



Is "The Jungle" True?

BY UPTON SINCLAIR

["The Jungle" is to be considered not merely as one of the most popular novels of the day, but as raising an issue of national importance. President Roosevelt was so impressed with the book that he sent for Mr. Sinclair to come to Washington and give in person his evidence as to the conditions in the Chicago Stock Yards. The President has since sent as his personal commissioners, Charles P. Neill, Commissioner of Labor and James B. Reynolds, to investigate the situation, and their report will shortly be published, which is likely to result in Government action.—EDITOR.]

"THE question is," says THE INDEPENDENT reviewer, "how seriously shall we take this story of life in the packing house district of Chicago?" That seems to be the question with a great many people. For the past year, ever since the story began appearing serially, I have been receiving half a dozen letters a day, asking it; so that if a public answer serves no other purpose, it will at least help to lighten the burden of my mail.

"Of all the recent literature of exposure," says the *New York American*, "The Jungle" is at once the most astounding and the most convincing. It rings with truth in every paragraph." On the other hand, the *Chicago Inter Ocean* thinks that it is "too hysterically sensational and furiously denunciatory." "Common sense should tell the reader," the review continues, "that conditions in the world's chief source of meat supply cannot be as 'The Jungle' portrays them." Perplexed between opinions such as these, people are writing me letters such as one I have received today from a Jewish clergyman in California: "I wish that I might know the truth about this. How is one to know it? Will you tell me yourself, what you believe about the book? Can it be that you think it is true? Can you assure me that it is true? If I can have your assurance, it will go a great way with me, because no man can read this book and fail to be convinced that you yourself are honest." My answer to this correspondent, and to all others, has been as follows: "I in-

tend 'The Jungle' to be an exact and faithful picture of conditions as they exist in Packingtown, Chicago. I mean it to be true, not merely in substance, but in detail, and in the smallest detail. It is as true as it should be if it were not a work of fiction at all, but a study by a sociologist; it is so true that students may go to it, as they would to a work of reference. I have exercised none of the ordinary privileges of the writer of fiction. I have imagined nothing, I have embellished nothing; I have simply dramatized and interpreted. In the portion of the book that deals with other parts of Chicago I have invented several incidents, such as the story of how Jurgis loses the hundred-dollar bill, and how he gets into the millionaire's palace—the artistic purpose of which is evident to any one; but in the earliest portions of the book, which deal with conditions in Packingtown, I have not invented the smallest detail. Everything that has been there described has, to my own positive knowledge, happened to some one in that neighborhood. And likewise every fact or figure which I have given is absolutely accurate and exact, the result of patient inquiry and investigation. I spent seven weeks in the stockyards district alone, living with the people, meeting them in their homes, in the places where they worked, in their saloons and clubs. During that time I talked with hundreds of workingmen; I talked also with every other class of persons to be found in the district, with bosses and superintendents, with doctors and lawyers and merchants,

with saloon keepers and policemen, clergymen and criminals. Everywhere I took note of what they said, testing the statements of one by those of another, and verifying every minutest detail; and afterward, when I came home, I kept up a continual correspondence with many people in Packingtown—in cases which I could name I wrote several letters in order to make sure of a single statement which I was making in the story. So I am not disturbed when people who know nothing whatever about Packingtown declare, either in reviews or in conversation, that the book "cannot be true." I know that every honest man who takes the trouble to go out there and investigate will find that it is true, and true in every sense of the word. Among the (literally) thousands of letters that have come to me about this book, and the hundreds of reviews which have been written, I have been impeached upon but one single *fact*. That fact was that I made my immigrants pay \$8.40 interest instead of \$7, as it should have been: An error due to a miscalculation, and that not a miscalculation of my own, for I wrote the figures exactly as they were given to me by one of the agents who rented houses upon the plan which I have described. The blunder being his, and one that he might just as readily have made in a real transaction, my helpless immigrants might quite possibly have had to pay the larger amount after all.

