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Letter: Eleanor McClure to Ida M. Tarbell, November 7, 1937

McClure, Eleanor

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Brookfield Center, Conn.
November 7th, 1937

My dear Miss Tarbell;

I read with great interest the stories of your eightieth birthday. I would like to add my congratulations, and tell you how glad I am that you are well, and busily engaged. Those two things, and friends, really make up the sum total of happiness, I should say.

As you know, my father is eighty, too. I think about him a great deal, and wish that it were in my power to make his life happier than it has been these last few years. Just at present my mind has been filled with what Mr. Mark Sullivan has written about him in his forthcoming book, and I have been distressed about it. I know that you have seen the proof, and so you too, must know what has been written, and what a false characterization it gives. So much has been written about father of late years that is untrue, or that gives a false impression of the sort of person he really is, that I can't bear to think of another book carrying on what has come to be an accepted representation.

I wrote to Mr. Sullivan, and he was most kind in his reply and asked me to go over the chapter from my point of view. I have been working on my reply. In order to give weight to what I would like to say I have been reading over the letters of those happy days of friendship. They recalled our summers in Switzerland, and the days when there was a room at our house always called "Miss Tarbell's room." Those letters give a very different impression of my father, and his relationship to his associates than that given by Mr. Sullivan, for instance. And what a picture of the staff is created by this paragraph from the book:

"..it is no wonder McClure's associates and editors took on toward him a protective manner of coldness, and were only warm to him on the occasion- they were, happily for his staff, frequent- when he came to the office at nine in the morning to announce that he was sailing for Europe at twelve.

Facilitation and other preparations for departure was about the only function in which McClure's associates served him with unqualified cheerfulness."

All that was lovable in my father, his kindness to others, and his consideration, the charm of personality that won him so many friends, and his great happiness in those friends, all that is brushed aside, and has come to be utterly ignored by those who write of him. His bitter struggle with ill-health, the result of the deprivation of his youth, is forgotten and overlooked. But more than anything, his very real editing of McClure's, his invaluable contribution to that magazine, which made it what it was, is being denied him. He is pictured as an eccentric, an unlimited source of ideas, sorted out and selected by "his" editors, a man to be disregarded by those very ones to profit by him. In fact, the characterization of his associates is no more creditable, nor true, than that of my father.

What Mr. Sullivan writes carries great weight. He is careful, and would like to be accurate, as well as sympathetic, in what he says. But his association with McClure's was short, and never very close, while yours was one of many years. I am sure you must agree with me that it would be too bad to have such an erroneous picture given of my father, as well as of his associates. No one could correct this picture for Mr. Sullivan better than you, or give a better picture of the real person that is my father. If he were written of with truth and appreciation, and the affectionate regard that ought to be his, it would make up for many things in his life. It would add greatly to his happiness, and to the happiness of us all, his children. I hope that it may be possible for you to do something to bring this about.

I am sorry that I should be so little in New York. It is possible that I shall be in town early in the new year, and if so I should like very much to call on you. And please accept once again, my congratulations, and my best wishes for the success of the work that you are now engaged upon.

Very sincerely yours,

Edward McClure