several times that Ida's father was hurt by progress. He then sought his fortune as an independent oil producer and refiner, just as Rockefeller was consolidating the industry and snuffing out small operators.

In 1872, as an impressionable fifteen-year-old, Ida saw her paradise torn asunder by the South Improvement Company. As her father joined vigilantes who sabotaged the conspirators' tanks, she thrilled to the talk of revolution. "On the instant the word became holy to me," she later wrote. [29] The SIC darkened her sunlit world. The father who once sang, played the Jew's harp, and told funny stories became a "silent and stern" man, breeding in his sensitive daughter a lifelong hatred of Standard Oil. [30] For her, Standard Oil symbolized the triumph of grasping men over decent folk, like her father, who played fair and square.

She remembered the Titusville of her teenage years as divided between the valiant majority who resisted the octopus and the small band of opportunists who defected to it. On the street, Franklin pointed out turncoats to his daughter. "In those days I looked with more contempt on the man who had gone over to the Standard than on the one who had been in jail," she said.[31] After a time, Franklin's family would not speak to blackguards who had sold out to Rockefeller. It revolted Ida that the trust could turn proud, independent entrepreneurs into beaten men taking orders from distant bosses.

Although Tarbell had a more genteel upbringing than Rockefeller, with more books, magazines, and small luxuries, one is struck by the similarity of the Rockefellers' Baptist and the Tarbells' Methodist households. The straitlaced Franklin Tarbell forbade cards and dancing and supported many causes, including the temperance movement. Ida attended prayer meetings on Thursday nights and taught an infant class of the Sunday school. Shy and bookish, she tended, like Rockefeller, to arrive at brilliant solutions by slow persistence.

What set Tarbell apart from Rockefeller was her intellectual daring and fearless curiosity. As a teenager, despite her family's fundamentalism, she tried to prove the truth of evolution. By the time she enrolled at Allegheny College in Meadville, Pennsylvania, in 1876—she was the sole girl in the freshman class of this Methodist school—she loved to peer through microscopes and planned to become a biologist. What distinguished her as a journalist was how she united a scientific attention to detail with homegrown moral fervor. After graduation, Tarbell taught for two years at the Poland

Union Seminary in Poland, Ohio, then got a job on the editorial staff of *The Chautauquan*, an offshoot of the summer adult-education movement, which originated as a Methodist camp meeting. The fiery, militant Christian spirit of the movement made Ida even more high-minded in her expectations.

Tall and attractive, with dark hair, large gray eyes, and high cheekbones, Tarbell had an erect carriage and innate dignity and never lacked suitors. Yet she decided never to marry and to remain self-sufficient. She steeled herself against any feelings that might compromise her ambitions or integrity, and she walked through life, perhaps a little self-consciously, in a shining moral armor.

In 1891, the thirty-four-year-old Tarbell moved to Paris with friends and set up Bohemian quarters on the Left Bank—an unusually courageous decision for a young American woman at the time. She was determined to write a biography of the Girondist Madame Roland while selling freelance articles to Pennsylvania and Ohio newspapers and attending classes at the Sorbonne. Hardworking and levelheaded, she mailed off two articles during her first week in Paris alone. Even though the prim Tarbell was taken aback when lascivious Frenchmen flirted with her, she adored her time in Paris. She interviewed eminent Parisians, ranging from Louis Pasteur to Emile Zola, for American newspapers and won many admirers for her clean, accurate reportage; she claimed that her writing had absorbed some of the beauty and clarity of the French language. Still, she struggled on the "ragged edge of bankruptcy" and was susceptible when McClure wooed her as an editor of his new magazine.

While she was still in Paris, two events occurred that would lend an emotional tinge to her Standard Oil series. One Sunday afternoon in June 1892, she found herself roaming the Paris streets, unable to shake off a sense of doom. Later that afternoon, she read in the Paris newspapers that Titusville and Oil City had been ravaged by flood and fire, with 150 people either drowned or burned to death. The next day, her brother, Will, sent a single-word cable— "Safe"—relieving her anxieties, but the event reinforced a guilty feeling that she had neglected her family. In 1893, one of her father's oil partners shot himself in despair because of poor business, forcing Franklin Tarbell to mortgage his house to settle the debts he inherited. Ida's sister was in the hospital at the time, and "here was I across the ocean writing picayune pieces at a fourth of a cent a word while they struggled there," she later recalled. "I felt guilty, and the only way I had kept myself up to what I had

undertaken was the hope that I could eventually make a substantial return."[32] While in Paris, Ida Tarbell laid hands on a copy of *Wealth Against Commonwealth*, where she rediscovered the author of her father's woes: John D. Rockefeller.

Once in New York in 1894, Tarbell published two biographies in serial form that might have predisposed her to focus on a single figure at Standard Oil. Anticipating her portrait of Rockefeller, she presented Napoleon as a gifted megalomaniac, a great but flawed man lacking "that fine sense of proportion which holds the rights of others in the same solemn reverence which it demands for its own."[33] Lifted by this series, McClure's circulation leaped from 24,500 in late 1894 to more than 100,000 in early 1895. Then followed Tarbell's celebrated twenty-part series on Lincoln, which absorbed four years of her life (1895–1899) and boosted the magazine's circulation to 300,000. She honed her investigative skills as she excavated dusty documents and forgotten courthouse records. In 1899, after being named managing editor of *McClure's*, Tarbell took an apartment in Greenwich Village and befriended many literary notables, including Mark Twain, who would soon provide her with entrée to Henry H. "Hell Hound" Rogers. By this time, having sharpened her skills, she was set to publish one of the most influential pieces of journalism in American business history. The idea of writing about Standard Oil had fermented in her mind for many years before she worked for *McClure's*. "Years ago, when I dreamed of some day writing fiction. . . . I had planned to write the great American novel, having the Standard Oil Company as a backbone!" [34]

After receiving McClure's blessing, Ida Tarbell launched the series in November 1902, feeding the American public rich monthly servings of Rockefeller's past misdeeds. She went back to the early Cleveland days and laid out his whole career for careful inspection. All the depredations of a long career, everything Rockefeller had thought safely buried and forgotten, rose up before him in haunting and memorable detail. Before she was done, Ida Tarbell turned America's most private man into its most public and hated figure.

The inspiration for publishing the anatomy of a major trust came from Samuel McClure, one of the most gifted windbags ever to occupy an editorial chair, who recruited writers with marathon speeches about his magazine's greatness. High-strung, mercurial, seized by hourly brainstorms, McClure was described

by Rudyard Kipling as a “cyclone in a frock coat.”[35] Moving through life at breakneck speed, he seemed forever to be veering toward a nervous collapse. When McClure first materialized in Tarbell’s Paris apartment in 1892, he appeared distracted and breathless. “I’ve just ten minutes,” he told her, checking his watch, “must leave for Switzerland tonight to see [English physicist John] Tyndall.”[36] Eager to sign up this startled young woman, the man with the tousled, sandy hair and electric blue eyes stayed for three hours. “Able methodical people grow on every bush but genius comes once in a generation and if you ever get in its vicinity thank the Lord & *stick*,” Tarbell once told a colleague apropos of McClure.[37]

That McClure hired a young, relatively inexperienced woman as his first full-time staff writer attests to his unorthodox style. He would collar every talented young writer in America—Frank Norris, Stephen Crane, Theodore Dreiser, Willa Cather—as well as more established figures, such as Mark Twain and Rudyard Kipling. O. Henry, Damon Runyon, and Booth Tarkington debuted in his pages. Yet it was perhaps in nonfiction that McClure left his most lasting imprint, for the best investigative reporters, from Lincoln Steffens to Ray Stannard Baker, gravitated to the magazine. Of his first office visit, Baker reminisced, “Even with S. S. McClure absent, I was in the most stimulating, yes intoxicating editorial atmosphere then existent in America—or anywhere else.”[38] McClure watched over the creative chaos like a restless genie. “I can’t sit still,” he once told Lincoln Steffens. “That’s your job. I don’t see how you can do it.”[39] Amid this swirling lunacy, Ida Tarbell sat in her high collar and shirtwaist dress, a model of calm sanity. As Lincoln Steffens recalled, she “would come to the office, smiling, like a tall, good-looking young mother to say, ‘Hush, children.’ ”[40]

A man with a weakness for big, startling facts, McClure commissioned articles on new gadgets, scientific research, and futuristic technologies. This penchant for facts enabled him to spot Tarbell’s talent for enlivening a dry subject when she wrote an entertaining article about the paving of Parisian streets. Instead of the scandalmongering being offered by Pulitzer or Hearst, McClure wanted to analyze complex issues and explore them with scientific precision. Aiming at a comprehensive critique of American society, McClure concluded by 1901 that two great issues confronted the country: the growth of industrial trusts and political corruption. Before long, Lincoln Steffens was digging out municipal corruption in a series entitled “The Shame of the Cities” that started to run in October 1902. (In the February 24, 1905, issue,

he skewered Senator Aldrich in a piece on Rhode Island corruption.) The choice of the proper trust to expose was a trickier issue. At first, Tarbell contemplated the steel trust and the sugar trust before the discovery of oil in California turned her attention to Standard Oil as the "most perfectly developed trust."[41] Since it had been investigated by various government bodies for three decades, it had left a rich documentary trail. At first projected for three issues, the Standard Oil series eventually stretched, by popular demand, to nineteen installments. It was inaugurated in November 1902 against an especially timely backdrop: An anthracite coal strike during the winter of 1902–1903 deprived the poor of coal, forcing them to heat their homes with oil, and the subsequent sharp rise in oil prices made energy an incendiary issue.

Although Tarbell pretended to apply her scalpel to Standard Oil with surgical objectivity, she was never neutral and not only because of her father. Her brother, William Walter Tarbell, had been a leading figure in forming the Pure Oil Company, the most serious domestic challenger to Standard Oil, and his letters to her were laced with anti-Standard venom. Complaining of the trust's price manipulations in one letter, Will warned her, "Some of those fellows will get killed one of those days."[42] As Pure Oil's treasurer in 1902, Will steered legions of Rockefeller enemies to his sister and even vetted her manuscripts. Far from cherishing her neutrality, Tarbell in the end adhered to the advice she had once received from Henry James: "Cherish your contempts."[43] Amazingly enough, nobody made an issue of Tarbell's veritable partnership with her brother in exposing his chief competitor.

When Franklin Tarbell heard that his daughter was taking on the mighty Standard, he warned her that she was exposing herself to extreme danger. "Don't do it, Ida—they will ruin the magazine," he said and even broached the possibility they might maim or murder her—a far-fetched scenario but suggestive of the dread that the trust inspired.[44] As her research began, she made a sentimental trip to Titusville, which rekindled her old animosity toward Standard Oil. Her father was slowly dying of stomach cancer while she was writing her series, and this might have further embittered her toward Rockefeller, however unfairly; Franklin Tarbell would die on March 1, 1905. Contrary to her father's predictions, Ida inflicted far more damage on Standard Oil than she received in return. The closest she came to being threatened was at a Washington dinner party where Frank Vanderlip, a vice president of National City Bank, drew her into a side room to voice his strong

displeasure with her project. Sensing a vague financial menace to *McClure's*, she retorted, "Well, I am sorry, but of course that makes no difference to me."[45] In fact, what was most notable about Standard Oil's response was its haughty, self-defeating silence.

Tarbell approached her work methodically, like a carpenter, but she soon reeled under the weight of documentary evidence. After a week spent combing through reports of the Industrial Commission in February 1902, she wrote despairingly, "The task confronting me is such a monstrous one that I am staggering a bit under it."[46] By June, having completed three installments, she confessed that the material had acquired an obsessive hold over her mind and even invaded her sleep. On the eve of a needed European vacation, she told her research assistant, "It has become a great bugbear to me. I dream of the octopus by night and think of nothing else by day, and I shall be glad to exchange it for the Alps."[47]

Upon her return from vacation, she met with Henry Demarest Lloyd at his seaside estate in Sakonnet, Rhode Island. He insisted that, despite the Interstate Commerce Commission, large shippers were still getting the same old freight rebates, although they carefully destroyed the evidence. He told her, barely containing his rage, that Rockefeller and his associates embodied "the most dangerous tendencies in modern life." [48] At one point, when he learned that Ida Tarbell had met with Henry H. Rogers, Lloyd thought she might be in cahoots with the company and warned his Pennsylvania contacts to watch out for her. His doubts were instantly dispelled as the series got under way. "When you get through with 'Johnnie,' " he applauded her in April 1903, "I don't think there will be very much left of him except something resembling one of his own grease spots." [49] In the end, Lloyd handed over his abundant notes to her and urged George Rice, Lewis Emery, and other independents to talk with her. Having passed the torch, Henry Demarest Lloyd died in September 1903, before the series was finished.

Shortly before Tarbell began her research, Sam McClure tried to coax Mark Twain into editing a magazine, but Henry H. Rogers persuaded Twain to resist. As early as December 1901—almost a year before the series started to run— Rogers spotted an ad announcing *McClure's* forthcoming series on Standard Oil and was startled that nobody at 26 Broadway had been contacted by the author. Concerned, he wrote to Twain, "It would naturally be supposed, that any person desiring to write a veritable history, would seek for

information as near original sources as possible."[50] Fearing that Tarbell might be consorting with the enemy, Rogers suggested that Twain tell McClure that he should verify all statements with the trust before they were published. When Twain pressed for details about the series, McClure balked, saying, "You will have to ask Miss Tarbell." To which Twain replied, "Would Miss Tarbell see Mr. Rogers?" [51] Tarbell had, of course, hoped to interview the top brass at Standard Oil, and when McClure burst into her office with the invitation, she was eager to seize the chance.

A veteran charmer, Hell Hound Rogers invited Tarbell for a two-hour chat at his home on East Fifty-seventh Street. She had never met a real captain of industry before and seemed entranced by his resemblance to Twain. "His big head with its high forehead was set off by a heavy shock of beautiful gray hair; his nose was aquiline, sensitive," she wrote, still betraying admiration years later.[52] Rogers seduced her with nostalgic recollections of the days when they were Rouseville neighbors. "That reminiscence of Henry H. Rogers is only one of several reasons I have for heartily liking as fine a pirate as ever flew his flag in Wall Street."[53]

The upshot of the meeting was that Tarbell agreed to give Rogers a chance to react to any revelations she unearthed, and for two years she periodically visited him at 26 Broadway. These encounters had a quasi-clandestine aura, with the reporter whisked in one door and out another. In a spirit of guarded cooperation, Samuel Dodd assembled material for Tarbell, while Daniel O'Day passed along information on pipelines. Since Tarbell had spoken with Rogers for nearly a year before the series started, she held her breath when the first issue appeared in November 1902. "I rather expected him to cut me off when he realized that I was trying to prove that the Standard Oil Company was only an enlarged South Improvement Company."[54] To her astonishment, Rogers still received her and, while occasionally miffed by this or that article, he remained on friendly terms with her.

Rogers's complaisance has always been a huge mystery, engendering two schools of thought. Tarbell cited Rogers's self-interest. He and Archbold had been stung by accusations that they had conspired to blow up a Buffalo refinery that competed with Standard Oil. "That case is a sore point with Mr. Archbold and me," he immediately told Tarbell. "I want you to go into it thoroughly."[55] Responding to his heightened sensitivity on this matter, she agreed to let him review anything she wrote about it. (Rogers's strategy paid

off as far as the Buffalo imbroglio was concerned.) In Tarbell's view, Rogers was willing to see Standard Oil's reputation sullied as long as his own was preserved.

Another school of thought hypothesized that Rogers was both deflecting attention from his own misdeeds and taking revenge against Rockefeller, who had disapproved of his stock-market speculations. This argument suggests that Rogers enjoyed Tarbell's series as a rebuke to his colleague's sanctimony. Rockefeller privately denounced Rogers as a traitor who had fed Tarbell false, garbled information to defame him.[56] Many years later, after a confidential chat with John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Allan Nevins recorded in a memo, "Junior thinks that [Rogers's] part in the publication of Ida Tarbell's book was far from unselfish; that he was secretly glad to see Rockefeller attacked, and supplied some of the material."[57] Tarbell's own notes reveal that while Rogers often defended Rockefeller, he also kept the spotlight tightly focused on the founder and away from himself. Rogers did not terminate his meetings with Tarbell until February 1904, when she published a shocking account of railway agents spying on Standard Oil competitors—a practice that Rogers had strenuously denied. When she next arrived at 26 Broadway, he demanded, "Where did you get that stuff?" That tense, brief meeting ended their relationship.[58]

While stewing about Rogers, Rockefeller would have been equally shocked and wounded had he seen the acidulous comments made to Ida Tarbell by his old pal Henry M. Flagler, who portrayed the titan as petty and miserly. After their confidential talk, Tarbell recorded in her notes, "Mr. Flagler talked to me of J.D.R. Says he is the biggest little man and the littlest big man he ever knew. That he would give $100,000 one minute to charity and turn around and haggle over the price of a ton of coal. Says emphatically: 'I have been in business with him 45 years and he would do me out of a dollar today—that is, if he could do it honestly.' "[59] Though Flagler dispensed some pious claptrap about how "the Lord had prospered him," Tarbell could not draw him into any serious, sustained discussion of Standard Oil history.[60]

From the start, sensing that Tarbell was full of malice toward Standard Oil, Archbold had refused to cooperate. As for Rockefeller, he was slow to fathom the magnitude of the gathering threat and had no notion that this magnificent journalist could wield her slingshot with such deadly accuracy. Having weathered thirty years of assaults in the courts and statehouses, he must have

felt invulnerable. When associates clamored for a response to Tarbell, Rockefeller replied, “Gentlemen, we must not be entangled in controversies. If she is right we will not gain anything by answering, and if she is wrong time will vindicate us.”[61] To sit through an extended grilling from Tarbell would have violated his lifelong approach to business. This was a tactical blunder, for in dodging Tarbell he inadvertently seemed to validate her portrait.

From the perspective of nearly a century later, Ida Tarbell’s series remains the most impressive thing ever written about Standard Oil—a tour de force of reportage that dissects the trust’s machinations with withering clarity. She laid down a clear chronology, provided a trenchant account of how the combine had evolved, and made the convoluted history of the oil industry comprehensible. In the dispassionate manner associated with *McClure’s,* she sliced open America’s most secretive business and showed all the hidden gears and wheels turning inside it. Yet however chaste and clearly reasoned her prose, it was always informed by indignation that throbbed just below the surface. It remains one of the great case studies of what a single journalist, armed with the facts, can do against seemingly invincible powers.

Tarbell is perhaps best appreciated in comparison with her predecessor, Henry Demarest Lloyd, who was sloppy with his facts, florid in his prose, and too quick to pontificate. A meticulous researcher, Tarbell wrote in a taut, spare language that conveyed a sense of precision and restraint—though she had more than her quota of strident moments. By writing in such a relatively cool style, she made her readers boil with anger. Instead of invoking political panaceas or sweeping ideological prescriptions, she appealed to the reader’s sense of common decency and fair play and was most effective where she showed something small and mean-spirited about the Standard Oil style of business.

Like Teddy Roosevelt, Tarbell did not condemn Standard Oil for its size but only for its abuses and did not argue for the automatic dismantling of all trusts; she pleaded only for the preservation of free competition in the marketplace. While she was by no means evenhanded, she was quick to acknowledge the genuine achievements of Rockefeller and his cohorts and even devoted one chapter to “The Legitimate Greatness of the Standard Oil Company.” “There was not a lazy bone in the organization, not an incompetent hand, nor a stupid head,” she wrote.[62] It was the very fact that they could have succeeded without resorting to unethical acts that so

exasperated her. As she said, “They had never played fair, and that ruined their greatness for me.”[63]

If Tarbell gave an oversimplified account of Standard Oil’s rise, her indictment was perhaps the more forceful for it. In the trust’s collusion with the railroads, the intricate system of rebates and drawbacks, she found her smoking gun, the irrefutable proof that Rockefeller’s empire was built by devious means. She was at pains to refute Rockefeller’s defense that everybody did it. “Everybody did not do it,” she protested indignantly. “In the nature of the offense everybody could not do it. The strong wrested from the railroads the privilege of preying upon the weak, and the railroads never dared give the privilege save under the promise of secrecy.”[64] To the contention that rebates were still legal, Tarbell countered with the questionable theory that they violated the common law. She argued that Rockefeller had succeeded by imbuing subordinates with a ferocious desire to win at all costs, even if that meant trampling upon others. “Mr. Rockefeller has systematically played with loaded dice, and it is doubtful if there has ever been a time since 1872 when he has run a race with a competitor and started fair.”[65] Tarbell rightly surmised that Standard Oil received secret kickbacks from the railroads on a more elaborate scale than its rivals did. This is abundantly borne out by Rockefeller’s private papers, which show that the practice was even more pervasive than Tarbell realized.

Beginning with the Cleveland Massacre of 1872, Tarbell showed that Rockefeller had taken over rival refineries in an orchestrated atmosphere of intimidation. She exposed the deceit of an organization that operated through a maze of secret subsidiaries in which the Standard Oil connection was kept secret from all but the highest-ranking employees. She sketched out many abuses of power by the Standard Oil pipelines, which used their monopoly position to keep refractory producers in line while favoring Standard’s own refineries. And she chronicled the terror tactics by which the trust’s marketing subsidiaries got retailers to stock their product exclusively. Like Lloyd, she also decried the trust’s threat to democracy and the subornation of state legislators, although she never guessed the depths of corruption revealed by Rockefeller’s papers.

Nevertheless, as Allan Nevins and other defenders of Rockefeller pointed out, Tarbell committed numerous errors, and her work must be cited with caution. To begin with, the SIC was initiated by the railroads, not Rockefeller, who doubted the plan’s efficacy. And for all its notoriety, the SIC did not

cause the oil crisis of the early 1870s but was itself a response to the glut that forced almost everybody to operate at a loss. It is also true that, swayed by childhood memories, Tarbell ennobled the Oil Creek drillers, portraying them as exemplars of a superior morality. As she wrote: “They believed in independent effort—every man for himself and fair play for all. They wanted competition, loved open fight.”[66] To support this statement, she had to overlook the baldly anticompetitive agreements proposed by the producers themselves. Far from being free-marketeers, they repeatedly tried to form their own cartel to restrict output and boost prices. And, as Rockefeller pointed out, they happily took rebates whenever they could. The world of the early oil industry was not, as Tarbell implied, a morality play of the evil Standard Oil versus the brave, noble independents of western Pennsylvania, but a harsh dog-eat-dog world.

Though billed as a history of Standard Oil, the Tarbell series presented Rockefeller as the protagonist and center of attention. Tarbell made Standard Oil and Rockefeller interchangeable, even when covering the period after Rockefeller retired. Sometimes it is hard to tell whether Rockefeller is a real person or a personification of the trust. Significantly, Tarbell chose for her epigraph the famous line from Emerson’s essay on self-reliance, “An Institution is the lengthened shadow of one man.” When Henry Rogers questioned this approach, Tarbell noted the dramatic effect of focusing on one individual, writing in her notes after the meeting, “Illustrate it by Napoleon work and the effort to keep the attention centered on Napoleon, never mentioning anybody if I could help it.”[67] This great-man approach to history gave a human face to the gigantic, amorphous entity known as Standard Oil but also turned the full force of public fury on Rockefeller. It did not acknowledge the bureaucratic reality of Standard Oil, with its labyrinthine committee system, and stigmatized Rockefeller to the exclusion of his associates. So Flagler came off relatively unscathed, even though he had negotiated the secret freight contracts that bulk so large in the *McClure’s* exposé.

However pathbreaking in its time and richly deserving of its accolades, the Tarbell series does not, finally, stand up as an enduring piece of history. The more closely one examines it, the more it seems a superior screed masquerading as sober history. In the end, Tarbell could not conquer her nostalgia for the Titusville of her girlhood, that lost paradise of heroic friends and neighbors who went forth doughtily to do battle with the all-devouring Standard Oil dragon.

The most celebrated and widely quoted charge that Tarbell made against Rockefeller was the least deserved: that he had robbed Mrs. Fred M. Backus — forever known to history as “the Widow Backus”—blind when buying her Cleveland lubricating plant in 1878. If every melodrama needs a poor, lorn widow, cheated by a scheming cad, then Mrs. Backus perfectly fitted Tarbell’s portrait of Rockefeller. “If it were true,” Rockefeller later conceded, it “would represent a shocking instance of cruelty in crushing a defenceless woman. It is probable that its wide circulation and its acceptance as true by those who know nothing of the facts has awakened more hostility against the Standard Oil Company and against me personally than any charge which has been made.”[68]

The background of the story is simple. In his early Cleveland days, Rockefeller had befriended Fred M. Backus, who worked as a bookkeeper in his office and taught in the Sunday school of their church. In time, Backus married, had three children, and started a small lubricating company. In 1874, the forty-year-old Backus died, likely from consumption, and his widow inherited an obsolete plant that consisted of little more than a primitive cluster of sheds, stills, and tanks. Its hilltop site meant that raw materials had to be hauled up the slope at great expense, and then the lubricating oils had to be carted down the same steep path—not the most efficient of venues. Before it entered the lubricating business, Standard Oil had tolerated this marginal operation. When it branched out into lubricating oils and greases in the late 1870s, it absorbed three small lubricating companies, of which Backus Oil was probably the most backward. In fact, the Backus operation was so outmoded that Standard Oil eventually shut it down. This did not prevent the Widow Backus from stirring up a rabid national controversy about Rockefeller’s supposed theft of her priceless plant.

When Standard Oil first approached her about the purchase, she insisted upon dealing with Rockefeller who, for old time’s sake, agreed to meet her in her house. Appealing to her status as a widow and trusting to his gentlemanly honor, she pleaded for a fair price for her property. As she recalled, “he promised, with tears in his eyes, that he would stand by me in this transaction, and that I should not be wronged. . . . I thought that his feelings were such on the subject that I could trust him and that he would deal honourably by me.”[69] Backus told a friend that Rockefeller suggested that they kneel together in prayer. Up until this point, her story tallied closely with Rockefeller’s, who said that he had been “moved by kindly consideration to

an old employee."[70]

While Backus wanted Rockefeller to conduct the negotiations for her plant, he knew nothing about lubricants and sent his associates instead. According to Backus, Rockefeller's hirelings bilked her unmercifully. She valued her operation between $150,000 and $200,000, whereas the Standard Oil people refused to pay more than $79,000—$19,000 for the oil on hand, plus $60,000 for the factory and goodwill. (Out of regard for Backus, Rockefeller had had his appraisers bump up this last figure by $10,000.) Backus's negotiator, Charles H. Marr, later swore that his client, in an estimated inventory of her assets, had written down $71,000 for plant and goodwill—not much more than Rockefeller finally paid. Yet she grew incensed over the purchase price and drafted a savage letter to Rockefeller, accusing him of double-dealing, to which he made the following reply:

In regard to the reference that you make as to my permitting the business of the Backus Oil Company to be taken from you, I say that in this, as in all else that you have written . . . you do me most grievous wrong. It was of but little moment to the interests represented by me whether the business of the Backus Oil Company was purchased or not. I believe that it was for your interest to make the sale, and am entirely candid in this statement, and beg to call your attention to the time, some two years ago, when you consulted Mr. Flagler and myself as to selling out your interests to Mr. Rose, at which time you were desirous of selling at considerably less price, and upon time, than you have now received in cash, and which sale you would have been glad to have closed if you could have obtained satisfactory security for the deferred payments.

He then pointed out that the $60,000 paid for the property was two or three times the cost of constructing equal or better facilities—a statement corroborated by a Mr. Maloney, superintendent of the Backus plant. "I believe that if you would reconsider what you have written in your letter . . . you must admit having done me great injustice, and I am satisfied to await upon [your] innate sense of right for such admission."[71] In closing, Rockefeller offered to restore her business in return for the money or give her stock in the company at the same price paid by Standard Oil. It was an eminently fair offer, and yet the histrionic Backus flung the letter in the fire.

Because Ida Tarbell insisted upon reviving this hoary story—Henry Demarest Lloyd had already wrung tears from readers with it—in 1905

Rockefeller's attorneys leaked to the press a letter written by H. M. Backus, the widow's brother-in-law. Having lived with his sister-in-law during the period in question, he was present the day Rockefeller paid his visit. As he told Rockefeller, "I know of the ten thousand dollars that was added to the purchase price of the property at your request, and I know that you paid 3 times the value of the property, and I know that all that ever saved our company from ruin was the sale of its property to you, and I simply want to easy my mind by doing justice to you by saying so."[72] It was exceedingly lucky for Backus that she bowed out of business, for Standard Oil built more modern lubricating plants, marketed 150 different lubricants, and drove prices far below the price at which she could have operated profitably. Had she stayed in business, she would have been bankrupt within a few years.

By investing her proceeds in Cleveland real estate instead, Backus, far from being reduced to filth and misery, became an extremely rich woman. According to Allan Nevins, she was worth approximately $300,000 at her death. [73] Nevertheless, the supposed theft of Backus Oil became an idée fixe, and she dredged up the story for anyone who cared to listen. The notion of Rockefeller gleefully ruining a poor widow was such a good story, with so fine a Dickensian ring, that gullible reporters gave it fresh circulation for many years.

If Tarbell perpetuated one myth about Rockefeller, she also had the honesty to debunk another: that Rockefeller had blown up a competing refinery in Buffalo. It was this allegation that so upset Henry Rogers that he cooperated with Tarbell to clear his name. Swallowed whole by Lloyd and constantly brandished by the *World*, the tale was a hardy perennial of the anti–Standard Oil literature.

Like the Backus case, the incident dated back to the period when Standard Oil entered the lubricating business in the late 1870s. The trust had coveted the Vacuum Oil Works in Rochester, New York, owned by a father-and-son team, Hiram and Charles Everest. One day, John Archbold shepherded Hiram Everest into Rockefeller's office and asked him point-blank to name a price for his firm. When Everest obliged, Archbold threw back his head and roared with laughter, dismissing the figure as absurd. Taking a suaver approach, Rockefeller leaned forward, touched Everest on the knee, and said, "Mr. Everest, don't you think you would be making a mistake to go into a fight with young, active men, who mean to develop the entire petroleum industry?" When Everest shot back that he was a fighter, Rockefeller just smiled.

Everest eventually realized he was dealing with an immovable force and sold a three-fourths interest in his firm to Henry Rogers, John Archbold, and Ambrose McGregor, acting as agents for Standard Oil. Because the Everests remained the managers, the Standard executives were involved only tangentially. In 1881, a trio of Vacuum employees—J. Scott Wilson, Charles B. Matthews, and Albert Miller—defected to start a rival refinery, the Buffalo Lubricating Oil Company. They brazenly planned to re-create their old firm by transferring technology, poaching clients, and copying processes patented by Vacuum. When the Everests learned of this, they threatened legal action. Albert Miller repented and sought help from Hiram Everest. Together, they consulted a Rochester lawyer, and at this meeting Everest allegedly floated the idea of Miller sabotaging the new plant: "Suppose he should arrange the machinery so it would bust up, or smash up, what would the consequences be?" [74] A tall edifice of speculation would be erected on this query.

According to a later conspiracy charge, on June 15, 1881, Miller ordered the fireman at the Buffalo plant to heat the still to such explosive temperatures that the heavy crude oil began to stir and boil. Pretty soon, the brickwork cracked, the safety valve blew off, and a large volume of gas hissed out—without kindling a fire. A week later, Miller met in New York with Hiram Everest and Henry Rogers, who packed him off to work at a California cannery. When the Everests filed patent-infringement suits against the Buffalo refinery, Charles Matthews, ringleader of the renegades, retaliated with his own civil suit, charging a conspiracy to blow up his Buffalo works and seeking $250,000 in damages. The three Standard Oil worthies on the Vacuum board—Rogers, Archbold, and McGregor—despite the distant nature of their involvement in Rochester, were indicted along with the Everests. Only vaguely aware of the brouhaha, never having met Miller, Rockefeller was roped into the case for publicity purposes and subpoenaed as a prosecution witness. The case always struck him as a petty irritant, distracting him from more pressing matters. Nothing in Rockefeller's papers suggests that he regarded the suit as anything other than outright extortion.[75]

In May 1887, Rockefeller sat captive in a packed Buffalo courtroom for eight days. Resentful of being turned into a public spectacle, he felt he was being served up as a sideshow freak to "this curious class of wonder-worshippers, the class whom P. T. Barnum capitalized [on] and made his fortune out of."[76] When Rockefeller testified, he displayed, as always, total forgetfulness, but in this instance he really knew little about the case. At the

end of eight days, the judge dropped charges against Rogers, Archbold, and McGregor. While Rogers hugged a bunch of pansies given by a well-wisher, Rockefeller, in a rare display of public fury, rose from his seat, jaw clenched, and said, “I have no congratulations to offer you, Rogers. What should be done with people who bring an action against men in this way—what?” Wheeling about, he shook his fist at Charles Matthews. Then, muttering “what an unheard-of-thing,” he strode briskly from the courtroom, his retinue in tow. In later years, he fulminated against Matthews as a “scheming, trouble-making blackmailer” who offered to sell his refinery to Standard Oil for $100,000 and only initiated his nuisance suit after being rebuffed.[77]

The Buffalo suit, in truth, had scant merit. The prosecution never established that an explosion had taken place or even that a high flame was necessarily hazardous when starting up the still. Though the Everests were convicted and fined $250 apiece, this small figure mirrored the jurors’ belief that the Everests did not conspire to blow up the refinery and were guilty only of luring away Albert Miller. If Henry Rogers cooperated with Ida Tarbell for the sake of vindication in the Buffalo case, he was amply rewarded. She stated categorically: “As a matter of fact, no refinery was burned in Buffalo, nor was it ever proved that Mr. Rogers knew anything of the attempts the Everests made to destroy Matthews’ business.”[78] Yet the notion that Rockefeller enjoyed blowing up rival plants so tickled the popular fancy that it remained enshrined as a story much too good to retire, and it was duly revived, along with the musty canard about the Widow Backus, by Matthew Josephson in his 1934 book *The Robber Barons.*

By the third installment in January 1903, President Roosevelt himself was voraciously reading Tarbell’s articles and even sent her a flattering note. Her celebrity spread with each issue, and her level gaze stared out from countless newspaper profiles. “The way you are generally esteemed and reverenced pleases me tremendously,” McClure told her. “You are today the most generally famous woman in America.”[79] That she had succeeded in a traditionally masculine field only added to her mystique.

Samuel McClure would let a series run as long as the public kept snatching up copies. As Tarbell summarized this policy, “No response—no more chapters. A healthy response—as many chapters as the material justified.”[80] Hence, her series was open-ended and profited from the tremendous crescendo of attention, which drew more and more Rockefeller critics from

the woodwork. The circulation of *McClure's* had risen to 375,000 by the time Tarbell's series was finished. Though the series was published as a two-volume book in November 1904, she then capped it with a scathing two-part character study of Rockefeller in *McClure's* in July and August of 1905.

It does not detract from her achievement to state that she enjoyed the services of a first-rate research assistant, John M. Siddall. Short, pudgy, and bespectacled, the young Siddall was an experienced hand, having been a cub reporter at the Cleveland *Plain Dealer* and secretary to the Cleveland Board of Education during Mayor Tom Johnson's reform administration. Based in Cleveland, he not only supplied Tarbell with numberless facts but charged her imagination. "I tell you this John D. Rockefeller is the strangest, most silent, most mysterious, and most interesting figure in America," he wrote to her. "The people of this country know nothing about him. A brilliant character study of him would make a tremendous trump card for McClure's."[81] At first, Siddall thought Rockefeller cold and humorless but had to modify the caricature. "My informant states that John has a real delightful way of cultivating the speaking acquaintance of all sorts of people—rich and poor, black and white. That only illustrates again the marvelous complexity of Rockefeller's character."[82]

One of the first and most shocking revelations dug up by Tarbell and Siddall came from a teenage boy who had been assigned to burn records at a Standard Oil plant each month. He was about to incinerate some forms one night when he noticed the name of a former Sunday-school teacher who was an independent refiner and Standard Oil rival. Leafing through the documents sent for burning, he realized that they were secret records, obtained from the railroads, documenting the shipments of rival refiners. Tarbell knew Standard Oil was ruthless, but she was shocked by this outright criminal activity. "There was a littleness about it that seemed utterly contemptible compared to the immense genius and ability that had gone into the organization," she said.[83] At this point, she realized she was being snookered by Henry Rogers.

Tarbell and Siddall were willing to take their own moral shortcuts to expose Rockefeller. To spy on him, Siddall had a friend from the *Plain Dealer* impersonate a Sunday-school teacher to sneak into the annual church picnic at Forest Hill. At Siddall's behest, an old Rockefeller friend, Hiram Brown, pumped the mogul on several matters, including his reaction to the *McClure's* series. At the mention of Tarbell's name, Rockefeller steadied himself with a long breath. "I tell you, Hiram, things have changed since you and I were

boys. The world is full of socialists and anarchists. Whenever a man succeeds remarkably in any particular line of business, they jump on him and cry him down."[84] To secure photos, Siddall had a friend pose as an agent of some distant Rockefeller relatives to obtain snapshots of the magnate from Cleveland photo studios. "Now of course these pictures were got under false pretenses," Siddall reminded Tarbell, "and we must protect our over-zealous friend."[85]

Since Rockefeller banned Tarbell from his presence, Siddall searched for a way that she could obtain a firsthand glimpse. During summers at Forest Hill, Rockefeller appeared in public only for Sunday services at the Euclid Avenue Baptist Church. By the early 1900s, this event had taken on the air of a circus spectacle as hundreds of people massed outside the church to view him. As the Tarbell series swelled the gaping throngs, Rockefeller would gingerly approach his church bodyguard before the service and ask, "Are there any of our friends, the reporters, here?"[86] Even though Pinkerton detectives mingled with the crowd, Rockefeller now felt anxious about public exposure. Sometimes, he confessed, he wanted to bolt from the service, but he feared that people would brand him a coward.[87] At one Friday-evening prayer service, when a radical agitator sat opposite him all evening, his hand stuffed menacingly in his pocket, Rockefeller grew so rattled that he put away his planned speech on socialism.

It probably hurt his image that he appeared in public only at church, for it played to the stereotype of a hypocrite cloaking himself in sanctity. In fact, his motivation for churchgoing was quite simple: Aside from the spiritual pleasure of prayer, he was loath to give up contact with ordinary people, many of them old friends. The church retained many blue-collar members, enabling Rockefeller to chat amiably with a blacksmith or mechanic. Such everyday experiences increasingly eluded him as he withdrew behind the high gates of his estates.

On Sunday, June 14, 1903, John Siddall got a windfall beyond his most feverish hopes when Rockefeller not only appeared but delivered a short "Children's Day" talk at the Sunday school. "If I had been able to foretell what happened yesterday I should have advised you to come from Titusville to spend Sunday in Cleveland," Siddall told Tarbell.[88] He described Rockefeller, in ministerial coat and silk hat, sitting before the pulpit and surveying the crowd apprehensively, as if fearful for his safety. "He bows his

head and mutters his prayer, and sings the hymns, and nods his head, and claps his hands in a sort of a mechanical way. It's all work to him—a part of his business. He thinks that after he has done this for an hour or two he has warded off the devil for another week."[89] Only months later did Siddall learn of the anonymous charity Rockefeller practiced each Sunday morning, handing out money in small envelopes to needy congregants. "Doesn't this shake your belief in the theory of pure hypocrisy?" Siddall then asked Tarbell, noting the curiously compartmentalized nature of Rockefeller's mind. "In one part is legitimate business, in another corrupt business, in another political depravity, in another—somewhere in his being— religious experience and life."[90] This was a richer, more accurate appraisal of Rockefeller than that contained in his earlier, reductive gibe.

In the early fall, Siddall found out that Rockefeller, before returning to New York, would deliver a short farewell address at the Sunday school, and he begged Ida Tarbell to attend. "I will see that we have seats where we will have a full view of the man," he promised her. "You will get him in action."[91] They planned to squeeze between them an illustrator, George Varian, who would execute rapid sketches of Rockefeller. Tarbell felt "a little mean" about secretly ambushing Rockefeller in church, and she dreaded that they would be caught. To prevent this, she asked Siddall to pack the pew with three or four tall confederates who would shield Varian and his notebook.

When Tarbell and Siddall arrived at the Sunday-school room that morning, she wrinkled her nose at the shabby surroundings, "a dismal room with barbaric dark green paper with big gold designs, cheap stained-glass windows, awkward gas fixtures."[92] Suddenly, Siddall gave her a violent dig in the ribs. "There he is," he breathed. The hairless figure in the doorway did not disappoint Tarbell. As she wrote, "There was an awful age in his face—the oldest man I had ever seen, I thought, but what power!"[93] He slowly doffed his coat and hat, slid a black skullcap over his bald head, and sat flush against the wall, giving him an unobstructed view of the room—which Tarbell thought a security precaution. During his brief talk to the children, she was impressed by the clear strength of his voice. After the Sunday-school speech, the *McClure's* contingent packed a church pew in the auditorium for the service. Self-conscious about being there, Tarbell was convinced that Rockefeller would pick her out of the crowd, but he apparently did not.

In her 1905 character study, Tarbell stressed Rockefeller's fidgety behavior,

the way he craned his neck and scanned the room, as if searching for assassins. “My two hours study of Mr. Rockefeller aroused a feeling I had not expected, which time has intensified. I was sorry for him. I know no companion so terrible as fear. Mr. Rockefeller, for all the conscious power written in face and voice and figure, was afraid, I told myself, afraid of his own kind.”[94] It did not occur to her that she had contributed to that fear. This edgy behavior was vitally important for Tarbell because it suggested that Rockefeller had a guilt-ridden conscience, that God was torturing him, that he could not enjoy his ill-gotten wealth; the ordinary reader could find no more satisfying fantasy. “For what good this undoubted power of achievement, for what good this towering wealth, if one must be forever peering to see what is behind!”[95] It certainly never occurred to Tarbell that Rockefeller might be searching the congregation for charity recipients.

