



THE FIRST READER... By Harry Hansen

Ingersoll Novel Hollow Recital of Commonplace Without Spiritual Depth

"THE GREAT ONES." A novel. By Ralph Ingersoll. New York. Harcourt, Brace, \$3.

"THE LAST BILLIONAIRE." By William C. Richards. New York. Scribner, \$3.75.

BEFORE I BEGAN stalking authors, I used to stalk politicians, of whom the woods were full. Among them was that tall, bearded Republican stalwart, Charles Warren Fairbanks, Senator and Vice President, who nursed a Presidential bee for a long time. One day he was asked about some adverse comment on his candidacy. I don't recall the exact question, but this was his answer:

"It isn't what people say about a man that should bother him; it's what comes out of his own mouth that ought to scare him to death."

This observation recurred to me while I was reading Ralph Ingersoll's tongue-in-cheek novel, "The Great Ones," which is likely to be an eight-day sensation in the editorial and advertising circles of New York. Although labeled "the love story of two very important people," it reads like a distorted paraphrase of the news-magazine making of the last 25 years, in which Mr. Ingersoll was immersed up to his chin.

While I was trying to figure out how the author had turned fact into fiction I discovered that the novel does not carry the usual disclaimer that all this is imaginary and that any resemblance to persons living or dead is unintentional.

I do not expect Mr. Ingersoll to blush for his own words, but it seems to me that his novel is one of the meanest jobs in print.

IN MITIGATION it may be said that publishers are fair game for satirists, and since they make everybody's business their own, it is only natural when their affairs become everybody's. The publisher in Mr. Ingersoll's novel is a man of intense concentration and industry, so occupied making his magazines pay that his life, though full of activity, is basically hollow and unsatisfying. At middle age, inordinately rich and spiritually baffled, he can merely repeat his routine.

He is Sturges Strong, one of two Yale men who determine while in college to start a news magazine, *Facts*, the *Knowing Weekly*, as compact as *Time* and as bright as the *New Yorker*. When Sturges marries the former fiancée of his partner, the latter sells his interest. Sturges' wife, though wealthy, helps loyally in the hard days of the magazine; after it becomes a \$40,000,000 property, she is tossed aside by him for the dynamic career woman, Letta Long.

BOTH STURGES and Letta represent wealth and want it. They are not miserly, but they know how to use it. Letta is beautiful, tactful, competent and "sane in everything except love." After a brief career in the theater and a love affair with an editor of the *New Yorker*, she marries into a New York family worth \$60,000,000. Her divorce settlement makes her a millionaire twice over. She then organizes a dress design house and sells it for \$2,500,000. Figures are part of the scenery in this novel.

In two years Letta becomes "the most widely known painter in America." In six weeks she finishes a book, sells it to Hollywood and goes there to help Samuel Goldwyn produce it. Sturges had the idea they could work together on his magazines, now headed by the phenomenally successful *Fantasy*, a sort of super-life, but this peters out. Instead Letta turns to politics. As one of her friends said, she should have been a five-star general.

THE GREAT ONES proves that it takes more than bank balances and circulation figures to make a novel. Just as these lives are lived wholly for externals, so this novel is full of movement without meaning. The story is heaped with details, often routine. Mr. Ingersoll seems to have had half dozen of his "researchers" at his elbow, with the usual results—the glorification of the insignificant and the elaboration of the commonplace. Sturges and Letta remain wooden effigies. They compound their wealth without excitement.

CROSSWORD PUZZLE

Laugh-Maker

HORIZONTAL

15 Pictured

16 Entertainer

17 Type of

18 molding

19 Hospital

20 resident

21 physician

22 Golf teacher

23 Boy's name

24 United States

25 Legion (ab.)

26 Irish sea god

27 Wild plum

28 Route (ab.)

29 Wear away

30 Greek

gravestone

31 Flower

32 Fails to win

33 Parent

34 Note in

35 Guido's scale

36 Populace

37 He performs

38 on the —

39 Angry

40 Deer tracks

41 Bitter wretch

42 Negitive word

43 Perched

44 Awaken

45 Sloths

46 Pester

47 Louse eggs

48 Ticks

VERTICAL

1 Boring

2 instruments

3 Indonesian

4 tribal group

5 French article

6 Diminutive of

7 Lemuel

8 Liquid

9 measure

10 Preposition

11 United States

12 Legion (ab.)

13 Irish sea god

14 Wild plum

15 Route (ab.)

16 Wear away

17 Greek

gravestone

18 Flower

19 Fails to win

20 Parent

21 Note in

22 Guido's scale

23 Populace

24 He performs

25 on the —

26 Angry

27 Deer tracks

28 Bitter wretch

29 Negitive word

30 Perched

31 Awaken

32 Sloths

33 Pester

34 Louse eggs

35 Ticks

36 Territorialism

37 Hopkins' kilns

38 Dry

39 Station

40 Monkey

41 Hauls

42 Traduces

43 Completes

44 (ab.)

45 Expires

46 Man's name

47 Abstract being

48 Part of "be"

49 Mistakes

50 Subjugate

51 Bestow

52 That thing

53 That

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