

The Knowledge Bank at The Ohio State University

Ohio State Engineer

Title: The Engineer's Bookshelf

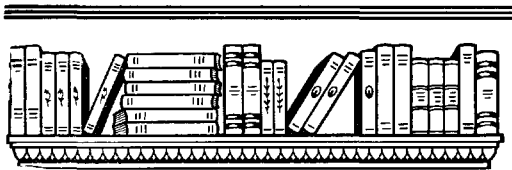
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The Engineer's Bookshelf

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Following a custom established several years ago—this column, believe it or not, is now ten years old—I want to print a couple books reviews that have been written for me by students in regular class work. In the following paragraphs the reader will find two reviews by Charles E. Beck, a member of English 414 class last Autumn Quarter. They were written as class assignments; and since they were handed in, they have been collecting dust in my desk drawer. The reviewer is a native of Columbus and at the time of writing them he was enrolled in the College of Engineering as a freshman. At the moment he is enrolled in the Meteorology course at Dennison University.

Native Son by Richard Wright, one of the more prominent Negro writers in the land, was published in 1940, and caused a considerable stir in literary circles. Orson Wells, it will be remembered, converted the novel into a stage production that had a successful Broadway run. The other book, *Address Unknown*, that Mr. Beck has reviewed needs no comment here. The author, Mrs. Kressmann Taylor, so we are led to believe, wrote this story out of her own experience. In condensed form it was reprinted in *The Readers' Digest* following its publication in book form in 1939.

NATIVE SON

In these turbulent days when the racial problem often raises its ugly head in the form of mob outbreaks and riots, it is inspiring to see such a masterpiece as *Native Son* come from the pen of a negro. The book is actually a psychological study of the thoughts, emotions, and ambitions of a young, lower-class negro. The very fact that a colored author could carry out such a clever analysis of the social situation of his own race portends a future of much wider opportunity for the negroes.

Native Son is a saddening story. It is also an adventurous, engrossing, and sometimes dreadful story. From the beginning we know we are not to pity Bigger Thomas, for he is shown at once as a mean, cowardly, lying, thieving bully. But at the same time we recognize in him something larger than a persecuted black; we see him as a symbol of the downward path to which society has pushed many a negro. Society, in its own way, had thought that it was helping an easy-

going, useless negro to a better life when it forced him to become chauffeur for a wealthy philanthropist. Mr. Dalton was typical of a group who thought they helped the negroes when they gave them ping-pong balls to occupy their time, while at the same time they charged exorbitant rents for broken down tenements, and kept them within a certain district.

Bigger is not befriended by the attitude of his "benefactors," but is bewildered and baffled. Mary Dalton and her communist lover, Jan, have him tour the town with them, trying to find out more about negro life. They drink a lot, and Jan leaves Bigger to take Mary home. Mary has had too much to drink and suddenly passes out on the back steps; Bigger, fearing he will betray her secret by calling for help, carries her to her room after she collapses in his arms. Here fate again tricks him when her blind mother comes into the room; Bigger takes a pillow and presses it over her head to smother any sound, only to find after Mrs. Dalton has left that he has also smothered the life from Mary. Here his cruelty or perhaps desperation shows as he decapitates the body and burns it in the furnace.

From this horrific episode until the end of the book, his life becomes a race with fate. Tricks, false accusations, kidnap notes, the discovery of Mary's bones, the flight across Chicago rooftops as the white "vigilantes" close in on the "black belt," the rape and murder of his own girl, and his final capture and imprisonment unfold like a kaleidoscopic nightmare. Then comes his trial, during which he has a brilliant lawyer, Mr. Max, a Communist, one of those whom he tried to blame for the murder. Mr. Max's plea against a society that drove Bigger to crime, and a district attorney trying to advance himself, is a masterpiece, but is of no avail against mob fury. Then the book culminates in Bigger's own confession, not for an accidental murder, or for rape he did not commit, but for obscure causes that made him hate and commit aggressive acts that he might live his own life as a free-thinking individual.

This is truly a remarkable novel. Its bluntness, and unexpurgated, pithy statements lend color to its timely and unforgettable theme. Richard Wright, its author, writes about his own people as only he can do it. This book with its powerful writing, vigorous description, and stark reality,

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Every branch of the Armed Services uses the telephone. No. 2 of a series, Submarine.



Five thousand miles from home Bill—Torpedoman—is keeping a date. Weeks of waiting, days of watching, hours of hiding under the sea, all for the moment when he reports over his wartime telephone, "All tubes ready, sir!" There'll be other dates, Bill—better ones—in the kind of world you're fighting for.