Despite her fears, Tarbell and her associates evaded detection at the Euclid Avenue Baptist Church that Sunday morning. It was the only time that Tarbell ever actually stood in Rockefeller’s presence. Ironically, he never knowingly set eyes on the woman who did more than any other person to transmogrify his image.

By the end of her nineteen-part series, Tarbell had come to regard Rockefeller as the embodiment of evil. She had largely maintained a clinical tone, despite many shrill digressions, but in the poisonous two-part character study of July and August 1905, she allowed her vengeful feelings to blossom. Throwing off any pose of objectivity, she found in Rockefeller “concentration, craftiness, cruelty, and something indefinably repulsive.” She described him as a “living mummy,” hideous and diseased, leprous and reptilian, his physiognomy blighted by moral degeneracy. The pious, churchgoing image that Rockefeller projected was only a “hypocritical facade brilliantly created by the predatory businessman.”

The disease which in the last three or four years has swept Mr. Rockefeller’s head bare of hair, stripped away even eyelashes and eyebrows, has revealed all the strength of his great head. . . . The big cheeks are puffy, bulging unpleasantly under the eyes, and the skin which covers them has a curiously unhealthy pallor. It is this puffiness, this unclean flesh, which repels, as the thin slit of a mouth terrifies. . . . Mr. Rockefeller may have made himself the richest man in the world, but he has paid. Nothing but paying ever ploughs such lines in a man’s face, ever sets his lips to such a melancholy angle.[96]

Rockefeller could brush off Tarbell's critique of his business methods as biased, but he was deeply pained by the character study. He was furious that Tarbell converted his alopecia, which had produced so much suffering, into a sign of moral turpitude. He was no less upset by her charge that he was ill at ease in his church, for this struck at the heart of his lifelong faith. As he said later, he was not fearful in church "because there was no place where I felt more at home in a public assembly than in this old church, where I had been since a boy of fourteen years of age and my friends were all about me."[97] The patent cruelty of the character study steeled Rockefeller against Tarbell's valid strictures about his business methods. For Rockefeller, this malice was the final proof he needed of Ida Tarbell's bias against him.

As legions of Rockefeller enemies sought interviews with Tarbell, she was bound to encounter the most vituperative foe, his brother Frank. Refusing to forgive John after the Corrigan affair, Frank still popped up in the press from time to time to deliver flaming imprecations against John. During the *McClure's* series, he was quoted by a Washington paper as saying that "the fear of kidnapping [had] become a mania" with his brother and that "armed men accompany him everywhere ready to repel any effort to capture him." [98] In fact, Frank had not set eyes on his brother in years and could only parrot gossip.

Tarbell was always coy about how she met Frank Rockefeller, but her papers tell a startling tale. Although Siddall's brother had been one of Frank's attorneys, this had not helped him to line up an interview. Then a breakthrough occurred in January 1904, when Siddall learned that the Tarbell series had won two unexpected admirers: Frank's daughter and son-in-law, Helen and Walter Bowler. Using Mr. Bowler as a go-between, Frank stipulated his conditions for a tête-à-tête with Tarbell: "I want no member of my family to know of this interview. Nobody is ever to know of it. I shall see Miss Tarbell in my Garfield Building office. No one is to be present. No clerk is to know who Miss T is."[99]

Following instructions, Tarbell even donned a disguise. It would be one of the most disturbing interviews of her long career. Though Frank seemed candid, he chewed tobacco and talked incontinently, spewing forth bile against his brother. At moments, his self-pitying harangues suggested a deranged man. Afterward, Tarbell jotted down impressions, including his off-the-record statements, for her files:

He seemed dimly conscious that it was unnatural and monstrous to talk to me, and yet to be so bitter that he could not restrain himself. He began to talk of his brother by referring to him as “that individual.” “I have nothing to do with that individual,” he said. “I never want to see him. I have not seen him but once for eight years, and that was by accident. He has ruined my life. Nearly drove my wife insane. Two years ago I had to put her in a sanitarium, where she stayed for nearly a year, and this entirely came of this man’s vindictive feeling of me.” He says, “I have read every one of your articles. Some of them I have read two or three times. I have never known of any literary subject which interested me so much, or interested the people with whom I came in contact so much.” [100]

Unaware of the stormy history between the two brothers, Tarbell confessed that Frank was the last person she had expected to volunteer as a source. A brisk, businesslike journalist, she was appalled by the ugly emotions he betrayed, however much she welcomed his information. Predictably, Frank dragged out his self-serving version of the Corrigan case. He portrayed John as a sadist who took pleasure in lending people money then seizing their collateral and destroying them when they did not repay: “Cleveland could be paved with the mortgages that he has foreclosed on people who were in a tight place.”[101] Though Tarbell came to believe that John D. had acted in an ethical manner with Corrigan, she quoted so freely from the original lawsuit against Rockefeller as to obscure that she was siding with him.

Aside from the Corrigan case, Frank contributed few facts and preferred to vent his spleen. He told Tarbell that John had only two ambitions, to be very rich and very old, and he even chastised Cettie, calling her a “narrow-minded, stingy and pious” woman, whose greatest goal was “to be known as a good Christian, and to impress the world with the piety and domestic harmony of the family.”[102] According to Frank, Cettie was a crafty, avaricious hypocrite who ensured that John’s charities were widely publicized and tinged with the proper religious coloring. Touching up this gruesome portrait, Frank later told one of Tarbell’s assistants: “[John] has the delusion that God has appointed him to administer all the wealth in the world, and in his efforts to do this he has destroyed men right and left. I tell you that when you publish this story the people will arise and stone him out of the community. . . . He is a monster.”[103]

Frank had two other shockers for Tarbell. First, he told her that “the real

reason that I have sent for you is that I want some day to write the life of my brother. I cannot write. You can do the kind of thing I want, and I want to know if you will do it using my material."[104] Tarbell did not quite picture herself as Frank Rockefeller's ghostwriter. On the other hand, she did not wish to alienate him and mumbled something about helping him if her editorial work allowed the time. Then Frank came up with a remarkable finale to his ravings about his brother: "I know you think I am bitter and that it is unnatural, but this man has ruined my life. Why I have not killed him I do not understand. It must be that there is a God who prevented me doing such a thing, for there have been a hundred times when, if I had met him on the street, I know that I should have shot him."[105]

Tarbell did not quote these background statements and preserved Frank's anonymity. But such lunacy should have told her to exercise extreme care in dealing with the Corrigan case. Instead, in a lapse in judgment, she used Frank's material in such a slipshod, misleading manner that Rockefeller justly accused her of slanting the story.

Perhaps the main reason that Frank did not blow out his brother's brains was that he did not want to murder one of his main bankers. Unable to curb his speculative appetite, Frank took another emergency loan of $184,000 from William during the 1907 panic. What Frank did not know—but surely must have suspected—was that John had guaranteed half the loan, secured by eight hundred head of cattle and one hundred mules on Frank's Kansas ranch. In fact, John D. carried this debt until Frank died, though a moment came in early 1912 when Frank again sounded off about his brother to reporters and John dispatched a lawyer to inform his ungrateful brother about the true source of the money that had so long sustained him.

For nearly three years, from November 1902 to August 1905, Ida Tarbell fired projectiles at Rockefeller and Standard Oil without taking fire in return. As one newspaper wondered aloud, "Is the Pen Mightier than the Money-Bag. . . . Is Ida M. Tarbell, weak woman, more potent than John D. Rockefeller millionaire?"[106] As the Tarbell series demonstrated, the new media possessed a power that rivaled that of the business institutions they covered. Paradoxically, the more Tarbell invoked the malevolent power of Standard Oil, the more she proved the reverse. At moments, Tarbell herself was startled by the kid-glove treatment. She wrote to Siddall in February 1903, "It is very interesting to note now, that the thing is well under way, and I have not been kidnapped or sued for libel as some of my friends prophesied, people are

willing to talk freely to me.” [107]

From today’s perspective, when corporations have teams of publicists who swing into action at the first whiff of trouble, Standard Oil’s muted reaction appears to be a perplexing miscalculation. Tarbell got enough wrong that a modern public-relations expert could have dented her credibility and shaken Samuel McClure with the threat of a libel suit. Rockefeller could, for instance, have exposed the hoax of the Widow Backus story. In the spring of 1905, he contemplated a lawsuit against Tarbell for alleging that he had perjured himself by denying knowledge of a *Southern* Improvement Company when his interrogator had garbled the name of the *South* Improvement Company. After Tarbell published her character study of Rockefeller, he authorized Virgil Kline to contest her treatment of the Corrigan case. Kline pointed out that Tarbell’s fallacious account was drawn largely from the original petition filed against Rockefeller, not the exculpatory testimony that followed in the case. “Mr. Kline says I used charges made in the petition instead of in the testimony,” Tarbell wrote, unfazed, in an internal memo at the time. “I did, and I see no reason why I should not have done so.” [108] Tough challenges from Rockefeller might have blunted Tarbell’s confidence and made readers question her sources.

The *McClure’s* series showed that the public-be-damned attitude that had served industrial barons well in the nineteenth century now made them easy prey for investigative journalists who fed a public famished for revelations of misconduct. The schizoid American worship of millionaires was shot through with envy and a desire to see these demigods punished and desecrated. So why did Rockefeller stick to his self-defeating silence? One side of him simply did not want to be bothered by libel suits. “Life is short,” he wrote to Parmalee Prentice, “and we have not time to heed the reports of foolish and unprincipled men.”[109] He was also afraid that if he sued for libel, it would dignify the charges against him and only prolong the controversy. Strolling about Forest Hill one day, a friend suggested that he respond to the Tarbell slanders. At that moment, he spotted a worm crawling across their path. “If I step on that worm I will call attention to it,” he said. “If I ignore it, it will disappear.”[110] In certain instances, he was muzzled from responding because of his involvement in ongoing court cases.

But the main reason for Rockefeller’s silence was that he couldn’t dispute just a few of Tarbell’s assertions without admitting the truth of many others,

and a hard core of truth did lie behind the scattered errors. When Gates urged him to rebut Tarbell on the Backus affair and the SIC perjury charge, Rockefeller agreed he could do so but that "going further than the Backus and the South Improvement Company cases may involve the necessity of going thoroughly into the whole book"—and he did not wish to do that.[111] Two months later, Tarbell herself reached a similar conclusion in *McClure's:* "His self-control has been masterful—he knows, nobody better, that to answer is to invite discussion, to answer is to call attention to the facts in the case." [112]

Rockefeller claimed that he had not even deigned to glance at *McClure's,* a claim inadvertently refuted by Adella Prentiss Hughes, Cettie's nurse and companion, who traveled with the Rockefellers on a western train trip in the spring of 1903. "He liked to have things read to him, and during these months I read aloud Ida Tarbell's diatribes," she recalled. "He listened musingly, with keen interest and no resentment."[113] He tossed out wisecracks about "his lady friend" or "Miss Tarbarrel" but would not be drawn into serious discussion about her. "Not a word," he said. "Not a word about that misguided woman."[114] His office, however, kept him well apprised of her allegations as they appeared.

Nonetheless, it is true that Rockefeller never formally sat down and read her searing indictment. "I don't think I ever read Ida Tarbell's book: I may have skimmed it," he said a decade later. "I wonder what it amounts to, anyway, in the minds of people who have no animus?" [115] When William O. Inglis began to interview Rockefeller in 1917 and read aloud portions of Tarbell's work, it grew clear that Rockefeller had only a vague familiarity with the series. It was equally clear that beneath his pose of stoic fortitude he was still angry. His private comments about her were marked by a heavy sniggering and dry mockery that he never exhibited in public. "How clever she is, compared with poor Lloyd, who was always hysterical! She makes her picture clear and attractive, no matter how unjust she is. She really could write."[116] At the same time, he was convinced that this daughter of Oil Creek was "animated more with jealousy begotten by the inability of her father and her brother and some of her neighbors to do as well as the Standard Oil Company."[117] Far from making him repent and reconsider, the Tarbell series hardened his faith in his career. How dismayed Tarbell would have been to find Rockefeller writing to Archbold in July 1905: "I never appreciated more than at present the importance of our taking care of our business—holding it

and increasing it in every part of the world."[118]

Faced with Tarbell's invective, Rockefeller was too proud to give the world the satisfaction of knowing that he was wounded. The press was rife with speculation about his reaction. "Mr. Rockefeller's friends say that it is all cruel punishment for him, and that he writhes under these attacks," reported one Detroit newspaper.[119] A Philadelphia paper chimed in that "the richest man in the world sits by the hour at Forest Hill, his chin sunk on his breast. . . . He has lost interest in golf; he has become morose; never free in his conversation with his employees, he now speaks only when absolutely necessary, and then gives his directions tersely and absently."[120] These reports tell more about the popular thirst for revenge than about Rockefeller's actual response. He was never tormented by guilt and went on playing golf.

Yet he *was* more vulnerable to criticism than he admitted. During this period, he grew closer to his son, who became his confidant just as Cettie's maladies made it more difficult for her to discharge that function. Junior remembered, "He used to talk to me about the criticisms to which he was exposed, and I think it eased his mind to do so, because beneath his apparent insensitiveness, he was a sensitive man, but he always ended up by saying: 'Well, John, we have to be patient. We have been successful and these people haven't.' "[121] Even John D. Rockefeller, Sr., required cathartic chats in time of trouble.

Having been filled to the brim with morality and religion, Rockefeller's children must have been disoriented to see him exposed as a corporate criminal. How did they reconcile the rapacious Rockefeller splashed across *McClure's* pages with the reverent father that they knew? As a rule, they fell back upon an implicit belief in father's integrity, which was more a matter of religious faith than anything grounded in fact.

Senior might talk in general terms about Tarbell's criticisms but refrained from specific rebuttals, an omission that especially tormented his son, who had taken his parents' morality at face value. Junior had always been prey to tension-related symptoms, and they intensified with each new installment of *McClure's.* By late 1904, gripped by migraine headaches and insomnia, he wavered on the edge of a breakdown. Under doctor's orders, he, Abby, and their baby daughter Babs sailed to Cannes in December 1904 for what would extend into a yearlong absence from 26 Broadway. They toured the charming

Languedoc country towns, drove through the maritime Alps, and ambled along the Promenade des Anglais. But Junior's troubles were so intransigent that their projected one-month stay lengthened to six. Junior's breakdown has been variously attributed to overwork, exhaustion, or an identity crisis, but he himself privately emphasized the toll of the Tarbell series, as well as two subsequent controversies: the tainted-money affair and his leadership of a Bible class.

While Tarbell's articles were running, Rockefeller, his wife, his son, and two of his three daughters were afflicted by serious medical problems or nervous strain. In 1903, Rockefeller had such severe bronchial troubles that he took a rest cure near San Diego. That spring, Bessie suffered the stroke or heart ailment that left her sadly demented, and the following April Charles Strong took his wife off to Cannes, where she and Junior may have consulted the same nervous-strain specialists. In April 1904, Cettie had the attack that left her semiparalyzed and from which she took two years to recover. Finally, plunged into depression after the birth of her daughter Mathilde in April 1905, Edith fled to Europe. Understandably, the Rockefellers did not wish to broadcast their misfortunes to the world. The price that the series exacted on them, like so much else, was scrupulously hidden from both the public and posterity.

The most stinging personal blow to Rockefeller was not Tarbell's exposé of his chicanery but her defamatory portrait of his father, published in the two-part character study. Rockefeller had never dropped the pretense that his father, like his mother, was a person of sterling virtue. Even in later years, he told one of his grandsons, "I had a rich inheritance in foundation building from both my father and mother, and I reverence them, and often long to see them even though it is so many years since they passed away."[122] Now readers across the country were introduced to the protean Doc Rockefeller, snake-oil salesman, ne'er-do-well, bigamist, and absentee father. Most mortifying of all to Rockefeller, Tarbell disinterred his oldest and deepest shame: Big Bill's rape indictment in Moravia in the late 1840s.

By this point, Rockefeller seldom had dealings with his infirm, elderly father, who was increasingly crotchety, and routed urgent queries to him via brother Frank—to whom he was not speaking either. Tarbell had stumbled upon Doc Rockefeller's existence in serendipitous fashion. One day in April 1903, J. M. Siddall was on the phone with Rockefeller's brother-in-law, the genial William Rudd, when Rudd let slip that William Avery Rockefeller was

still alive. Perhaps Rudd did not at first perceive the magnitude of this admission. “Oh yes, the old gentleman is living. He travels about from place to place in the west. The last I knew of him was in Dakota. We don’t know where he is now.”[123]

Sitting there agape, Siddall could scarcely believe his ears: Scoops did not come any bigger than this. The second he got off the phone, he pounded out a typewritten report to Tarbell.

I have always supposed that Mr. Rockefeller’s father died years and years ago, and I am startled almost beyond expression to learn, as I have through the telephone within the last five minutes, that the old man is living. . . . I never in my life was more surprised. . . . I am under the impression that I have been told over and over that the old man died some years ago, and I am sure from W. C. Rudd’s attitude toward me today that there is something secret and mysterious about the thing.[124]

In his hands Siddall now had a thread that would lead him and then other reporters into a vast investigative maze. Through his brother, Siddall sounded out Frank Rockefeller’s secretary, who offered a helpful hint: Doc Rockefeller lived in either North or South Dakota. “He doesn’t know where and says frankly—though confidentially—that he *doesn’t dare ask Frank or any members* of the family,” Siddall informed Tarbell.[125] This only added to the mystery: Why had Rockefeller so thoroughly expunged his father from his life? Siddall next prodded a reporter from the Cleveland *Plain Dealer* to ask Dr. Biggar, very casually, whether on a recent trip west with Rockefeller they had detoured to visit Doc Rockefeller. At first Biggar walked straight into the trap. “No, we didn’t go through Dakota,” he began to blurt out, then, seeing his error, clammed up.[126] Siddall and Tarbell scored their biggest coup with Rockefeller’s old friend Hiram Brown, whom Tarbell had met while researching her Lincoln book. During a meandering chat at Forest Hill, Brown sounded out Rockefeller about his father, which produced the following exchange, as recorded in Tarbell’s research files:

“Well, sir, the old gentleman is on his last legs I guess. He is absolutely senile. He is living on a farm near Cedar Valley, Cedar County, Iowa. He has lost all his powers. He is ninety-three years old, you know. They say the old gentleman is so deaf that he cannot hear a word. His nieces are taking good care of him. He is living on the farm because he owns it . . . because it is the

place that is most pleasing to him."

"Well, John, what a comical, funny old fellow he is," Brown said.

"Yes," John replied. "They say the old gentleman lies on the bed and swears all day. I haven't seen him since he was here three years ago."[127] This last sentence alluded to the party that John had thrown at Forest Hill for Bill and his erstwhile cronies.

When Ida Tarbell interviewed Frank Rockefeller in 1904, he gave his own self-serving account of John and Bill's final break. At age ninety, Bill had decided to bequeath his $87,000 in property equally among his four living children. According to Frank, John had wanted his one-quarter share *plus* repayment of an outstanding $35,000 loan; Bill, irate, believed that the gift should cancel out the loan. As Tarbell paraphrased Frank's narration in a memo, "The old man was so furious that now he will not come home. He says he will not live in the same state with his son." [128] As Tarbell peeled away bits and pieces of Bill's clandestine life, she did not know how abominably Bill and Frank had behaved over the years, how much they had borrowed from John, nor how erroneous their tirades against him were. Tarbell was never able to track down Doc Rockefeller or figure out the riddle of his double life, but her revelation that he was still alive somewhere created a national sensation.

Among the intrigued was Joseph Pulitzer, publisher of the *World*, who had inveighed against Standard Oil as the most pitiless trust. Pulitzer served his readers an incongruous mix of scabrous stories and lofty crusades against corporate abuse. "Money is the great power of today," he declared. "Men sell their souls for it. Women sell their bodies for it."[129] He wished to purge capitalism of its vulgar excesses so that a more enlightened capitalism might flourish, and he evinced a special animus toward Rockefeller, whom he christened "the father of trusts, the king of monopolists, the czar of the oil business," a man who "relentlessly crushes all competitors."[130] Hence the story of Doc Rockefeller— uniting, as it did, the spice of family scandal with Standard Oil's notoriety—was a godsend. Stirring the pot, Pulitzer offered eight thousand dollars to anyone who could provide information about Rockefeller's father, a reward that set off a nationwide manhunt.

It is a credit to Bill's matchless duplicity that teams of reporters were immediately stymied in this search. There was also a fair bit of luck involved.

When *McClure's* printed a picture of Rockefeller's father to accompany the character sketch, many Freeport, Illinois, residents were shocked to see Dr. William Levingston staring out at them. Many traits that Tarbell attributed to Doc Rockefeller sounded oddly reminiscent of their queer local resident. The editor of the *Freeport Daily Bulletin* contacted *McClure's* to inform them that they might have mistakenly printed a picture of Dr. William Levingston. Indignant at this insinuation—and totally oblivious of the revelation implicit in the Freeport editor's query—*McClure's* wrote back and assured the editor that the photo of Rockefeller's father was indeed authentic. Amazingly enough, the national press corps never picked up on all the rumors buzzing around Freeport, Illinois.

An impatient Pulitzer dispatched one of his star reporters, J. W. Slaght, to Cleveland, hoping for a quick solution, but two weeks later Slaght slogged back to New York, weary and dispirited. In a despairing memo to Pulitzer, he stressed the inordinate effort required to track down Rockefeller's father and hinted that it would be thankless drudgery. He hoped that the matter would end there. "In just about time enough for the report to have reached Mr. Pulitzer I was ordered to take up the search and stay on it until I found Mr. Rockefeller, regardless of time or expense," Slaght revealed to William O. Inglis a decade later. "It seems that the story fascinated Mr. Pulitzer—the disappearance of the father of the richest man in the world, a thrilling mystery that would interest people everywhere." [131]

So thoroughly had Doc Rockefeller erased his tracks that Slaght had only one tenuous clue. During the reunion a few years earlier at Forest Hill, Big Bill had slyly told his buddies that he resided somewhere out West and shot "shirt-tail swans" in a nearby lake. Slaght consulted a naturalist who said that a wild goose nicknamed the "shirt-tail swan" abounded in parts of Alaska. Setting forth with this sketchy information and a photo of Doc Rockefeller, the miserable Slaght trekked through Alaska, tramping from lake to lake. Once he had exhausted this terrain, he heard that Bill had been sighted in Indiana and was off on another wild-goose chase. For a time, he peddled razors door-to-door, trying to pry information loose from suspicious German farmers. "I'll bet I shaved myself ten or fifteen times a day, till my face was sore, selling the blamed razors." [132] Even clean shaven, Slaght again came up empty-handed.

Desperate, he turned to Frank Rockefeller, the only person in direct communication with the phantom. Bribing Frank's secretary with candy and

theater tickets, Slaght gained access to Frank, who was no less protective of his father than John was. He was quite upset by Slaght's quest and offered a straightforward deal: If Slaght called off the search, Frank would repay him with sensational findings about his brother. To enhance the deal's allure, Frank exhumed from his drawer an impressive manuscript, thick as a telephone directory.

After a flurry of calls to New York, the *World* editors agreed to terminate their search for Doc Rockefeller for sixty days if they could, in return, publish Frank's philippic against John. Having never dealt with Frank, Slaght naively trusted him. But when the time expired, Frank would not return his calls, and Slaght had no choice but to accost him on a Cleveland street and bluntly remind him that the *World* had fulfilled its end of the bargain; in exchange, he demanded the manuscript. "No, sir," Frank snapped, "not one word of it."[133] Aghast, Slaght said the *World* would publish the inflammatory remarks Frank had made about John in his office. "If you publish that," retorted Frank, "I'll kill you."[134] However much he detested John, Frank must have feared that any published comments would dry up the loans from his brothers.

In August 1907, still baffled in its search for Doc Rockefeller, the *World* ran the interview with Frank recorded a year and a half earlier. "My father is alive and well," a defiant Frank was quoted as saying. "He is dependent upon no man. He would scorn the proffer of financial aid from John D. and would not take it from me. He has means of his own, ample for all his needs." Then he openly taunted his brother for his estrangement. "Go ask John D. where our father is: tell him that I sent you and that I dare him to answer."[135] By this point, the Pulitzer reporters labored under insane pressure to come up with fresh leads. When William Randolph Hearst also threw reporters into the search, Pulitzer (who referred to Rockefeller as "Grasping" in internal coded messages) could not bear the thought of being beaten and offered a handsome cash bonus to any reporter who broke the story. To bolster the burned-out Slaght, he assigned another reporter, A. B. Macdonald of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, to the chase.

Before turning to the finale of this cross-country quest, let us fill in a few blanks about Bill's life during these past years. Too old to travel, Bill had renounced his itinerant life and mostly remained in Freeport, Illinois. As garrulous as ever, he spent his days dabbling with his guns, telling hunting stories to whoever would listen, or boasting of his big ranch and fine horses in North Dakota. When he visited Frank's ranch, he sat on the front porch and

fired at targets Frank set up for his amusement. One night in 1904, the portly, ailing Bill, then ninety-four, lowered himself into a chair but missed it. As he tried to grab something to break his fall, he broke his arm near the shoulder, an accident so severe that his survival seemed doubtful, and it became necessary to contact his next of kin. Until this time, Margaret Allen Levingston had not known that her husband was a bigamist with five children and that one of them was among the world's richest men. A proper lady, active in the First Presbyterian Church and the Women's Christian Temperance Union, she must have reeled from this revelation.

There is reason to suspect that John D. met Margaret Levingston at this time. The nurse who treated Bill, Mrs. J. B. Gingrich, told of the arrival of a mysterious visitor from the East who came by private railroad car, slipped into the house discreetly by a side door, and only entered Bill's room after she and the doctor had left. She remembered the sound of this visitor pacing up and down an adjoining room as Bill lay in pain. One suspects that John D. was the spectral figure, since William would not have asked for these special security precautions. If it was John D., it would have been the first time he ever set eyes on the wife whose legitimacy he had never acknowledged.

As he recuperated, Bill was often delirious, though still talkative. "Even as sick as he was he was jovial in his rational moments and in his delirium," said Mrs. Gingrich. "He talked of his vast business interests in the East. He sang often a ditty about a frog in a well, and he sang often a lullaby which he said his mother used to sing to him when he was a baby nearly 100 years before."[136] As if shedding all the accumulated artifice of his double life, Bill's mind frequently reverted to his early days as Doc Rockefeller in upstate New York. In the feverish mental state of his final days in early 1906, he repeatedly babbled the names of the five children from his first marriage—John, William, Frank, Lucy, and Mary Ann. And he would stare at the loyal Margaret and suddenly cry out, "You are not my wife. Where is Eliza?"[137]

It was to be a season full of bitter surprises for Margaret, who had been gulled by Bill's braggadocio into thinking they were supremely wealthy. During his illness, Bill had trouble paying his medical bills and even contemplated pawning the big, gaudy diamond he had always stuck in his shirtfront. The night that Bill died, Margaret was unsure of the Rockefellers' reaction and did not know exactly what to do. She apparently stored the body for several months at the City Cemetery, awaiting a request to have it shipped back to Cleveland. When word never came from the family, she transferred

the body to the Oak Knoll section of the Oakland Cemetery. Though Bill is always said to have died on May 11, 1906, references to his estate suddenly appear in John's papers in January 1906, suggesting that the burial may have taken place on that later date, not the death itself. Only Frank and Pierson Briggs attended the belated funeral in which Bill was entombed in a plain, unvarnished box in an unmarked grave. That Margaret was worried about her future financial state is confirmed by the fact that she paid the gravediggers three dollars, but could not afford the extra dollar for a brick vault—standard procedure at the time. It would be another five years, after Margaret's own death, before a granite memorial bearing the Levingston name in raised lettering was finally erected on the site. Few—if any—Rockefeller descendants seem to know that William Avery Rockefeller is buried there under his assumed name.

The tangled skein of Bill's life finally unraveled in early 1908, two years after his death, when a druggist in Madison, Wisconsin, told A. B. Macdonald that for years a friend and fellow druggist in Freeport named George Swartz had sold medical concoctions to a Dr. William Levingston. Swartz had always wondered whether the name was a fabrication, a suspicion confirmed when he saw a picture of Dr. Levingston gazing at him from Tarbell's series. Acting on this tip, Macdonald traveled to Freeport. When he flashed a photo of Bill Rockefeller to neighbors, everybody agreed that it was Dr. Levingston. Then he rang the doorbell of a private home on West Clark Street. A refined, elderly lady in her early seventies answered, her white hair covered by a lace cap. When the reporter disclosed his mission, Margaret Allen Levingston lifted her hands and started to sob. "I have been wondering when one of you would come," she said, sniffling. "And I have been dreading it, for I knew the secret could not be kept forever, now that my husband is dead." When Macdonald asked whether William Avery Rockefeller and Dr. Levingston were the same person, she replied, "Go to the other side if you want the facts." What other side? "To John D. Rockefeller. Let him tell if he will. It is not for me to talk. I lived happily with my husband for fifty years. He was kind and true. It is all I can say or will say. I must be a true woman to the end." [138] She furnished pictures of both herself and her husband—in fact, over the mantel Macdonald saw a crayon version of the photo of Bill he held in his hand—then told her visitor in parting, "I wish it were possible for you to leave me alone with my dead."[139]

To retire any lingering doubt, Macdonald went to the local library and found an obituary notice, dated May 11, 1906, for Dr. William Levingston,

who had died at age ninety-six and was listed as the oldest man in Freeport. The death notice listed his birthday as November 13, 1810—the same date as Doc Rockefeller's—settling the great mystery. Greatly relieved, Macdonald was at last liberated from Pulitzer's obsession.

On February 2, 1908, the nightmare that had haunted John D. Rockefeller his whole life suddenly burst forth in bold print. On its front page, the *World* trumpeted the headline "Secret Double Life of Rockefeller's Father Revealed by the *World*." The story received the coverage ordinarily reserved for major elections or great natural disasters, with the single column on the front page followed by an entire page inside. Nothing in the text was quite so cogent as the proof provided by two adjoining, identical photos of William Avery Rockefeller and Dr. William Levingston. The article gave a sketchy picture of his double life, his fifty-one years as a bigamist, his footloose life as a mountebank in the Dakotas, and his burial in an unmarked grave. It was a story more bizarrely implausible than anything ever invented by the tabloid press. For Big Bill, who had always wanted to be somebody important, it was a queer sort of posthumous fulfillment.

Rockefeller's archives do not reveal a single public or private reaction to the *World* article. His friends never dared to elicit his response, while his family pretended that the article did not exist. There were two noteworthy public reactions. First, Frank again decided to make mischief by publicly denying that his father had been a bigamist or even that he was dead. "Like others which have preceded it, the story is an unqualified lie. The whereabouts of my father concerns no one but his immediate family and it is precisely to protect himself from being hounded by cranks and others who would break in upon the peace and quiet of his retired life that he prefers to live in such seclusion as suits his convenience."[140]

Second, the article brought an emotional response from Dr. Charles Johnston, Bill's handsome, dark-skinned young disciple and traveling companion in the Dakota years. When he read the *World* exposé, Johnston was petrified that he would lose his license to practice medicine if it was shown that he and Bill had sold patent medicines illegally. Released from his pledge of secrecy by Bill's death, he told the *World*, "For years I have wondered why the secret was kept so safely. For twenty-five years the secret has been locked in my breast, but it was well known to others, and I have wondered when it would become known."[141] To protect his professional status, he portrayed Bill sympathetically as a "natural healer," not as a

cunning mountebank. Years later, when he no longer feared legal reprisals, he gave a less sanitized history of their scams. Perhaps more than Bill's real children, Charles Johnston retained a tender spot for him, telling the *World* that he still cherished the violin that Bill had given him when he was too old and gouty to play. And he made a public plea that the Rockefeller family should posthumously forgive this fallible man. "I think it's time that John D. Rockefeller and his brother should acknowledge him as their father, because all the world knows it now." [142]

Deaf to Johnston's plea, Rockefeller probably never forgave the father whose erratic ways had likely set him off on his exaggerated quest for money, power, and respectability. Bill's body was never brought back to Cleveland and his granite tombstone was paid for from Margaret Levingston's meager estate.

Frederick T. Gates, seated, with Dr. Simon Flexner, director of the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research. *(Courtesy of the Rockefeller Archive Center)*

CHAPTER 23

Faith of Fools

Had John D. Rockefeller died in 1902, at the outset of the Tarbell series, he would be known today almost exclusively as a narrow man of swashbuckling brilliance in business, a man who personified the acquisitive spirit of late-nineteenth-century American industry. But just as the muckrakers were teaching the public that Rockefeller was the devil incarnate, he was turning increasingly to philanthropy. What makes him so problematic—and why he continues to inspire such ambivalent reactions—is that his good side was every bit as good as his bad side was bad. Seldom has history produced such a contradictory figure. We are almost forced to posit, in helpless confusion, at least two Rockefellers: the good, religious man and the renegade businessman, driven by baser motives. Complicating this puzzle is the fact that Rockefeller experienced no sense of discontinuity as he passed from being the brains of Standard Oil to being the monarch of a charitable empire. He did not see himself in retirement as atoning for his sins, and he would have agreed emphatically with Winston Churchill's later judgment: "The founder of the Standard Oil Company would not have felt the need of paying hush money to heaven."[1] He was also insistent that his massive philanthropy paled in importance beside the good he had done in creating jobs and furnishing affordable kerosene at Standard Oil.

As his fortune grew big enough to beggar the imagination, John D. retained his mystic faith that God had given him money for mankind's benefit. Obviously, God disagreed with Miss Tarbell, or else why had He lavished such bounty on him? Rockefeller regarded his fortune as a public trust, not as a private indulgence, and the pressure to dispose of it grew imperative in the early 1900s as his Standard Oil stock and other investments appreciated fantastically. In the pre-Gates era, Rockefeller had found it difficult to expand his giving in proportion to his wealth—a strain that had pushed him steadily toward a psychic precipice. Tarbell stressed that Rockefeller had given away only a small fraction of his total wealth: between thirty-five and forty million dollars, or the equivalent of three years of Standard Oil dividends. (In fact, he had already given away several times that amount.) To parry the political attacks against him and mollify public opinion, he now had to disburse money

on a much larger scale. For purely selfish reasons, he had to show that as a philanthropist he could act in a disinterested, public-spirited manner. Those commentators who see his charity as crudely furthering his economic interests miss a far more important goal: his need to prove that rich businessmen could honorably discharge the burden of wealth. The judicious disposal of his fortune might also blunt further inquiry into its origins.

It was thus from political necessity that Rockefeller distanced himself from his philanthropies, which would be marked by a low-profile style. The muckrakers had fostered such distrust of Rockefeller that he needed to counter suspicions that his charity was just another trick, a way to burnish his public image in the wake of investigations. The Rockefeller philanthropies would be constrained by a fundamental paradox: While extremely powerful, they were also inhibited in exercising that power. In explaining why members of the Rockefeller boards never gave interviews, Gates once said that if they extolled their benefactions, it would "inevitably lend color to the suspicion that [Rockefeller's] gifts are not free from the taint of self-seeking." [2]

Gates helped Rockefeller to define his priorities so as to forestall political criticism. Rockefeller began to assign a lesser place to partisan or parochial concerns, such as the Anti-Saloon League or Anthony Comstock and his New York Society for the Suppression of Vice, in favor of programs with broad appeal and universal support—things unarguably good that helped all classes of people and lacked any tincture of self-interest. Groups that did not meet these criteria were either relegated to Rockefeller's small, private gifts or discarded altogether. In his memoirs, Rockefeller said that he had sought progress in six areas of life, and the choices are notable for their general, noncontroversial nature: "(1) material comforts (2) government and law (3) language and literature (4) science and philosophy (5) art and refinement (6) morality and religion."[3] Who could protest such emphases?

The most perplexing issue for Rockefeller was how to square philanthropy with self-reliance. His constant nightmare was that he would promote dependence, sapping the Protestant work ethic. "It is a great problem," he acknowledged, "to learn how to give without weakening the moral backbone of the beneficiary."[4] He dreaded the thought of armies of beggars addicted to his handouts. Back in the 1880s, when considering support for a veterans' organization in Cleveland, he warned brother Frank that he did "not want to encourage a horde of irresponsible, adventuresome fellows to call on me at

sight for money every time fancy seizes them." [5] He constantly reminded his son that it was easier to launch a charitable commitment than to end it.

He was also wary of upsetting the existing social hierarchy. Staunchly convinced that society meted out just deserts, he believed that the rich had been recompensed for superior intelligence and enterprise. Conversely, *the failures that a man makes in his life are due almost always to some defect in his personality, some weakness of body, mind or character, will or temperament. . . . It is my personal belief that the principal cause for the economic differences between people is their difference in personality, and that it is only as we can assist in the wider distribution of those qualities that go to make up a strong personality that we can assist in the wider distribution of wealth.*[6]

He contributed to education and medical research, for they strengthened recipients and better prepared them for the evolutionary struggle—that is, he equipped them to compete but did not tamper with outcomes. For this reason, he never used his wealth to alleviate poverty directly and scorned any charity that smacked of social welfare. "Instead of giving alms to beggars," Rockefeller said, "if anything can be done to remove the causes which lead to the existence of beggars, then something deeper and broader and more worthwhile will have been accomplished." [7] Unlike Carnegie, he did not build libraries, athletic facilities, or music halls for the recreation of ordinary people but promoted pure research that would lead to more generalized benefits.

In focusing on prevention rather than relief, Rockefeller was influenced by two contemporary reform movements. By 1900, many progressives had tired of dealing with the symptoms of social ills and began to search for fundamental causes. Instead of falling back on isolated good deeds, they aspired to a systematic attack on the underpinnings of poverty. Backed by a new faith in scientific method, they drew on a burgeoning new middle class, educated by an expanding university system, and enlisted the knowledge of experts in business, labor, agriculture, and other areas. This new technical class provided a ready-made population to staff the Rockefeller philanthropies. Such "scientific reform" appealed to Rockefeller, who liked to analyze systems and probe underlying causes. After all, he himself had profited from scientific breakthroughs at Standard Oil, such as the Frasch process.

Rockefeller's work was also buttressed by the social-gospel movement, which united social reform with moral uplift and religious renewal, reaching its high point between 1900 and 1920. For both Rockefeller senior and junior, this was a perfect synthesis, a way to be politically liberal and modern while clinging to an old-fashioned aversion to gambling, prostitution, alcohol, and other vices traditionally shunned by Baptists. It also guaranteed that reform took place under the safe aegis of religious authority. The social-gospel movement provided a way that the Rockefellers could make a smooth transition from narrow denominational giving to more secular, ecumenical causes.

Frederick T. Gates was the tutelary spirit of the Rockefeller philanthropies. Though nearly invisible to the public at the time, he advanced large claims for his contributions in his posthumously published memoirs. Yet Gates was groomed by Rockefeller, and if he was granted a large measure of freedom, it was partly because Rockefeller had trained him as his proxy. Since he held aloof from his charitable empire, Rockefeller's role has almost invariably been underrated, but Gates allowed that it was Rockefeller himself who furnished the idea for founding a medical-research institute. Around 1894, when William Rainey Harper first proposed a medical school for the University of Chicago, Rockefeller countered with a novel proposal for a medical department devoted mainly or exclusively to research. Gates had the courtier's knack for delivering on his sovereign's wishes with unmatched energy and intelligence, so when he proposed a medical-research institute three years later, he knew his words would find a sympathetic echo in Rockefeller.

On summer vacation with his family in the Catskill Mountains in 1897, Gates tackled a book of door-stopping length: *Principles and Practice of Medicine*, a thousand-page tome by William Osler of the Johns Hopkins Medical School, the most renowned contemporary physician. (Whereas Rockefeller scarcely ever cracked a book, except for slim volumes of sermons, Gates read exhaustively and said he had scoured more than a thousand volumes in steering the Rockefeller philanthropies.) That spring, Gates had survived a serious illness, awakening his curiosity about American medicine. Osler's magnum opus was not light summer fare, but with a medical dictionary at his side Gates waded through its pages with mounting amazement. He confided to William Rainey Harper that he had "scarcely ever read anything more intensely interesting."[8] Gates was appalled by the backward state of medicine unintentionally disclosed by Osler's book: While

the author delineated the symptoms of many diseases, he seldom identified the responsible germs and presented cures for only four or five diseases. How could one respect medicine that was so strong on anecdote and description but so weak on diagnosis and treatment? Gates had a sudden, vivid sense of what could be done by a medical-research institution devoted to infectious diseases. His timing was faultless, for major strides were being made in bacteriology. For the first time, specific microorganisms were being isolated as the causes of disease, removing medicine forever from the realm of patent-medicine vendors such as Doc Rockefeller.

With a rush of emotion, Gates drafted a strongly worded memo to Rockefeller, advocating the establishment of such an institute and citing European precedents, including the Pasteur Institute in Paris (founded in 1888) and the Koch Institute for Infectious Diseases in Berlin (1891), both of which greatly elevated the prestige of European medicine. At the time, the concept of a medical-research institute was still alien in America. The country's medical schools were mostly commercial operations, taught by practicing doctors who picked up spare money by lecturing on the side. Standards were so abysmal that many schools did not even require a college degree for entry. Since these medical mills had no incentive to undertake serious research, medicine hovered in a twilight area between science and guesswork. Gates got Rockefeller to hire Starr Murphy to canvass medical opinion about setting up an institute. He found that many physicians were frankly skeptical that the country contained enough scientific talent to staff such an institution, and they recommended the distribution of small grants to individual labs instead.

Rockefeller responded to Gates's memo with prolonged silence and let it marinate for a couple of years. But Rockefeller eventually realized that medical research ideally suited his needs. It would be safe, universally popular, and noncontroversial. While there was no guarantee that Rockefeller scientists would discover anything new, there was equally little chance that they would embarrass the founder. They would pick scientists associated with topflight universities and then set them to work with a free hand. Such an institution would also fill a void in the philanthropic universe. Gates told Osler, "This line of philanthropy, now almost wholly neglected in this country, is the most needed and the most promising of any field of philanthropic endeavor."[9] In fact, the promotion of medical science tallied so perfectly with Rockefeller's needs that it would end up forming the common denominator of his foundations.