As a writer of fiction I could be required to be true only in the way of art, and not in the way of a newspaper; but, as it happened, I was able to be true in both ways, and the book might as well have the credit for it. Therefore, let me show in detail exactly what I mean when I say that "The Jungle" is as true as a work of reference. I will take up some of the questions that have been propounded by my correspondents. A woman writes to ask me whether there can be any truth in my picture of the midwife in Packingtown and of the horrors which she perpetrated. I answered: "Upon one mile of a single avenue in Packingtown, Ashland avenue between Forty-seventh and Fifty-fifth streets, I counted over forty physicians; and I talked with one of them, a Polish doctor,

and one statement which he made to me I remember as follows: 'I have been practising for thirteen years in this district, and during that time never a week has passed that I have not been called in to two or three cases of women who have been mangled and mutilated by midwives.'" Again, Jack London, referring to the book in the course of a speech, was challenged by a man in the audience who said it was absurd to represent a child as being drowned in the streets of Packingtown; and London replied: "I myself, while in Chicago, talked with a settlement worker who buried that child." I, for my part, had clipped the incident from a Chicago newspaper; as I also did the one concerning the little boy who was locked in an oil factory at night and devoured by rats. To take another case, in the course of my story, I described a certain "forelady" who ran her department in connection with a house of prostitution downtown. Any one who knows anything about the yards knows that this sort of thing is common, but I had no particular forelady in mind. However, in a report upon "The Jungle," prepared by the legal department of Armour & Co. (which I had the pleasure of reading) I found that they took it for granted that I had in mind a certain particular forelady in their establishment; and only the other day I met a man who had been, for twelve years, a superintendent with Armour & Co., and who thought the same thing, and wondered how I had managed to get the details so exact. One of the curious things in connection with "The Jungle" is that I keep learning new facts continually, and they are always valuable. If I had met this superintendent before I wrote the story I could have made it a great deal blacker than it is at present.

Tho I meant to tell the truth, and to tell it relentlessly, and without in any way considering conventions or proprieties, I must confess that I should have shrunk from picturing the facts which I described in the casual conversation of this man.

All the facts which I put into the book I obtained from persons who were qualified to know about them; the medical facts were given to me by physicians,

the political facts by politicians, and the conditions in the different departments by the men who worked there. The whole story of the buying of the house was outlined for me by a man who had been in the business for many years. The little intimate details of stock yards graft were narrated to me by men who had been, or still were, members of the Wati-ta League—the "War-Whoop League" of "The Jungle." The diverting stories of election procedures were narrated to me by a man who had himself voted seven times at one election, and who had become a regularly enrolled citizen of America when he was only three months out from Bohemia. The exact description of the treatment of newly arrested criminals were all written down for me by a young physician who had been put in jail for practicing without the license, which had been refused him because he would not pay graft. And all this, of course, leaves out of consideration the things which I saw with my own eyes, by far the greater portion of what I have described. For I went among the packing houses, and into every corner of them, from the roof to the cellar. Being a contributor to the *Appeal to Reason* and other Socialist papers widely circulated in Packingtown, I was intimately known to many of the men in yards; and they took me in charge and introduced me to their friends, and I was passed from hand to hand and shown everything that I wanted to see. One man left his work altogether for three days, and having lived and worked in the district all his life, and knowing all the watchmen and spotters by their first names, he would introduce me, and start up a conversation about family affairs, while he piloted me into places where strangers had seldom come before. In this way I saw the rendering of condemned hogs into lard; in this way I saw the doctoring of spoiled hams with chemicals pumped thru a hollow needle; in this way I saw the rooms where sausage meat is stored, where the rats run about and poisoned rats are shoveled up by the men and dumped into the hoppers—and, by the way, this incident of the rats is one upon which I was challenged, by a person who was supposed to know; and as I was dissatisfied

