Dictated by dictaphone

May 25, 1922

Mr. C. C. Regier,
State University of Iowa,
Iowa City, Ia.

My dear Mr. Regier:

I have your letter of May 17, asking me to answer certain questions in regard to what you speak of as "The Era of Muck-Rakers."

I should think it would be wise, if you contemplate writing a serious piece of work, to define muck-raking. There is great difference between a sensational presentation of a public scandal for the sake of making a good story, and a serious study of situations which are making the public uneasy. My "History of the Standard Oil Company" was undertaken purely for the purpose of showing how the trust, which at that time was little understood and considerably feared, could come about, under our institutions. It was an historical study of the effect of a privilege and intended to show that without primary privilege you could not, under our institutions, produce a trust.

Now, as to your questions:

1) The cause of this so-called "Muck-Raking" campaign was abuses of which the public wanted to know more.

2) It was good, in so far as it was informed, candid, restrained.

3) Wherever it was sensational, that is, carried on simply for the sake of telling an exciting story and stirring up resentment.

4) No. The muck-raking campaign killed itself. It developed into pure sensationalism.

5) President Roosevelt was not a muck-raker. He was sincerely interested in efforts to correct certain things which he believed to be abuses, as all public servants and decent citizens ought to do.

6) This campaign was started long before the period which you mention - long before the work which you are talking about.

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It came in with the founding of the Republic and the criticism of abuses. It has never stopped. At times the public has paid particular attention because it felt some particular pinch or because things had gotten particularly menacing or flagrant. In the case of the History of the Standard Oil Company you will find it by no means the first criticism on that institution. The book was built on what others had done, investigations by states and the federal government, law suits, critical pamphlets.

7) I simply gathered up and put together a logical (I hope) story of what had been happening in the oil business over a period of some forty years, with the idea of showing, as I have said, that the Standard Oil Company was based on special privilege.

8) I left McClure's Magainze in 1906 for purely personal reasons. At that time there was no change in the policy of the magazine in regard to public affairs, no change had been thought of.

9) I cannot give you the figures exactly. I think McClure's had a circulation of about 500,000; the American about 400,000 or a little more.

10) Turner's articles were stopped, much against the desire of the magazine, because Turner began to turn in stuff for which he did not have sufficient documentary proof. The backbone of the articles on public questions which had been published in McClure's and in the American had always been documents. We never allowed a statement to be made that we did not believe we could prove to be true. In the case of Turner's articles, the editor went to great trouble and expense to convince himself that every statement was correct. This was true of the first few articles. Later, Turner, trusting to his emotions and suspicions, wrote articles in which there were charges for which he could not give the magazine proof. It is possible that all that he said was true, but our policy had always been to refuse to publish anything which we merely suspected, could not prove. This was the reason that Turner's articles were stopped. There was no change of policy in the American, it was followed faithfully, though by doing so we were obliged to give up what we had hoped would be an extended popular feature and one which would be productive of substantial reforms. We are also laid open to the suspicion of people who believe that you can substitute suspicion for the truth in critical works - the very thing which put an end to any good which was coming and might have come in the future from what you call the "Muck-Raking Campaign."

Hoping that the above answers your questions, believe me

Very truly yours,

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