The proposal encountered skepticism in the medical community. It seemed quite rash, even quixotic, to pay grown men to daydream and come up with useful discoveries. At the time, institutionalized innovation was no less novel a notion in medicine than in industry. With other Rockefeller ventures, Gates had mostly responded to entreaties, whereas he now had to sell the idea in the teeth of widespread resistance.

Gates had hoped the institute would be associated with the University of Chicago, an opportunity lost when Dr. Harper consummated a merger with the Rush Medical College. Rush was exactly the sort of proprietary medical school that Gates wanted to see abolished. American medicine was then embroiled in open warfare between two schools: the allopaths, who used remedies that produced effects different from the disease in question, and homeopaths, who tried to induce in healthy persons prophylactic symptoms similar to the disease being fought. Rush was strongly biased toward allopathy, while Rockefeller favored homeopathy; Gates dismissed both allopathic *and* homeopathic medicine as scandalous pseudo-science. In 1898, he admonished the University of Chicago, “I have no doubt that Mr. Rockefeller would favor an institution that was neither allopath or homeopath but simply scientific in its investigation of medical science.”[10] Nevertheless, Harper persisted in the Rush merger and forfeited any chance to have a Rockefeller medical-research institute in Chicago. After encountering allopathic sympathizers at Harvard and Columbia, Rockefeller’s advisers decided that it would be easier to set up an autonomous institution in New York.

Rockefeller was pleased by the decision to support a modest, freestanding research center. After all the bitter wrangling with Harper, he was doubtless sated with academic politics and administrative dreamers. An independent medical institute would be tightly controlled and minimize the chances of unpleasant fiscal surprises. In endowing the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research (RIMR), he rigorously avoided the mistakes he had made with the University of Chicago, which became his cautionary tale of how *not* to build an institution. After the battle royal with Augustus Strong over the site for a Baptist university, Rockefeller must also have been glad to select his adopted town as the site of the research center.

If the University of Chicago seemed to emerge full-blown from the fertile brain of Dr. Harper, then the RIMR, founded in June 1901, was deliberately launched more modestly. It had no initial endowment and was lodged in

temporary quarters in a Lexington Avenue loft building. This muted approach was designed to cool off any expectations that sudden miracles would emerge from this first American facility devoted solely to biomedical research. Deviating from custom, Rockefeller consented to the use of his name. The amount he pledged for this project—$200,000 over ten years—was considered spectacular at the time. To avoid a reprise of his Chicago problems, Rockefeller promised no additional gifts and deliberately kept administrators in the dark so that they would not feel overly confident of his support.

Rockefeller placed a premium on recruiting the best people for leading positions. "John, we have *money,*" he told his son, "but it will have value for mankind only as we can find able *men* with ideas, imagination and courage to put it into productive use."[11] That Rockefeller placed scientists, not lay trustees, in charge of expenditures was thought revolutionary. This was the institute's secret formula: gather great minds, liberate them from petty cares, and let them chase intellectual chimeras without pressure or meddling. If the founders created an atmosphere conducive to creativity, things would, presumably, happen.

A stellar team was soon assembled. The chief adviser in this search was Dr. William H. Welch, professor of pathology and first dean of the Johns Hopkins Medical School. A bald, portly bachelor with a goatee, fondly called "Popsy" by his students, this sociable bear of a man liked everything from food to theater to Shakespeare's sonnets. Trained in Germany, he had transplanted high German medical standards to America by opening the first pathology lab at Bellevue Hospital Medical College in 1878. When Hopkins inaugurated its medical school fifteen years later, Welch oversaw a faculty trained mostly in Germany and working as full-time teachers and researchers—a milestone in American medicine. Spurred by Rockefeller money, this model would later be copied across America. When in doubt, the Rockefeller lieutenants used the Johns Hopkins Medical School as the benchmark by which they judged progress in medical education.

As president of the RIMR board, Welch wooed as its first director his protégé Simon Flexner, whom he had considered his most gifted pupil and America's best young pathologist. Of German-Jewish ancestry, raised in Louisville, Kentucky, Flexner neatly fitted into the Rockefeller mold of disciplined, self-made men.

Though highly respected in the medical world, Flexner was not a luminary when Welch approached him in early 1902. At thirty-nine, he faced an excruciating decision: whether to surrender a lifetime appointment as a pathology professor at the University of Pennsylvania to leap into the vortex of "an institution devoted exclusively to discovery of something new," as he put it.[12] When Flexner asked Gates why he was certain they would find something new, Gates smirked and replied that he had the faith of fools. The whole thing seemed so shadowy and insubstantial that Flexner hesitated for several months to accept the post. He bargained hard for the ability to offer high salaries to prospective researchers as well as for a promise that the institute would have a small, adjoining hospital in which diseases under study could be tracked in a clinical setting.

Flexner—spare, lean, ascetic, bespectacled—had features as sharp and precise as his mind. He was the sort of fair but tough-minded administrator who appealed to Rockefeller. Many people saw warmth beneath his businesslike exterior, but he was not a bluff clubman. "Flexner was competent," said H. L. Mencken, "but he was a precise and somewhat pompous fellow."[13] More than one scientist quaked at his exacting expectations and incisive criticisms. Evidently heartened by this perfectionist director, Rockefeller pledged another one million dollars to the RIMR that June. Recalling how quickly Harper had burned up money, he stipulated that Flexner should receive the payments staggered over a ten-year period, slowing the pace of development.

Simon Flexner came to symbolize the institute, and his high-minded tone of scientific rigor established its enduring character. (Sinclair Lewis patterned the character of A. DeWitt Tubbs, the worldly director of the McGurk Institute of Biology in *Arrowsmith,* after him.) He exhibited a shrewd talent for exciting the public about the RIMR's work. Soon after his appointment, a reporter tracked him down at his Philadelphia lab amid "the gruesome cans and jars of his work, busy as a hornet," and he conveyed the audacious nature of the nascent institute, which he called "an extensive scheme, embracing the whole field of study of the cause and prevention of disease."[14] He had a missionary ardor for pure research, then rare in scientific circles. "There is no such thing as useless knowledge in medical research," he said. "Ideas may come to us out of order in point of time. We may discover a detail of the facade before we know too much about the foundation. But in the end all knowledge has its place."[15]

With Flexner signed up, a search committee surveyed Manhattan for a permanent home, and in 1903 bought thirteen acres of farmland on a stony bluff overlooking the East River between Sixty-fourth and Sixty-eighth Streets. When Junior first spotted this site, it was a bleak, treeless slope with cows browsing on the grass. The district was still so poor that the steam-heat company had not run lines there, and it attracted unsavory industries, such as breweries and slaughterhouses. For this so-called Schermerhorn tract, the Rockefellers paid $660,000. After an interim period of eighteen months spent in two brownstone houses at Lexington Avenue and Fiftieth Street, the RIMR moved into its new home on York Avenue in May 1906. Photos show a solid six-story brick building standing on a bare, windswept hill, flanked by a tiny copse of trees and a few sheds, with the Queensborough Bridge being constructed in the background. It is hard to match up this picture with today's Rockefeller University, the pampered home of Nobel laureates, with its lushly landscaped grounds, screened from the city by magnificent gates and lofty trees.

As at Standard Oil, Rockefeller played the grand ventriloquist, operating at arm's length. In pithy notes, he transmitted his wishes to subordinates, reserving the right to approve all major commitments of money. Having learned in business to rely on experts, he could seem remote from his own philanthropies. In 1910, Charles W. Eliot, the former Harvard president, lamented to Gates, "Mr. Rockefeller's method of giving away money impersonally on the basis of investigation by others was careful and conscientious; but it must have cut him off almost completely from the real happiness which good deeds brought to the doer."[16]

Rockefeller refrained from interfering with the medical institute's autonomy and for a long time did not even visit it. While appreciating this restraint, Simon Flexner repeatedly invited him to tour the premises. "Very graciously he said that he could not take the valuable time of the workers," said Flexner, "and when I said we had many visitors he remarked that made it more important that he should not consume my time."[17] Several years after the main building's dedication, Rockefeller *père* and *fils* were in the vicinity one day when Junior suggested, "Father, you have never been at the Institute. Let us take a taxi up there and look at it."[18] Rockefeller agreed reluctantly. When they pulled up outside the institute, he just sat in the car and stared at it. "Father," Junior gently prodded, "don't you want to go in and look at it?" "No," said Rockefeller, "I can see the outside."[19] After more coaxing, he

finally went inside. A staff member gave them a brief tour. Rockefeller expressed his gratitude then left, never to return. His craving for anonymity, such a controversial feature of his business career, seemed noble in his benefactions, and his respectful diffidence before scientific expertise won him praise as an exemplary donor.

However enlightened, Rockefeller's detachment was also self-protective, for he feared that face-to-face encounters would generate fresh pleas for funds. One reason he did not visit the RIMR sooner was almost certainly that he wished to keep Flexner guessing about his intentions. As late as 1911, he advised his son, "I think it better that no intimation shall reach the Institute representatives of any purpose to increase the endowment in the near future. Let us hold the Institute to the strictest administration and observe for a further time how they get along and delay committal, as long as we can, to be confirmed as to the wisdom of such additional endowment." [20] This slow development of the RIMR was a classic Rockefeller move.

In retirement, he devoted about one hour per day to philanthropy. Yet he managed to preside over this charitable universe in deed as well as name, demanding that his administrators have the exactitude of scientists, the sound economy of businessmen, and the passion of preachers. It was not the case, as Charles Eliot feared, that Rockefeller derived no pleasure from his good works, for he was engrossed in the RIMR. "If in all our giving, we had never done more than has been achieved by the fine, able, honest men of the Medical Institute," he once remarked, "it would have justified all the money and all the effort we have spent."[21] Doc Rockefeller's son took more pride in the RIMR than in any of his creations other than Standard Oil. In response to Eliot's letter, Gates explained that Rockefeller stayed abreast of developments there:

I make it my business to keep Mr. Rockefeller personally informed of every important thing done and every promising line of inquiry at the Institute. He knows the lines of experiment trembling on the verge of success and their thrilling promise for humanity. I have seen the tears of joy course down his cheeks as he contemplated the past achievement and future possibilities of the Institute. He is a man of very quick and tender sympathies just as he is a man of a keen and lively sense of humor.[22]

Allowing for a certain hyperbole, the portrait is essentially just.

While Flexner paid social calls on Rockefeller and always found him cordial, he and Welch dealt mostly with the nonmedical trustees—Gates, Junior, and Starr Murphy—on policy matters. They made presentations that evoked the high drama of their medical sleuthing, holding their auditors rapt. As president of the trustees, Gates sat at the head of the table, his tie askew, shaggy hair falling over his forehead, flaming with enthusiasm at each new discovery, while the self-contained Junior posed well-chosen questions. Both Gates and Junior brought an almost mystical intensity to these meetings, as if their spirituality was finding a new home in scientific research. Gates likened the RIMR to a "theological seminary" and described Flexner's work as a kind of prayer. He told Flexner, "To you He is whispering His secrets. To you He is opening up the mysterious depths of His Being. There have been times when, as I looked through your microscopes, I have been stricken with speechless awe. I felt that I was gazing with unhallowed eyes into the secret places of the Most High." [23] For many of the men associated with the early Rockefeller philanthropies, science seemed to beckon as a new secular religion as the old spiritual verities waned.

Since cynics thought the RIMR would be relegated to ivory-tower irrelevance, Gates tried to shelter Flexner from any anxiety about immediate results. Then a sudden opportunity for heroism arose during the winter of 1904–1905, when three thousand New Yorkers died in a cerebrospinal meningitis epidemic. In response, Flexner developed a serum in horses to treat the disease. During monkey trials in 1907, he found that if injected at the proper spot in the spinal canal, the serum would treat the disease effectively. Rockefeller eagerly followed developments, telling a friend on January 17, 1908, "Only two days ago I was called on the telephone to speak with a German doctor, who had given it to a patient, and he reported that in four hours after the first application, the temperature became normal and so continued, and he was very hopeful at that time of the recovery of the patient." [24] Until early 1911, when the New York City Board of Health took up the slack, the RIMR distributed the Flexner serum free as a public service. Later, the disease was treated with sulfa drugs and then antibiotics, but in the meantime Flexner's serum mercifully spared hundreds, perhaps thousands, of lives. The press lionized him as a miracle worker, redounding to the lab's benefit.

In a turbulent season of antitrust suits, Flexner's triumph generated goodwill for Rockefeller, and this loosened the master's purse strings. In early 1907, the institute directors asked Rockefeller for a $6 million endowment;

eager to dampen starry-eyed hopes, he consented to $2.6 million, or less than half the desired amount. That same year, Junior advised him that the time was ripe to build the small adjoining hospital that had been promised to Flexner; the combined cost of endowment and hospital would be $8 million. As Rockefeller pondered this, the triumph of Flexner's serum tipped the scales, and in May 1908 Junior notified the board that his father, in homage to this feat, would create a sixty-bed hospital and a nine-bed isolation pavilion. As blueprints were rolled out, Rockefeller tempered his generosity with his usual pinchpenny pleas for economy. "It is easy for these institutions to ask for money," he told his son. "We have not one farthing to expend injudiciously."[25] When it opened in 1910, the hospital treated, free of charge, patients afflicted with any one of five priority diseases under study: polio, lobar pneumonia, syphilis, heart disease, and intestinal infantilism. Four rooms on the top floor were reserved for the Rockefeller family, but Senior never took advantage of this privilege, despite Gates's constant urging: "The physicians are extremely polite, gentle, and courteous, and the nurses the very paragons of their tribe," he assured him.[26] But Rockefeller stubbornly preferred his osteopaths and homeopaths, whom he could also more easily control.

Now an independent foundation established in perpetuity, the RIMR adopted bylaws creating a board of scientific directors with unlimited control over research—a declaration of faith in science unprecedented in American philanthropic annals. (A separate board of trustees saw to fiscal matters.) In the estimation of one periodical, the RIMR was now "probably the best equipped institution for the study of the causes and cure of disease to be found anywhere in the world"—high tribute for an outfit less than ten years old.[27] It was becoming the most richly endowed institute of its kind on earth, cranking out an enduring catalog of medical wonders.

More than a laboratory wizard, Flexner was a master talent scout. He collected brilliant strays, loners, and eccentrics who found the relaxed atmosphere of the institute congenial to their creative work. On his East River bluff, he marshaled an outstanding stable of scientific talent—he proudly dubbed them his prima donnas—including Paul Ehrlich and Jacques Loeb. Another inspired hire was a Japanese lab worker, Hideyo Noguchi, who would perform pathbreaking work in the study of syphilis. Flexner turned the institute into a series of autonomous departments, with each fiefdom shaped around a resident genius, while he kept close tabs on the central budget.

Flexner's most prescient decision was to recruit the French-born surgeon Dr. Alexis Carrel from Chicago. Short and thickset, with an erect, military bearing, Carrel was a Catholic mystic and diehard royalist. His future medical agenda was defined in 1894 when President Sadi Carnot of France was stabbed by an assassin and died from the hemorrhaging of a severed blood vessel. Then only twenty-one, Carrel turned to the puzzle of rejoining severed vessels and devised solutions that would facilitate blood transfusions, organ transplants, and other advanced surgical procedures. Rockefeller frequently told dinner guests the dramatic tale of how Dr. Carrel, in 1909, saved the life of a premature infant who developed *melena neonatorum,* a condition in which blood oozes from the digestive tract. In a wondrous operation, Carrel resuscitated the pallid infant by attaching a vein in its leg to the artery of its father, a New York physician; within minutes, a rosy flush suffused the baby's face. In 1912, Carrel won the Nobel Prize for medicine, the first ever awarded to a researcher in America.

Rockefeller was fortunate to have applied his money at the precise moment that medical research matured as a discipline and offered unbounded opportunities. None of the titan's other philanthropies was perhaps such an unqualified success. Bowing to a serviceable division of labor, Andrew Carnegie ceded medicine to Rockefeller. Once approached about building medical facilities, he smiled shrewdly and said, "That is Mr. Rockefeller's specialty. Go see him."[28]

After decades spent warding off abuse, Rockefeller and his entourage were delighted, perhaps even mildly surprised, by the unalloyed praise heaped upon the RIMR. Gates fairly glowed with pleasure: "The nicest ear can scarcely detect a single discordant note."[29] In pleading for money for the RIMR, Junior observed to his father that "none of the Foundations which you have established are so popular with the public generally or so free from criticism as the Institute. I feel, therefore, that large sums of money are, in a sense, safer there than in other fields." [30] Gates expanded on the theme that through medical research Rockefeller money touched everyone on earth and that "the values of medical research are the most universal values on earth, and they are the most intimate and important values to every human being that lives."[31] How could Rockefeller, long the target of almost universal obloquy, not embrace this new role of benefactor of all humanity? His gifts also reflected his own obsessive concern with longevity. When Carl Jung, the Swiss psychoanalyst, met Rockefeller in 1912, he recorded this impression:

“He is almost exclusively preoccupied with his bodily health, thinking of different medicines, new diets and possibly new doctors!”[32]

In his inner circle, Rockefeller faced one boisterous critic of the RIMR: his golfing pal and crony Dr. Hamilton F. Biggar, a champion of homeopathy. A small-town doctor of the old school, Biggar was wont to pontificate: “We have too much laboratory and not enough bedside practice.”[33] It was partly at Biggar’s behest that Rockefeller had balked at the merger of the University of Chicago with the allopathic Rush Medical College. Under Biggar’s influence, Rockefeller nearly refused to provide a $500,000 check to repair the Johns Hopkins Medical School after it was partially destroyed by fire in 1904—simply because the school refused to recognize homeopathy. Gates dismissed the work of Samuel Hahnemann, the German founder of homeopathy, as “the wild imaginings of a natural fool turned lunatic,” and found it hard to endure Rockefeller’s vestigial faith in what he saw as outdated medicine.[34] Although he often muzzled his strong views on the subject, Gates’s real aim was to deliver a mortal blow to homeopaths—to shut their medical schools, expel them from medical societies, and strip them of hospital privileges—so as to clear the field for scientific medicine. Gates considered Biggar, if not a charlatan, at least a fossil and feared his rearguard attempts to undermine the RIMR.

At one point, antivivisection activists created an uproar about experiments at the RIMR, and Biggar leaped into the fray, complaining to Rockefeller about the cruelty inflicted on the lab animals. At this point, Gates decided to wipe out Biggar’s influence forever. In several caustic memos to Rockefeller, he lashed out at the homeopaths: “Neither Dr. Biggar nor any of his Homeopathic friends have told you, so I think it in hand to tell you, this fact—that Homeopathy is rapidly dying out in this country”—ditto for allopathy. “Both are fading away as schools of medicine with the dawn of scientific inquiry. Both were wrong. The theories of both have been completely exploded in the last twenty-five years.”[35] In an early version of the letter, never sent, Gates was even more outspoken. “Dr. Biggar has not kept up with the progress of medicine and is still living in the twilight of two or three generations ago.”[36] In deference to his golfing partner, Rockefeller did not acknowledge these memos.

It was deeply ironic that Rockefeller retained such residual faith in homeopathy even as he financed the world’s most sophisticated medical-

research operation. Periodically, he had spasms of irritation, firing off letters on the need to save homeopathy, but these outbursts quickly passed. Through his philanthropies, Rockefeller did more than anyone else to destroy homeopathy in America, and in the end he seemed powerless to stop the scientific revolution that he himself had so largely set in motion.

In all, Rockefeller gave $61 million to the research institute. By the 1950s, it had bred so many imitators that it needed to change direction and was transformed from a research center into a specialized university offering only Ph.D.s and research fellowships. The name was officially changed to Rockefeller University in 1965. Its faculty roster became heavily laden with Nobel Prize winners, and by the 1970s it had housed sixteen of them. For the son of an itinerant vendor of dubious nostrums, this was a most implausible feat. The loftiest encomium to Rockefeller's impact in this field came from Winston Churchill, who wrote shortly before Rockefeller's death:

When history passes its final verdict on John D. Rockefeller, it may well be that his endowment of research will be recognized as a milestone in the progress of the race. For the first time, science was given its head; longer term experiment on a large scale has been made practicable, and those who undertake it are freed from the shadow of financial disaster. Science today owes as much to the rich men of generosity and discernment as the art of the Renaissance owes to the patronage of Popes and Princes. Of these rich men, John D. Rockefeller is the supreme type.[37]

A documentary photo used by the Rockefeller Sanitary Commission in trying to stamp out hookworm in the South. The small boy on the left suffered from the disease, which had stunted his growth. *(Courtesy of the Rockefeller Archive Center)*

CHAPTER 24

The Millionaires' Special

In April 1901, a specially chartered train, jammed with millionaires, pulled out of Manhattan and headed down the eastern seaboard for a ten-day tour of black colleges in the South, many of them financed with northern money, culminating in a conference on southern education in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. The train carried so many tony members of New York, Boston, and Philadelphia high society that the press pejoratively tagged it "The Millionaires' Special." This swank excursion was the brainchild of department-store magnate Robert C. Ogden, an associate of John Wanamaker. Certain that the "betterment of humanity" was "demanded by Divine authority," Ogden coupled evangelical faith with a retailer's flair for publicity.[1] In calling attention to the backward state of southern schools, he hoped to seal an alliance between Yankee philanthropists and southern reformers, healing the sectional strife left over from the Civil War and bringing southern economic development up to parity with the North.

For one passenger, twenty-seven-year-old John D. Rockefeller, Jr., the trip kindled a fuse that would glow brightly for the rest of his life. Struggling with ethical quandaries at Standard Oil, he must have hungered for the purity of social activism. Having led a circumscribed life, bounded by private schools, estates, and 26 Broadway, Junior welcomed this firsthand exposure to urgent social problems. The train rolled through a South pervaded by Jim Crow laws and riled by repeated outbreaks of racial violence. Literacy statistics conveyed a dismal story of derelict schools. While only 4.6 percent of the American population was illiterate, the figure soared to 12 percent for southern whites and 50 percent for southern blacks. Educational reform had scarcely penetrated the rural hinterlands and bayous of black communities, and their impoverished schools scandalized northern educators. Kentucky was the sole southern state with compulsory school-attendance laws, which were then all but universal in the North. Yet as the rich philanthropists alighted at the celebrated showcases of black education—Hampton Institute in Virginia, Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute in Alabama, the Rockefellers' own Spelman Seminary in Atlanta—the trip had its share of inspirational interludes. "The trip has been a constant revelation to me," Junior told

newspaper reporters upon his return. “Tuskegee was especially interesting. Mr. [Booker T.] Washington is a truly remarkable man. His school is doing a wonderful work for the race. I’m glad I made the trip.” [2] Junior described the journey to Ogden as “the most instructive experience of my life.”[3] In an elated mood, he sat down and wrote an enthusiastic report about it to his father.

Senior’s interest in southern black education antedated this junket by two decades, going back to 1882 when Spelman Seminary was still operating from a leaky church basement. In his own travels through the South, he often attended black Baptist churches on Sunday mornings. Each of his children had been matched to a black scholarship student whose education was paid for by the family, and for several years Junior corresponded with his “adopted” black student at Hampton Institute. In 1900, the Rockefeller family had virtually made over the Spelman campus, paying for a new hospital, two dormitories, a dining hall and kitchen, a power plant, and a residence for the school president. During the 1901 train tour, Junior addressed students in the Spelman chapel and was feted with gospel music. Noting the new buildings bequeathed by the Rockefellers, the school’s annual report that year rang with resounding hosannas for the family: “The Lord gives us all these wonderful blessings through the generous hand of Hon. John D. Rockefeller.”[4]

Before the 1901 trip, Senior had toyed with establishing a trust fund for black education instead of funneling all his money through the American Baptist Education Society—part of his evolution away from the limitations of sectarian giving. That the 1901 trip might be the prelude to some big benefaction was hinted at when Junior told Ogden, “For several years the question of colored education has been much in our minds and in our thoughts. We have endeavored to arrive at some plan which might help in working out this great question.”[5] For all the noble sentiments behind the Millionaires’ Special, black education remained an inflammatory issue among southern whites, who feared it might weaken segregation. As the chartered train circled back toward New York, the missionary spirit of the passengers suffered a jarring clash with political realities when Henry St. George Tucker, the president of Washington and Lee University, boarded the train in Virginia to deliver a rebuke to the prevailing euphoria:

If it is your idea to educate the Negro you must have the white of the South with you. If the poor white sees the son of a Negro neighbor enjoying through

your munificence benefits denied to his boy, it raises in him a feeling that will render futile all your work. You must lift up the "poor white" and the Negro together if you would ever approach success. [6]

Perhaps because his auditors did not fully fathom the implications of this admonition, it was lustily applauded. If it tempered naive talk with a gritty touch of political realism, it also opened the way for some egregious concessions to the more bigoted southern whites.

As well-meaning, paternalistic men eager to alleviate the suffering of blacks but not wanting to threaten the established order, these rich northern reformers typified their time and were perhaps unusual only in having any concern for black welfare at all. Nevertheless, their political compromises rendered them vulnerable to charges of racism, especially among purists champing at piecemeal reform. One is frankly taken aback by the views of some of these men committed to bettering black education—views often indistinguishable from those of the southern whites they criticized. When Ogden convened a group called the Southern Education Board, its executive secretary, Edgar G. Murphy, declared that the two races "must dwell apart," "must live apart," and "must be schooled apart."[7] Even Frederick T. Gates yanked his children from the Montclair, New Jersey, public schools because "some of the colored and of the foreign-born children were ill mannered, filthy, and unsanitary."[8] He favored vocational training for blacks, not intellectual equality with whites. "Latin, Greek and metaphysics form a kind of knowledge that I fear with our colored brethren tend even more than with us to puff up rather than to build up," he had written ten years earlier. "The colored race is not ready it seems to me for high culture."[9] Such attitudes gave a foretaste of the way that the Rockefeller philanthropies would accommodate southern segregationists.

In the aftermath of the Millionaires' Special, Junior and Senior consulted many experts on southern education, including Booker T. Washington, who joined them one Sunday night for tea on West Fifty-fourth Street. Washington, too, endorsed practical, vocational training for blacks, not exposure to abstract subjects. On February 27, 1902, flanked by Abby in an oak-paneled study of their house, Junior chaired a meeting of ten men to consider southern education. Swirling brandy snifters and warmed by a blazing fire, they talked until well after midnight, hatching plans for a new philanthropy to be launched with a one-million-dollar gift from Senior. Junior hoped to name it

the Negro Education Board, but it was, tellingly, given the neutral name of the General Education Board (GEB) instead. On the same colossal scale as everything else attached to Rockefeller, it would turn into the world's foremost educational foundation. It was an extension of the ABES with the Baptist trappings pared away.

With crisp efficiency, Senator Aldrich shepherded an incorporation bill through Congress in January 1903, making it the only Rockefeller philanthropy to enjoy the public endorsement of a perpetual, federal charter.[10] Banishing the former accent on black education, the elastic charter delineated the group's aim as "the promotion of education within the United States without distinction of race, sex or creed." With the Tarbell series under way, Rockefeller kept a salutary distance from his new foundation. Where he hovered over the RIMR at one remove, he delegated more power in the GEB to his son and never met with its board. As Abraham Flexner later wrote of Senior's detachment, "I recall that when in 1914 I wrote a history of the General Education Board from 1902 to 1914 we searched the files of the General Education Board in vain in order to obtain a facsimile of his signature to be placed beneath the lithograph prefaced to the text. There was not a single letter in the files of the Board which bore his signature." [11] Nevertheless, Junior and Gates reported regularly to Rockefeller, who, along with his son, reserved the right to designate the use of two-thirds of the money given. Rockefeller believed that certain universal principles of businesslike efficiency should apply to nonprofit ventures no less than to profit-making ones. In making his first million-dollar appropriation to the GEB, he stipulated that the money should be ladled out over ten years. He tried to influence the pace and scope of his philanthropies, not their contents, and ensure measured, fiscally responsible growth.

For executive secretary, Gates shrewdly chose Dr. Wallace Buttrick, a fellow graduate of the Rochester Theological Seminary and an ex-Baptist preacher. Like Gates, Buttrick renounced the pulpit for philanthropy and more worldly satisfactions. It was no accident that so many ex-ministers flocked to the sanctuary of the Rockefeller philanthropies, which advanced secular causes with an evangelical spirit. An amiable, roly-poly man, blessed with an easy laugh, Buttrick brought consuming dedication to his work. When a minister inquired, "What is your idea of Heaven?" he rejoined, "My office."[12]

As a former board member of the American Baptist Home Mission Society,

Buttrick had studied black mission schools in the South exhaustively. On his office wall, he had a large map, sprinkled with colored pins, showing the major American educational facilities. Where Gates was an uncompromising, table-thumping orator, Buttrick brought a statesman's tact to the job, defusing tense situations with humor. Without offending applicants, he could deftly expose weaknesses in their projects. His intuitions were so exact that Gates said Buttrick had "cat's whiskers; he feels objects before he gets to them."[13] His greatest drawback—and a real one—was that he thought it expedient to truckle to white supremacists to maintain GEB operations in the South. He told an audience of Tennessee school superintendents, "The Negro is an inferior race—the Anglo-Saxon is superior. There cannot be any question about that."[14]

To endow the board with a safely conservative cast, Gates preferred "successful business men who would steer the ship along traditional lines and would not be carried out of their course by any temporary breeze or even by hurricanes of sentiment."[15] The first chairman was William H. Baldwin, president of the Long Island Railroad, a vocal apostle for black education—so long as white people stayed on top. Of the southern black, Baldwin observed, "He will willingly fill the more menial positions, and do the heavy work, at less wages, than the American white man or any foreign race which has yet come to our shores. This will permit the Southern white laborer to perform the more expert labor, and to leave the fields, the mines, and the simpler trades for the Negro."[16] With such men at the helm, the GEB, for all its good works, would fall considerably short of heaven. Neither Junior nor Senior held such baldly racist sentiments, but they agreed that the board had to accommodate retrograde southern views in order to function. It is interesting to note in this context that Standard Oil of Ohio did not hire its first permanent black employee until 1906.

At the beginning, the well-heeled GEB grafted its work onto that of the Southern Education Board, the shoestring operation started by Robert Ogden. Taking up its cause, the GEB campaigned in the South to improve educational standards, taking as its first major mission the creation of high schools. Before Reconstruction, no southern state except for Tennessee had tax-supported educational systems. As a legacy of this history, the four-year high school was practically nonexistent in the region, and there was not a single such school for blacks; many high schools were really extra rooms crudely tacked on to elementary schools. The GEB identified the creation of new high

schools as a top priority, since their graduates would furnish teachers for lower-grade schools and also provide a bumper crop of college students, magnifying reform efforts up and down the educational ladder.

Lacking the resources to create a complete high-school system, the GEB established a pattern mimicked by future Rockefeller philanthropies. Rather than trying to accomplish everything through its own budget, it would awaken public opinion and stimulate government action. It took on a crusading spirit, borrowed from the Baptists, and sent forth circuit riders to proselytize for the cause. Ironically, as Standard Oil took a hostile attitude toward state and federal antitrust suits, Rockefeller was forging extensive public-private partnerships for social change. The GEB paid the salaries of special professors at state universities who would roam the state, pinpoint sites for high schools, then drum up political support from local taxpayers. These professors were also affiliated with state education departments, giving a necessary political camouflage at a time when Rockefeller's name was still anathema across America. So revolutionary was the impact of GEB money that by 1910 it had helped bring into being eight hundred southern high schools.

The GEB was repeatedly blocked in its original ambition to foster black education. Submitting to racism, the foundation limited its support to a "very few" counties that could yield "the largest permanent results," in Buttrick's words.[17] Only in 1914 did the organization hire rural school agents for *both* races in the South, and even then it tended to hire white agents for black schools and continued to encourage schools to teach blacks useful trades and ignore their minds. In the end, it came in for biting criticism from blacks such as W.E.B. Du Bois who did not want to see the school system slot blacks into menial jobs. Du Bois later excoriated the GEB in his autobiography for supporting the idea "that the races in the schools should be separated socially; that colored schools should be chiefly industrial; and that every effort should be made to conciliate southern white opinion."[18] While the GEB achieved remarkable things in upgrading southern education, it failed to deliver major results where it had originally wanted them most: in black education. In the end, nine-tenths of the GEB's money went to white schools or to promote medical education—a sorry sequel for a foundation that was supposed to be called the Negro Education Board.

In 1905, the GEB extended its purview to higher education with a $10 million gift from Rockefeller, followed by another $32 million in 1907—

hailed by the board as “the largest sum ever given by a man in the history of the race for any social or philanthropic purposes.”[19] (It would be equivalent to $500 million today.) Much of this last gift was routed to the University of Chicago. As the GEB bolstered college and university endowments, it applied the rules that Rockefeller had insisted upon, often futilely, with William Rainey Harper: that gifts should stimulate matching grants; that local communities should help to take up the financial burden of their schools; that universities should be founded in population centers with thriving economic bases; and that endowment income should not cover more than half the operating expenses.

Not long after the GEB was started, it became woefully evident that the defects of southern education could not be remedied without stronger local economies. Gates was struck by this revelation as he and Buttrick took a train excursion through the South. He was staring out the window and ruminating when he suddenly exclaimed: “This is a favored section of the world. It has a superb climate, an abundance of fertile soil, and no end of labor. It must be enriched so that it can properly tax itself if it is to support education and public health. It is your job, Buttrick, to find out how.” [20]

Nobody ever accused Gates of thinking small. If education depended upon healthy tax rolls, then they would lift the entire tax base of the South. And if that meant enhancing the productivity of southern agriculture, well, so be it. Such was the godlike perspective, if not the mortal hubris, made possible by great wealth. Where other philanthropic executives could only tinker, the Rockefeller proconsuls were urged to indulge more spacious fantasies.

In the spring of 1906, Gates and Buttrick traveled to Washington to meet with a pioneering scientist at the Department of Agriculture, Dr. Seaman A. Knapp, a former teacher, editor, and gospel preacher. In his experimental farmwork, Knapp had striven toward something analogous to Rockefeller’s work in medicine: He tried to bring a scientific spirit to a business bogged down in ancient folklore. Three years earlier, Knapp had gained legendary status when he saved Texas from a boll-weevil infestation that threatened to destroy its cotton industry; farms were deserted and counties depopulated as panicky people despaired of ever again profiting from the crop. If this situation was duplicated in the cotton-dependent South, it would presage disaster. By establishing a demonstration farm in Terrell, Texas, Knapp showed how the boll-weevil plague could be contained through the careful selection of seeds accompanied by intensive farming. From that time, Knapp

kept an eye out for private money to enlarge his project. Now, the seventy-three-year-old Knapp and Agriculture Secretary James Wilson met with Gates and Buttrick, who gratified Knapp's dreams by calling for the sort of public-private partnership that was fast becoming a GEB trademark. If the Agriculture Department drew up plans and supervised the farm-demonstration projects, the project would be greased with monthly checks from the GEB.

In the following years, Rockefeller money helped stamp out boll weevils and improve the yield of southern crops and livestock, swelling the tax base to support public schools. By 1912, more than 100,000 farms had altered the way they cultivated cotton and other crops as a direct result of demonstration work done jointly by the GEB and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Emboldened by such feats, the Rockefeller philanthropies steadily expanded their southern programs, among which the most successful was the campaign to eradicate hookworm. As had happened with Dr. Knapp, this odyssey started out with the dispiriting quest of a frustrated dreamer on the federal payroll, Dr. Charles Wardell Stiles.

When the United States acquired Puerto Rico after the Spanish-American War, an army surgeon named Dr. Ashford made a startling discovery: Many poor islanders thought to suffer from malaria were actually infected with hookworm. The son of a Methodist minister, Stiles had crisscrossed the South for years for the U.S. Public Health Service. Based on Ashford's work, he was seized by the wild surmise that the poor whites of the South—infamous in popular myth for their indolent, sluggish lives—might be suffering from hookworm. In September 1902, outfitted with just a microscope, Dr. Stiles journeyed through the South examining human feces, and, sure enough, he found hookworm eggs everywhere. It was an exhilarating discovery, since hookworm could be cured with fifty cents' worth of salts and thymol.

When Dr. Stiles reported these results at a Washington, D.C., medical convention that December, he stated that southerners long considered lazy were simply enervated by hookworm. His remarks were greeted with both profound outrage and mocking amusement. The next day, the *New York Sun* published the lecture under the whimsical headline, "Germ of Laziness Found?" Stiles was aghast: He was being turned into a figure of fun, his great finding trivialized by interminable hookworm jokes. As a zoologist—and therefore presumed ignorant of the human body—he fared no better among physicians: Dr. William Osler went so far as to deny hookworm's existence in America. Few doctors were prepared to accept that the chronic anemia or

continuous malaria commonly attributed to poor whites was, in fact, caused by hookworm, contracted by barefoot people through their soles.

For several years, Dr. Stiles persevered in his crusade to locate private money to apply his theory, and he found an unexpected champion in 1908 when President Roosevelt appointed him to a commission on country life. While touring the South that November, he told another member of the commission, Walter Hines Page, a North Carolina native, that a shuffling, misshapen man on a train platform was suffering from hookworm, not laziness or congenital idiocy. “Fifty cents worth of drugs would make that man a useful citizen in a few weeks,” he said flatly.[21] He explained to Page that thymol pried the hookworms loose from the intestine walls—some victims harbored up to five thousand in their systems—and then epsom salts flushed them from the body. As a board member of the Rockefeller Institute, Page was the perfect ambassador to bring Stiles to Rockefeller’s attention.

At the end of their tour, Stiles and Page stopped at Cornell University for a reception, where Stiles met a round, jovial man who had already been briefed by Page: Wallace Buttrick. The two men went back to Buttrick’s hotel room and “talked hookworm almost all night.”[22] After years of useless speeches, Stiles was now dazed by the dreamlike speed of events. Back in Washington, he got a telegram summoning him to a New York meeting with Gates and Simon Flexner of the RIMR. After delivering a monologue and showing slides for forty minutes, Gates interrupted him to bring Starr Murphy into the meeting. “This is the biggest proposition ever put up to the Rockefeller office,” Gates told Murphy. “Listen to what Dr. Stiles has to say. Now, Doctor, start from the beginning again and tell Mr. Murphy what you have told me.”[23] These sessions lasted for two days, and by the end Gates and his fellows were sold on a mass-mobilization program to eradicate hookworm from the South. It was an ideal opportunity for large-scale philanthropy: Here was a condition that could be easily diagnosed and cheaply cured, with an estimated two million victims in the South. The results would be rapid and visible, giving the program more populist appeal than the rarefied work of the medical-research institute. It would, in short, simultaneously serve the overlapping objectives of science, philanthropy, and Rockefeller public relations.

Junior was deputed, as was so often the case, to sell his father on the need for a commission to fight hookworm. Although Stiles had modestly suggested a half-million dollars, Gates fixed on one million dollars as a nice round sum

that would capture the South's attention. Since the region remained touchy about any assumption that it was riddled with listless imbeciles, Junior reassured his father that the board would recruit a southern contingent. On October 20, 1909, Junior implored him to act fast and stake out a leadership role in the hookworm fight. Two days later, Rockefeller replied: "Answering your letter 20th with reference to hook worm, it seems to me that $1,000,000 is a very large amount to promise, but I will consent to this sum, with the understanding that I shall be conferred with step by step and consent to whatever appropriations are made from time to time. This, however, need only be known to such as you choose to have know it."[24] Since Rockefeller had started to take winter golfing vacations at the Hotel Bon Air in Augusta, Georgia, he derived special pleasure from the gift. As he said, "It has been my pleasure of late to spend a portion of each year in the South and I have come to know and to respect greatly that part of the country and to enjoy the society and friendship of many of its warm-hearted people." [25]

As expected, many southern editors reacted to the hookworm campaign as a calculated affront to their honor and dignity. Originally, the effort was to be known as the Rockefeller Sanitary Commission for the Eradication of Hookworm in the South. To avoid stigmatizing the South, it was shortened to the Rockefeller Sanitary Commission or even the U.S. Sanitary Commission. Instead of being based in New York, like other Rockefeller programs, it opened in 1910 in Washington, D.C., diplomatically south of the Mason-Dixon line.

The executive secretary was a Tennessee native, Dr. Wickliffe Rose. Another clergyman's son, Rose, forty-seven, was a shy, immaculate man who often wore bow ties and stared primly through wire-rimmed spectacles or pince-nez. Steeped in the writings of Kant and Hegel, grounded in the Latin and Greek classics, and fond of writing poetry in French, he had been dean of Peabody College and the University of Nashville before becoming general agent of the Peabody Education Fund, where he came to the GEB's attention. The courtly Rose, modest and painstakingly thorough, supplied both the tact and determination that made the hookworm campaign a smashing success.

In mapping out his strategy, Rose adopted the GEB model of using Rockefeller money as a catalyst for government cooperation. The first order of business was a detailed survey to identify the centers of hookworm infestation. Once again, the states were urged to hire sanitation directors to educate the public about the menace. State medical boards sent young doctors

into rural areas, their salaries paid by Rockefeller money. These campaigns were often carried out under the auspices of state health boards, thus providing political protection. As Gates privately explained this decision, “To put Mr. Rockefeller’s name prominently forward . . . would impair the usefulness of the work.”[26] This was doubly necessary since many southern communities saw the Sanitary Commission’s work as a degrading new form of northern carpetbagging. Yet for all the efforts to shroud Rockefeller’s involvement, many southerners knew the program’s real sponsorship and devised preposterous theories to explain it. One was that Rockefeller was entering the shoe business and financed the hookworm campaign to accustom southerners to wearing shoes year-round, instead of only during the winter months.