with my own evidence I commissioned a friend to make inquiries for me, and learned that these storerooms had been cleared out for use as lodging houses during the strike, and that after the men had dined there and thrown scraps of food upon the floor, the rats would come for the food in the day time, and were so thick at night that the men would have to put their cots up on top of the tables in order to sleep. Also I learned that there is a new place now being built by one of the packers, who is determined to keep rats out of his storerooms, and is building his walls with iron sheeting upon each side, and layers of concrete next, and a packing of cinders in the center. I might add that all these precautions do not mean that conditions are being reformed, but simply that the rats get into the chilling rooms, where the carcasses for export are stored, and they eat into the carcass and all the way down the tenderloin, thus ruining many hundreds of pounds of prime beef at one meal.

I have explained in "The Jungle" the whole system of graft in the use of condemned meat for food; and perhaps it is about this that the reader is most anxious to know. I have been getting my evidence together, but I cannot even outline it in an article of this length. Suffice it to say that it contains no allegations of my own, but consists of affidavits and court testimony, of chemists' analyses, and the signed declarations of persons of responsibility and authority: all proving my assertion that hundreds of millions of pounds of diseased and tainted meat are sold to the American people every year; that our national system of inspection is a farce, maintained for the packers' benefit, and paid for by the people of the United States in order to certify to the governments of Europe that no diseased meat is sent there; also that the Government inspector is without authority to follow meat after it has passed the post mortem examination, and that there is no provision in our law to prevent the greater number of the abuses which I have described in "The Jungle": the doctoring of spoiled ham, the re-grinding of old sausage, and the use of "everything in the pig but the squeal"—including the gullet and the stomach to

make "deviled ham," and the skin to make "headcheese." I can say no more about this evidence at present, except that it will constitute itself a challenge to the honor and manhood of every newspaper reviewer who has said that "The Jungle" is not true.

I come back again to the question of the things which I saw with my own eyes. No one who knows anything about literature will need to be told that I saw the wedding feast with my own eyes. It was about four o'clock one Sunday afternoon. I had been over to inspect Tom Carey's dump, and had narrowly escaped a clubbing at the hands of a policeman who had been posted there for the express purpose of preventing what I attempted—the taking of a photograph of it. I noticed a crowd in front of a saloon, and I pushed my way in, and behold, there was the opening scene of my story, a gift from the gods. I stayed there until seven o'clock; and then I went away and had a little supper, and returned and stayed there until two o'clock in the morning. My habit of working is such that I can carry long scenes about in my memory for days, and then write them down word for word; I seldom write anything about which I really care without having done this for a long period. So I sat there and wrote that whole chapter in my mind—every tiniest detail of it and every emotion of it; I watched the people there and imagined their lives, and little by little the whole story took shape. Everything which I had previously planned seemed in some miraculous way to fit in with them, and when I came away I was so exhausted that I could scarcely walk, but I knew that I had my whole book. That was two years ago, yet even now I cannot hear a child whistle "In the Good Old Summer-time," without feeling the tears start into my eyes.

I have nearly got over the emotions of it now, thank heaven! During the time that I was actually in Packingtown it used to make me ill; I would go into the settlement to supper, and the people would remark that I was as white as a sheet. It was not merely the sights of human degradation and misery, it was not even the physical horror, the stiches and the blood; it was a spiritual thing—

it was the sight of tyranny and oppression. The Beef Trust is a thing which presents itself to my imagination as a huge castle, a fortress of knavery and fraud. It towered above me, insolent and triumphant, mocking at all opposition; and I was poor, and alone, and helpless, with nothing but my cry of anguish.

That is the way everybody comes to feel who knows anything about Packingtown; and when they try to put it in words, the public says that they are hysterical, and unreliable as witnesses. For instance, I asked Robert Hunter to write me his opinion of "The Jungle," and this is the way he replied:

"Having lived for three years in that hell called the Chicago Stock Yards, I can say that you have given a full and true picture of the life in that community."

