McCLURE'S MAGAZINE

S. S. McClure launched his eponymous *McClure's Magazine* at the beginning of a major economic depression in 1893, hardly an auspicious time to make a debut. As the first issue hit the newsstands in May, many newspapers were already beginning to delay payments to McClure's newspaper syndicate and even discontinuing their subscriptions, drastically reducing his available operating capital; simultaneously, most major companies were cutting back drastically on their magazine advertising expenditures. McClure was further dismayed when twelve thousand of the twenty thousand copies of the inaugural issue of *McClure's* were returned from newsdealers. After such a difficult start, however, *McClure's* would go on to become one of the most popular, innovative, and influential American magazines during the period 1895–1912. Unfortunately, though, once S. S. McClure himself was deposed from the editor's chair in 1912, the magazine began a slow decline into mediocrity and ultimately suffered an ignoble end in March 1929.

EARLY HISTORY

McClure's was part of a group of magazines that in the late 1880s and early 1890s began to target the rapidly expanding middle-class audience of this period. The copiously illustrated, current events–focused *McClure's Magazine* joined such low-priced, middlebrow magazines as Edward Bok's *Ladies' Home Journal* (ten cents a month, begun in 1883), *Scribner's Magazine* (1887), *Munsey's Magazine* (1889), and *Cosmopolitan* (1886) (all at twenty-five cents per month) but at a lower price of fifteen cents a month, which prompted *Munsey's* and *Cosmopolitan* to lower their own cover prices shortly thereafter.

From the very start, the content of *McClure's* reflected the eclectic interests of S. S. McClure (1857–1959). Known as the "Chief" by his magazine staffers, McClure was constantly rushing across the country and to Europe to meet with authors, gather ideas from local periodicals, and talk to leaders in a wide variety of fields in order to learn what would be the latest subject of interest. McClure was a pioneer in the magazine field because he inaugurated a more active style of editorship, often assigning nonfiction authors their topics and even directing their approaches to particular subjects. The resulting magazine contained a broad range of articles, everything from reports on technological advances being made by Alexander Graham Bell, Thomas Edison, and Guglielmo Marconi to accounts of polar exploration and fiction by both unknown and well-known authors. The popularity of *McClure's* must in large part be attributed to the way that McClure intuited what would interest readers. Far from an intellectual himself, he later wrote, "I always felt that I judged a story with my solar plexus rather than my brain; my only measure of it was the pull it exerted on something inside of me" (p. 204).

Yet *McClure's* would never have succeeded the way it did without the extremely capable staff that McClure hired in the 1890s. John S. Phillips, McClure's college classmate, served as managing editor from the magazine's inception until he left in 1906. Highly educated with a graduate degree from Harvard, Phillips was also organized and practical—an ideal counterbalance for

In this editorial preface to one of the most famous issues of his magazine, S. S. McClure appears to be a solid progressive who believes in the power of journalistic exposure and democracy to right the wrongs of modern industrial capitalism. This one issue contained muckraking articles by the staff writers Ida Tarbell, Ray Stannard Baker, and Lincoln Steffens, all of which helped effect greater regulation of corrupt businesses, unions, and municipal governments. To what extent McClure actually believed in progressivism, however, is unclear, especially because in this same editorial he wrote about these three articles, "We did not plan it so; it is a coincidence that the January McCLURE'S is such an arraignment of American character as should make every one of us stop and think."

Capitalists, workingmen, politicians, citizens—all breaking the law, or letting it be broken. Who is left to uphold it? The lawyers? Some of the best lawyers in this country are hired, not to go into court to defend cases, but to advise corporations and business firms how they can get around the law without too great a risk of punishment. The judges? Too many of them so respect the laws that for some "error" or quibble they restore to office and liberty men convicted on evidence overwhelmingly convincing to common sense. The churches? We know of one, an ancient and wealthy establishment, which had to be compelled by a Tammany hold-over health officer to put its tenements in sanitary condition. The colleges? They do not understand. There is no one left; none but all of us.