The campaign relied on extensive publicity and showy gimmicks, and it sent out “health trains” with traveling exhibitions on modern sanitation. Perhaps the single most important factor in its success was the introduction of dispensaries for public-health work. In 1910, only two southern counties had such dispensaries. That number burgeoned to 208 counties within three years, thanks to Rockefeller money. To coax crowds into these dispensaries, the field workers (in a manner oddly reminiscent of Doc Rockefeller) distributed handbills saying, “See the hookworms and the various intestinal parasites that man is heir to.”[27] In the rousing spirit of tent revival meetings, rural people formed long lines and gaped at hookworm eggs through microscopes or examined them squirming in bottles. Because infected people were cured swiftly, it seemed no less miraculous than faith healing to many people, and the throngs often erupted into singing “Onward Christian Soldiers.” In a single day in 1911, 454 people were cured of the disease. One field director in Kentucky wrote, “I have never seen the people at any place so wrought up and so full of interest and enthusiasm.” [28] Except for Florida, every southern state joined in the program.

Pretty soon, the gentle, decorous Wickliffe Rose ran an operation of military scope. During the first year of work, 102,000 people were examined in nine southern states, and 43,000 were identified with hookworm. At the end of five years, Gates reported to Rockefeller that nearly half a million people had been cured. While the disease had not been extirpated completely, it had been reduced drastically. “Hookworm disease has not only been recognized, bounded and limited,” Gates boasted to Rockefeller, “it has been reduced to one of the minor infections of the south, perhaps the most easily

and universally recognized and cured of all." [29] Most important, the states had set up machinery to perpetuate the work and avert backsliding. Lauding the campaign as "well planned and well executed," Rockefeller especially praised its deft diplomatic touch in dealing with a politically charged situation. The Rockefeller Sanitary Commission was a landmark in epidemiology and preventive medicine, as Charles W. Eliot recognized when he called it "the most effective campaign against a widespread disabling disease which medical science and philanthropy have ever combined to conduct."[30] In 1913, the newly formed Rockefeller Foundation asked Wickliffe Rose to take the hookworm campaign abroad, extending the fight to fifty-two countries on six continents and freeing millions of people from this worldwide scourge.

By 1910, medicine and education had emerged as the top priorities of the Rockefeller philanthropies, and that year the two trends fruitfully dovetailed. The stimulus was a report with the deceptively bland title *Medical Education in the United States and Canada.* Its author, Abraham Flexner, was the brother of RIMR director Simon. Where Simon was precise and conciliatory, Abe was a combative iconoclast who relished a good intellectual brawl. After graduating from Johns Hopkins, he started a small, innovative private school in Louisville that won a fine reputation among Ivy League colleges. He had the maverick's talent for casting a fresh, critical eye on practices sanctified by custom, and he provoked a national debate when he proposed that students should graduate college in three years.

When the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching invited him to survey American and Canadian medical schools, Abe pleaded ignorance, but with typical zealousness he visited all 155 schools and came away appalled by the experience. Like his brother, he took the Johns Hopkins Medical School as his model of a competent school. "Without this pattern in the back of my head," he admitted later, "I could have accomplished little." [31] By contrast, the majority of schools he visited seemed to be dreary, haphazard affairs, run negligently by local doctors to supplement their income from private practice.

As Flexner doggedly made the rounds, nobody realized that he was the exterminating angel who would snuff out many fly-by-night institutions. The tableaux he described would have been richly satirical had they not been strictly accurate reportage. Since most medical schools relied solely upon tuition fees and could not afford modern equipment, they still languished in

the dark ages of medicine. In Washington State, Flexner asked the dean of one school whether they had a physiology lab. “Surely,” said the dean. “I have it upstairs. I will bring it to you.” And he proudly produced a little pulse-taking device. One osteopathic school in Iowa had desks, blackboards, and chairs but could not muster any charts or scientific apparatus. Of the 155 schools, only 23 required more than a high-school education. Since some schools did not even demand that, they were not exactly bursting with brainpower.

In 1910, Flexner published his polemic, known as the Flexner Report—the most pitiless and influential indictment of medical education ever printed. Naming the most notorious diploma mills, the report sparked furious debate, and more than one hundred schools either perished in the ensuing controversy or were absorbed by universities. Among the major casualties were the quaint homeopathic schools so dear to John D. Rockefeller, Sr. Already in decline, the schools were dealt a lethal blow by the Flexner Report.

Gates devoured the report. Disgusted with medical practice, he believed that young doctors ended up either as “confirmed pessimists, disappointed and chagrined, or else mere reckless ‘pill-slingers’ for money.” [32] With a big pile of cash at his disposal, Gates would not let the Flexner Report gather dust. When he invited the author to lunch, Flexner pointed to two maps in his book—one showing the locations of the medical schools he visited, the other showing what the country needed. “How much would it cost to convert the first map into the second?” Gates asked, and Flexner replied, “It might cost a billion dollars.” “All right,” Gates announced, “we’ve got the money. Come down here and we’ll give it to you.”[33] When Gates asked Flexner how he would spend the first million to overhaul medical research, he said, “I should give it to Dr. Welch.”[34] Thus, Welch’s Johns Hopkins Medical School was consecrated as the prototype to be emulated by recipients of Rockefeller money. Hopkins ran its lab departments on a full-time basis, with many faculty members applying themselves solely to teaching and research, a pattern that Gates wished to see duplicated everywhere. Never before had a rich benefactor spent his money in this area. As Dr. Welch said, “It marked . . . the first large public recognition of medical education and medical research as a rewarding subject of philanthropy.”[35]

In 1913, Flexner formalized his ties with Rockefeller and joined the GEB staff. Flexner and his cohorts singled out well-regarded institutions—Vanderbilt University in the South, the University of Chicago in the Midwest

—to serve as regional models. Medical schools that wanted Rockefeller grants had to upgrade entrance standards, institute four-year programs, and adopt the full-time teaching approach. This movement to universalize the Johns Hopkins model proceeded even though it had one highly disgruntled critic: John D. Rockefeller, Sr., who still waged a lonely battle for an alternate form of medicine. “I am a homeopathist,” he complained to Starr Murphy in 1916. “I desire that homeopaths should have fair, courteous and liberal treatment extended to them from all medical institutions to which we contribute.” To Rockefeller’s credit, he did not pull rank on his advisers and often yielded to their judgments, even when they ran counter to his personal wishes. “I am glad to have the aid of experienced men who are able to sift out the applications and give to the deserving, ” he once said. “I am not a good one to judge such things: I am too soft-hearted.”[36]

In the spring of 1919, the GEB asked its founder for fifty million dollars to extend scientific medical education across the country, the world war having exposed the poor health of many soldiers and the inadequacy of base hospitals. For months, Rockefeller retreated into one of his baffling silences. Just when his lieutenants despaired of a response, he sent a letter pledging about $20 million for the project—a bonanza soon expanded to $50 million. By the time Flexner left the GEB in 1928, it had distributed more than $78 million to propagate the scientific approach to medical education. The sum total of these developments resulted in nothing less than a revolution in medical education. Doc Rockefeller’s son had banished laggards from the profession and introduced a new era of enlightenment in American medicine. In its thirty-year existence, the GEB dispensed $130 million, equal to more than $1 billion today.

While keeping apart from the management of the RIMR and the GEB, Rockefeller remained more involved with the University of Chicago. Paradoxically, it was the philanthropic effort that most frustrated him and most frequently violated his charitable principles. Meant as an incentive to lure money from Chicago businessmen, his initial endowment had, perversely, deterred people from giving. Reams of press coverage presented the university as Rockefeller’s hobbyhorse. In 1903, *Life* magazine ran a cartoon of Ye Rich Rockefeller University, showing a lady holding aloft a lamp marked Standard Oil, her robes checkered with dollar signs. Though Rockefeller studiously avoided the campus and visited only three times (1897, 1901, and 1903), he got little credit for this self-abnegation. The public was quick to pounce on his every move as yet another ruse. As Gates wearily

recalled:

The people of Chicago had ceased to give except in driblets. A hostile press often spoke of the University as if it were Standard Oil propaganda, its policies always dictated by the Founder, its professors subject to dismissal if they were other than mouthpieces of him, the splendid architectural creation of the Midway Plaisance was a monument to the glory of John D. Rockefeller, erected and maintained in his personal interest.[37]

This myth inverted the truth, as Ida Tarbell's spy Hiram Brown reported to J. M. Siddall. "Hiram says that John D. talks about Chicago University a good deal, but that he never brags about the money that he has given it, and that he never indicates that it is his private property," Siddall reported. "He says that John D. talks about the men who teach in the University a great deal, and that he is constantly bragging about their ability and the great things they are doing."[38] In the one area in which Rockefeller did openly intervene—university finances—he was powerless to brake the spendthrift Dr. William Rainey Harper. Each year, Rockefeller reluctantly gave another million dollars to bolster the permanent endowment to keep pace with his free-spending president. Though Rockefeller kept complaining about the chronic deficits, Harper ignored the founder's warnings, and relations grew very strained between him and Gates. Rockefeller hated being pressured, and Gates always believed that had Harper asked for less, Rockefeller would have willingly given much more. Then, in December 1903, Harper and the trustees were called to New York for a special session in Rockefeller's private office. In a dreadful miscalculation, Harper made an appeal for *more* money, despite the previous year's shortfall. When polled in Harper's presence, not a single trustee endorsed his position— a humiliating blow. That night, Senior and Junior huddled, and the next day Junior informed the board that his father would not add a penny to the endowment until the budget gap was plugged. Harper was strictly forbidden from enlarging existing departments or adding new ones. If harrowing for Harper, the episode was also distressing for Rockefeller, who had a fatherly feeling toward him.

Harper's health, meanwhile, was being undermined by his perpetual exertions. In 1903, he kept complaining of fatigue, yet he was congenitally incapable of moderation. As his son said, "He had frequently told the family that he knew he was shortening his life by the way he was doing his work, but explained to the family that he felt the work could be done better by this method." Three months after his showdown with Rockefeller, Harper

underwent an appendectomy. The doctors found evidence of cancer but were unsure of their diagnosis and delayed telling him until February 1905. By then, the malignancy had grown incurable and Harper minced no words with Gates: “It is as clearly a case of execution announced beforehand as it could possibly be.”[39]

When Rockefeller heard the news, he was distraught. “He cannot bring himself yet even to attempt to express his feelings,” Gates told Harper.[40] On February 16, 1905, he wrote Harper a letter whose laconic eloquence says much about the affection he felt for this flawed but deeply inspiring educator:

You are constantly in my thoughts. The feelings which I have always cherished toward you are intensified at this time. I glory in your marvelous courage and strength, and confidently hope for the best. I have the greatest satisfaction and pleasure in our united efforts for the university and I am full of hope for its future. No man could have filled your place. With highest esteem and tenderest affection.[41]

A few days later, about to undergo surgery, Harper repaid the tribute: “You have stood by me loyally; I can ask nothing more. The enterprise has proven to be larger and greater than we could have anticipated, but here it is—a splendid institution, and I know that you and your family will stand by it to the end.”[42]

Harper continued to write and teach, even though he was wasting away from cancer. In August 1905, he made a final visit to his patron at Forest Hill. Though Ida Tarbell had just published her acid character portrait of Rockefeller, he seemed philosophic. As Harper said, “He believes that this is all providential, and that he is to be thoroughly vindicated. It is a subject, however, which still occupies a large part of his mind. . . . I have never known him to be more genial or communicative.” [43] The two men spent bittersweet hours repairing the damage done to their friendship in recent years.

In January 1906, lying on his deathbed, William Rainey Harper, who had always had one eye fixed on heaven, the other on earthly prospects, called in two close friends, Ernest D. Burton and Albion W. Small. He had courted Rockefeller and his fortune during a period of extraordinary public outrage against Standard Oil, and now he seemed haunted, restless, his mind darkened by doubt. “I have not followed Jesus Christ as closely as I ought to have

done," he confessed to his friends. "I have come down from the plane on which I ought to have lived. I have justified it to myself at times as necessary because I was carrying so heavy loads. But I see now that it was all wrong."[44] On January 10, 1906, he died at age fifty.

In the following days, Rockefeller's mind returned to the exuberant period of his and Harper's early planning for the university. Harper's death perhaps affected him more than that of any colleague or friend. As he wrote the new university president, Harry Pratt Judson, "I am personally conscious of having met with an irreparable loss in his death. It seems a mysterious providence that he should have been cut off in the prime of his life and the height of his usefulness. I mourn him as though a member of my own family had been taken, and the sense of loss increases as the days go by." [45] Seldom did Rockefeller strike such a poignant note. For all his criticism of Harper's improvidence, he recognized his supreme achievement in creating a school equivalent to an Ivy League college in little more than a decade. Soon after Harper's death, he announced plans to build a campus library in Harper's memory and provided a $100,000 endowment to support his widow. In a no-less-fitting memorial, he agreed to close the budget deficit for 1906–1907. If Judson lacked Harper's vision and eloquence, he was a cautious administrator and sound budget planner—exactly the custodial figure the institution needed.

In 1907, Gates and Junior quietly began to lobby Senior to drop the requirement that the university and a majority of the trustees be Baptists. The school's fund-raising was hampered by its denominational character. Rockefeller was always of two minds on the matter, wanting the institution to remain under Baptist auspices while also arguing that it should be "conducted in a spirit of the widest liberality" with students drawn from every class of society.[46] For two years, Rockefeller deliberated before consenting to abolish the university's denominational link. Yet this bold step was easy compared to the next one contemplated by his advisers. By 1908, Rockefeller had spent $24 million on the university, but the Chicago citizenry had not lifted the burden from his shoulders. One evening in late 1908, Gates held a conference in his Montclair home with Harry Pratt Judson and Starr Murphy. "What would be the greatest service Mr. Rockefeller could now render the University?" Gates asked Judson and then promptly answered his own question: "Dr. Judson, the greatest possible service Mr. Rockefeller could now render to the University would be to separate himself from it altogether, withdraw his representatives, and turn it absolutely over to the public

forever."[47] When Judson protested that the university was still incomplete and sorely in need of funds, Gates said that Rockefeller might make one final large gift before departing.

Bent upon this plan, Gates managed to convince Junior who, in turn, tried to win over his father, who was flabbergasted by the suggestion and silently tabled it. When Junior renewed the subject in early 1909, his father rejected it categorically. "I confess the thought rather staggers me. . . . The institution is so large and far reaching in its influence and we have been such a potent factor in its upbuilding that I tremble at the possibility of cutting loose from our relation and leaving it a great craft in the middle of the ocean."[48] Though the campaign started out less than promisingly, Gates and Junior knew that major decisions were often protracted with Rockefeller. In November 1909, Junior suggested that his father make a last ten-million-dollar contribution to the school then cut loose forever. "Few men have founded great institutions and have had the courage to wean them," he said.[49]

A few weeks later, Gates weighed in with a letter that must rank as a seminal document in American philanthropy. It argued that a donor's highest ideal should be to give birth to an institution that would then enjoy a life totally independent of him. Gates noted that many schools—technology, agriculture, forestry, and others—were still needed to complete the university but that the money for them would not issue from other sources so long as Rockefeller was the university's patron. During the previous seven years, he had given nearly $12 million, while the midwestern public had given only $931,000—a pittance. Rockefeller's withdrawal was imperative on political grounds as well:

It will conclusively demonstrate the fact which the public has not been able to grasp—the fact of your entire disinterestedness. It will disclose beyond possibility of cavil that your motives in founding the institution are solely to bless and benefit your fellow men; that you have not been seeking through it to increase your personal power, to propagate your political views, to help your cause, or to glorify your name.

Noting that other rich men demanded control, Gates went on:

Mr. Carnegie is, I believe, a member of every Board which he creates, and of course, the managing member. Mr. Clark, who founded Clark University, undisguisedly and notoriously ran the institution until his death. Mr. Stanford

died soon after designating his property for the Leland Stanford, Jr. University. His wife, however, took up the reins and openly conducted the University for many years, demanding openly the dismissal of professors uncongenial to her and supervising every detail of administration.

In closing, Gates urged Rockefeller to withdraw from the university and set his creation free.[50]

At first, Rockefeller did not reply or even acknowledge this letter, yet it set up far-reaching reverberations in his mind. Gates's practical arguments must have counted heavily with him, but the idea of subordinating his ego to some larger institutional end would also have appealed to his religious sense of self-denial. He also believed that the "dead hand of fixed endowments" should not trap future generations with the outmoded agenda of the original donors. Perhaps for all these reasons, Rockefeller made a final $10 million payment to the University of Chicago in December 1910, bringing his total gifts to $35 million, or $540 million in 1996 dollars, then bid it farewell forever. In a valedictory to the board, he wrote, "It is far better that the University be supported and enlarged by the gifts of many than by those of a single donor. . . . I am acting on an early and permanent conviction that this great institution being the property of the people should be controlled, conducted and supported by the people." [51] The withdrawal was not quite as total as Rockefeller implied. Between 1910 and 1932, the GEB and other Rockefeller philanthropies channeled $35 million to the university, supplemented by another $6 million from Junior. But Rockefeller, in a statesmanlike act, had established the concept of the patron as founder, not owner or overseer, of his creation. At their December 1910 meeting, the trustees of the university paid tribute to Rockefeller: "Mr. Rockefeller has never permitted the University to bear his name, and consented to be called its founder only at the urgent request of the Board of Trustees. He has never suggested the appointment or the removal of any professor. Whatever views may have been expressed by members of the faculty, he has neither indicated either assent or dissent."[52]

In the early 1900s, there was a well-nigh universal perception that John D. gave generously to philanthropy to fumigate his fortune. As Governor Robert M. La Follette said in 1905, "I read yesterday that Rockefeller has been to prayer meeting again; tomorrow he will be giving to some college or university. He gives with two hands, but he robs with many. If he should live a thousand years he could not expiate the crime he has committed. . . . He is

the greatest criminal of the age." [53] Cartoonists stereotyped Rockefeller as a churchgoing hypocrite. One cartoon showed him as an angel with wings sprouting from his head, beneath the caption: "John the Baptist: High Finance Is Now Getting So High That Some People Expected to Get to Heaven from the Top of It." [54]

Were John D.'s donations as saintly as he claimed? Could he possibly have been insensible to the political impact of his good deeds? An internal memo written to George Rogers in 1906 sheds some light on this intriguing question. To assist Standard Oil in its political travails, Archbold asked Rockefeller in October 1906 to publish a list of the dozen or so colleges to which he had given significant endowments. Rockefeller was extremely reluctant to print such a list. "It is a thing we have never done before," he advised Rogers, "and is very distasteful to me, and would not be considered for a moment, only with the idea that it might prove of help to us in the Standard Oil Company." If a list was made up, he wanted a guarantee that it would be returned and destroyed, blotting out any trace of his complicity.[55] This letter generally vindicates Rockefeller's assertion that he did not exploit his philanthropy for selfish reasons, but it also shows that he occasionally bent his own rules. H. G. Wells was mostly right when he wrote in a 1934 book that "of all the base criticisms [Rockefeller's] career has evoked, the charge that his magnificently intelligent endowments have been planned to buy off criticism or save his soul from the slow but sure vindictiveness of his Baptist God is surely the most absurd." [56] Since his adolescence, charity had been interwoven with the fabric of his life.

Nevertheless, the press treated each Rockefeller donation as another bid to buy back his reputation. Never was this truer than during the tainted-money controversy that flared up in March 1905, when it was revealed that Rockefeller had given $100,000 to the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, a Congregational group in Boston, likely the largest gift the group had ever received. Coming at the close of the Tarbell series, this farsighted gift was bound to stir up a hornet's nest of controversy.

With the creation of the GEB, Rockefeller had begun to funnel money to nondenominational groups and transcend religious giving altogether. Gates, who regarded sectarianism as "the curse of religion at home and abroad, a blight upon religion, whether viewed from an economic, intellectual, or spiritual standpoint," eagerly encouraged this trend.[57] As this lapsed minister

jettisoned the Baptist Church, his Christianity sounded increasingly like high-minded social work. “My religion became . . . simply the service of humanity in the Spirit of Jesus. It is the religion of Jesus, of science, and of evolution alike.”[58] In his papers, Gates left a startling memo, “The Spirit of True Religion,” which he apparently wrote to clarify his thoughts and in which he candidly stated, “There is no essential difference between religion and morality except that the one is more intense and passionate than the other.” [59] In 1903, he bluntly told one applicant that while Rockefeller was a Baptist, he would no longer establish Baptist schools “for the sole purpose of propagating those views which are peculiarly and distinctively Baptist.”[60]

The $100,000 gift of what came to be called tainted money was solicited by Dr. James L. Barton, who met one Sunday with Starr Murphy and Gates in the latter’s Montclair home. While Gates did not initiate the meeting, he did recommend to Rockefeller that he contribute the $100,000. In a letter to Rockefeller, Gates made a secular case for this missionary money, again showing that Rockefeller was capable of responding to explicitly worldly rationales for religious giving:

Quite apart from the question of persons converted, the mere commercial results of missionary effort to our own land is worth, I had almost said, a thousand-fold every year of what is spent on missions. Our export trade is growing by leaps and bounds. Such growth would have been utterly impossible but for the commercial conquest of foreign lands under the lead of missionary endeavor. What a boon to home industry and manufacture![61]

Setting aside his customary silence, Rockefeller praised this letter profusely and agreed to send a $100,000 check to Boston a few days later.

So as not to be branded publicity-mongers, Rockefeller and Gates allowed beneficiaries to announce the receipt of gifts. Eager for publicity in this case — which would declare Rockefeller’s emancipation from sectarian giving— Gates pored over the newspapers, vainly awaiting some mention of the record Congregational gift. When he got the Boston board’s monthly publication, he expected to see banner headlines. Instead, the news was tucked away in a two- or three-line item in which the secretary noted that he had received a $100,000 check from John D. Rockefeller “with surprise,” implying that the money was unsolicited.[62] There was not a grudging syllable of thanks. The gift aroused a great ruckus as a chorus of Congregational ministers demanded

that it be returned. Everybody had read in *McClure's* about the nefarious methods by which this money had been procured.

The most visible critic was the Reverend Washington Gladden from Columbus, Ohio, a scourge of Rockefeller's for many years. An articulate critic of the trusts, he was a leader of the social-gospel movement. Now, armed with facts supplied directly by Ida Tarbell herself, Gladden rose up in his Congregational church one Sunday morning to deliver a stinging tirade against the $100,000 gift. "The money proffered to our board of missions comes out of a colossal estate, whose foundations were laid in the most relentless rapacity known to modern commercial history," he said.[63] In this sermon, Gladden dubbed Rockefeller's check "tainted money," an expression taken up by the press and fixed permanently in the political lexicon. He filed a protest with the Congregational Church, pleading for return of the money.

Faced with this uproar, Gates waited for the Boston board to make a clean breast of the story and admit that the money had been solicited. Instead, they suppressed the truth, and Barton even reassured reporters that it had been unsought. When Gates read this, he threatened to expose the gift's genesis, and only then did the Congregational board come clean. Both Gates and Rockefeller were disappointed that Gladden never made a widespread public retraction. As Rockefeller said, he "failed to do the manly thing and correct the false impressions which his writings had occasioned." [64] Of course, Rockefeller's self-satisfaction begged the larger question of whether people should accept money gained by what they deemed unscrupulous means.

The tainted-money controversy elicited a splendid piece of satire from Mark Twain who, having befriended the Rockefellers and Henry Rogers, knew that rapacious businessmen could be kindhearted benefactors. In *Harper's Weekly*, he published an open letter from Satan in which he chastised readers, "Let us have done with this frivolous talk. The American Board accepts contributions from me every year; then why shouldn't it from Mr. Rockefeller? In all the ages, three-fourths of the support of the great charities has been conscience-money, as my books will show; then what becomes of the sting when that term is applied to Mr. Rockefeller's gift?"[65]

As always, the public preferred to picture Rockefeller as crestfallen over the tainted-money hubbub. One newspaper said that he "sits by the hour under the trees that surround his costly home, brooding over the emphatic opposition public opinion has made against him. He speaks to no one save

those who call upon most urgent matters."[66] The truth was that Rockefeller did not waver or buckle under the torrent of bad publicity, though he was sobered by it. In July 1905, he turned up at the Euclid Avenue Baptist Church in an excellent mood, if slightly worn out, and chatted jovially with old friends. He even allowed himself some drollery at the end of his Sunday-school speech. Pulling out his watch, he told the crowd, his eyes twinkling mischievously, "I've talked too long, I'm afraid. There are others here who wished to talk. I don't want you to think I'm a selfish monopolist!"[67] The congregation responded with hearty applause.

CHAPTER 25

The Codger

By the close of the Tarbell series in 1905, Rockefeller's infamy as a businessman still overshadowed his budding philanthropic fame. He continued to cherish Forest Hill and Pocantico Hills as peaceful oases, sealed off from the outer world. But where he had once let the public roam the outer grounds of these estates, he could no longer sustain this policy for safety reasons. In 1906, a forbidding iron fence, eight feet tall and topped by wire netting, suddenly rose around Forest Hill, closing off sections to the public. This caution was now warranted, since Rockefeller was inundated with death threats and hired Pinkerton detectives to protect himself. After the *McClure's* series, he kept a revolver on his bedside table. He almost never attended public ceremonies, and Cettie was so rattled by a sense of menace that she advised him to stop public speaking altogether.

Yet however many would-be assassins squatted in the shadows, Rockefeller moved through his days with equanimity. He was not the icy man of myth, and his geniality grew more pronounced with age. If more subdued during the publication of the Tarbell articles, Rockefeller began to lighten up around 1906 and relish his retirement. His health was excellent, he had cast off the excruciating burden of business, and he had put together a superb management team for his charities and outside investments. Now past sixty, he saw his first play, *The Music Master,* as well as William Gillette playing Sherlock Holmes. The Rockefellers subscribed to the Philharmonic and even sampled brother William's gilded box at the opera. For this abstemious Baptist couple, such behavior came perilously close to paganism.

Cheerful and jaunty, Rockefeller cultivated the sly asides, sage apothegms, and cornball humor of a codger. As a businessman, he had preferred dark, monochromatic suits, but now his wardrobe became dapper and eccentrically bright, like that of a retired stage actor. One favorite outfit consisted of a long yellow silk coat over a Japanese paper vest, a straw hat (likened by one periodical to "the headpiece of a rickshaw man") or a pith helmet, and a pair of goggles.[1] This sartorial change started with his alopecia, which made him experiment with skullcaps and wigs and then with a funny assortment of golf

and driving hats, many of them with goofy flaps dangling over his ears. With the goggles especially, they made him look like an elderly visitor from outer space. “When he went driving he also wore round black goggles,” wrote his gardener, Tom Pyle. “With his thin face and thin slash of mouth, the curious costume gave him an eerily cadaverous appearance.”[2] During his digestive troubles of the 1890s, Rockefeller had grown gaunt. Now, under the care of his German physician, Dr. Moeller, he put on more weight, his face grew rounder, and his tall, rangy frame again seemed muscular, if slightly bloated at the waist. Reporters who met him found him amazingly spry—his gaze keen, his step vigorous, his handshake firm.

As he carefully plotted his moves in order to live to one hundred, Rockefeller placed great store in following the same daily schedule down to the second.[3] Whether in prayer or in wholesome recreation, he still had the Puritan’s need to employ every hour profitably. Rising at 6 A.M., he read the newspaper for an hour, then strolled through house and garden from 7 to 8, giving a dime to each new employee and a nickel to each veteran. He then breakfasted at 8, followed at 8:45 by a game of numerica, which gave him time to digest his food properly. From 9:15 to 10:15 he worked on his correspondence, mostly devoted to his philanthropy and investments. (As many as 2,000 letters now arrived daily at Pocantico, most of them solicitations for money.) From 10:15 to 12 he golfed, from 12:15 to 1 P.M. he bathed and then rested. Then came lunch and another round of numerica from 1 to 2:30. From 2:30 to 3 he reclined on the sofa and had mail read to him; from 3:15 to 5:15 he motored, from 5:30 to 6:30 he again rested, while 7 to 9 was given over to a formal dinner, followed by more rounds of numerica. From 9 to 10 he listened to music and chatted with guests, then slept from 10:30 P.M. to 6 A.M.—when the whole merry-go-round started up again. He did not deviate from this routine by one jot, regardless of the weather. William O. Inglis, who observed this diurnal rhythm at close range, found “something bordering on the superhuman—perhaps the inhuman—in this unbroken, mathematical perfection of schedule. It was uncanny.”[4]

By the spring of 1905, Cettie had recuperated from the attacks that had leveled her a year earlier and again took daily drives with John in a two-seat buckboard. By now, she was a chronic patient, however, and her respite was short-lived: In 1906, she was again confined to bed for a month with “grippe pneumonia.” Oddly enough, for all his gallant devotion to his wife, Rockefeller refused to alter his seasonal house rotation, even though Cettie

could no longer follow him. For health reasons and to indulge his golf mania, he began to repair each winter to the Hotel Bon Air in Augusta, Georgia. He headed north to Lakewood for the early spring, followed by Pocantico in late spring, then Forest Hill in the summer, returning to Pocantico in October and staying there till he headed south for the winter. He adhered rigidly to this routine even though Cettie was bedridden for most of 1907; for one ten-month stretch she did not attend church or even breakfast in the parlor with her family. By the following year, suffering from emphysema, she had nurses attending her around the clock. Then, in 1909, serious congestion developed in her lungs, clumps of hair fell from her head, and she could not so much as walk across the bedroom. As she remained at Forest Hill, John was away for months at a time— remarkable for a man who had been inseparable from his wife. He must have felt that his own health would be jeopardized if he varied his rituals. He was also uncomfortable around illness, which served as an unpleasant reminder of his own mortality.

Rockefeller, arm in arm with an unidentified Pinkerton detective and accompanied by a favorite grandson, eleven-year-old Fowler McCormick, marches in the Easter Parade on April 19, 1908. *(Courtesy of the Rockefeller Archive Center)*

Rockefeller's life struck many observers as strangely cramped, given his gargantuan wealth: He had an annual untaxed income of $58 million in 1902

— several times larger than contemporary press estimates—or about a billion dollars in tax-free income per annum in today's money. One editorial writer pictured Rockefeller this way: "When that gentleman is seated in his office coin rattles down upon him at the rate of $1.90 per second. He needs a steam shovel to keep himself from suffocation."[5] Nevertheless, Rockefeller spent only $439,000 on household expenses that year.

Rockefeller engaged in strenuous rituals of austerity, and he grimly sought to simplify his life and reduce his wants. He liked to say that "a man's wealth must be determined by the relation of his desires and expenditures to his income. If he feels rich on ten dollars, and has everything else he desires, he really is rich."[6] He and Cettie took pains to show they were not squandering money and made a point of exchanging modest gifts. In 1905, for instance, John gave Cettie $500 for her birthday and $500 for Christmas, even though her personal portfolio of railroad and gas-company bonds was now worth more than $1 million. For holidays, the Rockefellers exchanged token gifts—pens, ties, handkerchiefs, gloves—then wrote elaborate thank-you notes about how beautiful they were. In the spring of 1913, Rockefeller sent vegetables to his son at his home at 13 West Fifty-fourth Street and at Abeyton Lodge, his house in Pocantico, prompting the following outpouring from the ecstatic recipient: "As I glance at the weekly vegetable report from Pocantico Hills and see that last week $11.10 worth of asparagus went to Abeyton Lodge and $5.40 worth to No. 13. . . . I am constrained to express Abby's and my warmest thanks for your kindness in allowing us to share with you the products of the garden." [7] In this manner, the Rockefellers inhabited two worlds: a real but unspoken world of unimaginable wealth and a make-believe world of modest gifts intended to show that they were not spoiled. Since money meant nothing to them, they had to stress the sentimental value of gifts. The main thing was to prove that you were not taking your good fortune for granted. In January 1905, Cettie wrote to Junior at Forest Hill: "I am looking for snow to try our new sleigh, which is on springs and has four runners so as to turn like a carriage. Is not this luxury?"[8] When one thinks of the ornate Newport "cottages" and giant steam yachts then in vogue among the rich, it is hard not to find Cettie's conception of "luxury" poignant.

Rockefeller never lost his ingrained sense of thrift. When Junior, defying custom, gave him a fur coat and cap for Christmas in 1908, it elicited the following humorous reply: "I thank you a thousand times for the fur coat and cap and mittens. I did not feel I could afford such luxuries, and am grateful

for a son who is able to buy them for me."[9] As his son should have known, Rockefeller would never strut around in this plutocrat's costume, and he returned it to Junior, who wore it instead.

Breathtakingly generous in his philanthropy, Rockefeller could also be stingy—appallingly so. Whereas most other tycoons hired subordinates to oversee personal expenditures, Rockefeller supervised every detail, and in small matters he tended to be an incorrigible skinflint. The account books of his estates were all sent to 26 Broadway and audited to the last dollar. The estates were all melded together into their own internal market system, and when Pocantico "sold" trees to Lakewood, Pocantico was credited and Lakewood debited. "We are our own best customers," Rockefeller observed archly in his memoirs, "and we make a small fortune out of ourselves by selling to our New Jersey place at $1.50 or $2.00 each, trees which originally cost us only five or ten cents at Pocantico." [10] He had studies performed to compute the cost of per-capita food consumption at his various houses and chided the housekeeper at 4 West Fifty-fourth Street for "table board" that ranged as high as $13.35 per person compared to $7.80 for Pocantico and $6.62 for Forest Hill.

Rockefeller spent a ridiculous amount of time protesting bills both large and small and scrutinized the smallest bills from grocers and butchers. Somewhat paranoid to begin with, he assumed every tradesman was an extortion artist, or at least was padding the rich man's bills. Even while walking on his estate, he tried to spot shirkers. "I have noticed of late several instances of idling," he told one superintendent, "and in one or two cases have stopped my automobile and waited to see if the men would resume their work."[11] For a time, he tipped porters by holding out a handful of change and asking them to take what they deserved; when they took him at his word, he was shocked and renounced the policy, resorting to a strict 10 percent policy.

Rockefeller was notably suspicious when it came to the medical profession. In an extraordinary number of cases, he imagined that he was being gouged by physicians and threatened lawsuits. In 1909, Dr. Paul Allen treated Rockefeller at Hot Springs, West Virginia, and brought in a consulting physician, a Dr. Smith. When Rockefeller received a $3,000 bill from Dr. Smith, he complained to Dr. Allen that he could have gotten other reputable physicians for between $500 and $1,000. "I prefer to adjust this matter with Dr. Smith without litigation, but I am in no state of mind to submit to what I

regard as extortion," he warned Dr. Allen.[12] After Rockefeller threatened legal action, Dr. Smith settled for $500. Then Rockefeller received a bill from Dr. Allen himself of $350 per diem for 21 days of treatment at Hot Springs, and he again flew into a rage, refusing to pay more than $160 a day—an amount he dropped to $75 after canvassing doctor friends and examining local compensation levels. Once again, he hinted at litigation. When Junior noted that Dr. Allen had sacrificed four families as patients because of this extended West Virginia stay, Senior countered that "the prestige of his going to Hot Springs for twenty-one days as our family physician . . . might be worth a great deal more to him than this loss of patients." Calling the doctor's charges "extortionate," Senior concluded, "I believe it my duty to a good many people who have been blackmailed by doctors to stand a trial."[13] For Rockefeller, it was dogma that prices should reflect true market values, not the buyer's ability to pay, and nothing upset him more than the notion that a rich man should pay a premium on his hard-earned wealth.

As Senior disappeared behind the gates of his estates, the public spotlight was progressively cast on his son and heir, who shrank beneath its glare. "John D. Rockefeller, the greatest organizing genius in the world, and largest individual owner of the United States and its inhabitants, is the father of a young man called John D. Rockefeller, Jr.," opined one Hearst newspaper. "John D. Rockefeller, Jr., in his own right will be richer than many entire nations. He will be worth more money than the whole of Greece was worth when the work done by the Greeks constituted the glory of the world." [14] Nobody was more daunted by this prospect than Junior himself, who felt trapped in the iron cage of dynastic expectation. Never sure of himself, Junior plodded ahead, always wondering where he was heading.

Junior was awed by his father, whom he regarded as a marble figure on a pedestal. "To his son he had always seemed of heroic proportions—brilliant in his construction of a huge industrial empire, exacting in matters of personal integrity, disciplined in the control of his own emotions, serene in the face of public abuse, and magnanimous in his contributions toward mankind," Gates wrote.[15] Taught to regard his father in this golden light, Junior felt humble in his presence. He once told the New York Chamber of Commerce that his sole desire was to help his father and, if necessary, "to black his shoes, to pack his bag." [16] "Of my ability I have always had a very poor opinion," he told his father in 1902, "but I need not assure you that such as it is, it is wholly and absolutely devoted to your interests, and that now and always you can trust

me as you always have."[17] Instead of bucking up his courage, Senior often let his son wallow in self-flagellation.

If Senior tried to shut out his critics, Junior was hypersensitive to insinuations about his father. As Gates observed, Junior's "whole conduct of life is governed by the purpose, hardly at all concealed, of rehabilitating his father's public reputation."[18] Junior's need to vindicate his father stemmed partly from love but also from more self-interested reasons. As an ethical young man, how could he feel good about himself if he was spending blood money? To give away the Rockefeller fortune with a clear conscience, he had to convince himself that it had been earned fairly.

If Junior lacked the intestinal fortitude to spend his life facing down a hostile public, this feeling only grew as he and Abby began to create a large family. Their first child, Abby—known as Babs—was born at 13 West Fifty-fourth Street in 1903, followed by John D. Rockefeller III in 1906, whose birth elicited the headline, "Richest Baby in History." Nelson was born in 1908 in Seal Harbor, Maine, on Senior's birthday, which he always regarded as an omen, if not outright proof, that he was destined to lead the next generation of Rockefellers.

Desperately in need of guidance and emotional support, Junior re-created with his wife the close relationship he had had with his mother. He clung to Abby and depended upon her judgment, and sometimes he seemed scarcely able to live without her. When Abby and Babs went off to the Aldrich estate at Warwick, he was tormented by her absence. Abby enabled him to savor all the romanticism repressed during his upbringing. Two years after their marriage, Junior could still write to her breathlessly, "How happy you made me that night, darling, in the radiance of your young womanhood, so beautiful, so fascinating, so loving, and so long the one object of my passionate desires. . . . What a beautiful night that was, darling. We were oblivious of all except each other and our great love."[19]

Cool and very shrewd in sizing up situations, Abby saw something unseemly in the demeaning tasks assigned to Junior when he started at 26 Broadway. She encouraged him to claim his rightful place as heir apparent. Junior still did not know how he would divide his time between business and philanthropy. Aware of the public-relations value of a Rockefeller heir, the Standard Oil of New Jersey chieftains were eager to use him as window dressing, and in 1904, at age thirty, he was appointed a director. Two

executives, A. C. Bedford and Henry H. Rogers, took him on a whirlwind tour of the Oklahoma oil fields and discovered that this likable, unassuming young man had his own shy appeal. “Bedford and Rogers found out that I got on with the public very well and that the public was interested in seeing a live Rockefeller,” said Junior. “In other words, they began to think of me as something of an asset.”[20] In 1909, he was elevated to a vice presidency.

A neophyte in business, the product of a sheltered upbringing, Junior was bound to be shocked by the moral squalor of Standard Oil under John D. Archbold. The quick-witted, combative Archbold knew how to use his violent temper to bully people into submission. Since Archbold lived in Tarrytown, he stopped by Pocantico each Saturday morning to present a bright red apple to Rockefeller and to consult with his largest shareholder. Commuting to work by speedboat each morning, Archbold often invited Junior along, and they had breakfast as they raced down the Hudson River. On these occasions, Junior often quizzed Archbold about a matter that greatly upset him: the secret political payoffs—legal but seamy—routinely made by Standard Oil. As Junior explained, “The party bosses would come to the back door and it seemed to the management of the company wise to favor them. . . . I gradually became sensitive to usages and actions for which as a member of the board and an officer I felt responsible but which as a single individual I had little voice in determining.”[21] The money traffic was blatant: At campaign time, Mark Hanna, Cornelius N. Bliss, and other party bosses hung around, as Junior put it, “at the back door, hat in hand.” Yet when Junior protested, Archbold airily dismissed it as a matter of survival and said that all big corporations did it.[22] Did Junior ever wonder why his father, whom he considered a paragon of virtue, had groomed Archbold as his protégé?

On several occasions, Junior was asked to lobby Senator Aldrich for Standard Oil. In 1903, for instance, Junior prodded his father-in-law to appoint Senator Boies Penrose to the Senate Finance Committee because he “has for some years been a friend of certain gentlemen in our company and has usually shown himself friendly toward the company.”[23] In later years, Junior must have regretted these actions, one of the few times when his ethical compass failed him. Having gotten a hint of the moral atmosphere at Standard Oil, Junior began to distance himself from its management and attended only about a third of the board meetings. While he feigned affection for Archbold—“We were all very fond of him, he was so witty and jolly”—he made a point of having less contact with him.[24]

Of course, as Junior struggled with his dawning awareness of corruption at Standard Oil, Ida Tarbell was exhuming its unsavory past, and the two overlapping events probably pushed him into his nervous breakdown in late 1904. The press did not help matters. In the gauche young heir, reporters spotted a far more vulnerable target than his father, and they ridiculed him as weak, fumbling, prudish, and neurasthenic. This coverage made Junior even more self-conscious than before, and he was pilloried no matter what he did. If he did not give tips, he was mocked, but when he gave his barber a nickel, the coin was posted on the barber's wall and reproduced in the newspapers. "He rarely spends more than 50 cents for his midday lunches," the New York *Daily News* reported. "He drinks no intoxicating liquors, uses tobacco moderately, and his tailors' bill in a year is not as heavy as that of a prosperous clerk in a Wall Street office."[25] Junior fidgeted under the attention. "It was rather expected of me that having inherited money I would waste it," said Junior. "I made up my mind that I wouldn't do it." [26]

Whenever Junior spoke in public, hard-bitten journalists turned out to record and mock his words. In February 1902, he gave a talk at the Brown University YMCA in which he tried to square business ethics and Christianity. To justify the superiority of consolidation over competition, he cited the breeding of the American Beauty rose, which had only been achieved through constant, painful pruning. This figure of speech, tossed in extemporaneously, haunted Junior for years and was cited constantly as a credo of rapacious capitalism.

