

## The Burning Glass

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### I. "*The Goose Step*," By Upton Sinclair.

The stated purpose of *The Goose Step*, Upton Sinclair's diatribe against the contemporary university, is to bring about a strike of college professors. The demands upon which this proposed strike is to be made are three. First, before a faculty member can be discharged from his position "he must have the right, which every criminal possesses, of knowing what are the charges against him, and of having a hearing in which he is confronted by his accusers, and be given the right to cross-question them, to answer their charges and prove them false if he can. The decision in his case must rest not with his masters and exploiters, but with his peers."

In justification of this demand, he cites case after case in which instructors have been released without a hearing, because of liberality of opinion, unsubstantiated personal scandal, or opposition, either direct or indirect, to the private business interests of the trustees.

The second demand of the college professor is that not merely must he have security in his job, but he must have collective control of that job; he must say how the college shall be conducted, and what higher education shall be. The college, we are told, is controlled by a group of trustees, who are usually unacquainted either with advancing educational theories or with the best liberal thought of the time along any other line, and through the college president, who is too often merely their henchman, they compel the faculty members to conform with their own very narrow viewpoint of academic freedom. "The American college," says Sinclair, "has not been organized on the principles of American government but on those of American business; the college is not a state but a factory. . . . The college must become a democratic state, run by its citizens and workers."

After showing that the salaries of college professors hardly provide the necessities of life, the author makes the following sardonic forecast: "Such universities as Yale, Harvard, and Johns Hopkins rely upon their prestige to get them teachers, paying starvation wages, and tacitly establishing a celibate order in the



service of the plutocracy. I note in my morning newspaper that Northwestern University has come out into the open, and has refused to engage married men as professors, explaining that it cannot afford to pay a salary for two. . . . I expect some morning to pick up my paper and read that the president of some great university has announced that, inasmuch as college professors who cannot afford to marry sometimes set bad moral examples for the students, it is now ordained that none but eunuchs need apply for jobs."

The motive of the whole book is, of course, the Sinclairian complex, the control of big business. Painstakingly, one by one, he takes up each of the largest universities of the country and produces statistics to show that it is being manipulated corruptly by large financial interests for their own personal gain, and for the suppression of arguments against their inhuman exploitations. Columbia is "the University of J. P. Morgan" and his interlocking directorates; Chicago is the "University of Standard Oil;" Michigan is "the University of Automobiles;" Pittsburgh is "the University of the Steel Trust;" Minnesota is "the University of the Ore Trust," and so on.

Indiana is practically the only state university in the country which is not mentioned as being under the control of some one large business interest. Whether this omission was intentional or not, we cannot say; but this much we do know: Our state is singularly felicitous in not possessing any one powerful trust whose interlocking directorates control the affairs, economic, political, educational, and social, of the state. Any lack of academic freedom here, if any exists, would probably be due to the general jingoism of an ultra-conservative state, rather than to manipulation for individual gain.

For this reason we have perhaps comparatively greater freedom of speech than at other universities,—enough of it, at least, to satisfy the modest desires of the few faculty members and students who perceive the fundamental inequities of most of our existing mores and institutions. Even at that, in many towns of the state in which there prevails a general degree of enlightenment comparable to that of a theologians' conference in the Thirteenth Century, or of the present-day United States Senate, it is a widespread belief that "the state university corrupts the students with filthy Darwinism, and turns out all sorts of wild-eyed Bolsheviks and Atheists."



In this review I have not touched upon Sinclair's muck-raking of the personal lives of university presidents and trustees. There is undoubtedly exaggeration in these accounts; and, as in the book as a whole, there is too much petty invective, and too much display of egotism upon the part of the writer. But withal the matter may be crystallized to this: if the charges are fraudulent they furnish occasion for a big libel suit; if they are true, most of our institutions of higher education are in the hands dolts or rascals. In either case, the charges merit further investigation.

It is a significant fact, however, that although the book has been out almost a year, we have heard of no legal proceedings against the author. From this it would seem that the charges contain several grains of truth—enough, in fact, to make further inquiry undesirable.

However this may be, Sinclair makes several piercing observations such as this: "From their social life the students learn what the real world is—a place of class distinctions based upon property; they learn the American religion—what William James calls 'the worship of the bitch-goddess Success'."

The consensus of opinion expressed by impartial reviewers may be summed up in the words of the *Bookman*, a conservative magazine as magazines go nowadays: "He (Sinclair) shows that the universities are not responsive or responsible to those who pay the tuition fees; that the instructors are underpaid, the victims of university politics and individual caprice; that students are not taught original thinking; that radical thought and radical utterance are usually frowned on and often punished; that doctors' theses are too often careful investigations of foolishness; that the honorary degree is a joke. All this may be 'old stuff' but it required somebody to say so. Grant that the author is inaccurate and at other times he has misinterpreted the facts—there is enough material in the book to show where improvement in education is badly needed."

By Sir Polonius Panurge.

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2. "*Janet March*," by *Floyd Dell*.

In 1920 there appeared a novel which excited no stingy portion of comment. That novel was *Moon-Calf*; and its author, Floyd Dell, seemingly had found a place for himself in the ranks of the literary "promising." He had written a simple story well,



with just enough candor and restraint to make it the best of the realistic fiction of its year. In 1921 a sequel to *Moon-Calf* was published. This second novel appeared under the title of *The Briary Bush*; and it dealt, for the most part, with the individual problems of marriage. Like *Moon-Calf*, it was a simple story told in a frank, unhesitating way; and, too, it was replete with reactionary ideas indigenous to the year of its publication.

Since that time, serious and purposeful realism has given way to ultra-naturalism. The true literary ideal of naturalism has been swallowed up by the passion to out-do; and the three years that have passed since *Moon-Calf* have disgorged such a quantity of miserably written exploitations of sex that the present time finds readers turning back to "cloak and sword" fiction in an effort to rid themselves of the nausea which a confused notion of art has forced upon them.

Floyd Dell's latest novel, *Janet March*, which was published last month, is the epitome of this misconception. It is a supreme effort to out-do all sex novels; and, as a result, it is an ineffectual and inconsistent plea for Pagan love.

Janet March is presumably a "modern girl"—courageous, exposed to education, passably refined, with unconventional ideas about conventional things and a consuming determination to pattern her life after the dictates of her own reason. Consequently, unafraid, she ventures into life to learn the ways of this and that and to know herself; and she is confronted by endless dilemmas which the author describes in a disgusting way. But at last she meets Roger Leland, a middle-aged, disillusioned idealist who, in his youth, sought Pagan love. After two-hundred pages of filth, in which the incidents of Leland's life are described in an amateurish fashion, Janet and he are married, conforming to the conventions which they both despised.

Mr. Dell has accomplished at least one thing in the writing of *Janet March*. Caught in the swirl of ultra-naturalism, he has buried his art and his literary ambitions beneath a book that is both untrue and cheap.