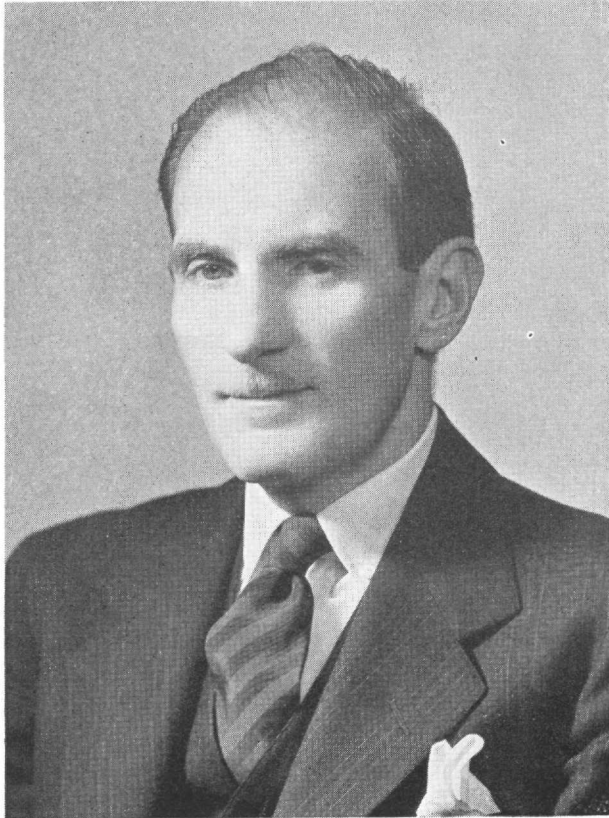
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# The Engineer's Bookshelf

By Wilson R. Dumble, Department of English



Professor Dumble

## THE MALE ANIMAL

The week of January 6 was Old Home Week at the Hartman theatre, for Mr. Elliott Nugent brought to his home town the play which he and Mr. James Thurber wrote and in which Mr. Nugent himself takes the lead. I do not need to tell you that I am referring to "The Male Animal," that limpid piece of comedy that so closely resembles one of Mr. Thurber's "New Yorker" drawings. All Columbus turned out to welcome the work of the two Ohio State boys who more than twenty years ago sat in the same class rooms that the young undergraduates are using today. The carriage trade saw the performances during the first few days of the week; then, as the salvo of praise grew louder and louder the University students took the house by storm toward the week's end. At least that is what happened on Friday night when I saw the performance.

Truly "The Male Animal" is the college play to end college plays. To be successful college plays have to be as modern as tomorrow morning's news headlines; otherwise, they would not be college plays. The slang of this season is not the slang of next year, and the playwright writing his story about a college campus is confronted with the problem of making his

dialogue modern, so modern in fact that on tomorrow, when today's slang is long forgotten, he still will have a play that will hold water, a play that is plausible. Suffice to say, Mr. Thurber and Mr. Nugent have done a good job, a job that will stand the test of some time to come, anyway. How have they done it?

To begin with, they have centered the action of the plot around young Professor Thomas Turner, an honest and timid member of the Department of English at Midwestern University. (Don't let any one tell you that Midwestern University is not Ohio State; it definitely is.) Mr. Turner has told young Michael Barnes, a "pinkish" intellectual of the undergraduate body and editor of the University's literary journal, that he intends to read to his composition class the letter containing Vanzetti's declaration of faith. Michael, unfortunately, has written an editorial for the forthcoming edition of his journal praising Mr. Turner for fearlessness in this matter, especially since the University has recently been the center of a Red-hunt by the noble members of its Board of Trustees. Mr. Turner sees no reason why the letter cannot be read along with Lincoln's letter to Mrs. Bixby; it is a splendid piece of composition. And Michael sees no reason why Mr. Turner should not read the letter; in fact, he says so with great emphasis in his editorial, consciously realizing all the time that the Board members will be biting their finger nails and sharp shooting for Communists.

But the Red charge is only one of the annoyances confronting Professor Turner on the eve of Midwestern's big football game with Michigan. It is Homecoming at the University, and the activities centered about the game have brought back into their midst one Joe Ferguson, ex-football star at Midwestern and ex-campus beau of Mrs. Turner. The result is amazing: At the cocktail party which the Turners give during the first act, the complications gather momentum with such rapidity and with such hilarious consequences that the audience is actually "rolling in the aisle" by the time of the first act curtain. It all makes "good theatre", and for simple enjoyment of the spoken work of the drama, the plot is tops.