As Junior said of this period, "My problem was to reconcile right and conscience with the hard realities of life on a practical level," and he groped his way unaided by his father. He clung ardently to his leadership of the men's Bible class at the Fifth Avenue Baptist Church. After he took over the class from Charles Evans Hughes in 1900, the number of young men in attendance at once quadrupled from 50 to 200 and ultimately reached 500, including many bookkeepers, clerks, salesmen, and students. In the class, Junior tried to use scripture to elucidate moral dilemmas of everyday life. "We have talks along financial, educational, sociological and religious lines, as well as talks of a generally helpful nature," he explained to William Rainey Harper in 1902.[27] It was never clear how many students were there for guidance and how many were angling for Rockefeller jobs or money. Reporters infiltrated the sessions just to hurl embarrassing questions at Junior, who sat with hands tightly clasped on the table as they made sport of his replies. Mark Twain, a

guest speaker, observed Junior's predicament firsthand. "Every Sunday young Rockefeller explains the Bible to his class," he wrote. "The next day the newspapers and the Associated Press distribute his explanations all over the continent and everybody laughs." [28] Twain conceded that Junior repeated platitudes preached from every pulpit, but thought he was unfairly roughed up for political reasons.

In 1905, as attacks mounted on his father and his talks were increasingly subjected to savage derision, Junior agonized over whether to relinquish the class. Still recuperating from his breakdown, he devoted three nights each week to preparing this Sunday talk. Gates in particular thought this was taking an excruciating toll. When Junior told his father in June 1905 of his wish to resign, Senior registered unequivocal opposition. "It would interfere with my pleasure to have you give up the class," he said. "It has been a source of great joy and comfort to your Mother and me."[29] John D. himself had informed one of Junior's classes, "I would rather see my son doing this work than see him a monarch on his throne."[30]

Junior's reasons for wanting to stay were illuminating. He needed a place where he could resolve the tensions between business and religion, Standard Oil and the Baptist Church, forging a synthesis that would enable him to function in an imperfect world. If he gave up the class, he also worried that the family wealth and notoriety would isolate him from society, as had so clearly happened to his father, who led an artificial existence. He received a timely warning along these lines from Dr. W.H.P. Faunce, the president of Brown University and former pastor of the Fifth Avenue Baptist Church:

If you drop that class, you will take a step toward retirement from your fellow-men. Your father has felt obliged—often against my protest—to barricade himself in order to avoid the imposters, cranks etc. of which the world is full. This is the inevitable penalty of his position. But there is no reason why that penalty should descend to you.[31]

For three years, Junior kept the Bible class, then, at Abby's gentle urging, withdrew in 1908 at a moment when he would not seem to be retreating under fire. As she reassured him, "You have borne all the criticism and ridicule that is necessary to let the world see that you are sincere."[32] It was not the last time that she rescued him from unnecessary martyrdom.

Since Junior had committed himself to serving his father, the question naturally arises of why Senior, eager to slough off cares, did not commence sooner the great transfer of wealth to his son. Other moguls, such as Commodore Vanderbilt and J. P. Morgan, Sr., had waited until their deaths to convey the bulk of their wealth to their sons, but they needed their money as working capital in their businesses and did not have extended retirements like Rockefeller's. Until 1912—when Junior was thirty-eight—Senior kept him in a prolonged adolescence, paying him a salary that was really a glorified allowance. "Why, the girls in the office here have an advantage that I never had," Junior once lamented. "They can prove to themselves their commercial worth. I envy anybody who can do that."[33] By slow increments, his father ratcheted up his allowance from $10,000 a year in 1902 to $18,000 five years later, but Junior never felt he had earned it, exacerbating his sense of inadequacy. As he told his father in 1907, "I have always wished, simply as a matter of satisfaction to myself, that my salary might represent the real value of my services in the office, while as it is and has been in the past it represents rather your generosity."[34]

Before 1911, Rockefeller made only token transfers of oil stock to his son, starting with his first annual gift of one hundred shares of Standard Oil of New Jersey in 1903, but he also deeded to him parcels of valuable property in Cleveland, Buffalo, and New York. Then, in 1909, he gave him a controlling interest in the American Linseed Company, and with this sixteen-million-dollar gift Junior saw the golden floodgates start to open. Grateful but anxious, he wrote to his father, "A deep feeling of solemnity, of responsibility, almost of awe, comes over me as I contemplate these gifts, and my heart rises in silent prayer to God that he will teach me to be a good and faithful steward as my Father has been."[35] Even though he now owned a company and extensive real estate, Junior still dangled in an awkward dependency, having to account to his father for his personal expenses. In January 1910, Senior asked how much he had spent the previous year, and Junior, like an obedient schoolboy, computed the answer, in Rockefeller style, down to the decimal points: $65,918.47.

At the turn of the century, Junior and his three sisters had roughly equal wealth—several hundred thousand dollars apiece—and father kept parity among them for several years. (Much of Junior's early income came from a $500,000 "credit" John D. had given him to supplement his salary.) Then it grew steadily clearer that Junior would be the receptacle for the bulk of the

fortune. Partly this was a plain case of male chauvinism. But special factors also worked against Bessie and Edith, while frigid relations with Alta's husband, Parmalee, lessened her chances. Senior had cool relations with two of his three sons-in-law and would have hesitated to give them undue influence over his money. In Junior's opinion, his sisters were also disqualified because they did not handle their finances in the scrupulous manner demanded by father.

Constantly consulting expert opinion and learning all he could, Junior was now immersed in the Rockefeller philanthropies, and nobody enjoyed finer access to the master. In casual moments at Pocantico, Junior could lightly broach a project or have Cettie read a proposal aloud. "Gates was the brilliant dreamer and orator," Junior conceded. "I was the salesman—the go-between with Father at the opportune moment."[36] Junior discharged this role perfectly, for he lacked the itch for fame, willingly laid all glory at his father's doorstep, and held views congruent with his. For Senior, exhausted from his business labors, this conscientious son was heaven-sent. Once, during a golf game, Rockefeller announced, "My greatest fortune in life has been my son."[37]

So why did Senior procrastinate in giving him his money? Since he remained tight-lipped, we can only conjecture. One plausible explanation is that he planned to reach age one hundred and had no wish to surrender power prematurely in his sixties. He must have fretted, too, about Junior's debilitating breakdown, which started in 1904 and dragged on for nearly three years, curtailing his activities. Senior must have feared that the stupendous weight of the fortune would crush his delicate son. Rockefeller might also have waited until Junior began to show more robust self-confidence. Protective of his vulnerable son, Rockefeller was irate when the press pummeled him. "They have no right to attack Mr. John," he would insist. "All my life I have been the object of assault. But they have no ground for striking at him!"[38]

Yet the overriding fear was most likely political. Since the family fortune largely took the form of Standard Oil stock, giving it to Junior would have engulfed him in controversy far uglier than anything he had ever known. With Standard Oil besieged by state and federal antitrust suits, Junior would have inherited both the controversy and the legal liability that went with the stock. Had Rockefeller unloaded the oil stock on Junior, editorialists would also have accused him of fleeing retribution and responsibility. That Junior had such grave reservations about Standard's management under Archbold would

have only strengthened his father's reluctance to hand over significant blocks of shares to him.

While Gates initiated Junior into the rites of philanthropy, the crown prince continued to perform many mundane domestic duties foisted upon him by his father, including paying the servants and overseeing repairs. Then, on the night of September 17, 1902, the Parsons-Wentworth house at Pocantico burned down. Hundreds of people stood by helplessly in the dark as flames consumed the wooden structure. Fortunately, nobody was hurt. John and Cettie simply moved their belongings to an undistinguished dwelling on the grounds called the Kent House. Senior had long wanted to build a new house at Pocantico anyway and was not therefore especially fazed by the fire.

From 1902, Junior and Abby had occupied a lovely house on the estate known as Abeyton Lodge, a comfortable, rambling affair in Hudson Valley Dutch style, festooned with many dormer windows and awnings. They tended to look askance at Senior's patched-up residences and wanted him to occupy a grander dwelling. As a result, they reinforced his desire to erect a new house at the property's highest point, Kykuit, a five-hundred-foot elevation with a peerless vista of the Hudson River, and took charge of planning a manor house that would be a model of quiet elegance and faultless taste. It has been hypothesized that Senior saw the project as therapeutic for Junior after his breakdown, but the latter's troubles actually stalled the project. As *The New York Times* reported accurately in May 1905, "The unexpected serious crisis in the health of John D. Rockefeller, Jr., has temporarily checked his father's plans for building a fine mansion this summer on his immense estate in the Pocantico Hills."[39] Even a year later, Senior told a cousin that he was trying to stop Junior from overwork and he would never have rushed him into building the new house. He would surely have remembered the onus of supervising construction of the family home in Cleveland as an adolescent.

In the spring of 1904, Senior had given his son permission to solicit preliminary sketches from architects, and by the following summer contracts were signed with Delano and Aldrich as architects (Chester H. Aldrich was Abby's distant cousin), Thompson-Starrett as builders, Ogden Codman, Jr., as interior designer, and William Welles Bosworth as landscape architect. Presented with these plans, Rockefeller reacted as he so often did when in a quandary—he did nothing. He exercised a pocket veto, leaving Junior in the old position of trying to figure out his intentions. "After a while," Junior said, "I became convinced that the reason he did nothing was because he hesitated

to build so large a house, with the additional care which its operation would involve, but on the other hand was too generous to suggest a smaller house, which would not adequately accommodate children and grandchildren."[40] Evidently, Junior guessed right, for when he presented plans for a scaled-down house—small enough to satisfy his father's craving for simplicity, roomy enough to accommodate guests—Rockefeller consented with relief. The house would be handsome but not ostentatious, previewing a new Rockefeller aesthetic of restrained grace that owed much to Abby Aldrich Rockefeller.

Before construction started, Rockefeller, an engineering buff, brought a number of demands to the table. To reinvigorate Cettie's health, he wanted Kykuit to receive maximum sunshine in the winter. He also wanted sunlight to trail him on his daily rounds, with light shining in the dining room for lunch, for instance, but with his bedroom dipped in shadow for his afternoon nap. This demand might have flummoxed the most adept architect, but for Rockefeller, who had dabbled in construction, it was child's play. He constructed a boxlike contraption mounted on a turntable at the center of the building site. Stationed in this box for several days, working the levers, he observed how the sunlight slanted down on a small model of the house. He then presented his hourly charts to the architects, who shifted the foundation lines in conformity with them.

Junior and Abby threw themselves into Kykuit's construction with a mixture of passion and nervous energy. (Mesmerized by measurement, Junior carried a collapsible four-foot ruler in his pocket for the rest of his life.) They oversaw creation of a three-story Georgian manor house, with elegant gables and dormer windows. In deference to Baptist values, the house had no ballroom, but it did have an Aeolian organ for both religious and secular music. Junior and Abby were very partial to their creation. After they had toured some pretentious "châteaux" on Long Island's north shore, Junior said that Kykuit, by comparison, was "far less elaborate than many houses we have seen" but "more perfect of its kind, more harmonious and more charming."[41]

John and Abby enlisted the services of Ogden Codman, the Boston interior designer who helped Edith Wharton refurbish her Newport home and coauthored a book with her, *The Decoration of Houses*, in 1897. In the book, Wharton rebelled against the cold, cluttered rooms of her childhood. Codman wanted to invest Kykuit with the easy tranquillity of an English country

house, furnishing it with pieces that would seem like old family heirlooms. No detail of design escaped John and Abby's exacting attention. They fussed over every item with that small flutter of anxiety that Junior always felt when performing a task for his father. "We bought all the furniture, china, linen, glass, silver and works of arts, employing, of course, the best advisers obtainable," he said.[42] Before unveiling the house to his parents, Junior and Abby slept there for six weeks, testing every bedroom and taking meals there.

Sure that the house was now ready, they apprehensively invited John and Cettie to sample it in October 1908, and it seemed, at first, an unparalleled success. "The new house all furnished by John and Abby was ready for us," Cettie recorded in her diary. "It is beautiful and convenient within and without."[43] Cettie and sister Lute delighted in playing the large pipe organ, with its player-piano attachment, and Senior imported an organist from the Fifth Avenue Baptist Church for after-dinner concerts on Sunday evenings. That Thanksgiving, three generations of Rockefellers gathered in the new house, with Abby and Junior bringing their growing brood of Babs, John III, and five-month-old Nelson. They instituted a tradition of no smoking or drinking at either Kykuit or Abeyton Lodge.

Unfortunately for Junior and Abby, their ordeal had only begun. Since Cettie had been sick, they had tried to spare her concern with construction details, but she was an extremely finicky lady. For the sake of diplomacy, John and Cettie pretended to be thrilled with their new home, but they increasingly carped in private. The third floor, reserved for guest rooms, had tiny dormer windows that made them stuffy and unsuitable. They then discovered graver problems. The elevator made an awful din; the roaring plumbing in Cettie's bathroom reverberated in the public areas; the racket from the service entrance below John D.'s bedroom grated on his nerves; rainwater dripped into the dining room; the chimneys sometimes belched smoke, and so on and so on. Cettie even found indecent the charming statues of male cherubim on the porch outside their bedroom and had them chastely converted into female angels. As his parents broke silence and confided their concerns, Junior's heart sagged: He had let them down again. After a year, it was decided that the house would be completely revamped.

Yet the brouhaha over the house was minor compared to the uproar over the grounds. William Welles Bosworth had planned to surround Kykuit with a small, formal park of 250 acres, with the rest of the estate left in something close to its wild, pristine state. Since Senior fancied himself a landscape

expert, he conceived an instant dislike for Bosworth, whom he regarded as a rival and a frighteningly extravagant fellow to boot. When Bosworth submitted his plans, Rockefeller harrumphed that he could do better:

"In a few days," Rockefeller recalled in his memoirs,

I had worked out a plan so devised that the roads caught just the best views at just the angles where in driving up the hill you came upon impressive outlooks, and at the ending was the final burst of river, hill, cloud, and great sweep of country to crown the whole; and here I fixed my stakes to show where I suggested that the roads should run, and finally the exact place where the house should be.

He then told Bosworth: "Look it all over and decide which plan is best."[44] When this plan was adopted, Rockefeller attributed this decision to its patent superiority, though it is hard to see how Bosworth could have objected. Even with the terraced formal gardens close to the house, Rockefeller interjected his own ideas. He insisted upon lime trees for the garden walk just south of the house, having learned they were the fastest growing trees and would most quickly cast shade on the footpaths.

Luckily, Rockefeller did not do everything himself and allowed Bosworth to create a majestic fantasy straight out of the Italian Renaissance, complete with grottoes, fountains, pergolas, sunken gardens, temples, topiary bushes, classical statues, and running streams. Disgruntled at the cost of these ornaments, Rockefeller would stroll the grounds with guests and tell them, only half jesting, "You know, these little brooks run mighty high!" [45] Cettie was especially fond of Bosworth's rustic Japanese garden with its quaint teahouse, but every time Rockefeller looked at it, he saw plain extortion and complained to his son. "I can hardly understand how the little Japanese house, which I supposed was to be a very superficial affair, would reach $10,000. . . . Bosworth may be all right. I hope we shall feel later on, as you do, that he has not been a too expensive luxury for us."[46]

Whenever they acceded to one of Bosworth's modest ideas, Rockefeller growled, it ended up costing much more than they imagined. Senior had first been quoted a figure of $30,000 for the entire landscaping job and was horrified in 1910 when the bill swelled to $750,000—more than the cost of house and furnishings combined! (It would equal nearly $12 million in contemporary money.) Thus far, he had been restrained, but now he gave his

son a good tongue-lashing. “Granted that we have a very satisfactory result, but $750,000 is very different from $30,000, and is, indeed, *25 times* that amount, and what Mr. Bosworth has received for his services is fifty percent more than the entire original estimate of cost to me. I should not want the public to know what our expenditure has been.”[47] In the end, the house paled beside the stately gardens, and this must actually have pleased the outdoorsy Rockefeller. For all his complaining, he adored the grounds and planted a network of electric lights that allowed him to illuminate them theatrically at night. “If you were to visit me on the darkest night,” he would boast, “I could show you vistas of trees from one part to the other of my estate by merely touching a button.” [48]

Starting in 1911, the house itself underwent two more years of renovation and was transformed into a fine specimen of American Renaissance, a voguish style that bespoke the self-confidence of the burgeoning industrial class. Narrow but deep, the house had four floors above ground and two below that were gouged into the hillside. Gone was the old dormer-ridden third floor, replaced with a mansard roof. By turning the wooden veranda into a stone loggia, the forty-room house acquired new dignity and grandeur. While not exactly modest, Kykuit was decorous and understated and testified to its owner’s simplicity. It fell far short of what Rockefeller could have afforded or what other preening magnates might have built.

To Senior’s delight, the redesign entailed complicated problems in civil engineering. To lengthen the approach to the house, hundreds of teamsters carted in thousands of loads of topsoil, requiring the construction of a huge retaining wall. To ferry in supplies without disturbing the occupants, an underground tunnel was created for trucks, and Senior delighted in watching the steam shovels punch a hole in the hillside. This construction thrilled him, as if he were a small boy equipped with a new set of toy trucks. The remaking of Kykuit went on until October 1913, when John and Cettie finally moved back into the house after two years of work. By that point, Cettie was very sick and did not have much longer to live.

With Kykuit complete, Rockefeller turned his attention to removing disturbing elements from the grounds. One row of houses inside the Rockefeller acreage was picked up and set back down in the nearby village. As he accumulated more land, Rockefeller was also increasingly bothered by the Putnam division of the New York Central Railroad, which cut a swath across the middle of his estate. He hated the hoboes and hunters drawn by the

right-of-way, not to mention the ash that fluttered down on his golf course from the coal-burning locomotives. In 1929, Rockefeller decided to have the train rerouted and paid an estimated $700,000 to buy the entire village of East View, with its forty-six homes; after buying and razing all of the houses, he donated the land for new railroad tracks five miles to the east of the original one. Removing another unwanted intruder, Junior paid $1.5 million for the three hundred acres of Saint Joseph's Normal College, underwriting the costs of relocating it and building a new campus elsewhere.

At its peak, the Pocantico estate was a self-contained world with seventy-five houses and seventy miles of private roads. Forever reworking his domain, Rockefeller kept hundreds of men busy moving trees and hills to open up new views. The estate included a sizable working farm that supplied the family's food needs. Rockefeller developed such a taste for Pocantico's produce and springwater that they were shipped to him wherever he went.

The Pocantico Hills estate was a marvelous haven, but the cluster of newsmen clamoring for answers beyond the majestic iron gates always reminded its owner of the hostile public. Their chorus of accusations grew only louder with time. By Teddy Roosevelt's second term, Rockefeller and Standard Oil could no longer flout the federal and state governments with impunity, as they had for so long. The moment of reckoning was at hand.

Bessie Rockefeller Strong, whose prolonged illness has always been surrounded by mystery. *(Courtesy of the Rockefeller Archive Center)*

CHAPTER 26

The World's Richest Fugitive

As they approached the 1904 presidential election, Standard Oil executives knew that Teddy Roosevelt was still miffed at their attempt to snuff out his new Bureau of Corporations and that the oil trust stood at the top of his list of evil trusts to be reined in by federal regulators. Since the idea of backing Roosevelt's Democratic opponent, Alton B. Parker, was unthinkable to Archbold and his associates, they smothered the incumbent with money, especially a $100,000 contribution from Henry H. Rogers. Other businessmen who feared the lash of federal regulation—including Edward H. Harriman, Henry Clay Frick, and James Stillman— also paid tribute to Roosevelt, provoking Democratic charges that the president was being bribed by the very companies he vowed to control. Attorney General Philander Knox wandered into Roosevelt's office one day in October 1904 and heard the president dictating a letter ordering the return of the Standard Oil funds. "Why, Mr. President, the money has been spent," Knox objected. "They cannot pay it back—they haven't got it." "Well," Roosevelt said, "the letter will look well on the record, anyhow."[1]

When Roosevelt won by an impressive margin in November, Rockefeller sent a telegram to him: "I congratulate you most heartily on the grand result of yesterday's election."[2] In the Standard boardroom, the contribution to Roosevelt's campaign was soon acknowledged to be the worst investment they had ever made. As Archbold moaned, "Darkest Abyssinia never saw anything like the course of treatment we received at the hands of the administration following Mr. Roosevelt's election in 1904." [3] Or as Henry C. Frick phrased it more succinctly, "We bought the son of a bitch, but he wouldn't stay bought."[4] Nevertheless, the Standard Oil hierarchs remained cocksure that, in any contest for supremacy with the federal government, they would inevitably prevail.

Before the election, the Bureau of Corporations, headed by James R. Garfield, had begun to gather data on Standard Oil. The son of the former president and active in Ohio Republican politics, Garfield was friendly with

some Standard Oil lawyers, and the initial inquiry went amicably enough. Then, in February 1905, by a unanimous resolution, the House of Representatives urged an antitrust investigation of Standard Oil, a result of the oil boom in Kansas. Re-enacting a drama once played out in western Pennsylvania, independent oil producers and refiners protested that Standard Oil dominated the state's pipelines, and they also accused it of conspiring with the railroads. Their passions were fanned both by Ida Tarbell's articles and by a dramatic tour she made through the oil fields. Suddenly, Commissioner Garfield was summoning Archbold and Rogers to question them about Standard's behavior in the state. When he broached the touchy subject of rebates—the flash point for so many battles in oil history—their relations deteriorated hastily. A new generation of independent oil producers in Kansas, Illinois, Oklahoma, Texas, and California would provide the motive force behind the antitrust drive against the Standard.

As the moribund Sherman Act quickened to sudden life under Teddy Roosevelt, the Tarbell series virtually guaranteed that Standard Oil would be the central target of any federal trustbusting probe. Tarbell thought it the optimal choice because it was "the mother trust and the most nearly monopolistic."[5] It furnished a well-known consumer article, affected nearly everyone, and had an abundant history of hearings and lawsuits to excavate. In the early 1900s, petroleum was being applied to an array of new uses and it no longer seemed tolerable for one organization to retain a stranglehold over it.

For years, Rockefeller and his colleagues had ignored public opinion, refusing to give interviews and behaving defiantly at hearings. In her *McClure's* series, Tarbell had justly said, "If Mr. Rockefeller had been as great a psychologist as he is a business manipulator he would have realised that he was awakening a terrible popular dread."[6] In their hubris, the oil monopolists mocked the petty efforts of politicians to obstruct them. "We will see Standard Oil in hell before we will let any set of men tell us how to run our business," an unreconstructed Henry Rogers swore.[7] Unwilling to compromise, Standard officials dealt with government officials as roughly as they did with business competitors. At this precarious moment, the trust needed a master diplomat, not the hotheaded Archbold.

In 1906, Roosevelt signed a stack of bills to curb industrial abuses. Profiting from the outcry prompted by Upton Sinclair's novel *The Jungle,* he signed the meat-inspection bill and the Pure Food and Drug Act. Identifying

railroad discrimination as a major issue, he supported the Hepburn bill, which granted broader power to the Interstate Commerce Commission to set railroad rates and placed interstate pipelines under its domain. By bringing Standard Oil to heel, Roosevelt hoped to check two abuses at once: railroad collusion and industrial monopoly. When the Bureau of Corporations sent him its report on the oil trust, it highlighted Standard's collusion, both in secret rates and open discrimination, with the railroads. Seizing upon this as a potent tool to push through the Hepburn bill, Roosevelt made the five-hundred-page report public on May 2, 1906. "The report shows that the Standard Oil Company has benefited enormously up almost to the present moment by secret rates," the president declared.[8]

Seriously misreading the punitive public mood, Rockefeller remained silent. When Charles M. Pratt drafted a reply, Rockefeller objected in no uncertain terms: "Giving broadcast [to] this information at this date is unwise and is a headliner for more drastic treatment by the Fed. Govt." [9] Overriding Rockefeller's dissent, Standard Oil released a statement denying that it had knowingly committed any unlawful actions.

In Standard Oil, Teddy Roosevelt found a trust tailor-made for his purposes: big, rich, brutal, unpopular, and totally unrepentant. He adored grandstanding and liked to use his bully pulpit to incite a popular furor. With an expugilist's flair for feints and bluffs, he kept the combine thoroughly confused about his true sentiments. At moments, he issued strong public denunciations: "Every measure for honesty in business that has been passed in the last six years has been opposed by these men."[10] Even less temperate in private, he told his attorney general that the Standard Oil directors were "the biggest criminals in the country."[11] Then, in friendly private chats at the White House, he disarmed the very Standard directors he had reviled by seeming the soul of civility. In early March 1906, Archbold and Rogers were received cordially at the White House, as Junior reported to his father in confidence:

[The president] professed great ignorance of the affairs of the company, saying his knowledge of it was "nebulous." As to the investigation on foot through Mr. Garfield's department, he seemed to know little. . . . He exhibited no personal animosity or unkindly feeling, nor could they judge from anything said that he himself was at the bottom of this investigation.

While Archbold professed satisfaction, Junior, educated by his father-in-law in the president's mutable ways, was more skeptical. "Senator Aldrich observed at my house the other night that while the President agreed with whoever talked last with him and seemed won over entirely to that view of the matter, the following day the next man who approached him with a different view gained an equally cordial hearing and relief."[12]

Even as Roosevelt entertained the bosses of Standard Oil, he was about to unleash the government's full fury against it. He was offended by its obstructive tactics with Garfield, its refusal to concede the legitimacy of his investigation. When he sent the Garfield Report to Congress, he warned that the Justice Department might prosecute Standard Oil for the abuses revealed. This linkage of Standard Oil with railroad rebates laid down the lines for future antitrust prosecution. Like Lloyd and Tarbell, Attorney General William H. Moody decided that the Standard monopoly had been based on a pattern of secret, illegal rebates. In late June 1906, Roosevelt summoned Moody and other cabinet members for an unusual nocturnal session at the White House to discuss possible prosecution. On June 22, Moody announced a preliminary investigation, headed by Frank B. Kellogg, of an antitrust suit against Standard Oil—a move that one newspaper reported under the stark headline, "Standard Oil Officials May Go to Prison." [13]

By this time, Standard officials knew that they had been grossly deceived by the president's genial manner. "There is no doubt that the special Cabinet meeting, which the President called, and where the action was entirely dominated by him, led to the instituting of the proceedings," Archbold told Rockefeller. Trying to strike a brave note, he added, "all well, feeling first rate, and ready for the fight."[14] As always, Standard Oil reacted with bravado, and Hell Hound Rogers sent these fighting words to Rockefeller: "It is my opinion that we are all right and going to win out sure, without doubt I do not think we have anything to fear."[15]

In retrospect, it seems clear that the ambiguous signals from the White House reflected more than duplicity on Roosevelt's part, for he was genuinely reluctant to wield the big stick against Standard Oil. He preferred compromise to antitrust cases, which were slow, time-consuming, and fiendishly difficult to win. He wanted to supervise trusts, not break them up and sacrifice their efficiency, and he was searching for some conciliatory overture from his adversaries, a suggestion that they would accept government oversight and

voluntarily mend their ways. But compromise was so alien to Archbold that he did not see that he might have averted an antitrust suit with a little political flexibility.

By the time the Roosevelt administration formulated its suit, Rockefeller had not darkened the door of 26 Broadway for years. After 1905, he even stopped drawing a token salary. But Rockefeller was still held responsible for the sins of Standard Oil and most vilified when least involved in the business. Aware of the benefits of giving a human face to the trust, Roosevelt presented Rockefeller as the active genius of the cabal, and the press dramatized the antitrust case as a cockfight between Roosevelt and Rockefeller, the White House and 26 Broadway.

Even before the federal government filed formal charges against Standard Oil, a rash of state suits broke out, the most aggressive one being in Missouri, where Herbert S. Hadley was elected attorney general in 1905. As a reform-minded prosecuting attorney in Kansas City, he had developed a reputation for battling corruption. No sooner did he become attorney general than he set out to prove that both Waters-Pierce and Republic Oil were secret marketing subsidiaries of Standard Oil that had fixed prices and carved up the state into exclusive sales territories with Standard Oil of Indiana. In serving subpoenas upon Standard executives in Manhattan, Hadley's men proved to be agile daredevils. "The gentlemen are following their daily avocation in town here but moving cautiously," Junior reported to his father from 26 Broadway.[16] One morning, Henry Rogers strode rapidly from his Manhattan town house to his chauffeured car. As it pulled away from the curb, a process server named M. E. Palemdo sprang from a hiding spot and landed on the running board. "Is this Mr. Henry H. Rogers?" he asked. While a speechless Rogers stared at this impudent interloper, Palemdo flung the subpoena at him, flashed his court order, then leaped from the speeding vehicle.

Even with such acrobatics, Hadley's minions could not catch Rockefeller, and the press joined in the national manhunt. Tracing a welter of rumors, reporters erroneously placed the titan aboard Henry Rogers's yacht, anchored off Puerto Rico, or in a hideaway with Flagler in Key West. As he decamped from one estate to the next, Rockefeller was reduced to the degrading life of a fugitive. Then his whereabouts were betrayed by the telltale cheese. Every day at Pocantico, Rockefeller received a shipment of his favorite cheese aboard the New York Central. One day, a local hack driver, Henry Cooge, informed the press that suspicious cheeses were again entering Pocantico.

“Them cheeses,” he said, “I would recognize anywhere, no matter whether it is day or night. . . . Rockefeller, in my opinion, is somewhere on his estate.”[17]

Cooge’s nose was correct: Rockefeller had retreated to Pocantico, turning it into his fortress, flanked on every side by detectives. Waves of process servers flung themselves against the battlements to no effect. “Time and again,” said one newspaper, “process-servers in various disguises have succeeded in passing the pickets, but never have they penetrated beyond the inner guard of detectives. When discovered they have been handled roughly and promptly ejected by the oil king’s minions.”[18] Afraid that his phone was being tapped, Rockefeller advised Cettie not to telephone him. He also advised his secretary at 26 Broadway to forward letters to him in plain envelopes without return addresses.

At a convenient moment, via a backdoor route, Rockefeller fled by boat from Tarrytown to Golf House in Lakewood, where he set up conditions worthy of a maximum-security prison. Floodlights were trained on people approaching the estate at night, and delivery wagons were searched thoroughly, lest they conceal crouching servants of the law. When Abby gave birth to John D. Rockefeller III in March 1906, the newspapers gloated that because of Hadley’s marauding agents Rockefeller could not visit his first male grandson bearing the Rockefeller name. The New York *World* taunted him with the headline, “Grandson Born to John D. Rockefeller And He, Mewed Up in His Lakewood Fort, Could Only Rejoice by Phone.”[19] This artful dodger urged relatives to keep his location secret. He advised brother-in-law William Rudd: “Confidentially I prefer not to have it known where I am. It often saves me much annoyance. My correspondence has been cut down fifty or seventy-five per cent since the autumn. I say this because some curious people might be asking you if you heard from me or if you were writing me, etc. I do not wish to have it known now or at any time.” [20] During the first round of testimony in New York, Hadley failed to get Rockefeller on the stand, but the humiliating pursuit had made an impression on him. After Hadley returned to Missouri, Rockefeller inquired of Archbold, “Would it be well for us to see how we could settle the Missouri cases without further litigation or trouble? I am not prepared to say, but suggest that we give it careful thought.”[21]

No sooner had he finished evading Hadley’s men than Rockefeller’s testimony was sought in a Philadelphia suit against the Pennsylvania

Railroad. Instructed by his lawyers not to venture within one hundred miles of the city, he had George Rogers draw a hundred-mile radius around Philadelphia on a map, and he did not penetrate that ring. Slowly, his life was being tied into knots by court cases. In March 1906, when Junior wanted him to attend his class reunion at Brown or at least to write a congratulatory note, Rockefeller declined, explaining that "if the location from which I wrote was not given it would cause comment. If the letter was dated from 26 Broadway, that would cause comment, especially in connection with the statement that I had not been in my office for many years. . . . Possibly if no reference was made to me on this occasion, it might be better."[22]

As lawsuits kept appearing, Rockefeller reacted with the indignation of a man who felt wronged, and he cynically dismissed the politicians behind them as sensation-mongers. Nevertheless, he was being held hostage to Standard Oil's legal travails and expressed frustration with his nominal title of honorary president, which made him a lightning rod for attacks against the trust. When he sounded out Gates and Junior about resigning, he recalled that when Standard Oil of New Jersey was formed, he had allowed his name to be used "at the solicitation of my associates, though I earnestly requested them to name my successor."[23] Both Gates and Junior pressed him to drop the unwanted title, which they thought a handicap to the conduct of his philanthropies.

In August 1906, amid great secrecy, Rockefeller quietly dictated a letter to George Rogers, resigning as president of Standard Oil and asking for speedy board approval—a request he renewed several times over the next few years. As he told Archbold, "I am placed in a false position and subjected to ridicule for not knowing about the affairs as one should know to be in the official relation; and I shall not be surprised to hear of stringent legislation to punish people for occupying positions in this way."[24] Every time that Rockefeller made this plea, Archbold resisted, afraid that his departure might appear to repudiate the organization at a vulnerable moment and undermine shareholder confidence. As far as Archbold was concerned, Rockefeller was now in too deep to back out. "We told him that he had to keep" the title of president, Henry Rogers had earlier told Ida Tarbell. "These cases against us were pending in the courts; and we told him that if any of us had to go to jail, he would have to go with us!"[25]

Rockefeller and his colleagues had been slow to grasp the power of the

growing newspaper chains and mass-circulation magazines, which could now saturate the country with a story. Rockefeller's image was suddenly everywhere. One cartoonist pictured him approaching a newsstand where his face was featured on the cover of every publication and dolefully asking the vendor: "Do you have any that aren't about me?" In another cartoon, Rockefeller shoveled coins into one side of a scale, with a scrap of paper saying "A Few Kind Words" on the other side; the caption wondered: "What Would He Give for Them?" This most secretive of men saw his most obscure designs exposed everywhere. Wanting to forget the past, he now had to confront it at every turn.

In retrospect, it seems clear that Rockefeller's press critics profited from a fleeting transitional moment when corporations had not adapted to the new media and lacked any public-relations apparatus. For nearly three years, Standard Oil was assailed by Ida Tarbell and made only halfhearted responses. When editorials appeared impugning the *McClure's* series, for instance, Rockefeller had copies circulated widely. And for years, Standard Oil clandestinely paid $15,000 per annum to an English economist named George Gunton who edited a magazine that with telltale regularity disputed Lloyd and Tarbell. (For fear of the political consequences, Rockefeller and his descendants always balked at outright ownership of major news properties.) The trust also financed a sympathetic history, *The Rise and Supremacy of the Standard Oil Company* by Gilbert H. Montague, which began as his thesis as a Harvard undergraduate. Yet these were random efforts, not a coordinated counterattack.

The real publicity watershed for Standard Oil came after the tainted-money controversy. Feeling impotent in the face of misinformation, Gates badgered Rockefeller with plans for a literary bureau, and Rockefeller encouraged him to speak to Archbold. According to Gates, Archbold was "overjoyed" by Rockefeller's change of heart, and the upshot was that the trust hired its first publicist, Joseph I. C. Clarke, an editor of the New York Herald. [26] Although Ivy Lee was already handling publicity for the Pennsylvania Railroad, such a step was still a novelty in corporate America. Most businesses did not concede the legitimacy of journalists poking into their affairs and consequently had no full-time publicist on the payroll. A jovial, outgoing poet and playwright, Clarke would greet reporters with a quip and a cigar to warm up the trust's image. Before long, he was lining up reporters for breezy, lighthearted interviews with Rockefeller, featuring a game of golf with the mogul, who obligingly delivered pithy observations on topical subjects.

Articles began to appear with titles like “The Human Side of John D. Rockefeller,” as if its existence wasn’t taken for granted.

At first, Junior doubted the efficacy of even favorable stories. But as early as 1903, he and Parmalee Prentice beseeched Senior to publish an authorized biography to rebut Tarbell’s work before it formed the basis of future histories. Sure that history would vindicate him, Rockefeller at first temporized, then compromised to appease his son—setting a pattern for the next three decades. In 1904, he began dictating answers to biographical questions posed by Starr Murphy, yet his heart was not in it, and the project soon expired. Work on an official Standard Oil history fared only marginally better. In 1906, a special executive committee of Standard Oil of New Jersey hired the Reverend Leonard Woolsey Bacon to write a history, and Rockefeller vetted his chapter on the South Improvement Company. Then Bacon got sick and only a pamphlet appeared.

Rockefeller imagined that the press’s muckraking ardor would cool shortly. He took comfort from the fact that the new mass media exemplified the big-business capitalism they deplored and so could not very well tolerate radical critiques for long. How could big newspaper barons such as Joseph Pulitzer crusade against their own interests? As Rockefeller assured Gates, “The owner of the *World* is also a large owner of property, and I presume that, in common with other newspaper owners who are possessed of wealth, his eyes are beginning to be opened to the fact that he is like Samson, taking the initiative to pull the building down upon his head.”[27] By 1905, Rockefeller and his entourage were picking up hints that investigative zeal was ebbing among the editors at *McClure’s*, where, Starr Murphy reported, “the thing has now gone so far that they themselves are getting disgusted and heartily wish they were out of it.”[28] In March 1906, Teddy Roosevelt delivered his famous speech at Washington’s Gridiron Club in which he borrowed a term from *Pilgrim’s Progress* and denounced the new investigative reporters as muckrakers who kept their eyes fixed on lowly matters instead of occasionally lifting them up to heaven. The muckrakers were now on the wane, but the trustbusters were not.

Hounded by government and the press, Rockefeller found little solace in family affairs. In May 1906, he provided one cousin with a somber litany of problems that had beset the family since the Tarbell series. Edith had returned from her therapeutic travels in Europe, which were supposed to alleviate her depression, but she was sick and recuperating only slowly; Junior was making

progress after his breakdown but was still weak; Alta had been in bed for several weeks after surgery; and Cettie was laid low with pneumonia and grippe. “So I think we will agree,” Rockefeller summed up, “that no one family has a monopoly of the ills of life.”[29] At sixty-six, he was the healthiest specimen in the family.

Of all the family medical problems, the most worrisome was that of Bessie. She and her husband, Charles Strong, had moved to Cannes in May 1904 to confer with neurological experts, especially a Dr. Bourcart. Now, two years later, she was also suffering from heart trouble and was too debilitated to return home. While Rockefeller applauded her for seeking rest in a warm, sunny climate, he was distressed by her two-year absence abroad. Sensitive to her delicate psychological state, he sent her gently whimsical letters. “I weigh nearly two hundred pounds, without my five wigs,” he wrote in December 1905. “You should see them! They are real works of art, and most satisfactory. I sleep in one, and do not know how I got along all these years without the hair.”[30]

In spring 1906, frustrated by Bessie’s absence, Rockefeller and Cettie decided to spend seven weeks with the Strongs in France—an eternity abroad for these two provincials—at their summer residence in Compiègne, northeast of Paris. That May, Charles had reported that Bessie “you will be glad to hear, is in better condition at the present than at any time since we came abroad, though we shall hardly be able to cross the ocean this summer.”[31] Rockefeller might have seen a sudden chance to deliver a timely plea for Bessie’s return to America. In commenting on the trip, George Santayana said of the Rockefellers, “they are going to travel under an assumed name, to protect themselves from begging letters and indiscreet curiosity.”[32] But Rockefeller might also have wanted to travel incognito to foil efforts to serve him with subpoenas.

In June 1906, the Rockefeller party—including Cettie, Lute, Alta, and Dr. Biggar—sailed for France aboard the *Deutschland,* with the Rockefeller name discreetly omitted from the passenger list. When it was learned that Rockefeller was aboard, the press busied itself with speculation about his motives. Some reporters stressed his desire to avoid testimony and others his supposedly broken health. Perhaps the most outrageous theory came from a *New York American* reporter, William Hoster, who conjectured luridly that Rockefeller’s stomach was ruined, that he was going to consult a renowned

European specialist, and that he might never return alive. Hoping to observe Rockefeller at close range, Hoster purchased a ticket for the crossing, intending to file a series entitled “How the Richest Man in the World Plays.”

During the voyage, as he stalked his quarry, Hoster was amazed at how different Rockefeller was from the stereotype that he himself had foisted on readers. For one thing, Rockefeller had an excellent appetite and wolfed down three meals a day. “It was a distinct shock to me,” he later wrote, “when Mr. Rockefeller strolled up the plank to find him, instead of the hopeless dyspeptic that he had been painted, a tall, broad-shouldered, robust man, with ruddy complexion, clear eyes, alert step and altogether vigorous manner.”[33] Far from being aloof, Rockefeller fairly cavorted around the ship: bursting into a dance when he bested Dr. Biggar at shuffleboard; donning a harlequin’s costume the night of the captain’s dinner; and delighting small children with his antics. “One sturdy little fellow one afternoon produced two pennies, which he insisted upon sharing with his playmate Rockefeller,” Hoster later wrote. “The man of millions gravely accepted the copper and carefully placed it in his pocket, then, with his face turned seaward impulsively took up the child and folded his arms about it.”[34] This warmhearted man was a revelation to Hoster.