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THE BOOKSHELF

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will again win many prizes and much distinction for the author. With books written by authors such as Mr. Wright, with negroes working side by side with whites in factories, with negroes giving their lives on the battlefield, and with their all out effort at home, one wonders how long the racial problem will endure.

ADDRESS UNKNOWN

One hears that the best things come in small packages, and so it is with **Address Unknown**; for as a book, **Address Unknown** is very small, but for thought-provoking qualities, it has the length of many volumes.

Address Unknown consists of a series of letters between two men, a Jew and a German, from 1932 until 1934. These men were former business partners and close friends. In addition they were the co-owners of the "Schulse-Eisenstein Galleries" of San Francisco. It is evident that the Jew, Max Eisenstein, had traveled much in Germany before the first World War. At the beginning of the story we see that the German, Martin Schulse, had returned to Germany with his wife and sons, and was very well settled there, now fairly wealthy. Max is happy for Martin and envies him his return to Germany. They are very confidential and cordial in their letters, Max telling how he rejoiced in selling an art monstrosity to some old Jewesses and Martin telling how he is satisfied with the new democracy of Germany. Max writes that his sister, Griselle, an actress with a traveling company, is enjoying success and may soon visit Berlin.

Later on Martin informs Max of his doubts concerning the new man, Hitler, coming to power, but he says he is good for the land. He says his family is happy, he is a village official, and he is about to become a father again.

Later on Max writes to Martin for inside news of Germany, and tells of the horrible tales he has heard of the treatment of the Jews. He asks Martin to tell him that these are not true; but Martin, slowly changing as his country and environment change, writes back that the stern measures are necessary, and states, "The Jewish race is a sore spot in any nation that harbors it. I have loved you, not because of your race, but in spite of it." He asks him not to write again because his mail is censored at home.

Later, Max begins to worry because he has had no news from his sister, and especially because his own letters are returned marked, **Adressant Unbekannt**, address unknown. He pleads with Martin as an old friend of his, and as a former suiter of Griselle, to find and help her.

However, the change has become complete in
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Something for you to do, afterward?

A MESSAGE TO MEN ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES

At no time in all the years we have been the confidant of young men approaching a career have we been so sure of the opportunity implicit in your future.

Today, your campus may not be of your own choosing. Your courses, your schedules almost all are pointed toward immediate necessity. Your career is set.

Have you a true conception of how much your special training means to your country? To Victory?

We think you do. But, honestly, don't you catch yourself wondering whether there is really going to be something for you to do, afterward? Are you sometimes in doubt of what's to come after NOW?

We say to you: There is a world to be made anew.

That world is going to offer you creative opportunity surpassing anything we old-timers have ever seen. You are going to have tools and materials and knowledge to work with such as no generation ever had.

We think you are going to find not only

a country, but a whole world, waiting for your talents.

And we know that in this country you are going to find a point-of-view throughout industry which is a new thing under the sun. Already countless leaders in industry are laying plans which are based on flat acceptance of the principle that their first responsibility, after all-out production for war, is to make postwar jobs.

We at Alcoa are one group of such men. We are Imagineering now, for you. We intend to do everything we know how to make aluminum make jobs, whether they may be with us, or in a thousand other industries which will be using Alcoa Aluminum when it is again available.

Wherever you are in service, you will surely be in, or around, or supported by, American airplanes. Will you remember two things: They are made largely of Alcoa Aluminum. *And*, the folks who make that metal are even now Imagineering for your future.

A PARENTHETICAL ASIDE: FROM THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF



ALCOA ALUMINUM

• This message is printed by Aluminum Company of America to help people to understand *what we do* and *what sort of men* make aluminum grow in usefulness.