And in the same way, John Burns, when he was in America, declared that Packingtown was "a pocket edition of hell," and later modified his statement by saying that hell was "a pocket edition of Packingtown." A few weeks ago there came a letter from the Rev. Artemas Jean Haynes, who said that he had been for three years the pastor of Mr. Armour's own church in Chicago, and I said, "Now, at last, I shall be given a calm and dispassionate opinion of 'The Jungle,' by a man who knows." And here is the opinion:

"It seems to me that I have a certain concrete right to speak, for in some ways I have been closer to the sheer devilry of the thing than even yourself. Men will say that you have overdrawn the thing; it is not so. Words utterly fail and break down in the attempt to tell the story. Terrible as is 'The Jungle,' it falls far short of the awful reality. You had the novelist's rights, of course, but you have not misused them. Your book is true—true as life—true as death. Men who do not know should keep still. Men who do know and deny it are liars. Men who know and say nothing are cowards. I hope the men who will hate this book will speak out. What we want is the naked truth!"

There is another class of critics, who grant the existence of the facts as I have described them, but who say that I have erred in my interpretation. They admit all the misery and the hunger, the heat and the cold, the filth and the stench, the disease and accident, and death; but they say that the people who live among these

things have grown used to them, and do not mind them, and feel none of the emotions which my poetic imagination has attributed to them. Here is the reviewer of the *Louisville Post*, for instance, who thinks that

"One of the strangest and most aggravating things in literature is the effort of novelists to put themselves in the places of other people. The point is that neither Mr. Upton Sinclair nor any other man of his type is going to feel as the man in the slaughter house. What we want is a book from that man himself—written with his own blood, telling his own tale. He will speak with authority—and we shall believe him as we cannot believe any other."

Now let me point out to this reviewer that, counting from the age of twelve, when many of the stockyards children go to work, I have been fifteen years getting the education to enable me to write "The Jungle." During twelve of those years I have actually been practicing at writing, and during that time I have written certainly not less than five million words. During the same time I have read certainly four or five thousand books, including all the worth while novels in the five languages which I succeeded in acquiring during the same period. To enable me to write the first chapter, I had to spend nearly three years studying the violin, and to attend many hundreds of concerts. To enable me to write other portions of it, I had to get married and become a father. The cost of the whole equipment could certainly not have been less than \$20,000; and including the labor incidental to the earning (or borrowing) of this sum, it took sixteen hours a day during the whole of the twelve years period described. And, finally, I spent two years in writing the book, and came out of it more dead than alive—so close to being a nervous wreck that I shudder whenever

I think of it; and now the glib reviewer surveys the product, and with one breath rebukes me for the one obvious fault which the book contains, and in the next breath finds fault with me because I am not a stockyard worker, and, therefore, cannot possibly know how stockyard workers feel!

No, the two things do not go together, and it is mere folly to talk of their going together. There are thousands of men in the stockyards who feel as I felt while writing "The Jungle." But their knowledge is of no avail, for they cannot write novels; if they have ever written anything at all it has been some pitiful cry which has appeared in some obscure socialist newspaper, and was never heard of by any interviewer. On the other hand, there are many men who know how to construct a novel better than "The Jungle" is constructed; but they do not know anything about the stockyards workers, and they do not care to know. The people of Packingtown had to wait for their deliverance upon the strange coincidence of a novelist who had all the training which the schools could give him, but was so bent upon writing things which the world did not want to read that he was willing for himself and his whole family to descend into the social pit and to experience all the degradation, physical, mental, and moral, of the wage-slaves of the stockyards; and who then had left enough strength and iron resolve to gather himself together, and stake his life upon the final cast, and put it all into a book into "one terrible heart-rending, menacing cry, materialized in black and white, the anguish of a great multitude made articulate." I quote the words from the review of *Life*, which seems to me to cover the case.

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