One part of Hoster’s assignment was to land an exclusive interview with Rockefeller. When the boat docked at Cherbourg, he knew that the Rockefeller party would shortly roar off in a touring car and that he had to confront the mogul at once. While Rockefeller wandered in an arbor, Hoster accosted him and introduced himself. Though he pretended that he never read his critics, Rockefeller evidently knew Hoster’s byline and expressed bitterness at the absurd treatment of his health. Hoster meekly confessed his error. Then, with a reporter’s cheek, he asked, “Mr. Rockefeller, have you ever reflected that perhaps you yourself may be in a measure responsible for the way that you have been treated by the newspapers?” He recounted how, dozens of times, he had gone to Rockefeller’s homes to try to interview him but had never been admitted or even allowed a glimpse, which seemed to verify the reports of ill health. Turning to another canard that Hoster had swallowed, Rockefeller noted that he had not been involved in Standard Oil management for many years. “Is it possible that is not known?” he asked. “I have made no concealment of it. All my friends know it.”[35] Yet Hoster insisted that he and other reporters were genuinely ignorant of that, and he implored him to make it public.

For a time, Rockefeller gazed stonily at Hoster and dug his walking stick into the gravel path. Then his face relaxed and a faint smile crossed his lips. “So it is all my fault,” Rockefeller said, with a touch of sarcasm. Then, after a pause, he added more seriously, “I suppose there may be something in what you say, though I had never thought of it in that way before.”[36] Since Rockefeller had demonized reporters, much as they had demonized him, he was surprised to find that Hoster was sincere and invented stories for lack of accurate information.

Rockefeller’s attitude toward the press had already begun to evolve with Standard’s hiring of Joseph I. C. Clarke, which might have predisposed him to talk more freely with Hoster. When Hoster asked if he was worth a billion dollars, Rockefeller shot back, “Nothing like it—not by one-third of that amount. I want to make clear to you the injury that is done to me by these persistent stories that I am worth a billion dollars. They provoke in the minds of thousands thoughts which lead to great unhappiness.”[37] Gradually opening up as they walked along, Rockefeller told Hoster how grieved he was to be transformed into a monster. “Is it not patent that I have been made into a sort of frightful ogre, to slay which has become a favorite resource of men seeking public favor?”[38] As always, Rockefeller blamed business rivals and demagogic politicians for his troubles. Yet however self-serving his remarks, he was at least now talking to a reporter. Then, to Hoster’s extreme amazement, Rockefeller invited him to accompany the party to Compiègne. How could he possibly resist?

Charles and Bessie were renting the Château des Avenues at the edge of the forest of Compiègne for the summer. Once the summer home of Queen Isabella of Spain, it was now owned by the Duc de l’Aigle. Despite his wife’s illness, Charles was winding up a new book called *The Origin of Consciousness.* The Rockefellers were heartened to find the forty-year-old Bessie in improved health, though her mental faculties remained gravely impaired. When George Santayana visited during the Rockefellers’ stay, he wrote to a friend, apropos of Charles, “It is a terrible life he leads as his wife is like a child, hopelessly ill, yet apparently not going to die for the present.”[39] Unlike Hoster, Santayana was shocked at how poorly Rockefeller looked, old and wrinkled and wearing a “pepper and salt wig decidedly too small for him.”[40]

After a lifetime spent escaping reporters, Rockefeller now converted

William Hoster into his bosom companion. They rambled through the forest, golfed, and dined together in local hotels. After teaching Hoster how to ride a bike, he took him cycling down the main street of Compiègne, along with his adored nine-year-old granddaughter, Margaret. Hoster was struck by Rockefeller's strong populist streak, how he was intrigued by common people but indifferent to the highborn. In discussing Napoleon, Rockefeller said, "He was a human being and virile because he came direct from the ranks of the people. There was none of the stagnant blood of nobility or royalty in his veins."[41] Rockefeller was entranced by Joan of Arc. "Where did she get her wisdom, if it was not inspired of Heaven?" he asked. [42] Sight-seeing with Hoster, Rockefeller might have begun to taste, for the first time, the pleasures of confession. "They will know me better when I am dead, Mr. Hoster," Rockefeller said one day. "There has been nothing in my life that will not bear the utmost scrutiny." [43]

Rockefeller found it impossible during this European idyll to banish thoughts of his tribulations at home. Around the time of his departure from New York, Attorney General Moody had announced the preliminary antitrust investigation of Standard Oil. Then, in early July, Rockefeller received word that a probate court in Hancock County, Ohio, had brought an antitrust action against Standard Oil and issued a warrant for Rockefeller's arrest. The local sheriff had bragged to reporters that he would be on the dock to greet Rockefeller when he sailed back from Europe. George Rogers relayed a message from Archbold, who called the Ohio suit frivolous but advised Rockefeller to extend his European stay. Rogers also reported a new suit in the works in Arkansas. "There seems to be a perfect wave of attacks all along the line," he warned from New York.[44] By late July, the Standard lawyers, reversing their earlier position, pressed Rockefeller to return, assuring him that the Ohio case was targeted against Standard Oil companies in the state, not individuals. As it turned out, Rockefeller was not arrested at the dock, since his lawyers had arranged for him to testify voluntarily in the Ohio case.

Having booked return passage on the *Amerika* for July 20, 1906, John and Cettie yearned to take Bessie with them. Rockefeller and Charles clashed repeatedly over this question. Charles later told William James, "I had an uphill fight to prevent Mr. Rockefeller from taking his daughter back with him in defiance of expert opinion."[45] Rockefeller refused to believe that Bessie was too frail to make the crossing. In the end, somewhat reluctantly, even resentfully, he acquiesced in Charles's decision to keep her in France.

Charles might have performed one signal service for him, however. One Sunday afternoon, he read aloud an essay that he had drafted on the duties of rich men, arguing that when people accumulated wealth on a colossal scale, they should then convert that wealth into public trusts, administered by trustees for the commonweal. This essay might have strengthened Rockefeller's wish to create a huge philanthropic foundation.

Back in New York in August, Rockefeller tried to launch a new era in his relations with the press. In fact, reporters were so startled by his sudden, voluble friendliness that one headline declared, "Oil King Acts Like Political Candidate."[46] When Hoster published a long, flattering interview with Rockefeller, the latter applauded the "fair and square treatment" he had received.[47] Deciding to combat ghoulish stories about his patient's health, Dr. Biggar gathered reporters and said, "Mr. Rockefeller is in stronger physical health than he has been in the last fifteen years. He is as active and as light-hearted as a schoolboy. The trip has benefited him wonderfully."[48]

Though sorry to return without Bessie, the Rockefellers had been encouraged by her progress, and Rockefeller, in thanksgiving, distributed shares of stock to family members. These hopes were cruelly dashed when word came from France on November 13 that Bessie had suffered a paralytic stroke. Rockefeller wired Charles, "Love Sympathy Hope. Leave nothing undone." He took comfort in the thought that Bessie had a good doctor, an attentive husband, and a loving daughter. But the next day came the dreadful wire from Charles: "Bessie Passed Away at Two O'Clock This Morning Without Suffering." [49] Deeply shaken, Rockefeller replied: "We all send love. All is well with dear Bessie. Command us for any service. Father." [50] By a ghastly coincidence, this news arrived just as the government began to prosecute Standard Oil under the Sherman Antitrust Act.

When Bessie Strong died, so little was known about this reclusive heiress that the newspapers strained to pad out their obituaries, admitting that she was known only to a small circle of family intimates. In late November, Charles and Margaret brought the body back for burial in the Sleepy Hollow Cemetery in Tarrytown. Having lost Bessie, the Rockefellers wanted Charles to settle in America, but he was now a permanent expatriate. As he told William James, "I have never been especially proud of being an American." [51] Fluent in German, Hebrew, Latin, Greek, and French, he wanted to return to Europe, seeing it as the fountainhead of culture. For Rockefeller, American

to the marrow, convinced that European society was decadent, such an attitude was incomprehensible. Around this time, when reporters asked whether he might ever retire to Europe, he replied, “The United States can’t develop enough drawbacks to make me lose the feeling that there is no place like home.”[52]

To Rockefeller’s immense chagrin, Charles took Margaret to England, where she went to school in Sussex and then to Newnham College, Cambridge. During the next thirty years, Charles took an apartment in Paris and a villa in Fiesole near Bernard Berenson’s I Tatti, living the life of a solitary, melancholy widower. Rockefeller kept renewing his earnest plea that Margaret be educated in New York City, and it became a sore point with him that Charles refused to oblige him. A year after Bessie’s death, Rockefeller discontinued all further gifts to his son-in-law, though not to Margaret. He feared that Margaret would become isolated from the rest of the family and was haunted by fears that she would be seduced by a continental fortune hunter. As he bemoaned to Edith, “[Margaret] is a dear girl. How much we wish she were at school in this country, where we could see her oftener; and when she gets all through with the English school, where are the American acquaintances to come from? I am talking this to her and Charles plainly, but without any encouraging response.”[53]

Rockefeller worried that Charles was exposing his granddaughter to too many radical, secular ideas. That Charles deplored capitalism, advocated trade unions, and favored taxes to rectify inequalities of income—these things Rockefeller could tolerate. But he could not condone that Charles led his daughter away from the church and deprived her of religious instruction. In 1908, Charles told Junior that he had dismissed Margaret’s beloved Irish governess, a Miss Lawrenson, for introducing religion into their household. “I find that, quite without her fault, Margaret was imbibing Catholic ideas, and there was nothing for it but to make a change, greatly as I regretted letting Miss L. go.”[54] Every time that Charles and Margaret visited New York, the Rockefellers tried to lure them back to church—a strategy that probably backfired and fortified their resolve to stay away. During one such visit in 1909, Junior wrote to his mother, “Charles and Margaret took supper with us again last Sunday night and went with us to church as far as the corner of Fifth Avenue and Forty-Sixth Street. Whether we ever get any nearer or not time only will tell.” [55] More than a decade after Bessie’s death, Rockefeller was still jockeying to get Margaret back, asking his son-in-law Harold

McCormick if he and Edith could use their “united influence to get Charles and Margaret to come over here when it is possible to do so. We want to have Margaret live with us.”[56]

Before considering the particulars of the antitrust case against Standard Oil, it is worth pursuing for a moment Rockefeller’s metamorphosis into a master of public relations. Back at Forest Hill that autumn, Rockefeller did something unexpected: He received—in a suitably jolly mood—a delegation from the American Press Humorists, who were so charmed by his wit that they elected him an honorary member and then cheerfully boasted that they now had the highest per-capita income of any such society in the world. For a long time, Starr Murphy and other aides had argued that if only reporters would meet Rockefeller and see him as a father, friend, and neighbor, he would not be so grotesquely misrepresented in the press. Joe Clarke invited more reporters to golf with the titan, and these festive outings, full of gags and banter, invariably produced favorable articles. “I have as my constant companions at golf, magazine writers and newspaper men,” Rockefeller wrote to Harold McCormick in September 1906. “They say they did not know me before, and seem entirely friendly and well disposed.” [57]

As he abandoned his fearful attitude toward the press, he loosened up, as if liberated by the change. It formed part of a general development away from the more severe manner of his business years. *Leslie’s Weekly* reported the following year, “At the age of sixty-seven he is growing out of his chrysalis. For the first years of his life he is beginning to enjoy himself. Two years ago he dodged newspaper men. Now he courts them.” [58] Virtually every reporter who profiled Rockefeller was surprised to discover a courteous, lighthearted old gentleman. “Never have I known anyone who could approach Mr. Rockefeller in thoughtful little attentions,” one impressed reporter wrote. “This is the testimony of all his guests. His worst enemy would succumb to this treatment.”[59] In response to this friendlier press treatment, Edith started giving her father giant scrapbooks, stuffed with the hundreds of articles about him that appeared around the world each year.

Though he had spurned many chances to respond to Ida Tarbell and declined offers to write his life, Rockefeller now decided to publish his memoirs in Tarbell-like monthly installments in *The World’s Work.* The magazine was an especially safe, attractive forum since its editor, Walter H. Page, was a member of the General Education Board. In February 1908,

Rockefeller began to play golf daily in Augusta, Georgia, with the publisher, Frank N. Doubleday. Their talks resulted in a string of seven articles published under the title “Random Reminiscences of Men and Events” starting in October 1908. These quaint, superficial pieces were ghostwritten by Doubleday, assisted by Starr Murphy. After Doubleday, Page published them in book form in 1909, the volume was released simultaneously in England, Germany, France, and Italy. Rockefeller thought this due penance from publishers who were trying to undo past harm “when they supposed they were serving the cause of righteousness,” as he told Edith.[60]

For legal reasons, editing the series required great tact. Rockefeller knew that the attorney general would be scanning the series for his antitrust suit and Standard’s lawyers rigorously combed every word. At first, Rockefeller wanted to trim the Widow Backus section, citing the petty sums at stake, but Gates rejoined that it was precisely the minute sums that had given the story its hold over the popular imagination. “I doubt if any single libel against you or the company has done more harm,” Gates said bluntly. “If a man or a company could do such things to a poor and defenceless widow and for a small sum of money, how relentless must be its spirit and its methods!” [61] Bowing to Gates’s reasoning, the titan devoted more pages to Backus than to any of his mighty industrial ventures.

For the most part, Rockefeller eschewed controversy in his book. Doubleday wanted to replace the image of the forbidding Rockefeller with that of the easygoing man he had come to know. In the series, Rockefeller struck an avuncular note, presenting himself as an avid gardener and sportsman, telling the reader at the outset, “On a rainy morning like this, when golf is out of the question, I am tempted to become a garrulous old man.” [62] He was just plain John, the next-door neighbor. Of his current life, he said, “I live like a farmer away from active happenings in business, playing golf, planting trees; and yet I am so busy that no day is long enough.” [63] As always, he tried to seem a model of Christian forbearance, turning the other cheek to unfair attacks against him. “I have had at least my full share of adverse criticism, but I can truly say that it has not embittered me, nor left me with any harsh feeling against a living soul.” [64]

In *Random Reminiscences,* Rockefeller described a fair world where strong, hardworking people were rewarded, and lazy folks punished; no admixture of tragedy clouded his vision. Despite the swelling tide of antitrust

suits, Rockefeller reiterated his faith that cooperation, not competition, advanced the general welfare. “Probably the greatest single obstacle to the progress and happiness of the American people,” he intoned, “lies in the willingness of so many men to invest their time and money in multiplying competitive industries instead of opening up new fields, and putting their money into lines of industry and development that are needed.” [65]

Though Rockefeller’s memoirs received mixed reviews, they helped to humanize his image. Everyone, of course, was eager for Ida Tarbell’s reaction, and she duly delivered a booming cannonade of criticism to a Chicago newspaper: Listen: There is the Mr. Rockefeller of his autobiography, for whom I have a real, a great admiration. He is admirable—there is no other word—in his quietly wise discussions of the proper setting out of Japanese quinces and blue firs, of the arrangements of geraniums and roses. . . . And then there is the other Mr. Rockefeller. . . . Utterly and almost as impersonally ruthless as a whirlwind or a torrent, he has swept through the country a conquering Hun, regardless of all save winning for himself. No, he’s not a Hun: the destructive force of him is too intelligent. He is more like Bernard Shaw’s Napoleon— great, because for himself he suspended the ordinary laws of conventionality and morality while keeping them in operation for other people. He is a mastodon of mental machinery. And would you ask a steam plow for pity? Would you look for scruples in an electric dynamo?[66]

Clearly, the lady had not mellowed.

Besides acting as midwife for *Random Reminiscences*, Doubleday made another valuable contribution to Rockefeller’s rehabilitation. As head of the Periodical Publishers’ Association, he dreamed up the idea of having Rockefeller address a luncheon of New York publishers; in a splendid coup de théâtre, the mogul would be introduced by Mark Twain, the chief satirist of the Gilded Age. As it turned out, Twain was ripe for this venture. In the summer of 1907, his dear friend Henry H. Rogers had suffered a stroke, and Twain had stayed with him in Bermuda from February 24 to April 11, 1908, easing his convalescence. Twain’s favorite daughter, Susy, had died of spinal meningitis a decade earlier at age twenty-four. When Frank Doubleday told Twain that Simon Flexner’s antimeningitis serum, developed at the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research, had cut the death rate from the disease from 75 to 25 percent of those afflicted, Twain was all the more eager to help.

Always on good terms with Rockefeller, Twain thought he deserved a fair hearing from the press and was sure he would make a good impression on the publishers. Beyond his affection for Rogers, Twain recoiled at the sanctimonious tone the press often adopted in attacking the trusts. He knew all about Rockefeller's business reputation, but some perverse, irreverent streak attracted him to anyone who was so deliciously notorious. For Twain, a man so universally hated by the American public had to have many redeeming features.

When Doubleday asked Rockefeller to meet with the magazine publishers, Rockefeller, now an old hand at press relations, replied, "Certainly. Why not? I am willing to meet and talk with any body of men, friends or enemies." [67] On May 20, 1908, Doubleday sat at the head of the luncheon table at the Aldine Club, surrounded by forty or fifty magazine publishers, when the rear door flew open and Mark Twain, Henry Rogers, and the two Rockefellers, junior and senior, marched single file into the room. As Twain noted of those present, "there was probably not one whose magazine had not had the habit for the past few years of abusing the Rockefellers, Henry Rogers, and the other chiefs of the Standard Oil." [68] Since Rockefeller had avoided contact with the literati, three-fourths of the publishers, by Twain's estimate, had never before set eyes on him.

First Rogers and then Twain gave brief introductions before Rockefeller got up to speak. His talk, illustrated with moving anecdotes, described the work of the RIMR. Rockefeller was still a tall, imposing man, yet there was now a touch of melancholy in his eyes, and it was a sadder, more reflective face that stared out at the magazine publishers. The next morning, Twain, who had no equal himself on the lecture platform, jotted down this tribute:

Mr. Rockefeller got up and talked sweetly, sanely, simply, humanly, and with astonishing effectiveness, being interrupted by bursts of applause at the end of almost every sentence; and when he sat down all those men were his friends and he had achieved one of the completest victories I have ever had any knowledge of. Then the meeting broke up, and by a common impulse the crowd moved forward and each individual of it gave the victor a hearty handshake, and along with it some hearty compliments upon his performance as an orator.[69]

It was an unlikely triumph for a reclusive man who had refrained from public speaking and had fled from the press for so long. Unfortunately, he had turned

this skill to advantage much too late, since the political assault against Standard Oil now headed inexorably toward its finale.

A grim John D. Rockefeller votes in November 1908, not long after the shocking disclosure of the Archbold bribery scandal. *(Courtesy of the Rockefeller Archive Center)*

CHAPTER 27

Judgment Day

On November 18, 1906, the federal government filed suit in Missouri to dissolve Standard Oil under the Sherman Antitrust Act, naming as defendants Standard Oil of New Jersey, sixty-five companies under its control, and a pantheon of chieftains, including John and William Rockefeller, Henry Flagler, Oliver Payne, John Archbold, and Henry Rogers. They were charged with monopolizing the oil industry and conspiring to restrain trade through a familiar litany of tactics: railroad rebates, the abuse of their pipeline monopoly, predatory pricing, industrial espionage, and the secret ownership of ostensible competitors. The proposed remedy was sweeping: to break up the massive combine into its component companies. As a government report documented in 1907, the Standard Oil leviathan still refined 87 percent of all kerosene, handled 87 percent of exported kerosene, marketed 89 percent of domestic kerosene, and was more than twenty times the size of its most serious competitor, Pure Oil. After the suit was filed, Standard officials tried to sound sanguine and could not subdue their now delusional sense of invincibility. In a letter marked “Strictly confidential,” Rockefeller told Archbold of reports that the Justice Department had scant confidence in its own case and that it was just a flimsy vendetta worked up by Roosevelt. “This program is the usual topic of his present day talk with friends and he shows a disposition that is vindictive. If his suit fails, he means to urge legislation, if he can have it framed, aimed at the same target.”[1]

There seems little doubt that Standard Oil seriously misplayed its cards with Roosevelt. In January 1907, the president tangled with one of his nemeses, Ohio senator Joseph B. Foraker, before a crowded dinner at the Gridiron Club in Washington. A stout ally of Standard Oil, Senator Foraker stiffly resisted measures to regulate business. With patent indignation, Roosevelt excoriated Foraker and the “malefactors of great wealth” behind him. As he pronounced the classic phrase, some reporters thought his gaze traveled to J. P. Morgan, whereas Morgan’s friends insisted that the president eyed Henry H. Rogers, then sitting next to Morgan. The latter were probably right, for Morgan and his client firms had handled relations better with the White House. If Roosevelt treated the Morgan interests (U.S. Steel,

International Harvester, et al.) more leniently than he did Standard Oil, it was partly because they had submitted to guidance from the Bureau of Corporations and worked out informal arrangements to correct violations. In briefing his father on the antitrust case, Junior relayed rumors that U.S. Steel had pushed Frank Kellogg to target Standard Oil so as to deflect heat from itself. He also mentioned that several Standard Oil executives, including Charles M. Pratt and Edward T. Bedford, thought that U.S. Steel had wisely placated the government while Archbold had been foolishly antagonistic. Senior preferred to view Standard Oil as vengefully singled out for abuse and claimed that "other large corporations went scot free who were regarded by these ablest attorneys in the land as far more vulnerable than was the Standard Oil Company."[2]

By the summer of 1907, the political fight against Standard Oil had spread across a vast, bloody battlefield, with seven federal and six state suits (Texas, Minnesota, Missouri, Tennessee, Ohio, and Mississippi) in progress against the embattled trust. New legal skirmishes seemed to crop up weekly. That year, an Ohio grand jury brought in 939 indictments against Rockefeller and other Standard Oil officers; a bill was introduced in Tennessee to oust the trust on antitrust grounds; Missouri fined and expelled the Waters-Pierce Company; and so on and so forth.

Approaching his sixty-eighth birthday, Rockefeller had never imagined that his twilight years would be so eventful. His fortune had failed to purchase him even a poor man's mite of tranquillity. As nominal president of Standard Oil, he was in a bind, responsible for actions he had not approved. In a July 1907 letter that betrayed considerable anguish, Rockefeller again pleaded with Archbold to accept his resignation and release him from his torment. During the next two weeks, he repeatedly proffered his resignation, telling Archbold this would free him from several subpoenas. Though he owned 27.4 percent of Standard Oil stock—three times the amount held by Flagler, the next largest shareholder—Archbold turned him down flat, and Rockefeller bowed to his protégé's wishes. But the decision did not sit well with him.

One thing evident amid the spate of lawsuits was that railroad rebates had not faded as an issue, even though pipelines had governed the oil business for more than a generation. When rebates were again forbidden by the Elkins Act of 1903 and the Hepburn Act of 1906, the public naively assumed they had ended. Then the Interstate Commerce Commission reported in January 1907 that Standard Oil was *still* secretly accepting rebates, spying on competitors,

setting up bogus subsidiaries, and engaging in predatory pricing—the same deadly sins patented by Rockefeller back in the 1870s. Roosevelt and his cabinet thirsted for a test case that would prove Standard Oil's collusion with the railroads and dramatize the twin evils of abusive trusts and scheming railroads.

The issue was duly highlighted in a 1907 case in Chicago in which Standard Oil of Indiana was accused of taking illegal rebates from the Chicago and Alton Railroad. The shipments in question had passed between Whiting, Indiana, and East Saint Louis, Illinois, *after* such rebates were outlawed by the Elkins Act. (Rockefeller, we recall, always insisted that Standard Oil took no rebates after they were banned in 1887.) The presiding figure in the Chicago courtroom was a gaunt, outspoken judge with premature white hair named Kenesaw Mountain Landis who, at forty-one, was newly appointed to the federal bench and later served as the first baseball commissioner.

Eager to levy an eye-popping fine against the trust, Landis asked its attorneys for figures on its capitalization and earnings between 1903 and 1905. The Standard lawyers, Landis knew, were in a tight spot: If they furnished the true figures, they might invite a punitive fine; if they withheld them, they would look guilty. On June 26, 1907, the federal district attorney tried to pry loose from Standard counsel John S. Miller a list of employees privy to those numbers. "I'll see you in hell first" was Miller's cordial reply. This riposte backfired: Landis assigned U.S. marshals to subpoena several Standard Oil officials, including Rockefeller. Flouting the judge's request, Rockefeller again fled and stayed with Alta and Parmalee in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. He instructed the bedridden Cettie, by now a battle-hardened veteran, to keep quiet about his whereabouts and send him mail only under the Prentice name. For several days, as the press guessed at Rockefeller's whereabouts, Landis's process server tried to track the titan through the New England countryside.

When Teddy Roosevelt and his attorney general heard that Landis wanted to haul Rockefeller into court, they were greatly dismayed, for if Rockefeller testified in the Chicago case, he might win an "immunity bath" from possible criminal prosecution in the more important federal antitrust suit. They sent an emissary to Chicago to plead with Landis. "I'd like to oblige Mr. Roosevelt," he said. "I'd do anything in reason to oblige him. But Rockefeller is making a monkey out of my process server, and I'm going to bring him before this

court to vindicate its dignity." [3] Rockefeller must have discovered the legal advantages of testimony, because he suddenly contacted Judge Landis from Pittsfield and voluntarily accepted a subpoena from a deputy marshal.

On July 5, 1907, arriving by private railroad car, John and William Rockefeller and Henry Flagler conferred with lawyers at the spacious new offices of Standard Oil of Indiana in Chicago. Instead of cooperating with Landis, Rockefeller counseled defiance and opposed revealing the balance sheets. "But, Mr. Rockefeller, times have changed," Flagler said. "The old maxim, silence is golden, doesn't work so well." "Well," Rockefeller drawled, "it did when I was at the helm."[4] Though he had agreed to travel to Chicago, Rockefeller hesitated to appear in court, and when he canvassed the lawyers present, they seemed to side with him. Then he sounded out the youngest lawyer, Robert W. Stewart, who said, "Mr. Rockefeller, in view of the opinion rendered by the distinguished legal talent present, I hesitate to express an opinion." "Young man," Rockefeller said, "I'm paying you to give me your opinion." Summoning up his courage, Stewart said, "Mr. Rockefeller, you are no different from any other citizen before the law, and if I were you, I would appear."[5] For all his tough talk, Rockefeller was smart enough to abide by the young man's advice.

On the sultry morning of July 6, 1907, John and William Rockefeller arrived at the federal building and found streets teeming with hundreds of spectators. When Rockefeller was spotted in a straw hat, grasping a slender cane, somebody shouted, "Here he comes!" The crowd surged forward in such close ranks that it took a squad of twenty club-wielding detectives to clear a path. Rockefeller grinned when a street urchin called out, "There's a man who got his picture in the paper."[6] Some zealous onlookers tore buttons from Rockefeller's coat. By the time the Rockefeller brothers reached the sixth-floor courtroom, a red-faced William, sweating profusely, muttered, "An outrage! I never heard of such treatment." [7] By contrast, John D. exhibited his usual cool demeanor before an unruly mob. When he entered the sweltering courtroom, with electric fans slicing overhead, he even imitated a reporter trying to take notes in the crush of people. Once the doors were closed, the hum of spectators outside was still so loud that policemen had to clear the corridor.

After the marshal brought down his gavel, Rockefeller began fifteen minutes of unforgettable testimony. A virtuoso of evasive testimony, he was

the tranquil eye of the storm. As one reporter noted, “Mr. Rockefeller was the coolest looking man in the room. Every motion he made was slow and dignified. His step was slow. His replies to the questions of the court were even slower.”[8] Judge Landis, itching to interrogate Rockefeller, had not reckoned on his incomparable mastery of prevarication and selective memory loss. Once again, in the halls of justice, Rockefeller turned himself into a confused old dotard. The most modest question seemed to pose insurmountable challenges to his mind.

To start things off, Judge Landis asked, “Mr. Rockefeller, what is the business of the so-called Standard Oil Company of New Jersey?” “I believe, your Honor . . .” Rockefeller began, then appeared to lose his way. He paused, fiddled with his cane, crossed his legs, then made a second stab at an answer. “I believe, your Honor . . .” Here again, his mind wandered as Judge Landis tapped his spectacles on his desk in frustration. Finally, Rockefeller concentrated his faculties and replied, “I believe, your Honor, they operate an oil refinery in New Jersey.”[9] To all questions, Rockefeller responded in this same slow, disconnected style, making his testimony worthless. In exchange, Landis had to give Rockefeller the one thing he dearly wanted: immunity from criminal prosecution. This testimony was not only a fiasco for the judge but a public-relations victory for Rockefeller. How, people wondered, could this sweet, bumbling old man have been the evil wizard of the trust? His testimony even received plaudits from the press. As he told Archbold afterward, “My experience at Chicago and with the newspaper people generally of late has been very satisfactory.”[10]

A month later, Judge Landis took his revenge. On the morning of August 3, 1907, as more than a thousand people sought entrance to his courtroom, Landis read aloud his decision in the Standard Oil case. (Possibly in anticipation, Rockefeller had just announced a $32 million gift to the General Education Board.) Once again, with difficulty, the marshals shut the great doors to keep out waves of spectators. Pale and edgy, Judge Landis called Standard Oil no better than a common thief and castigated its lawyers for their “studied insolence.”[11] As spectators guffawed at these insults, the bailiffs repeatedly had to rap for order. Then, Landis delivered his bombshell: a fine against Standard Oil of Indiana that dwarfed any other in American corporate history up until that time: $29.24 million ($457 million in 1996 dollars). This was the maximum penalty: $20,000 for each of 1,462 carloads of oil cited in the indictment. Reporters struggled to convey the magnitude of this fine. That

money could build five battleships; fill 177 flatcars with silver dollars; employ 48,730 city-street workers each year. It amounted to slightly more than half the money coined annually by the federal government. Since it represented nearly 30 percent of Standard Oil's $100 million capitalization, Rockefeller's theoretical share of the fine worked out to $8,011,760. Asked about the penalty, Mark Twain said it reminded him of the bride's words the next morning: "I expected it but didn't suppose it would be so big." [12]

Rockefeller used the record fine to put on a characteristic show of aplomb. He was in the middle of a golf foursome in Cleveland when a messenger came sprinting across the fairway, clutching a yellow envelope. Taking it and handing the boy a dime, Rockefeller read the verdict without even a twitch. Finally, he put the message in his pocket and said to his golf partners, "Well, shall we go on gentlemen?"[13] Then he hit an excellent drive of about 160 yards down the fairway. At first, nobody dared to ask the question on their minds, but then one person screwed up his courage: "How much is it?" "Twenty-nine million, two hundred and forty thousand, the maximum penalty, I believe," Rockefeller answered coolly. Then he gestured toward the tee and said, "It is your honor. Will you gentlemen drive?"[14] By all reports, Rockefeller was in superb form that day and completed nine holes in fifty-three shots, his best score ever. The next day, in relating the incident, one Cleveland paper said: "Not by Change of Countenance or Movement Did the Standard's Founder Betray the Fact That He Might Have Been Annoyed or Angered by the Sentence Handed Down in Chicago."[15]

Of course, Rockefeller's poker face concealed deep rage. The Landis fine supported the thesis that the Standard Oil empire was based on unethical, even illegal, rebates, not on the business acumen of its founders. Before the day was over, Rockefeller issued a statement upbraiding the court: "A great injustice has been done the company. It was from ignorance on how the great business was founded. For all these years no one has known and no one seems to have cared how it came into existence."[16] Descrying Teddy Roosevelt's influence, Gates told Rockefeller that he had lost his admiration for the man and hoped that "this amazing and reckless robbery and plunder under the forms of law, may awake the business interests of the country and thoughtful men, to the perils into which we have drifted." [17]

At one point during that famous golf game of August 3, 1907, Rockefeller had remarked, "Judge Landis will be dead a long time before this fine is

paid," and his prediction proved accurate.[18] He seldom spoke so harshly in public. Many observers saw the Landis fine as more of a political statement and a publicity stunt than sound jurisprudence. In July 1908, a federal appeals court not only revoked the fine but severely reprimanded Landis for considering each carload of oil as a separate offense. Judge Peter S. Grosscup, calling Landis's act an "abuse of judicial discretion," ordered a retrial, in which Standard Oil was subsequently found not guilty. [19] Teddy Roosevelt was hopping mad at the appeals court. While he had thought the Landis fine excessive, he had thought the trial itself fair. The day after the fine was thrown out, Roosevelt announced that the government would again prosecute Standard Oil for accepting rebates, since "there is absolutely no question as to the guilt of the defendant nor of the exceptionally grave character of the offense." Dismayed, he said with a touch of bombast that the decision had "hurt the cause of civilization." [20]

By the early fall of 1907, many Wall Street soothsayers were predicting a savage downturn in financial markets in response to the Landis fine and the antitrust suits. "It must be that these persecutions against business interests will not always continue," Senior warned his son in late August. "If so, we must be prepared for very disastrous results to our commercial fabric. I think we better increase our reserves of money with our income." [21] In the week after the Landis fine, Standard Oil shares skidded from 500 to 421, leading a stock-market slump.

For reform-minded critics, the ensuing panic originated with the misbehavior of the business fraternity itself. For several years, the stock market had coasted on a tide of easy money, low interest rates, and manic speculation in copper, mining, and railroad shares. In this euphoric mood, stock promoters had flogged unsound companies, and investors had gorged themselves on watered stock. Among the most flagrant speculators were trust companies that exploited legal loopholes to speculate heavily in the stock market while also lending excessively against securities as collateral. Roosevelt inveighed against "an era of over-confidence and speculation" that would lead to a severe purgative reaction. [22]

As money tightened that September, Rockefeller deposited in several New York banks bonds that could be pledged as security for government loans—a rescue operation for which he reaped a handsome 2 percent commission. As panic overtook Wall Street in late October 1907, throngs of petrified

depositors lined up in front of banks to empty their accounts, and J. P. Morgan rushed back to New York from an Episcopal convention in Richmond. On October 22, after his aides examined the books of the Knickerbocker Trust, Morgan decided that it was hopelessly insolvent and had to be shut. That night, in an extraordinary pledge of faith in a private citizen, Treasury Secretary George Cortelyou met with Morgan in a Manhattan hotel and placed at his disposal twenty-five million dollars in government funds to stem the panic. While Morgan was the impresario of the salvage operation, Rockefeller provided more private money than anybody else.

When Gates got wind of the Knickerbocker's collapse, he telephoned Rockefeller at Pocantico in the early morning and said a public statement from him might restore confidence. Rockefeller stood there in his bathrobe, mulling over the matter, then decided to call Melville E. Stone, general manager of the Associated Press. He told Stone, for quotation, that the country's credit was sound and that, if necessary, he would give half of all he possessed to maintain America's credit. It was an unprecedented statement: A single citizen had promised to bail out Wall Street. The next morning, as these sedative words were reprinted across America, reporters spilled onto the golf course at Pocantico. When asked if he would *really* give half his securities to stop the panic, Rockefeller replied, "Yes, and I have cords of them, gentlemen, cords of them."[23] It was a rare case of Rockefeller boasting about his wealth, but it was clearly meant to lift public morale. Because Rockefeller deposited ten million dollars there, National City Bank had the deepest gold reserves and cash resources of any bank during the panic. "They always come to Uncle John when there is trouble," Rockefeller noted with pride.[24] When J. P. Morgan decided to save the shaky Trust Company of America on October 23, he received three million dollars in rescue funds from George F. Baker of First National Bank and James Stillman of National City Bank, the latter drawing on Rockefeller money.

For the first time in several years, John D. Rockefeller, Sr., strode through the portals of 26 Broadway on October 24 and took up his command post. "I was surprised to find so many men who had come to the front since my last visit years ago. Afterward I had an opportunity to talk with old associates and many new ones, and it was a source of great gratification to me to find that the same spirit of cooperation and harmony existed unchecked."[25] Rockefeller offered his services to J. P. Morgan, and his millions formed part of the twenty-fivemillion-dollar fund that Morgan marshaled that day to keep

the stock market open, averting the bankruptcy of at least fifty brokerage houses. Whatever his personal distaste for Morgan, Rockefeller generously praised his leadership during the 1907 panic. “His commanding personality served a most valuable end,” he wrote in his memoirs. “He acted quickly and resolutely when quickness and decision were the things most needed to regain confidence.” [26]

Several family members sought Rockefeller’s help to withstand the storm. He bought $4.5 million of International Harvester stock from the cash-strapped McCormicks and extended a huge $7 million loan to his brother William, who was hip-deep in stock-market maneuvers. Even with a brother, Rockefeller could not suspend standard business practices—Frank had already learned that—and he asked William to furnish a list of securities as collateral. But when Rockefeller’s adviser Henry E. Cooper demanded more, it prompted an ironic reminder from Rockefeller: “Well, Mr. Cooper, don’t be too rigorous. Remember, William is a very rich man.”[27]

With full-blown panic raging around him, Rockefeller refused to depart from his daily schedule for long and, after his one day at the office, he returned to Pocantico to play golf. During his morning game, he was interrupted repeatedly by urgent messages, and each time he pedaled his bike back to the carriage house and made another enormous pledge to stave off trouble. He then resumed his game with his usual sangfroid and air of unconcern.

During the 1907 panic, Rockefeller, for the first time, appeared civic-minded to the general public and garnered lavish praise. As he told a relative, the newspapers had “spoken very kindly and favorably, and all have shown great appreciation of what we have tried to do to save the ship.”[28] For a time, it seemed this goodwill might moderate the antitrust zeal against Standard Oil, but this hope soon evaporated when Rockefeller told a reporter, “The runaway policy of the past administration can have but one result. It means disaster to the country, financial depression, and chaos.”[29] According to Rockefeller, he made this statement off-the-record and professed pity for the errant reporter who published it in violation of his solemn oath. The comment aggravated the hostility that President Roosevelt already felt toward Rockefeller, especially since Rockefeller kept pleading ill health as his reason for not coming to the White House to discuss Standard Oil. Privately, Roosevelt said that Rockefeller felt wounded because the government had

published the plain truth about Standard Oil.

After the Landis fine was announced, Standard Oil tried to alter its strategy and negotiate a government compromise. That September, it held out a tempting deal to investigators: It would open its books and abide by any recommendations to guarantee compliance with the antitrust laws if the government withdrew its suit. Government officials were caught off guard by this peace offering. “A really astonishing proposal,” James R. Garfield wrote in his diary.[30] But Roosevelt was no longer in the mood for a truce. “If we have a criminal case against these men,” he told Attorney General Charles Bonaparte, “I should be very reluctant to surrender it.”[31]

Archbold should have persisted in his conciliatory approach, but he was too accustomed to heavy-handed politics. He was openly contemptuous of all political attacks against the combine. During the spring and summer of 1908, he held several confidential meetings wih President Roosevelt arranged by Senator Jonathan Bourne of Oregon. The president expressed an earnest wish to see the Standard Oil case settled out of court. While Archbold believed in his sincerity, he also knew that Roosevelt had vacillated on this issue. Archbold then resorted to a typically tactless maneuver. In late October 1907, he had Senator Bourne suggest to the president that if the government struck a deal, Standard Oil would help Roosevelt win renomination in 1908. A horrified Garfield called this brazen offer “stupidly corrupt.” [32]

Because of Rockefeller’s helpful intervention in the Panic, Roosevelt observed a brief moratorium in attacking Standard Oil then made up for lost time in January 1908. In a special message to Congress, he complained that “the speculative folly and flagrant dishonesty of a few great men of wealth” had engendered the loss of fiscal confidence, and he condemned the “bitter and unscrupulous craft” of the Standard Oil leadership in fighting reform measures.[33] The antitrust suit would proceed as planned.

Since Rockefeller had created the largest business empire of the late nineteenth century, it was only fitting that he should face the most massive antitrust suit of his day. Some 444 witnesses delivered 11 million words of testimony; swollen by 1,374 exhibits, the proceedings filled 12,000 pages in 21 thick volumes. Before it was over, Standard Oil also contested some 21 state antitrust suits from Texas to Connecticut, leading one historian to comment, “Never before in the history of the United States had there been so

far-reaching a struggle between industry and government." [34] To supplement its legal staff, Standard Oil retained John G. Milburn and M. F. Elliott of Wall Street, D. T. Watson of Pittsburgh, Moritz Rosenthal of Chicago, and John G. Johnson of Philadelphia. For its part, the Justice Department brought in Charles B. Morrison, a federal district attorney from northern Illinois, and Frank B. Kellogg, a Saint Paul attorney whose success in the case catapulted him to the post of secretary of state in the late 1920s.

Throughout the case, the public fancied Rockefeller to be the all-powerful wire-puller who manipulated Archbold and the other pliant marionettes. If this was sheer fantasy, what then was his actual influence? He did exert limited influence on Standard Oil strategy through the medium of Henry Clay Folger, a Standard Oil director. A thin, bearded man, Folger was diplomatic and extremely diligent in his duties. Unlike the rugged Standard Oil businessmen of an earlier day, Folger had graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Amherst and then attended Columbia Law School. A cultured man, he left to posterity America's foremost collection of Shakespeare First Folios as well as a splendid library. Far more important to Rockefeller was that Folger played excellent golf and joined him on the links every Wednesday morning.

In memos to Folger about the suit, Rockefeller never touched on political or legal tactics but mostly addressed arcane calculations of profitability. Rockefeller wanted to prove that Standard Oil's profits had never been excessive or extortionate. Many other companies watered their stock—that is, issued them at inflated capitalization—so that their dividends appeared deceptively modest. To save on taxes and conform to Ohio law, Standard Oil had kept its capitalization low, which produced misleadingly high dividends of 40 or 50 percent per year. Rockefeller pegged the real dividend rate at something closer to 6 or 8 percent.

Folger performed statistical analyses showing that with its capitalization more accurately stated to reflect retained earnings, Standard Oil had paid average dividends twice as high as Rockefeller had surmised. "I am surprised to find the average dividends for twenty-five years 13.86%," the company founder confessed sheepishly to Folger. Rockefeller now had to rationalize the higher figure and suddenly found it within an acceptable range, noting the larger profits of "many other large businesses with less risk, including the *United States* Steel Company."[35] "Business men will not regard the earnings . . . which you present as excessive," he told Folger.[36] Afraid that militant trustbusters might see things differently, he promised to destroy this

incriminating data. He also reminded Folger that Standard Oil had not kept prices low out of altruism but to deter competition and "keep our profits on such a basis that others would not be stimulated to enter the field of competition with us." [37] This belied his frequent claim that his motive was to bequeath cheap oil to the working people.