S. S. McClure, Editorial, *McClure's Magazine,* January 1903, p. 336.

McClure's mercurial genius. Albert Brady, another college classmate, served as the extremely capable business manager until his premature death in 1900 (not coincidentally the year of greatest profitability for *McClure's*). August F. Jaccaci, the *McClure's* art director, procured and arranged the excellent, prolific illustrations that contributed greatly to the magazine's success.

THE CULT OF PERSONALITY

One thing McClure sensed instinctually was the American reading public's interest in great men and women. Beginning with the first issue, McClure sought to satisfy this desire with a regular section called "Human Documents," in each of which appeared about a half-dozen portraits of a famous person at various stages of his or her life. Subsequently the magazine launched a very popular series called "Real Conversations," which featured prominent people in a variety of fields being interviewed by other famous people.

Out of these series grew the greatest successes of the early *McClure's Magazine*. The first installment of Ida Tarbell's comprehensive, readable biographical series on Napoleon was printed in *McClure's* in November 1894, and by the final installment in April 1895 the magazine's circulation had reached 100,000. Shortly after this came Tarbell's series titled "The Early Life of Lincoln," which appeared from November 1895 to November 1896 and helped boost circulation to approximately 250,000. Notable too was Hamlin Garland's series on Ulysses S. Grant, which ran intermittently from December 1896 to May 1898. Much later, a series called "Mary Baker G. Eddy: The Story of Her Life and the History of Christian Science," which appeared from 1907 to 1908 under the byline of Georgine Milmine, was in fact substantially researched and revised by Willa Cather on her first major assignment for the magazine.

MUCKRAKING

What chiefly fueled the meteoric rise of *McClure's Magazine* to national prominence, however, was the significant role it played in the "muckraking" movement that supported progressive social and economic reforms in the late 1890s and early 1900s. Historians debate the extent to which McClure himself, exposed at Knox College in Galesburg, Illinois, to Christian progressivism, purposely used his magazine to expose the injustices of modern industrial society or whether he was simply an opportunist who believed that this kind of sensational journalism would sell more copies of the magazine and make him more money.

The debate about McClure's intentions is unlikely ever to be resolved conclusively. What is unquestionable, however, is that McClure was dedicated to producing for his readers engaging, informative, and accurate articles about life in modern America. McClure perceptively realized that to write these articles, authors needed a great deal of time to travel to the locales involved, conduct interviews, and check facts. As a result, he financed the work of such talented writers as Tarbell, Ray Stannard Baker, William Allen White, Mark Sullivan, and Lincoln Steffens, paying them liberally and reimbursing their expenses for months, sometimes even years of investigative research.

The results of such financial largesse and editorial freedom are extremely impressive. The January 1903 issue of *McClure's,* for instance, included parts of three investigative series that were being published simultaneously and that are now regarded as some of the best American journalistic writing ever. There was the third installment of Ida Tarbell's "The History of the Standard Oil Company"; an article by Ray Stannard Baker on the unfair practices of the United Mine Workers leadership; and Lincoln Steffens's "Shame of Minneapolis," the first installment of what would later be known as *The Shame of the Cities.* Steffens continued exposing corrupt local governments in a number of later issues, offering damning portrayals of the political machines operating in Minneapolis, St. Louis, Pittsburgh, and Philadelphia as well as in numerous state capitals. Baker, who had earlier written scathing accounts of lynchings and the U.S. Steel Corporation, later turned his attention to American railroads (1905–1906). Significantly, even after the departure of Tarbell, Steffens, and Baker from the magazine in 1906, *McClure's* continued to publish muckraking articles by such authors as C. P. Connolly, Burton Hendrick, Will Irwin, and George Kibbe Turner.

Muckraking certainly brought *McClure's* a great deal of attention, but it did not have an especially positive effect on circulation. In 1898 the magazine's average monthly circulation was 349,623, but in 1905 it stood at only 375,000 (Lyon, p. 251). If McClure had intended to reap huge profits from muckraking, the effort was a failure.

