

Will, Money, and Giantism

Nelson's report on dramatic developments at State University of New York at Albany (News and Comment, 24 Mar., p. 1521), explains everything as a miracle produced by a peculiar vitality shared by the governor, the president of the state system, and an aggressive academic vice president. He notes that it exudes a "sweet smell of money." What Nelson misses, however, is the background of strenuous, and often embittered, struggle for a broad and rigorous system of public higher education in a rich but laggard state.

A recent system president, Carlson, advocated dramatic development just a trifle prematurely, and he had to leave the state. Dean Blegen of Minnesota issued a research report on the New York lag in higher education and research and it received scanty attention in official circles. Faculty members who, as recently as 4 years ago, advocated or even predicted a fraction of the support that is now provided the university were distinctly unpopular with powers which still wield substantial authority. That power is now shared with newcomers. . . . Meanwhile the Albany student body remains, as Nelson indicates, extremely homogeneous in class and regional background. Few come from other states, few from the metropolis, and, of course, the percentage of minority racial or religious elements is vanishingly small. If pluralism stimulates intellectual alertness, this is a sign of continued lag.

Nelson correctly assessed the architectural giantism of Edward Durell Stone as a contribution to university vitality and lure. It is true that there is a will to attract to Albany both scientists and humanists who have "an edge" over the average men in their respective fields. And all this would be less important if it were not evidence that the academic motivation in the Empire State resembles that of several other states, as well as half a dozen other nations. Everywhere there is the will to "do better." If an unclassified university is to aspire to the higher ranks, is the combination, then, of will, money, and giantism the winning formula?

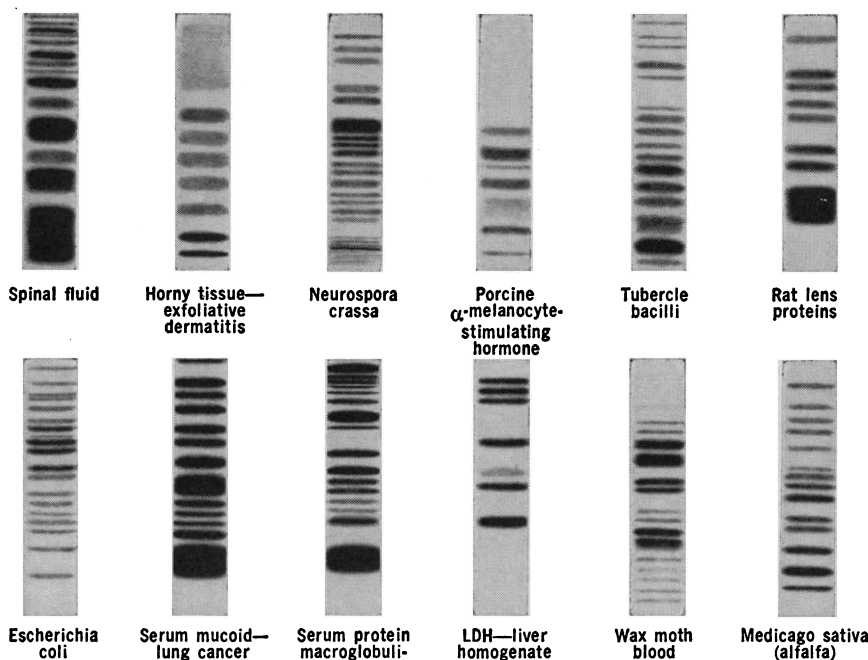
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