During his Standard Oil tenure, Rockefeller had mollified the public by generally keeping kerosene prices low. But when Archbold took control in the mid-1890s, he kept domestic prices high while depressing foreign prices to diminish overseas competition. During the dozen years before Rockefeller's retirement, the trust's return on assets ranged from 11 to 17 percent. With Archbold at the helm, returns soared from 21 to 27 percent between 1900 and 1906. This might have been smart business but it was very poor politics: The trust was booking record profits just when it could least afford to enrage public opinion. It is no coincidence that Ida Tarbell's series and Teddy Roosevelt's trust-busting coincided with Archbold's more grasping regime. He was a much less clever monopolist than his mentor.

When Frank Kellogg grilled Rockefeller in November 1908 at the customs house in New York, much of the testimony concerned Standard Oil's pricing policy. Standing by maps showing the operational areas of Standard marketing units, Kellogg tried to entrap Rockefeller into admitting that the cartel had divided America into exclusive sales territories. "Does the Standard Oil of Ohio have a limited territory?" he asked. "It has not," said Rockefeller calmly. "Has it not in the last five years?" asked Kellogg. "Not to my knowledge," Rockefeller replied. "Its field is the world. That is its mission, to light the world with the cheapest and best."[38] Smiling and imperturbable, Rockefeller kept glancing for guidance to his lawyers, who continually raised objections to Kellogg's questions.

Kellogg tried to show that Standard Oil routinely engaged in predatory pricing, eliminating competitors and then hoisting prices to exorbitant levels. He estimated that true competition prevailed in fewer than 10 percent of all petroleum markets and noted that kerosene prices had risen unreasonably from 1895 (when Archbold took charge) to 1906, creating widespread consumer discontent. To justify Standard's plush earnings, Rockefeller cited everything from fire hazards to the vagaries of drilling to the need to invest in new fields. To which Kellogg responded with sarcasm: "But Standard Oil has been paying enormous dividends right along." Lifting his eyes heavenward, Rockefeller replied, "And we were grateful for it."[39]

Once again, the press found it hard to believe that this amiable old gent with his sudden memory lapses and fuzzy logic was the fearsome raptor of Standard Oil. “Now that Mr. Rockefeller has emerged from his seclusion and is seen in the fierce light of a public inquiry, he appears no such monster as the public fancy has painted,” observed one paper. “He is affable to the point of cordiality.”[40] Said another: “If Rockefeller has been playing a part, he has done so in a way that would do credit to Uriah Heep. If not, it is barely possible that the curious old man has been misrepresented . . . and that the world owes him an apology.” [41] Perhaps if Rockefeller had made himself available at the beginning of his career as he now did at the end, he might not have been sitting in the witness stand.

In anointing Archbold as his successor, Rockefeller had made him the chief potentate in the world oil industry for the next twenty years. Round-faced, bright-eyed, and peppery, with a tiny body and big head, Archbold, the son of a poor Baptist minister, often bounded down the corridor whistling “Onward Christian Soldiers.” But a violent temper lurked beneath the vivacity. Nevertheless, he and Rockefeller always traded compliments about each other. “You know, when John Rockefeller dies,” Archbold said, “the world is going to be surprised to learn what a very great man he has been in every way.”[42] Rockefeller responded in kind: “[Archbold] was a man of imagination, of courage, of great persuasiveness, with a genius for reading men and dealing with them.”[43]

Yet as chief executive of Standard Oil, Archbold stooped to a far rougher style of combat than Rockefeller had, and he freely bribed elected officials. Rockefeller, of course, was no stranger to such skulduggery, but he engaged in payoffs more reluctantly, if only because he so disliked politicians. Archbold had fewer scruples, and as government regulation intruded deeper into business, he decided that the trust needed permanent representation in the U.S. House and Senate.

The first documented instance of Archbold suborning an official occurred in 1898, during Frank Monnett’s suit against Standard of Ohio, when Archbold placed Senator Joseph B. Foraker of Ohio on the payroll. He started with a payment of $15,000, then made another of $14,500 three weeks later, winding up with a total of $44,000 in a six-month period. A corporate lawyer from Cincinnati and former Ohio governor, Foraker was a formidable speaker who earned the nickname of “Fire Alarm Joe” for his rousing oratory.

Archbold got excellent value for his money. In February 1900, he wrote to the senator, apropos of a proposed bill hostile to Standard Oil: “It is so outrageous as to be ridiculous, but it needs to be looked after and I hope there will be no difficulty in killing it.”[44] When Foraker helped to dispatch the bill, Archbold sent congratulations: “I enclose you a certificate of deposit to your favor for $15,000. . . . I need scarcely express our great gratification over the favorable outcome of affairs.” [45] The certificate of deposit was more difficult to trace than a check and was the instrument of choice for political bribery.

Another favorite recipient of Standard Oil largesse was Senator Matthew Quay of Pennsylvania, who received $42,500 between 1898 and 1902. In one lighthearted note, Archbold told Quay that he was enclosing a $10,000 certificate of deposit as a reward for the senator’s “enticing ways.” [46] Evidently, Archbold felt more at ease with small, scattered payments, for he advised Quay on another occasion, “Please ask for payments as needed from time to time, not all at once.”[47] Another true friend of the trust from western Pennsylvania was Representative Joseph C. Sibley, later called “a political procurer for Archbold, an agent for the seduction and corruption of public men by the Standard Oil.” [48] In official Washington, Sibley acted as a conduit for Standard Oil money, once writing to Archbold, “A Republican United States Senator came to me today to make a loan of $1,000. I told him I did not have it but would try and get it for him in a day or two. Do you want to make the investment?” [49]

The trust’s Washington operations might never have surfaced had it not been for a kind act by Archbold. At his Tarrytown mansion, he employed a valued black butler, James Wilkins, who had a twenty-four-year-old ne’er-do-well son named Willie. Out of sympathy for Wilkins, Archbold hired Willie as an office boy at Standard Oil at a time when few if any blacks were employed there. Willie liked to play the ponies and was chronically short of cash. Hoping to take advantage of the political backlash against Standard Oil, he teamed up with Charles Stump, a nineteen-year-old white office boy, to scout out incriminating evidence on Archbold’s desk. In December 1904, the two young men pinched a couple of telegrams and contacted Fred Eldridge, an editor at William Randolph Hearst’s *New York American,* who studied the loot and said it was worthless. But he expressed a special interest in letters from Archbold to senators or congressmen and gave the two enterprising young men two hundred names that might interest readers. Armed with Eldridge’s wish list, Stump and Wilkins began to scour Archbold’s

correspondence after hours, and when they spotted letters to Sibley and Foraker, they took them to Eldridge and haggled over prices. On several occasions, when they reached an impasse, the editor would say he had to "see Mr. Hearst." [50] This espionage lasted from December 1904 until February 1905, when Archbold discovered the missing political documents, accused Stump and Wilkins of theft, then fired them. With the $20,500 that they had received from Hearst, the two young entrepreneurs were able to open their own saloon in Harlem.

For months, Archbold dreaded publication of the purloined letters and must have been puzzled when they did not appear. Hearst had stored the incriminating documents in his safe and awaited a propitious moment to unveil them. By attacking the trusts, Hearst had created a hybrid role for himself as the people's tribune, who would advance his own imperial ambitions by exposing those of his fellow empire builders. By the 1930s, Hearst became fiercely reactionary, yet in the early 1900s he was still a populist champion. Showing exceptional self-control, Hearst did not publish the letters when he ran against Charles Evans Hughes, a friend of Rockefeller's, for the New York governorship in 1906. "Charles, I do hope you beat that man Hearst!" Rockefeller told Hughes that year.[51]

But in the election of 1908, Hearst backed the Independence League Party, which nominated Massachusetts's Thomas L. Hisgen, a manufacturer of axle grease, as its presidential candidate. Hisgen had once spurned a bid from Standard Oil to buy him out for $600,000, and when the trust retaliated by slashing prices and trying to ruin him, Hisgen became an implacable foe. Hearst picked him as the party's candidate with the Archbold letters in mind. On September 17, 1908, Hearst gave a pro-Hisgen speech in Columbus, Ohio, in which he claimed that just before the talk a stranger had appeared in his hotel room and handed him copies of correspondence between Archbold and several politicians. "I am now going to read copies of letters written by Mr. John Archbold, chief agent of the Standard Oil, an intimate personal acquaintance of Mr. Rockefeller and Mr. Rogers," Hearst announced with great fanfare.[52] He then created a national sensation by reading aloud letters written by Archbold to Senator Foraker and Congressman Sibley. Later, in a Saint Louis speech, he recited two more specimens, with the correspondence prominently reproduced in Hearst papers.

Realizing that he could not deny the authenticity of the letters, Archbold tried to finesse the charges by claiming that the correspondence was "entirely

proper."[53] At first, Foraker pretended that the payments were strictly lawful and aboveboard. "That I was employed as counsel for the Standard Oil Company at the time and presumably compensated for my services was common knowledge," he insisted. "At least I never made any effort to conceal it."[54] When the public refused to buy this, Foraker and Sibley were hounded from public life. Archbold survived as head of Standard Oil, however, and the following year, perhaps to mend his increasingly tattered image, he gave one million dollars to Syracuse University.

The Archbold scandal convinced Junior that the doubts he had entertained about Standard Oil had not been the product of an overactive imagination. Many years later, he admitted to having been "sickened" by the Hearst exposé. "It was the political contributions that focussed the whole thing" as to whether or not he should resign from Standard Oil.[55] For more than a decade, ever since leaving Brown, Junior had been poised uneasily between business and philanthropy. He had never warmed to commerce, and the Archbold scandal pushed him toward his proper career: that of a full-time philanthropist.

The decision to leave Standard Oil was so sensitive that Junior discussed it only with his wife and father. He had to figure out how to extricate himself without hurting his father or the organization. To live with his own conscience, he told his father, he had to resign from the trust and devote his life to philanthropy. He also advocated Archbold's ouster, but Senior thought it impossible to fire Archbold in the midst of the antitrust suit. As for his son's departure, he reacted with surprising equanimity: "I want you to do what you think is right."[56] That his father honored his wish to leave Standard Oil only deepened the bond between them.

Whether as a concession to his father or to Archbold, Junior waited more than a year to depart from the company. At the January 11, 1910, board meeting, he quietly retired as a director of Standard Oil: thus, the active, daily involvement of the Rockefeller dynasty with the trust had lasted only slightly more than one generation. Two months later, when a bill was introduced in Washington to incorporate the Rockefeller Foundation, Junior's resignation was first revealed to the public, helping to separate the family's charitable efforts from Standard Oil. To purify himself of all business ties, Junior also retired at the same time from U.S. Steel. He had ended his relations with every company except for American Linseed and the one company, ironically,

that would defile his name: the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company.

It seems odd that Junior's disenchantment with Archbold did not diminish his reverence for his father. We know that Archbold had studied corruption at the master's feet, but Senior made no effort to disabuse his son. Clearly, he did not want to forfeit the love of this young man whose goodness validated his own life. Perhaps he did not think Junior could live with the moral ambiguities of a fortune extracted by dubious methods. Perhaps he felt he was sparing his son disturbing knowledge. Or perhaps he had so thoroughly rationalized his own behavior that he saw himself in the same glowing, virtuous light as his son did. This last theory would seem to be the one most consistent with the rest of his career.

In the last analysis, it took a stupendous leap of faith for Junior to believe that his father was blameless and that Archbold had inaugurated corruption at Standard Oil. It is almost inconceivable that he did not suspect at moments that Archbold had learned some of his tricks from Senior. And how did Junior know that his father was innocent? By instinct, by blind faith, by knowledge of his father's private character—by everything but detailed knowledge of his business career, which Senior did not care to discuss. If Junior harbored any unspoken doubts about his father's ethics—doubts only whispered to Abby in the dead of night—the Archbold scandal gave him a convenient cover to slip away from Standard Oil without blaming his father's past.

The scandal coincided with a formative phase in Junior's life, as he caught the bracing spirit of Progressive reform. Soon after graduating from college, Junior had joined the movement to clean up tenements, making contact with reformers such as Jacob Riis and Lillian Wald and proposing to Gates an attack on tuberculosis in the slums. The Progressive movement favored peaceful, incremental change and was infused with unimpeachable ideals: that people should be healthier and better educated and that government should operate in a businesslike manner. The Progressives conjured up an antiseptic world of public administration in which decisions would be made rationally by scholars, scientists, and experts. For someone like Junior, who shrank from venomous words and violent confrontation, such clean government promised to transcend the bruising partisan politics that had sullied his father's reputation. Best of all, Progressives were well-bred, educated, upstanding types whom you could invite home to dinner without embarrassment.

In the early 1900s, the movement latched on to an ideal issue: the New York brothels then flourishing under Tammany Hall protection. During the

1909 mayoral campaign, a debate arose over something called white slavery —the traffic in young women forcibly drafted into a life of sin. After the election, a special grand jury was impaneled to weigh the matter, and in January 1910 Judge Thomas C. O'Sullivan picked Junior as its foreman. Protesting that he had never patronized the ladies and was achingly ignorant of the subject, Junior tried to beg off, only to have the judge snap: "You owe it as a duty to the city to do your part in crushing out the vile practices that are said to exist."[57]

The choice of Junior was a setup. Tammany bosses figured that he would be weak and spineless, too prudish to explore the demimonde, and that his grand jury would sit for a month and issue harmless recommendations. Instead, Junior plunged into his work with fanatic energy. "I never worked harder in my life," he said. "I was on the job morning, noon, and night."[58] The cause enlisted his deepest sympathies, for he yearned to overcome a crippling sense of amateurism and become an expert in *something*. The white-slavery jury gave him a chance to graduate from being his father's factotum and to acquire a separate identity. Emerging from Senior's shadow, Junior re-created himself as a reformer, placing himself alongside the Ida Tarbells and Henry Demarest Lloyds of the world.

Junior explored the murky realm of Manhattan bordellos at arm's length, as if afraid to expose himself to their forbidden allure. He later made an astonishing confession: "When I was investigating vice in New York I never talked to a single prostitute."[59] But behind the protective shield of scientific inquiry, he questioned countless experts and became extremely knowledgeable. Because he refused to settle for superficial answers, his grand jury extended its work from one to six months. When he handed up a presentment with fifty-four indictments, Judge O'Sullivan, aghast, quarreled hotly with him. "When O'Sullivan found out what I intended to do he was thoroughly frightened because it meant that the plans of Tammany Hall had miscarried," Junior recalled.[60] The grand jury's work was, sadly, nullified when Mayor William Gaynor—himself now at war with Tammany Hall—failed to act on the findings, and most of the indictments ended in acquittal. Despite this denouement, Junior emerged as something brand-new in Rockefeller annals: a civic hero. Not some rich patsy to be pushed around by party bosses, he now stood forth as a formidable personage in his own right.

The white-slavery jury had a lasting impact on him. When the city did not

follow up on the jury recommendations, Junior consulted one hundred experts on how to solve the problem. (Among those who most impressed him was the young Raymond B. Fosdick, who had rooted out municipal corruption under two mayors; Fosdick later became president of the Rockefeller Foundation and Junior's official biographer.) In May 1913, Junior set up and personally financed the Bureau of Social Hygiene, which for twenty-five years studied urban ills ranging from venereal disease to lack of birth control to drug addiction. Cettie proudly sent him $25,000 to promote instruction in sexual hygiene for female students around the country. Junior also worked with Jacob Schiff and Paul Warburg to protect young Jewish women on the Lower East Side from procurers. The young Rockefeller heir, so long kept in limbo, was now showing a new willingness to tackle controversial social issues and place his money behind it. The more evil that people attributed to his father, the harder he worked to achieve an impossible purity.

As he awaited the verdict in the antitrust case against Standard Oil, John D. Rockefeller, Sr., gave way to uncharacteristic melancholy. While working on *Random Reminiscences,* he toted up the names of more than sixty former colleagues who had died. Henry Rogers died in May 1909, following a stroke, leaving an estate appraised at $41 million, and his memorial service was probably the last occasion that lured Rockefeller back to 26 Broadway. The titan was now one of the last veterans of the early days on Oil Creek and had to contemplate the fact that the government was about to undo his decades of work.

In trying to predict the verdict, Rockefeller, usually a tough-minded realist, fell back on the most feathery hopes. After the 1908 election, he was relieved to be free of Teddy Roosevelt, who handed over the Republican nomination to his corpulent secretary of war, William Howard Taft. On October 29, 1908, in a cameo appearance at 26 Broadway, Rockefeller endorsed Taft for president. "He is not a man, I judge, to venture with rash experiments or to impede the return of prosperity by advocating measures subversive of industrial progress." Annoyed by this implicit dig at him, Teddy Roosevelt mocked Rockefeller's endorsement: "It is a perfectly palpable and obvious trick on the part of the Standard Oil people to damage Taft."[61]

After Taft's election victory over William Jennings Bryan—who had said that Rockefeller should be sent to prison—Rockefeller understandably wired his congratulations to the president-elect. When the press hinted that Taft might be hostile toward Standard Oil, Rockefeller demurred, telling Henry

Folger that “I cannot believe this is anything more than an idle rumor.”[62] Actually, Taft liked Rockefeller personally but loathed the trust. He later wrote, “It was indeed an octopus that held the trade in its tentacles, and the few actual independent concerns that kept alive were allowed to exist by sufferance to maintain the appearance of competition.” [63] While many industrialists hoped that antitrust prosecutions would slacken under Taft, he in fact initiated sixty-five antitrust actions, even more than the forty-four brought by Roosevelt. Throughout the antitrust case, Rockefeller woefully underestimated public animosity against Standard Oil, and as late as August 1909 he told Harold McCormick that he had stopped granting interviews for a while because “the sentiment has greatly changed in our favor.”[64]

Three months later, a federal circuit court in Saint Louis ruled unanimously that Standard Oil of New Jersey and thirty-seven affiliates had violated the Sherman Antitrust Act; the holding company was given thirty days to divest itself of its subsidiaries. Taft praised Frank Kellogg for his “complete victory,” while Teddy Roosevelt, on safari in Africa, where he was butchering a small zoo’s worth of animals, conveyed his elation, terming the verdict “one of the most signal triumphs for decency which has been won in our country.”[65]

Although the trust appealed instantly to the Supreme Court, a deep sense of gloom settled over 26 Broadway as the final verdict approached. Meanwhile, one government decision after another went against the stigmatized monopoly. In 1909, Congress largely repealed the duty that had protected the trust from foreign competition; the secretary of war halted purchase of petroleum products from it; and the president set aside petroleum-rich territory for conservation purposes. When Rockefeller crossed paths with Taft in 1910 during his stay at the Hotel Bon Air in Augusta, Georgia, they agreed to golf together, but Mrs. Taft, fearing bad publicity, got the president to cancel his game. On another occasion—doubtless when the first lady was not looking—Rockefeller asked the president to greet his five-year-old granddaughter, Mathilde McCormick. To Rockefeller’s delight, the huge Taft hoisted the lovely little girl with the long curls high into the air.

By the spring of 1911, the wait for the Supreme Court’s decision began to seem interminable, and even the president grumbled about the court’s glacial pace. Because the court’s composition changed after the death of one justice, the arguments had to be heard twice. On April 25, 1911, Junior passed along

to his father Senator Aldrich's wily prediction: "He was disposed to believe that the decision will be adverse to the company, but thinks the Court will clearly define the law and hopes that it will point out a legal way for the conduct of large corporations."[66] The senator must have had excellent sources.

When the end came for Standard Oil after forty-one years of existence, it was swift, sudden, and irrevocable. At 4 P.M. on May 15, 1911, Chief Justice Edward White told a sleepy courtroom, "I have also to announce the opinion of the Court in No. 398, the United States against the Standard Oil Company."[67] At once, the room quivered with expectation as senators and congressmen streamed in to hear the verdict. For the next forty-nine minutes, White read aloud the twenty-thousand-word opinion, speaking in such a low, monotonous voice that other justices had to lean over and ask him to speak louder. In his mumbled, momentous words, White upheld the decision to dismantle Standard Oil, which was given six months to spin off its subsidiaries, with its officers forbidden from reestablishing the monopoly. Thus ended the longest running morality play in American business history.

Rockefeller reacted with studied nonchalance. He was golfing at Pocantico with Father J. P. Lennon from the Tarrytown Catholic church when he learned of the decision, and he did not seem particularly perturbed. "Father Lennon," he asked, "have you some money?" The priest said no, then asked why. "Buy Standard Oil," Rockefeller said—which turned out to be sound advice.[68] To his former partners, he sent a sad, whimsical obituary that began, "Dearly beloved, we must obey the Supreme Court. Our splendid, happy family must scatter." [69] Intent as always on ignoring bad news, Rockefeller refused to read the celebrated opinion that broke up his empire—exactly what one would have expected.

The antitrust suit against Standard tested whether the American legal system could cope with the new agglomerations of wealth and curb their excesses. The paradoxical lesson learned was that government intervention was sometimes necessary to ensure unfettered competition. Regulation did not inevitably harm business but could also aid it. The 1911 decision was not an undiluted triumph for reformers by any means, and many of them considered it a shameful betrayal. Senator Robert La Follette, who stood in the courtroom as Judge White read the verdict, told reporters afterward, "I fear that the court has done what the trusts wanted it to do, and what Congress

has steadily refused to do."[70] Echoing this, William Jennings Bryan asserted that Chief Justice White had "waited 15 years to throw his protecting arms around the trusts and tell them how to escape." [71]

For fifteen years, White had vainly advanced a doctrine called the "rule of reason," which would not outlaw every combination in restraint of trade but only those that were unreasonable and violated the public interest. This doctrine vastly expanded judicial discretion and opened a loophole large enough to tolerate many trusts. In the lone dissent, Associate Justice John Harlan angrily protested this new principle, banging the bench and accusing his fellow justices of having put "words into the antitrust act which Congress did not put there."[72] He added mockingly, "You may now restrain commerce, provided you are reasonable about it; only take care that the restraint is not undue."[73] The decision tallied in many ways with Teddy Roosevelt's belief that the government should rein in irresponsible trusts but not meddle with good ones. The more militant reformers were right to consider it, at best, a partial victory.

As so often happens with politics and markets, by the time of the Supreme Court's 1911 decision, evolutionary changes in the marketplace had already eroded the trust's dominance. With the final amalgamation of Royal Dutch and Shell in 1907, Standard Oil at last faced a worthy competitor abroad, while the Anglo-Persian Oil Company was tapping rich new fields in the Middle East. At home, more oil poured forth from Texas, Oklahoma, California, Kansas, and Illinois, providing an opening wedge for assertive newcomers. Where the trust had pumped 32 percent of American crude oil in 1899, its share had slumped to 14 percent by 1911. Even Standard's historic strength in refining dipped from an 86 percent market share to 70 percent in the five years before the breakup.

The automobile was also radically recasting the industry: In 1910, for the first time, gasoline sales surpassed those of kerosene and other illuminating oils. In 1908, William C. Durant launched the General Motors Corporation, and that year Henry Ford brought out his first Model T. Auto ownership soon exploded, reaching 2.5 million cars by 1915 and then 9.2 million by 1920. Though Standard Oil of California introduced the first filling station in 1907, the trust was not a pioneer in this area, and the national network of gas stations would be too extensive to be monopolized by any one company.

Those who had seen the Standard Oil dissolution as condign punishment for Rockefeller were in for a sad surprise: It proved to be the luckiest stroke of his career. Precisely because he lost the antitrust suit, Rockefeller was converted from a mere millionaire, with an estimated net worth of $300 million in 1911, into something just short of history's first billionaire. In December 1911, he was finally able to jettison the presidency of Standard Oil, but he continued to hold on to his immense shareholdings. As the owner of about one quarter of the shares of the old trust, Rockefeller now got a one-quarter share of the new Standard Oil of New Jersey, plus one quarter of the thirty-three independent subsidiary companies created by the decision. And that did not include the oil shares he had given to the GEB, the University of Chicago, and other recipients of his largesse.

At first, investors did not know how to value the shares of these Standard Oil components, since Rockefeller had resisted a New York Stock Exchange listing and the old trust never issued reports to shareholders. As one Wall Street publication warned on the eve of trading, the value of the new companies was "the merest guesswork."[74] What quickly grew apparent, however, was that Rockefeller had been extremely conservative in capitalizing Standard Oil and that the split-off companies were chock-full of hidden assets. Two other factors encouraged a veritable feeding frenzy in the stocks. For years, the shares of Standard Oil of New Jersey had been depressed by the antitrust litigation, but with the litigation ended, they bounced back to a more normal level. And the explosion of the automobile industry created euphoria about the endless growth prospects of the petroleum industry, which had been shadowed for fifty years by warnings of doom.

When trading started on December 1, 1911, the public exhibited an insatiable appetite for the new companies, especially after they declared dividends averaging 53 percent of the old capital value of Standard Oil stock. As if rejoicing in the chance to tweak trustbusters, investors bid up the shares to insane levels. Between January and October 1912, Standard Oil of New Jersey zoomed from 360 to 595; Standard of New York went from 260 to 580; and Standard of Indiana from 3,500 to 9,500. Thanks to this staggering appreciation, Rockefeller's net worth reached a lifetime peak of $900 million in 1913—more than $13 billion in 1996 dollars. (To put that $900 million in perspective, the total accumulated national debt of the United States stood at $1.2 billion that year, equivalent to 3 percent of the gross national product; federal spending was a mere $715 million.) As Junior later explained, his father never had a billion dollars at any one moment, although much more

than that passed through his hands. During the ten years after Standard Oil's 1911 dismantling, the assets of its constituent companies quintupled in value. Beyond his talents as a businessman, Rockefeller benefited from a large dollop of luck in his life, making more money in retirement than on the job.

The soaring fortunes of the Standard companies made it seem as if the cagey Rockefeller had outwitted the country again. Newspapers began running daily box scores of his wealth—not exactly the chastening sequel Washington had envisioned. As former J. P. Morgan partner George Perkins told a friend, Wall Street was "laughing in its sleeve at what has been going on." [75] Nobody felt more frustrated than Teddy Roosevelt, who returned to the presidential fray with his third-party Bull Moose candidacy in 1912. Lashing out at Standard Oil again, he roared, "The price of stock has gone up over one hundred percent, so that Mr. Rockefeller and his associates have actually seen their fortunes doubled. No wonder that Wall Street's prayer now is: 'Oh Merciful Providence, give us another dissolution.' " [76]

In the eternal race for the title of the world's richest man, Rockefeller now left Andrew Carnegie far behind and probably had at least twice as much money as Carnegie did. (Exact comparisons are difficult since both men had given away so much.) Nonetheless, Rockefeller and Carnegie still enjoyed cordial if rather distant relations. In 1912, en route to Washington to give testimony, Carnegie dropped by Kykuit and found Rockefeller "tall and spare and smiling, beaming." Carnegie still savored his belief that he had outfoxed Rockefeller on their old Mesabi ore deal, for he afterward wrote a friend, "Positively it is a delight to meet the old gentleman. But I did not refer to the ore purchase I made from him."[77]

It was hard to convince a skeptical public that the thirty-four new companies, with their seventy thousand employees, would not reconstitute a new conspiracy. J. P. Morgan, upon hearing of the 1911 decision, asked, "How the hell is any court going to compel a man to compete with himself?" [78] Many of the newly independent companies were powerful enough to inspire fear as freestanding entities. Standard Oil of New Jersey remained the world's largest oil company, second only to U.S. Steel in size among American enterprises and retaining 43 percent of the value of the old trust. Five of the newly divested companies stood among the country's two hundred largest industrial firms. Since all the companies had identical owners, it was hard to foresee vigorous competition. As Roosevelt complained, "All the

companies are still under the same control, or at least working in such close alliance that the effect is precisely the same."[79]

Rockefeller made all the right noises about obeying the 1911 decision. As he told Archbold on September 8, 1911, "We will do the best we can to comply with every requirement of the government, and if as much is required of others it does seem as though it must bring about a reform." [80] Yet he quietly worked to undermine the dissolution, suggesting that officials of the Standard Oil companies meet at 26 Broadway at ten-thirty each morning to maintain amicable relations and swap information. (For legal reasons, everyone was cautioned not to exchange thoughts on paper.) That both Standard Oil of New Jersey, headed by Archbold, and Standard Oil of New York, headed by Folger, kept their headquarters in the same old building said much about their relationship.

For the next decade, the divestiture often seemed a sham. The Standard companies continued to divide the country into eleven marketing territories, selling the same brand names and not competing on prices. It took a long time for former colleagues to view each other as competitors and raid each other's territories. Many critics thought that, to avert this complicity, the government should have done one of three things: keep the trust intact and regulate it; force shareholders to take stock in only one of the thirty-four companies; or create fully integrated companies that did not need to rely on other Standard companies. Standard of New Jersey, for instance, inherited a vast refining system without the crude oil to service it, forcing it into close collaboration to remedy the imbalance.

While the old guard at 26 Broadway mourned the trust's passage, some Young Turks at the operating companies were overjoyed. Many Standard Oil directors had been over sixty. This had given the organization a geriatric tone, stifling young, imaginative men at a time that demanded rapid adaptation to the auto age. One of these extraordinary mavericks, Dr. William M. Burton of Standard Oil of Indiana, thought that Roosevelt and Taft had performed an inestimable service. After the 1911 dismemberment, he said, "It was felt all along the line—younger men were given a chance." [81] Free of top-heavy bureacracy, Burton patented an exceptionally valuable process in 1913 for "cracking" crude oil—that is, for refining it so as to yield a far higher percentage of gasoline. This discovery permitted Standard of Indiana to reap windfall royalties from other oil companies. Maintaining full control of this technology until 1921, Standard of Indiana required its cousin companies to

restrict sales of “cracked” gasoline to their pre-1911 marketing territories, helping to extend the trust structure for another decade.

It is an enduring tribute to Rockefeller that so many Standard Oil companies prospered during the remainder of the century, controlling a significant fraction of both the American and world oil industry. Rockefeller’s stepchildren would be everywhere: Standard Oil of New Jersey (Exxon), Standard Oil of New York (Mobil), Standard Oil of Indiana (Amoco), Standard Oil of California (Chevron), Atlantic Refining (ARCO and eventually Sun), Continental Oil (Conoco), today a unit of DuPont, and Chesebrough-Ponds, which had begun by processing petroleum jelly. Three offspring—Exxon, Mobil, and Chevron— would belong to the Seven Sisters group that would dominate the world oil industry in the twentieth century; a fourth sister, British Petroleum, later took over Standard Oil of Ohio, then known as Sohio. It was certainly not their intention, but the trustbusters helped to preserve Rockefeller’s legacy for posterity and unquestionably made him the world’s richest man.

Henry H. Rogers and Mark Twain sailing together in Bermuda in 1908.
(Courtesy of the Mark Twain Project, the Bancroft Library)

CHAPTER 28

Benevolent Trust

As the national thirst for gasoline caused his stock in the Standard Oil companies to appreciate wildly, it was only proper that the oil king should develop a passion for automobiles. He kept a Peerless auto at Pocantico as early as 1904. In the 1910s, cars began to fill his stone coach barn alongside the old-fashioned buckboards and coaches. Even as a young man, Rockefeller had been exhilarated by speed and motion, racing his trotting horses down Euclid Avenue, and he now took daily auto drives of fifty miles or more. It was the powerful, gleaming Crane-Simplex touring car of 1918 that truly captured his fancy. Big as a cruise ship, smoothly navigating bumpy back roads, this elaborate maroon vehicle with semi-open sides had wide running boards and a glamorous interior of black leather upholstery.

Since the Crane-Simplex comfortably seated seven, Rockefeller turned the afternoon drives into carefully orchestrated social affairs, telling each person where to sit and specifying the exact itinerary to the chauffeur. Like a king enthroned in his movable court, Rockefeller always sat in the middle of the backseat. As with his golf games, the afternoon drives permitted no intimate or serious conversation, only obligatory jollity. As the huge car swept down country roads, trailing whorls of dust and ventilating the passengers with fresh air, Rockefeller hummed, sang spirituals, whistled, or joked. Social director of these excursions, he was relaxed and jovial, often sitting back and daydreaming— but without ever abandoning his competitive instincts. If a young hotshot sped by, Rockefeller would absorb the affront in silence, then bend forward and calmly instruct the chauffeur, “Phillips!” “Yes, sir.” “How fast are we going?” “Thirty-three, sir.” “Could we go a little faster?” Slowly but inexorably the speedometer would climb until the young motorist was overtaken—at which point Rockefeller would stare resolutely ahead, his face impassive, betraying no sign of his joyful triumph.[1] Rockefeller clocked these drives and liked to set new speed records. “Phillips,” he would say, “we got to town Monday in one hour and seventeen minutes. Let’s see what we can do today.”[2] Phillips would smile, touch his cap, and go for the record.

On many drives, the touring car stopped by a meadow so that Rockefeller

and his guests could recline on the grass. Rockefeller chatted happily with farmers who happened by, quizzing them about their seed or fertilizer and passing along tips to the superintendents of his estates. It was one of many signs in Rockefeller's later years that he yearned for the innocent pleasures of his bucolic boyhood. "I am very sorry to see this tendency of crowding into the cities, very sorry," he once told a Bible class. "It is not like fifty years ago, when I was a boy. It seems to me that as the cities grow larger the country in general becomes weaker."[3] Carrying a cane, chatting casually with neighbors, he loved to wander around the Pocantico village in his golf knickers. Each year for his birthday, he invited the local children to Kykuit and offered them huge mounds of ice cream while a brass band boomed and flags fluttered overhead. Shedding his straitlaced image, he even stooped on all fours and played with the town children. His comfort with children was one of the conspicuous features of his later years.

For all the holiday ease of his retired life, Rockefeller could never escape a sense of danger off in the shadows. In 1912, he received threats from the Black Hand, a Sicilian and Italian American secret society engaged in blackmail and terrorism. As a precaution, Junior, Abby, and the children were packed off to Lakewood for the autumn while security was tightened at Pocantico. Senior was sufficiently spooked that he installed a special alarm system at Kykuit, with a button under his pillow. If he heard prowlers or unexplained noises, he pressed the button, which made small, inconspicuous lights twinkle in the trees at three or four spots; the night watchman would then ring Rockefeller to verify his safety.

Rockefeller devoted a great deal of his spare time to religion. Before breakfast, he reverently recited a blessing then read aloud a page from *My Daily Meditation for the Circling Year* by the Reverend John Henry Jowett, who championed a severe, uncompromising Christianity and counseled readers against pride, lust, and avarice. Jowett preached stoic calm in the face of hatred and warned against bearing grudges against enemies—advice that Rockefeller must have taken to heart. At breakfast, guests were invited to read poems or selections from the New Testament. Rockefeller turned for bedtime solace to another volume of sermons called *The Optimist's Good Night,* so that his days were bracketed with the consolations of religion.

While Rockefeller felt that his retirement years were steeped in righteousness, the American public never quite believed it. For all the good work performed by the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research and the

General Education Board, the founder was still accused of hoarding his wealth. The newspapers applied their own grinding pressure, showing that his gifts had neither matched Andrew Carnegie's nor kept pace with his own growing fortune. One statistician projected in 1906 that if he let his wealth collect compound interest for the next thirty years, he would end up sitting on a pile of ninety billion dollars.

As early as 1901, Rockefeller had realized that he needed to create a foundation on a scale that dwarfed anything he had done so far, and he toyed with the idea of establishing a benevolent trust: "Let us erect a foundation, a trust, and engage directors who will make it a life work to manage, with our personal cooperation, this business of benevolence properly and effectively."[4] Frederick Gates revived the idea in June 1906 when he wrote to Rockefeller, "I have lived with this great fortune of yours daily for fifteen years. To it, its increase and its uses, I have given every thought, until it has become a part of myself, almost as if it were my own."[5] Mustering all his rhetorical resources, Gates thundered, "Your fortune is rolling up, rolling up like an avalanche! You must keep up with it! You must distribute it faster than it grows! If you do not, it will crush you and your children and your children's children."[6] If Rockefeller did not act soon, Gates predicted, his heirs would dissipate their inheritances or become intoxicated with power. The solution he advanced was to set up "permanent corporate philanthropies for the good of mankind" that would give money to education, science, the arts, agriculture, religion, and even civic virtue.[7] These trusts would constitute something novel in American society: private money administered by competent trustees for the public weal. "These funds should be so large that to become a trustee of one of them would make a man at once a public character," Gates explained. "They should be so large that their administration would be a matter of public concern, public inquiry, and public criticism."[8]

The concept of charitable trusts was not invented by Rockefeller; Benjamin Franklin, Stephen Girard, and Peter Cooper had set up such trusts. What he brought to the concept was unprecedented scale and scope. As he contemplated the formation of a giant foundation in 1906, Margaret Olivia Sage, widow of financier Russell Sage, was about to establish a foundation to investigate the plight of working women and the social ills bred by modern life. Junior touted such philanthropies as the best way to advance the family's favorite causes. To his father, he suggested that he create one trust to promote Christian civilization abroad, a second to do the like at home, and a third to

supply money to the University of Chicago, the GEB, and the RIMR. These boards would be small by design and staffed by about five family members and Rockefeller insiders. However limited the vision behind this blueprint, it began to sketch the outlines of a new approach to philanthropy. Not surprisingly, the architect of Standard Oil favored the creation of a single mammoth foundation in which he would retain veto power. Once again, the scale of the Rockefeller fortune demanded that new forms be devised to administer it.

Afraid that a state charter for a Rockefeller Foundation could be repealed at the whim of an unfriendly state legislature, Junior and Gates aimed for a more prestigious federal charter for the new foundation, such as that received by the GEB in 1903. The Rockefellers waited until early 1908 to make their pitch in Washington, possibly hoping to capitalize upon the goodwill generated by Senior's assistance in quelling the 1907 panic. By chance, on a train trip to golf in Augusta, Georgia, Rockefeller had encountered Senator "Pitchfork Ben" Tillman of South Carolina and unexpectedly charmed this critic. Junior was cheered by this serendipitous encounter: "Senator Tillman would formerly have been one of the leaders in antagonizing the bill. If he is favorable to it he could do more with the radicals than anyone else." [9]

On June 29, 1909, Rockefeller signed over 73,000 shares of Standard Oil of New Jersey, valued at $50 million, to three trustees: Junior, Gates, and Harold McCormick. This was supposed to be the first installment of an initial $100 million endowment for the projected Rockefeller Foundation. Getting the U.S. Senate to grant a charter for a tax-exempt foundation amid the tumult of the federal antitrust suit against Standard Oil proved a tricky proposition. Exactly how did legislators explain to their perplexed constituents that the ill-gotten gains now being exposed in court should be honored by a federal charter? Introduced in the Senate in March 1910, the charter bill threatened to stir up more public animosity against the Rockefellers than it assuaged. Only a week later, Standard Oil attorneys filed briefs with the Supreme Court in the antitrust appeal, mingling the two events in the public mind and putting the patently bad Rockefeller and the patently good Rockefeller on display side by side.

The charter traveled a rocky road in Congress. Following the pattern of Johns Hopkins, Rockefeller advocated a broad, unrestricted charter that would allow great flexibility. "Perpetuity is a long time," he was fond of saying, and he did not wish to saddle future foundation executives with outmoded

mandates.[10] Gates thus enunciated a purposely vague mission for the Rockefeller Foundation: “to promote the well being of mankind throughout the world.”[11] Critics were quick to allege that this nebulous charter gave the Rockefellers carte blanche to manipulate the foundation for their own ends. In fact, this open-ended quality was meant to free the proposed foundation from the influence of its founder. That it would be huge, global, and general—that its money could go anywhere and do anything—was the essence of its novelty. Many newspapers saw the vagueness, however, as a gauzy curtain behind which the evil wizard of Standard Oil could work his mischief. Others deplored the foundation as an elaborate publicity stunt to deodorize the Rockefeller name. In denouncing the charter, one paper called the projected organization a “gigantic philanthropy by which old Rockefeller expects to squeeze himself, his son, his stall-fed collegians and their camels, laden with tainted money, through the eye of the needle.”[12]

The charter scandalized Attorney General George W. Wickersham, who was entrusted with prosecuting Standard Oil. He protested to President Taft in February 1911.

The power which, under such bill, would be vested in and exercised by a small body of men, in absolute control of the income of $100,000,000 or more, to be expended for the general indefinite objects described in the bill, might be in the highest degree corrupt in its influence. . . . Is it, then, appropriate that, at the moment when the United States through its courts is seeking in a measure to destroy the great combination of wealth which has been built up by Mr. Rockefeller . . . the Congress of the United States should assist in the enactment of a law to create and perpetuate in his name an institution to hold and administer a large portion of this vast wealth?[13]

Taft granted the point. “I agree with your . . . characterization of the proposed act to incorporate John D. Rockefeller.”[14]

Yet Taft saved these barbs for internal consumption and struck a more conciliatory tone with the Rockefellers in person. On April 25, 1911, Senator Aldrich shepherded Junior and Abby to the White House for a top secret lunch with the president. While this meeting was later interpreted as a gauche effort to sway the Standard Oil case, it was concerned exclusively with the Rockefeller Foundation charter. Petrified that the press might get wind of this lunch, Taft insisted that his guests bypass the main door and enter through a

side door of the east entrance. The visitors' names were never recorded in guest books or mentioned by White House staff. Taft's trusted aide, Archie Butt, was amused by the president's discomfiture. "It is strange how men in public office shudder at the names of Aldrich and Rockefeller," he reflected.[15] Over lunch, Taft speculated that the foundation charter would pass only if held in abeyance until after settlement of the antitrust suit. Junior, heartened, left the luncheon feeling that the president had been "most agreeable and kindly."[16]

To appease the public, the Rockefeller camp volunteered some extraordinary concessions, including offering to base the new foundation in the nation's capital. When Gates ran into Taft at a Bryn Mawr College luncheon, the president suggested that he send along ideas about how to install safeguards in the plan. In a follow-up memo, Gates said that Congress could, at any time, limit how the foundation money was spent. As to fears that the Rockefellers would wield undue power, Gates said that Rockefeller intimates would make up only five or more members of a board of up to twenty-five people. Gates then made an extraordinary proposal: that all, or a majority, of the following people would have the power to veto board appointments: the president of the United States; the chief justice of the Supreme Court; the president of the Senate; the speaker of the House; and the presidents of Harvard, Yale, Columbia, Johns Hopkins, and the University of Chicago.