LITERARY SUCCESS

The catholic tastes of S. S. McClure extended to the magazine's fiction as well. No one genre was privileged more than any other, with works of historical romance printed alongside local color sketches, detective stories, and tales of domestic intrigue. British authors were well represented; these included Robert Louis Stevenson, Anthony Hope, Thomas Hardy, Arthur Conan Doyle, Walter Besant, Stanley Weyman, and Rudyard Kipling (*Captains Courageous* appeared as a serial between November 1896 and February 1897, and *Kim* ran from December 1900 through October 1901). Kipling's poem "The White Man's Burden," which drew international attention and became a widely known catchphrase used to justify—and criticize—American and British imperialism, was printed in *McClure's* in February 1899.

To save money, the magazine at first relied heavily on a stock of stories that McClure had previously purchased for his syndicate but had not yet sold to newspapers. McClure's financial straits during this time resulted in one of the magazine's greatest failures. In early 1894 Stephen Crane submitted the manuscript of *The Red Badge of Courage* to *McClure's;* however, McClure could not afford to purchase it, and Crane consequently sold it to Irving Bacheller's newspaper syndicate. McClure did recognize Crane's talent, however, publishing in the magazine a number of Crane's nonfiction and fiction works, most notably "In the Depths of a Coal Mine," "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky," and "The Veteran."

Playing a key role in maintaining the magazine's high level of literary excellence was its literary editor from 1896 on, Viola Roseboro'. Roseboro' and her staff (including Witter Bynner, who after 1903 would serve as poetry editor) sifted through the thousands of unsolicited manuscripts sent to *McClure's.* One of her discoveries was William Sidney Porter, who wrote under the pen name of O. Henry; his first story to see print was "Whistling Dick's Christmas Story," which appeared in the December 1899 issue. Roseboro' also was the first to recognize the quality of Booth Tarkington's writing; his first novel, *The Gentleman from Indiana,* ran serially from May to October 1899.

Whether McClure or Roseboro' was most responsible, almost all the best American authors of this period published at least once in *McClure's.* The regionalists Sarah Orne Jewett, Octave Thanet (Alice French), Hamlin Garland, Joel Chandler Harris, Bret Harte, and Mary E. Wilkins (Freeman) as well as the realists Theodore Dreiser, Ernest Poole, and Jack London, whose "The Law of Life" appeared in the March 1901 issue, were contributors. The latter was, though, quite anomalous; somewhat surprisingly, given the magazine's reputation for hard-hitting, graphic journalism, it tended not to publish fictions that depicted life with unbridled, gritty realism or were too depressing.

Possibly the greatest of McClure's discoveries was a young Pittsburgh author and schoolteacher named Willa Cather. In 1903 McClure promised to print her stories in *McClure's* and to find publishers for those works he did not have room for. Cather became an editor at *McClure's* in 1906, and in 1908 she became managing editor—a position she held until she left the magazine in 1911. Her now famous story "Paul's Case" was published in the May 1905 issue, and the magazine, besides printing a good number of her early stories and poems, ran "Alexander's Masquerade" from February through April 1912; this would later be published as Cather's first novel, *Alexander's Bridge.*

In general, the quality of fiction was slightly lower after 1907. However, *McClure's* did publish a number of works by the likes of Arnold Bennett,

***McClure's Magazine* staff and contributors** From left: Samuel McClure with former staffers Willa Cather, Ida Tarbell, and Will Irwin, New York City, 1925.

G. K. Chesterton, Kathleen Norris, P. G. Wodehouse, Rex Beach, Zane Grey, Edna Ferber, and James Branch Cabell.

A LONG, SLOW DEMISE

Always underlying the editorial successes of *McClure's Magazine*, unfortunately, was an extremely shaky financial foundation. McClure was an abysmal businessman, expending money to authors and making purchases that far outstripped revenues. Even during the period 1895–1899, when *McClure's Magazine* ran more advertising in its pages than any other monthly (often approximately half of each issue was devoted to advertisements), it usually ran in the red. Despite the fact that the magazine's highest circulation came in 1910, its last year of profitability was 1905.