THE BOOKSHELF

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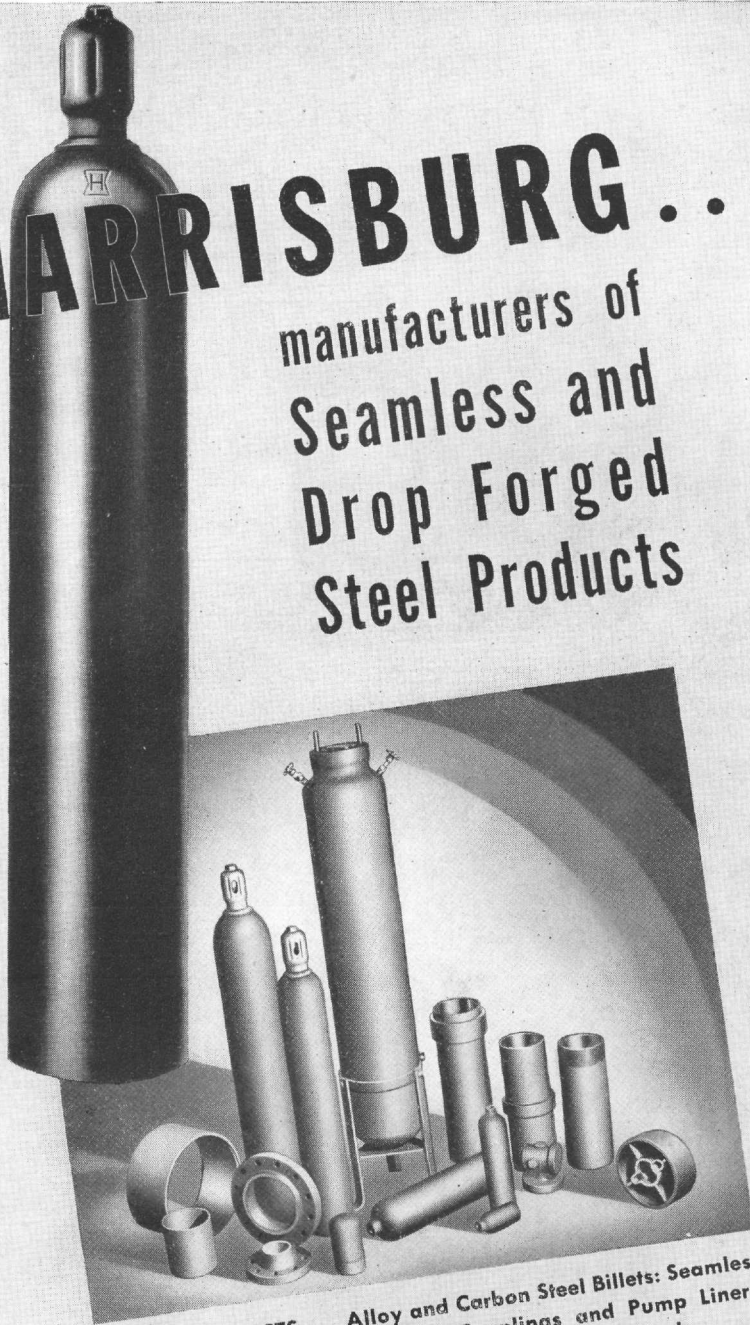
Martin. He writes back bluntly that "your sister is dead." He describes how she was driven from the stage as a Jewess, and pursued by storm troopers because "she had displayed her Jewish body on the stage before pure young German men." She came to his house with troopers close behind, but he refused her admission. Then they caught her, but she soon stopped screaming. The next day he sent down for the body. In closing he writes fanatically, "A new Germany is being shaped here. We will soon show the world great things under our Glorious Leader."

Then the last chapter begins to unfold. Max sends Schulse a cablegram and letters including phrases of doubtful meaning which refer to fictitious exhibitions and a false German Young

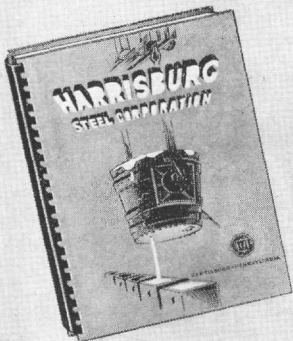
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THE BOOKSHELF

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Painters' League. In short they are messages that would seem to be in code. Moreover, sentences such as "Our prayers follow you daily, dear brother"; and "Aunt Rheba says tell Martin he must write more briefly and clearly so his friends can understand all that he says," do much to futher German suspicions that he is a Jewish traitor.

One last letter comes by special messenger from Martin, in which he begs Max to stop. But to no avail. Once the Jew decides he is wronged, he reaps his revenge. With one more letter to Martin, the next letter returns stamped, "Address Unbekannt."

So we see in this book the work the German government does. It makes enemies of friends, it turns a tolerant person into a bigot; yes, it causes a complete metamorphosis in its followers. The book shows the real evils of a dictatorship, how it affects even the small people of the country, and places a firm confidence in its readers that no loyal American will ever rest until Hitlerism dies.

Kressmann Taylor, the author, is married and the mother of three children. For a time she was an advertising copy writer, but since then, she has not written much, considering her duty to her home more than her duty to the pen. She understands how people behave; what they will do when placed under violent pressure, or in fear, and how they will react to defiance, revenge, and passion. She has shown this in the lives of the three characters, Max, Martin, and Griselle, the lives of all oppressed peoples today. It is a book which everybody should read and enjoy. It does much to show why today we are fighting harder than ever before, and why Hitler and all he means must perish forever.