Although "The Male Animal" is intended chiefly as light comedy, if you want to be serious about it I suppose you can find satire in its lines about the general helplessness of civilized man in a world that is dominated by primitives. Mr. Brooks Atkinson—those are his words—writing about the play in "The New York Times" feels that way; and probably he is correct. But I prefer to take my Thurber for what

it is worth on the surface. To me "The Male Animal" showed a stage full of people smothering their serious troubles with a pattern of comical nonsense. We all do that; and why shouldn't we?

Many of my students enjoyed the attraction and I am happy that they were able to see it. Yet, as I told a class the following Monday morning, nobody of their generation could have enjoyed the play half as much as did those members of my generation who happened to be on the Ohio State University campus during the late Teens and the Twenties. To us who knew two outstanding professors in the Department of English and who also realize how they influenced our lives as admittedly they did the life of Mr. Thurber and Mr. Nugent, we could recognize the meaning of many lines. I refer to the late Professor "Joey" Taylor and the late Professor Joe Denney. I know the influence of those two men as well as I know that I am now pounding out these lines on my own trusty Royal Portable: Prof. Damon of "The Male Animal" is a composite portrait of Joey Taylor and Joe Denney. Take Tommy's line in the first act: "I believe that college should be concerned with ideas. Not just your ideas . . . or my ideas, but with all ideas." Take one of Dean Damon's lines in the first act: "I have been putting ideas into young people's heads for forty-two years with no visible results whatever." And still another one of the Dean's lines: "Tell Thomas that if he decides not to read the letter, I shall feel easier in my mind. Much easier, and—slightly disappointed."

That was Joe Denney talking; it was not Thurber, it was not Dean Damon, but it was Joe Denney. As years pass I feel more sure that the students at Ohio State between the Nineteen-Hundreds and 1930 who sat in the English classes of Joey Taylor and Joe Denney gained a certain joie de vivre that will help them carry on during these turbulent times of the Forties.

Yes, the week of January 6 was Old Home Week, and it gave not only the youngsters a gay sharp comedy but also the oldsters a slight nostalgic whiff of the days that were. The college play to end college plays has been written; let us look no further.

#### REPORT ON ENGLAND

During the last days of 1940 Simon and Schuster

published a little volume called "Report on England". It consists of a series of observations made by Ralph Ingersoll, editor of P. M. I am told that they originally appeared in his paper and that they met with such a joyful reception that it was decided to publish them in book form after a certain amount of editing. Mr. Ingersoll spent two weeks in England during the last days of October, and these articles are accounts of his experience in England under air raids.

Although the author recounts vividly his Atlantic crossing by Clipper, his encounter with the custom officials at an unnamed English port of call, his motor trip through shell-torn country to London, and his astonishment at the high morale of the British during their darkest hours, the chief interest in the book is his amazingly fine description of air raid shelters, visits to English air ports, and a personal interview with Mr. Churchill. With an easy flow of language, Mr. Ingersoll takes the reader on a night visit to the Isle of Dogs air raid shelter, viewing some eight thousand people from the poorer districts of London, people from Arthur Morrison's Mean Streets, sleeping under almost unbelievable conditions.

In reading the book, one gathers more than a mere idea of what is happening; the reader is overwhelmed by the very magnitude of disaster and almost feels the necessity of rushing to the nearest recruiting station. It leaves one in coldest despair with positively no alternation between optimism and despondency. One reads much between the lines of Mr. Ingersoll's book. Considerable is not said in black and white: From periods of quiescence, Hitler invariably emerges with completed hideous plans, which he proceeds to execute unerringly. But even if he does win, and if the war closes with the demolition of the British Empire, the peace can last only for an hour. When hostilities are renewed, the theatre of maneuvers will certainly be in the Western Hemisphere. These are a few of the ideas suggested, ideas that are gaining greater ground day by day in America.

"Report on England" is the first and as far as I know the only complete story that has appeared in America depicting Britain at war. It is well worth reading.

REPORT ON ENGLAND, Ralph Ingersoll, Simon and Schuster, New York, \$1.50.