In the spring of 1906 McClure hastened the demise of the magazine when he unveiled a plan to greatly expand the company by, among other things, establishing People's Bank and People's Life Insurance Company. Phillips, along with Tarbell, Baker, and Steffens, tried to talk him out of his plans but with no success. That May they all left, with McClure buying out Phillips's and Tarbell's shares in the company. The magazine's circulation was maintained and even rose somewhat in the following few years, but financing the debt on a series of ill-advised expansion plans proved unsupportable. Eventually the company was reorganized in 1911, with McClure becoming merely a salaried editor rather than the owner and publisher.

McClure continued as the magazine's editor until the spring of 1912, when he was forced to resign. After

this the magazine went through a series of new owners and editors before its formal death in 1929. McClure himself came back for brief stints as editor or owner at various points in the 1920s, but the magic was gone. In 1926 Hearst Publications bought the magazine and renamed it *McClure's: The Magazine of Romance,* and from July 1928 until its final issue in March 1929 it was known as *New McClure's Magazine*.

See also Journalism; Muckrakers and Yellow Journalism; Periodicals

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McTEAGUE

An acknowledged classic in the U.S. literary canon, the 1899 novel *McTeague: A Story of San Francisco* by Frank Norris (1870–1902) is also a touchstone for two important developments in American cultural history—one having to do with the impact of evolutionary theory by the late 1890s and the other with the demise of Victorian moral limitations on subject matter that could be frankly treated in fiction intended for a popular readership. Like Stephen Crane's *Maggie, A Girl of the Streets* in 1893 and James Lane Allen's *Summer in Arcady* in 1896, *McTeague* broke with long-standing precedent by addressing what in his essay "A Plea for Romantic Fiction" (1901) Norris termed "the mystery of sex." It did so, however, in a more forthright, less genteel manner than seen in Crane's and Allen's novels. Not only is the sexual arousal of the hero, McTeague, given unmistakably clear description in chapter 2; but three chapters later so is that of the woman he will marry: "Suddenly he took her in his enormous arms, crushing down her struggle with his immense strength. Then Trina gave up, all in an instant, turning her head to his. They kissed each other, grossly, full in the mouth" (p. 84). Scenes of this kind prompted the book reviewers Edward and Madeline Vaughn Abbot to protest in the *Literary World* (1 April 1899) that "grossness for the sake of grossness is unpardonable"; and when *McTeague* appeared in England, the *Spectator* reviewer echoed the sentiment, terming Norris "simply an animal painter, who, while he entirely fails to touch the heart, is often completely successful in turning the stomach" ("Novels of the Week," p. 662). There was by 1899, however, a warrant in scientific thought for rendering the great "love scene" in this novel with imagery suggesting a barnyard encounter between a rooster and hen.

Four decades earlier with the publication of *On the Origin of Species* (1859), Charles Darwin (1809–1882) opened a new chapter in Western intellectual history by sounding the death knell for thinking and speaking about male-female relationships in solely idealistic or spiritual terms. Darwinism encouraged a reconception of humanity in light of its close kinship with lower life-forms and with parent species from which it descended over vast expanses of time. As with a bull and cow in rutting season, so are McTeague and Trina's responses to each other inextricably rooted in primal instinct. That is, the *Spectator* reviewer was correct: Norris was an "animal painter," picturing and interpreting the human animal in *McTeague*.

Only once, in an 8 February 1902 article for the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* titled "Frank Norris Writes Cleverly about Child Fiction for Old Readers," did Norris comment cogently upon one of Darwin's publications, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872). By the mid-1890s, though, Norris had come under the influence of the major literary Darwinist at work in Europe, the French novelist Émile Zola (1840–1902), known as the father of a literary school advancing the principles of naturalism in