Despite this almost unseemly eagerness to accommodate the government, the bill had a checkered career in Congress, even with Senator Aldrich's high-powered patronage. It passed in the House then stalled in the Senate and kicked around, in various forms, for three years. After a point, legislators started to haggle with the Rockefellers, promising support only if certain foundation grants flowed to their districts. Aghast at this blackmail, Rockefeller asked his son in November 1911 whether it might not be better to seek a state charter. A federal charter, Junior rejoined, would be preferable, since states might require board members to live there, weakening the Rockefeller ties and holding them hostage to statehouse politics.

Nevertheless, the Rockefellers soon despaired of Washington and turned to New York State for a charter in 1913. Two years earlier, the state legislature had chartered the Carnegie Corporation, with a $125 million endowment. Now the Rockefeller charter was quickly approved with scarcely a whisper of protest. Between 1856 and 1909, Rockefeller had given $157.5 million for

charitable purposes. Mindful of Gates's admonition that his gifts must keep pace with his exploding wealth, Rockefeller gave $100 million to the Rockefeller Foundation in its first year, bolstered by another $82.8 million by 1919. In current dollars, that would translate into a $2 billion gift during the foundation's inaugural decade. It also meant that by 1919 Rockefeller had already given away an amount roughly equal to the $350 million that Andrew Carnegie gave away in his entire lifetime; the titan would donate another $180 million before he died. Since his son gave away an additional $537 million directly and another $540 million through the Rockefeller philanthropies, Rockefeller far surpassed his great rival's benefactions and must rank as the greatest philanthropist in American history.

By securing the Rockefeller Foundation charter in 1913, Rockefeller insulated a large portion of his wealth from inheritance taxes. That year also saw the ratification of the Sixteenth Amendment, which provided for the first federal income tax. Even though the top rate was only 6 percent to begin with, Rockefeller categorically denounced this innovation. "When a man has accumulated a sum of money, accumulated it within the law, the Government has no right to share in its earnings," he complained to a reporter in 1914.[17] As taxes became steeper and more progressive in the coming decades, it became a daunting task for any businessman to amass the money that Rockefeller had earned in a laissez-faire world devoid of antitrust laws. His own wealth, in fact, was the text for many sermons in favor of using taxation as a way to check the acquisition of huge fortunes, to redistribute wealth, and to reduce social tensions.

The birth of the Rockefeller Foundation coincided with the gradual retreat of Frederick T. Gates from Rockefeller's business affairs after twenty years of tenacious attention. During the summer of 1909, the fifty-six-year-old Gates was suffering from nervous strain, likely from overwork, and wanted to spend more time with his wife and seven children. Around 1912, the once threadbare Minnesota preacher picked up at bargain prices twenty thousand acres of land near Hoffman, North Carolina, and set about growing cotton, corn, and oats and raising livestock on a thousand-acre farm with a peach orchard of seventeen thousand trees.

In August 1912, Gates tendered his resignation from the business side of the family office to devote himself solely to the philanthropies. Long reliant upon Gates's sound judgment, Rockefeller tried to sweet-talk him into staying: "Shall we not, dear friend, continue along life's pathway together,

both of us recognizing the propriety for ourselves of increasing freedom from care, but, nevertheless, both continuing to give what time we wisely and appropriately can, to the large and important questions, old as well as new, which we find ourselves in a position to help to solve?" [18] By November, Rockefeller had capitulated and accepted his resignation. For the next five years, Gates chaired the GEB but ceased to draw a regular salary and performed only sporadic business missions for Rockefeller. For all his panegyrics about Rockefeller's wisdom, Gates had some private grievances and was irked by what he saw as his skimpy compensation; the value of his services had been a sore point with him ever since the 1901 Mesabi-ore sale to U.S. Steel. In 1915, Gates undertook a long, tortuous negotiation for Rockefeller with the Consolidation Coal Company; afterward, he rejected as too meager Rockefeller's $25,000 in compensation and held out for $60,000.

Although Gates had been the visionary behind the Rockefeller Foundation, he now became just one of nine trustees. When the foundation held its first meeting at 26 Broadway on May 19, 1913, Junior was elected president. He invited his father to attend but knew he would decline. Nominally a trustee for ten years, Rockefeller followed his usual practice and never sat in on a single meeting. He was now receding to a more distant supervisory role with his philanthropies and yielding more power to his son, although he never surrendered his veto power. Perhaps the congressional donnybrook over the foundation charter reminded him of the value of keeping a salutary distance from his foundations. Or perhaps it was just age.

Several features of the new foundation mocked the idea that it was a public trust and suggested instead a closely guarded Rockefeller preserve. Its governing structure conjured up a holding company for existing Rockefeller philanthropies instead of the autonomous operation once promised so fervently to Congress. Of the nine trustees, two were family members (Senior and Junior), three were staffers (Gates, Starr Murphy, and Charles O. Heydt, Junior's secretary), and four came from Rockefeller philanthropies (Simon Flexner and Jerome Greene from the RIMR, Harry Pratt Judson from the University of Chicago, and Wickliffe Rose from the Rockefeller Sanitary Commission). The Rockefeller philanthropies remained a self-contained universe, with the same faces rotated among the various boards.

The Rockefeller Foundation's claim to autonomy was also undercut by Rockefeller's retention of the right to allocate $2 million of its income yearly. Until this practice was abolished in 1917, these founder's designations

constituted up to a third of all grants and financed several of Senior's pet projects, from Baptist missionary work to the Eugenics Record Office of Charles B. Davenport. In retrospect, Congress, by denying a charter to the foundation, had forfeited a chance to restrict Rockefeller's influence over his money.

As for the recipients of grants, buffeted by the uproar over the federal charter, the Rockefeller Foundation refrained from anything that smacked of controversy. Having had more than enough public criticism, the Rockefellers wanted everything to be simon-pure. Like the family's other philanthropies, the Rockefeller Foundation was attuned to the optimistic, rational spirit of the Progressive era and drew on its new class of technocrats. (Woodrow Wilson, a political scientist, had been elected to the White House in 1912.) Science would be the magic wand waved over any project to show that it was sound and objective, free of favoritism or self-interest. For a long time, the Rockefeller Foundation shunned the humanities, social sciences, and the arts as areas too subjective or fraught with political peril. In 1917, when advising his father to pump another fifty million dollars into the RIMR, Junior explained his preference for medicine: "This is a field in which there can be no controversy, so that I think the possibility of criticism as regards the use of the fund or its potential dangers would be almost nothing. There is no limit to the development of medical work."[19]

In its first decade, the Rockefeller Foundation focused on public health and medical education both at home and abroad. As founder of one of the first multinational corporations, Rockefeller applauded the unique global range of his new philanthropy, a feature that would always distinguish it. In its maiden action in June 1913, the new board decided to take the superb work of the Rockefeller Sanitary Commission's antihookworm campaign and apply it around the globe. To accomplish this, it created a new International Health Commission under the leadership of Wickliffe Rose, who exported his campaign to fifty-two countries on six continents, treating millions of people.

In the future, Rose would engage in battles to subdue malaria, tuberculosis, typhus, scarlet fever, and other scourges, but he registered his most spectacular success with yellow fever, once tagged "the terror of the Western Hemisphere." During the Spanish-American War, Major Walter Reed had shown that mosquitoes transmitted yellow fever, knowledge used by Colonel W. C. Gorgas to control the disease in Panama during the building of the canal through mosquito-infested jungles. Touring the Far East in 1914, Rose

heard fears from public-health officials that a fresh outbreak of yellow fever could result from ships passing through the new canal. Back in the United States, Rose consulted Colonel Gorgas, who asserted that yellow fever could be “eradicated within a reasonable time and at a reasonable cost” if a systematic campaign was mounted to stamp out seedbeds in the Western Hemisphere.[20] Hired by Rose to accomplish just that, Gorgas achieved such triumphant results that the disease was nearly wiped out in South and Central America by the late 1920s. When it flared up again, the Rockefeller Foundation sponsored a team of scientists to develop and manufacture a vaccine to fight it, a dramatic effort that yielded a vaccine by 1937 but also claimed the lives of six researchers, who contracted the disease. Millions of doses of the vaccine were distributed worldwide and saved innumerable American soldiers during World War II.

These moving crusades to eliminate infectious diseases generated one troubling afterthought: What if these diseases returned for lack of trained government personnel in the affected areas? It soon became evident that the best way to safeguard Rose’s work was to assist governments in establishing public-health machinery. It was an auspicious moment for such an approach, for pure science had now begun to outstrip applied medicine, which meant that enormous gains could be made simply by implementing existing knowledge. With this in mind, the Rockefeller Foundation gave six million dollars to Johns Hopkins for a new school of hygiene and public health that opened in 1918, a newfangled institution to train public-health professionals in such emerging disciplines as sanitary engineering, epidemiology, and biostatistics. In 1921, the foundation made a similar gift to Harvard to start a public-health school and finally spent twenty-five million dollars to create such schools from Calcutta to Copenhagen, along with numerous fellowship programs. Through its catalytic role, the Rockefeller Foundation played an integral part in the rise of American medicine to the pinnacle of world leadership.

While Rockefeller Foundation largesse was distributed across many continents, China was a special beneficiary, receiving more money than any country except the United States. As Rockefeller scaled back involvement with the University of Chicago in 1909, Gates fancied that they might replicate this feat with a great Chinese university. Like many Baptists of his era, Rockefeller was interested in China because of the extensive missionary efforts there. Though the political unrest in China gave him pause, Gates sent a study mission there to investigate. Two groups stoutly opposed the project:

local Christian missionaries, who feared the heathenish secularism of the proposed university, and government officials, who feared foreign subversion. So the interest in China turned to that old Rockefeller standby: medicine. In 1915, the Rockefeller Foundation set up the China Medical Board, which constructed the Peking Union Medical College and opened it in 1921. One of Rockefeller's most ambitious projects, the medical complex contained fifty-nine buildings, roofed with jade-green tiles (it would be dubbed the Green City) scattered across a twenty-nine-acre site. Later nationalized by the Communists, the school introduced a generation of Chinese doctors to modern medicine.

By the 1920s, the Rockefeller Foundation was the largest grant-making foundation on earth and America's leading sponsor of medical science, medical education, and public health. John D. Rockefeller, Sr., had established himself as the greatest lay benefactor of medicine in history. Of the $530 million he gave away during his lifetime, $450 million went directly or indirectly into medicine. He had dealt a mortal blow to the primitive world of nineteenth-century medicine in which patent-medicine vendors such as Doc Rockefeller had flourished. He had also effected a revolution in philanthropy perhaps no less far-reaching than his business innovations. Before Rockefeller came along, rich benefactors had tended to promote pet institutions (symphony orchestras, art museums, or schools) or to bequeath buildings (hospitals, dormitories, orphanages) that bore their names and attested to their magnanimity. Rockefeller's philanthropy was more oriented toward the creation of knowledge, and if it seemed more impersonal, it was also far more pervasive in its effect.

CHAPTER 29

Massacre

In his philanthropies, John D. Rockefeller had ascended into the pure air of good works, high above the clash of partisan politics and industrial strife. With the advent of the Rockefeller Foundation, the Rockefeller name, so besmirched by association with Standard Oil, took another long step toward redemption. And by serving on the white-slavery jury, Junior had tested a brand-new image as a social reformer. It was at this happy juncture that news reached New York of terrible bloodshed in the southern Colorado coalfields and the worst nightmare in Rockefeller history—surpassing anything ever related to Standard Oil—descended upon the family with terrible swiftness.

The Rockefellers' ill-fated involvement in Colorado dated back to 1902, when Senior was flush with windfall profits from the spectacular sale of Mesabi iron ore to U.S. Steel. At George Gould's urging, Frederick Gates visited the properties of Colorado Fuel and Iron (CFI), the state's largest employer, which owned twenty-four coal mines that provided coke for its own steel mills. If the Rockefellers controlled the company, Gould fancied, his railroads might receive lucrative coal-carrying contracts. Inspired by his Mesabi triumph, Gates had a hunch that a CFI investment might be a bonanza on an equivalent scale. In November 1902, Rockefeller paid $6 million for 40 percent of its stock and 43 percent of its bonds, gaining uncontested supremacy over the Colorado company. Only later did Gates learn that Gould had been tipped off by a trusted aide that the company management was "rotten" and that its top executives were a pack of "liars," "swindlers," and "thieves."[1]

To strengthen CFI, Gates convinced Rockefeller in 1907 to import a new management team, and he had an ideal candidate in mind: his sixty-year-old uncle, LaMont Montgomery Bowers, whose consumptive wife might benefit from the Colorado mountain air. Because of Bowers's demonstrated proficiency in running the Great Lakes ore fleet, the Rockefellers reposed extraordinary— and ultimately misplaced—trust in the abilities of this former wholesale grocer from upstate New York who became vice president of the Colorado company and the Rockefellers' chief liaison with it.

Despite this fresh leadership, the Colorado investment seemed as misbegotten as the Mesabi investment had been charmed, and for years CFI did not pay a penny on its stocks or bonds. Hobbled with a money loser, the Rockefellers took an intransigent tone with union organizers. As early as October 1903, Junior sent fighting words to CFI's president on the subject: "We are prepared to stand by in this fight and see the thing out, not yielding an inch. Recognition of any kind of either the labor leaders or union, much more a conference such as they request, would be a sign of evident weakness on our part."[2] In his decades in business, Senior had learned never to budge on the prerogatives of capital, especially when it came to unions. In 1903, Standard of New Jersey had truculently broken a strike for union recognition at its Bayonne, New Jersey, refinery. So when Bowers came on board, he had an understanding with the Rockefellers that he would be assertive in blocking unionization.

When dealing with CFI, Junior reflexively abided by his father's faith in absentee ownership and delegated wide authority to managers, monitoring their performance by ledger statistics. This approach had made sense where the Rockefellers were minority stockholders and did not wish to get in deeper but proved sadly deficient here. At CFI, the Rockefellers found themselves in the indefensible position of being all-powerful yet passive amid a spiraling crisis.

When Junior resigned from Standard Oil and other corporate boards in 1910, he stayed on at CFI because the family retained a controlling interest. The second-largest steel company and seventeenth-largest industrial firm in America, CFI still operated in the red, and Junior felt it his duty to engineer a turnaround, showing his father that he could solve a difficult situation. Prior to 1914, his papers reveal considerable correspondence about CFI matters—dreary, soulless letters filled with sterile talk about preferred stock, debentures, and dividends and far from the dismal reality of the miners. On January 31, 1910, when an explosion at a CFI mine killed seventy-nine men, Bowers blamed careless miners, even though the Colorado Bureau of Labor Statistics charged the company with "cold-blooded barbarism."[3] When Junior wrote Bowers on February 7, he did not even allude to this atrocity and merely noted that CFI's growth had stagnated in recent years. The Rockefellers had no long-term commitment to the company, which Senior planned to sell to U.S. Steel as soon as he could wangle a fair price. Right on the eve of the Colorado disaster, Gates urged Rockefeller to slim down his investment, but he would not hear of it.

William Lyon Mackenzie King (left) and John D. Rockefeller, Jr., don denim overalls at the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company, September 1915, after the Ludlow Massacre. *(Courtesy of the Rockefeller Archive Center)*

Under Rockefeller rule, it was heretical for anyone in CFI management to concede any legitimacy to unions. To scare off union organizers, Bowers and CFI president Jesse Welborn resorted to terror, fielding spies and detectives and firing union sympathizers. At the same time, they tried to inoculate workers against unions through paternalistic measures, raising their wages 10 percent and introducing an eight-hour day. As a chastened Junior later said of Bowers, “He had the kindness-of-heart theory, i.e. that he was glad to treat the men well, not that they had any necessary claim to it, but because it was the proper attitude of a Christian gentleman. For example, he always argued in favor of company stores. He would say that the company owned the towns, why shouldn’t they own the stores.”[4]

If Senior’s philanthropies showed his broad-mindedness, his unrelenting opposition to organized labor brought out his more antediluvian side. He could never see unions as anything other than frauds perpetrated by feckless workers. “It is all beautiful at the beginning; they give their organization a fine name and they declare a set of righteous principles,” he said. “But soon the real object of their organizing shows itself—to do as little as possible for

the greatest possible pay." Workers were incorrigible spendthrifts who squandered surplus earnings. "They spend their money on picture shows, and whiskey and cigarettes."[5] At Pocantico, he did not allow employees to take Labor Day as a vacation and fired one group that tried to unionize. Right before the Colorado troubles, he even tried to halt contributions to YMCA building projects that employed closed-shop union labor, but he was talked out of it by his staff. Gates, if anything, was even more obdurate about unions, warning that "it is clear that if they get the power, they have the spirit to rob, to confiscate, to absorb remorselessly, cruelly, voraciously, if they can, the whole wealth of society." [6] When union organizers targeted CFI, Rockefeller, Junior, Gates, and Bowers treated it as the industrial equivalent of Armageddon.

For years, the Colorado coalfields had been scarred by labor warfare. This was raw capitalism such as Karl Marx pictured it: dangerous mines run by harsh bosses and policed by armed guards in a desolate, hellish place. During 1913 alone, 464 men were killed or maimed in local mining accidents. Blackened by soot from coke ovens, workers lived in filth, shopped in company stores, and were ripe for unionism. Nevertheless, in May 1913, Bowers reassured the Rockefellers that CFI workers were happy souls, prompting Junior's naive response that it was "most gratifying . . . that a large industrial concern can treat all people alike, be open and above-board in all its dealings, and at the same time increasingly successful."[7]

The United Mine Workers of America (UMW) spotted fertile soil in this arid country. In the polyglot mining communities, workers came from thirty-two countries and spoke twenty-seven languages; some of them were so ignorant of American ways that they imagined Rockefeller was president of the United States. As union organizers tramped the dusty foothills, they appealed to workers in English, Spanish, Italian, Greek, and Slavic languages. By late July 1913, a showdown appeared imminent as John Lawson of the UMW announced plans to unionize local miners, making a strike all but certain. In response, the three major coal companies, CFI among them, brought in gunmen from the Baldwin-Felts Detective Agency and had them deputized by county sheriffs. Albert C. Felts took credit for designing a ghastly vehicle dubbed the Death Special, an early version of an armored car, topped with two machine guns that could be trained against strikers.

In September 1913, with a grisly confrontation imminent, the federal government tried to head off a strike. The Rockefellers' unsympathetic

response was colored by a belief that President Wilson was biased toward labor. Rockefeller lamented after Wilson's election, "I wish some day that we might have a real businessman as President."[8] When Wilson appointed a former UMW official, William B. Wilson, as the first secretary of labor, he implicitly committed his administration to the concept of collective bargaining. Wilson sent a deputy, Ethelbert Stewart, to New York to confer with Junior about averting the strike. Even with arsenals being stockpiled on both sides, Junior refused to see the emissary and shunted him off to Starr Murphy, who warned that "we here in the east know nothing about the conditions [in Colorado] and would be unwilling to make any suggestions to the executive officers."[9] Junior hid cravenly behind L. M. Bowers, deferring to his judgment.

On September 26, 1913, nine thousand workers at CFI struck to demand union recognition, as well as better hours, wages, and housing conditions. In a bellicose letter to Junior, Bowers promised to resist until "our bones were bleached as white as chalk in these Rocky Mountains." From 26 Broadway, Junior cheered this combative stance. "We feel that what you have done is right and fair and that the position you have taken in regard to the unionizing of the mines is in the interest of the employees of the company." Then, in words that would resound with an eerie retrospective ring, he added, "Whatever the outcome, we will stand by you to the end." [10]

In a move that served only to polarize the situation, the coal companies evicted strikers from company homes, forcing them and their families into a massive exodus. The outcasts pitched tent colonies beyond company grounds, with the largest concentration at a spot called Ludlow. By the end of September, more than 11,000 of the nearly 14,000 workers were on strike, bringing Colorado coal mining to a virtual halt. As both sides hoarded weapons, an air of violence hung over the tent colonies. Deputy sheriffs, supplied with guns and paid $3.50 a day, cordoned off the grounds of CFI.

Afraid that the unions would trumpet any meeting as a concession, the mine owners refused even to talk with organizers. Back in New York, the Rockefellers received highly distorted pictures of events as Bowers fed them sanitized reports that made union organizers sound like common hoodlums. "When such men as these, together with the cheap college professors and still cheaper writers in muck-raking magazines, supplemented by a lot of milk and water preachers . . . are permitted to assault the businessmen who have built up the great industries . . . it is time that vigorous measures are taken,"

Bowers fulminated in one letter.[11] Junior held aloof from these events, not wanting to second-guess management or perhaps reluctant to soil his hands with such filthy business.

On October 17, the situation veered toward open warfare as gunfire was exchanged between strikers and deputy sheriffs at a tent colony. By the time the battle ended, sheriffs had hurtled through the colony in a Death Special, spraying machine-gun fire and killing several strikers. To intimidate workers, CFI also strafed the colony with blinding searchlights. While Bowers kept Junior well informed about the Winchester rifles and revolvers being smuggled in by strikers, he remained mute about the company's own ample cache of weaponry, including machine guns.

As the violence intensified, the well-meaning but indecisive Governor Elias Ammons sent in the Colorado National Guard to restore order. Instead of acting in an evenhanded fashion, the guard primarily protected company property from the miners. On October 30, President Wilson intervened, asking Jesse Welborn of CFI to "submit a full and frank statement of the reasons which had led them to reject counsels of peace and accommodation in a matter now grown so critical."[12] Instead of a temperate response, Bowers sent Wilson a shocking, six-page diatribe, dismissing union recognition as unthinkable: "We shall never consent, if every mine is closed, the equipment destroyed, and the investment made worthless."[13] Since the UMW had now enlisted the legendary organizer Mary Harris Jones—better known as Mother Jones—Welborn retailed vicious scuttlebutt to the president about her alleged early career in a brothel. After reviewing this response, Junior, who was sure the trouble sprang from the strikers, extolled the "energetic, fair and firm way" that CFI had conducted itself. When Labor Secretary Wilson asked Junior for his cooperation, he ducked responsibility and expressed confidence in CFI executives who "have always been quite as solicitous for the well-being of employees as for the interest of stockholders." [14] Workers had struck, he argued, only because they were terrorized by union organizers: "The failure of our men to remain at work is due simply to their fear of assault and assassination."[15] Senior shared this grievous misperception. Junior informed Bowers, "I know that Father has followed the events of the past few months in connection with the Fuel Company with unusual interest and satisfaction." [16]

That December, a terrible blizzard blanketed Colorado. Twenty thousand

men, women, and children shivered in their tents, but Junior's position only hardened. While egged on by his father, he was clearly the point man during the strike. For the first time, Junior was the target of a Rockefeller political controversy. Summoned to give testimony before the House Subcommittee on Mines and Mining in March 1914, Junior saw himself perpetuating his father's noble legacy. "Father was the greatest business witness ever on the stand," he said. "No one could ever ruffle him or corner him and he never lost his temper. I had this great example before me and I felt I couldn't let him down."[17]

On April 6, 1914, Representative Martin D. Foster of Illinois questioned Junior before the subcommittee. Cool and poised, Junior made several admissions that critics thought damaging but that he submitted with pride: He had done nothing personally to end the strike; had not visited Colorado in ten years; had not attended a CFI board meeting since the strike; did not know of any valid worker grievances; and did not know the company had hired Baldwin-Felts detectives. For Foster, this seemed a damning self-indictment:

FOSTER: "Now, do you not think that your duty as a director goes further than that?"

JUNIOR: "We spent ten years testing out . . . one of the men in charge."

FOSTER: "Do you think your duty goes further than that? . . . Don't you believe that you, looking after the welfare of other civilians of the United States, that somewhat closer relations between officers and . . . these six thousand coal diggers who work underground, many of them foreigners, ignorant and unacquainted with the ways of the country, would be an uplift to them to make them better citizens?"

JUNIOR: "It is because I have such a profound interest in these men and all workers that I expect to stand by the policy which has been outlined by the officers, and which seems to me to be first, last and always, in the greatest interest of the employees of the country."[18]

At a climactic moment, when Foster posed the question of whether Junior would willingly lose all his property and see all his employees killed to uphold the open shop—that is, the principle that every employee had the right not to join a union, even if it bargained collectively for other workers—Junior replied, "It is a great principle," and then compared it to the sacred ideals of

freedom for which the Revolutionary War had been fought.[19]

Thrilled by Junior's defense of their privileges, businessmen swamped him with congratulatory telegrams. Almost tearful with joy at her boy's performance, Cettie wired him that his testimony "was a bugle note . . . struck for principle."[20] A no-less-exultant Senior told a friend apropos of Junior's testimony, "He expressed the views which I entertain, and which have been drilled into him from his earliest childhood."[21] Until this point, Junior had not owned any shares in the Colorado company and acted only as his father's proxy. Now, Senior gave him ten thousand shares of CFI as a reward for his testimony. Before the month was out, the stock certificates would seem like a curse that he had myopically visited upon his son.

Two weeks after Junior testified in Washington, the inadequacy of his position became evident at the tent colony in Ludlow. Some thirty-five militiamen from the national guard—many of them, said the union, company gunmen sworn in as soldiers—were stationed on a ridge overlooking the camp when a shot was fired at dawn. Who fired it was never ascertained, and perhaps it does not matter, for both sides were heavily armed and ready to fight. After the shot, the militiamen pelted the gray and white tents with machine guns, the staccato fire tearing many tents to shreds, and by day's end they had killed several strikers. Then the drunken guardsmen swooped down into the colony and, by some reports, spread a blaze from tent to tent with oil-drenched torches. The arsonists did not know that two women and eleven children were huddling for safety in a dirt bunker that had been scooped out by hand under one tent. As the canvas above them caught fire, they were overcome by smoke and promptly asphyxiated—a slaughter that was not discovered until the next morning.

When Bowers informed Junior of the so-called Ludlow Massacre, he gave it his usual self-serving gloss, describing it as an act of self-defense committed by outnumbered militiamen. Echoing the party line, Junior sent back regrets over "this further outbreak of lawlessness." [22] Junior and Abby were doing landscaping at Kykuit at the time—Abby objected to the "rather cramped" proliferation of gardens, balconies, and terraces—so that the horrific news from Colorado seemed to arrive from some infernal, faraway world.[23] Having pledged his ardor in the wrong cause, Junior could not accept blame. Two months later, he wrote a strange memo for his files in which he seemed to lambaste the strikers for the deaths of their own wives

and children:

There was no Ludlow massacre. The engagement started as a desperate fight for life between two small squads of militia, numbering twelve and twenty-two respectively, against the entire tent colony which attacked them with over three hundred armed men. There were no women or children shot by the authorities of the State or representatives of the operators in connection with the Ludlow engagement. Not one. . . . The two women and eleven children who met their death in a pit underneath the floor of one of the tents, where they had been placed by the men, apparently for safety, were smothered. That such an outcome was inevitable as a result of placing this number of human beings in a pit 8×6 and 4½ feet, the aperture of which was concealed, without any possible ventilation is evident. . . . While this loss of life is profoundly to be regretted, it is unjust in the extreme to lay it at the door of the defenders of law and property, who were in no slightest way responsible for it.[24]

However he might rationalize it, it was a nightmare for Junior, a huge stain on what he had hoped would be an immaculate life, and a reversion to the Rockefeller past. As one Cleveland paper said, "The charred bodies of two dozen women and children show that Rockefeller knows how to win."[25] John Lawson castigated Junior for these "hellish acts" and sneered that he "may ease his conscience by attending Sunday school regularly in New York but he will never be acquitted of committing the horrible atrocities."[26] Others regarded Junior as an errand boy for his father, and even Helen Keller, once helped so generously by Henry Rogers and Rockefeller, now told the press, "Mr. Rockefeller is the monster of capitalism. He gives charity and in the same breath he permits the helpless workmen, their wives and children to be shot down." [27]

A show of penitence on Junior's part might have placated the public, but his defensive moralizing invited a severe backlash. In late April, Upton Sinclair sent a "solemn warning" to Junior: "I intend this night to indict you upon a charge of murder before the people of this country. . . . But before I take this step, I wish to give you every opportunity of fair play."[28] When Junior did not respond to his requested interview, Sinclair spearheaded a demonstration outside 26 Broadway, a "mourning parade" of pickets dressed in black armbands, their ranks swollen, at one point, by a delegation from Ludlow. "The harder we pound Rockefeller, the surer we are of winning," Sinclair told his associates.[29] In this threatening environment, a woman with

a loaded pistol was forcibly removed from Junior's office. Senior had been unflappable in crises, but his son was shaken to the core. He now kept a Smith & Wesson .38 pistol in his office drawer and posted watchmen at Fifty-fourth Street, where another chanting contingent besieged his home.

As Emma Goldman, Alexander Berkman, and other prominent anarchists and Wobblies flocked to Kykuit to protest, guards tried to seal off the estate against these interlopers, some of whom penetrated the grounds, smashed windows, and set fire to the dairy barn. Foolishly confident of his persuasive powers, Senior marched toward the wrought-iron gates, hoping to calm the protesters, but the Burns detectives urged him to go back into the house. The local fire department was summoned to train water cannons on demonstrators who were trying to clamber over the gates. So many journalists converged on the scene that Rockefeller was distracted at golf by the incessant glare of the photographers' lights and had to alter his daily schedule. Before the summer was over, he had installed barbed-wire fences at Pocantico and strung out potentially lethal razor wire across the tops of walls. Dismayed by the fortresslike atmosphere of their compound, Junior told his father, "I am wondering whether so obvious an effort to make entrance to the place difficult at this time may not challenge attention and suggest a fear and apprehension on our part which might induce, rather than help, to keep out intruders."[30]

All the Rockefeller wealth suddenly seemed insufficient beside the magnitude of the threat. During one rally outside 26 Broadway, a speaker denounced Junior and exhorted the crowd to "shoot him down like a dog."[31] Such inflammatory rhetoric was not just political bombast. In May, several Wobblies were killed or injured when a bomb they were assembling blew up on the top floor of a Lexington Avenue tenement; it was widely thought that the explosive had been destined for Junior's town house.

After the massacre, the coalfields witnessed a fresh upsurge in violence as southern Colorado degenerated into a lawless no-man's-land, and President Wilson faced vociferous demands to dispatch federal cavalry troops to the area. To avert this, he wrote to Rockefeller and implored him to meet with Martin Foster before Foster left to tour the coalfields. Playing his sly old game, Rockefeller said he had not been to work in twenty years, but that his son would meet Foster in New York.

At this April 27 meeting, Junior was completely inflexible, telling Foster that CFI controlled a mere third of Colorado coal output and shouldn't be

singled out for criticism. Afterward, Junior informed the president,

Dr. Foster was unable to make any suggestions which did not involve the unionizing of the mines or the submission of that question to arbitration. We stated to him that if the employees of the Colorado Fuel and Iron had any grievances, we felt sure that the officers of the Company would be willing now, as they had always been, to make every effort to adjust them satisfactorily, but that the question of the open shop . . . could not be arbitrated. [32]

Wilson was stunned by this brazen indifference to a presidential request, telling Junior, "It seemed to me a great opportunity for some large action which would show the way not only in this case but in many others." [33] A few days later, Wilson sent federal troops to Colorado.

It was all a regrettable throwback to the days of Standard Oil, with Junior now cast as the villain of the piece. His inability to escape from this debacle stemmed from his own rigidity plus an unbending intolerance toward unions that was also exhibited by his father and Gates. "We are trying to move quietly, and patiently, under the trying ordeal," Rockefeller told Harold McCormick, "but I repeat it is a matter for all of us to give earnest heed to, and we must all cooperate throughout the land for the maintenance of our rights."[34] Supporting his uncle, Gates also refused to give an inch to save lives. "The officers of the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company are standing between the country and chaos, anarchy, proscription and confiscation and in so doing are worthy of the support of every man who loves his country." [35]

Surrounded by these retrograde views, this refusal to entertain new ideas, Junior was locked in an untenable position. The Ludlow disaster threatened to undo all his efforts to cleanse the family name. His father—so long his cynosure, guide, sage, and mentor—could not graduate to new wisdom in this area. The Ludlow Massacre forced Junior to admit that his father held some antiquated views and that he must take spiritual leave of him. To do so, he needed a confidant from outside his immediate circle, someone who shared his sense of ethics and could devise a practicable, honorable way out of the impasse. He found this providential personage in William Lyon Mackenzie King.

Mackenzie King exerted a tremendous influence upon Junior in part because they had similar styles and tastes but radically different knowledge of the

world. The offspring of a renowned Canadian family, King had been a wunderkind of Canadian politics. After studying economics at Toronto, Chicago, and Harvard, he was named Canada's first deputy minister of labor at age twenty-five and then minister of labor nine years later. A gently persuasive man, he had arbitrated many acrimonious labor disputes and espoused new government mechanisms for settling such disputes. In 1911, his luck expired when the Liberal government fell, depriving him of his ministerial post and throwing him into a state of acute anxiety about money. For three years, a rich British woman named Violet Markham helped him financially. King always claimed to find fault with high society, which he dismissed as petty, false, and vain, but when he needed the money, he could be obsequious toward the rich.

In early June 1914, still fretting about his finances, he received a cryptic telegram from the Rockefeller Foundation, inviting him to New York to discuss a special labor project for its new economic-research unit. On June 6, he found himself closeted in a four-hour marathon session at 10 West Fifty-fourth Street with Junior, Jerome Greene, and Starr Murphy. By the close, Junior had asked him to head the foundation's new Department of Industrial Relations—which, in essence, meant serving as his personal adviser on Ludlow. Even though Junior publicly denied it, he was smart enough to see that he needed to grope toward some new innovation in labor-management relations. An ambitious, liberal politician, King was initially petrified by the potential repercussions of this association. As he confessed to his diary, "Once associated in any way with the Rockefeller concern, my future in politics would be jeopardized."[36] For two months, King wavered about accepting the job. But since it was being offered by the Rockefeller Foundation, not Standard Oil, he was emboldened to take the risk, especially when former Harvard president Charles Eliot strongly endorsed the move. At a second meeting with Junior at Pocantico, in Senior's presence, King accepted the job.

Just about the same age, King and Junior were both short and stocky, prudish and proper, and dressed in dark, old-fashioned suits. Something about King's platitudinous moralizing was highly reminiscent of the Rockefellers'. A fervent Presbyterian, King devotedly read the Bible and abstained from cards and tobacco, and these two reserved, rather solitary young men enjoyed an immediate rapport. Many observers saw in King the very strengths and weaknesses—a messianic nature combined with a lack of social ease—often attributed to Junior. Both young men idealized their mothers, and when King

later drifted into spiritualism, he claimed that he had communicated with his dead mother's spirit in séances. According to Junior, King was "quite silly about women," yet some inhibition always kept him a bachelor. [37]

Junior considered King's arrival "heaven-sent deliverance" and later said, "Seldom have I been so impressed by a man at first appearance."[38] Normally surrounded by elders, Junior found in King a peer who had known firsthand the hurly-burly of the world. Within a year of their meeting, Junior told him, "I feel I have found in you the brother I have never had and have always wished to have." [39] Despite that, Junior called him "Mr. King" for the next forty years. An idealist with a wide streak of ambition, King saw in Junior a way to carry out social reform and be well compensated in the bargain. Despite his liberal politics and initial prejudice against the Rockefellers, King liked Junior instantly and thought him a kindred spirit. "Whatever his father may have done or is," King told a friend, "that man I have found to be almost without exception the truest follower of Christ." [40]

Except to his uninhibited wife, Junior never talked as candidly to anybody as he did to King. King bluntly warned him that the Rockefellers' philanthropic work could be destroyed by Ludlow and that it would be a "Herculean task" to overcome unfair public prejudice against the family. Only King could broach the dreaded topic of Senior's business ethics without seeming disloyal. He recorded in his diary that he told Junior *that he must recognize that we were living together in a different generation than the one in which his father had lived, and that it was possible, in building up an industry such as Standard Oil, to maintain a comparative secrecy as to methods of work, etc. and to keep business pretty much to those who were engaged in it. Today, there was a social spirit abroad, and it was absolutely necessary to take the public into one's confidence, to give publicity to many things, and especially to stand out for certain principles very broadly.* [41]

He made Junior see the need to depart from his father's legacy and chart an independent course.

By this point, Junior was touchingly frank in his need for advice about Ludlow. "He had vast experience in industrial relations and I had none," Junior said of King's influence. "I needed guidance." [42] Though supporting unions, King favored compromise, opposed strikes purely for union recognition, and insisted upon gradual reform. He thought that fair-minded

investigations of the facts would suggest a common ground for capital and labor. Appealing to Junior's conscience, King argued that Christian brotherhood could be brought to the bloodstained fields of Colorado through greater worker-management cooperation. Under the Rockefeller Foundation aegis, King devised a plan in which CFI employees would elect representatives to boards for dealing with worker grievances. At best a halfway house on the road to true labor reform, the plan was a cosmetic modification rather than a sharp break with the past, and organized labor scoffed at it as another paternalistic trick. But it was a courageous departure from the prevailing business ethos, however timid it might seem by later lights. As proof of this, CFI management resisted it, fearing it would deliver the company into the union's hands. In the end, Senior looked on benignly and let these changes occur. It was a road that he could not have traversed himself, but his son found the way to do so.

King led Junior away from his father's orthodoxy while simultaneously charming the old man. When King pleaded for greater public openness, Rockefeller seemed deeply moved. "I wish I had had you the thirty or forty years I was in business to advise me on policies," he said.[43] King found Rockefeller far nicer than he had expected. As he told a friend:

In appearance, [Rockefeller] is not unlike pictures one sees of the old popes. In manner he is singularly simple and natural and genuinely kindly. . . . I had the feeling I was talking with a man of exceptionally alert mind and great discernment of character. He is a good deal of a mimic, and in telling of people and his own feelings is apt to imitate the expression of the person or the attitude he is representing. He is full of humor, particularly in conveying a shrewd knowledge of situations and men. His whole nature is a gentle one and a sweet one.[44]

By December 1914—eight months after the Ludlow Massacre—striking miners, their strike fund depleted, voted to end the long walkout, allowing federal troops to leave the area. With the end of the strike, Junior pressed his blueprint for labor-management cooperation upon CFI leadership with renewed vigor. Bowers and Welborn still worried that the plan might lend credence to union grievances, but Junior persisted despite their hostility. Far from fleeing criticism, he exposed himself to it. His old college classmate Everett Colby gave a dinner at the Union Club in Manhattan so that Junior could meet people who had pummeled him, including Lincoln Steffens and the socialist lawyer Morris Hillquit. During postprandial cigars, speaker after

speaker reviled Junior's initial refusal to become involved in the strike. Then Colby said, "Do you want to say anything, Mr. Rockefeller?" "I certainly do," said Junior, slowly rising to his feet. Everyone expected a withering counterblast, but Junior confounded them by saying, "I want you gentlemen to realize how deeply grateful I am for this. I shan't forget any of it. My difficulty is that I can't find out the truth. A chap in my position is so used to being made a target for unjust accusations that his tendency is to disbelieve even those which may perhaps be justified." [45] It was a polite way of saying that his press critics had some truth on their side and was thus a major step forward from his earlier denials.

Unlike Senior, whose hide was thickened by abuse, Junior was traumatized by press invective. "I never read the papers when there's apt to be any trouble," he reflected years later. "I learned that in the old days during the strike out west."[46] In May 1914, while still reeling from the Ludlow Massacre, Junior asked Arthur Brisbane to recommend someone who might burnish the family image, and Brisbane suggested thirty-six-year-old Ivy Ledbetter Lee, executive assistant to the president of the Pennsylvania Railroad. The son of a Georgia Methodist preacher, the slim, blue-eyed Lee had a southern drawl and willowy southern charm that would subtly seduce a generation of newsmen. After working his way through Princeton, he traced a career route that became commonplace in the news business: After stints at two New York papers, Hearst's *Journal* and Pulitzer's *World*, he went into corporate public relations, a budding field fostered by the dual impact of investigative journalism and government regulation of business. At their first encounter at 26 Broadway, Junior told Lee, "I feel that my father and I are much misunderstood by the press and the people of this country. I should like to know what your advice would be on how to make our position clear."[47] Instead of buying press coverage, Lee expounded his belief that businessmen should present their views fully and frankly—then trust to the truth. Said a relieved Junior: "This is the first advice I have had that does not involve deviousness of one kind or another."[48]

Still committed to an unfinished project at the Pennsylvania Railroad, Lee started out by working on a $1,000-a-month retainer for Rockefeller, which was shortly increased to a handsome full-time salary of $15,000 a year. Though he soon defected to set up his own consulting firm, he faithfully served the Rockefellers and Standard Oil of New Jersey from this outpost. So pervasive and trusted was his counsel that Junior later told a head of Standard

of New Jersey: “Mr. Lee is very much more than a publicity agent. He is one of our advisers in regard to various matters of policy.” [49]

It is difficult to assess whether Ivy Lee had a beneficial effect upon the Rockefellers. His instructions to Junior sounded commendable enough: “Tell the truth, because sooner or later the public will find out anyway. And if the public doesn’t like what you are doing, change your policies and bring them into line with what people want.”[50] Excellent advice, to be sure, but did it reflect Lee’s own behavior? For several months in mid-1914, he issued a series of bulletins called “Facts Concerning the Struggle in Colorado for Industrial Freedom” that were broadly disseminated to opinion makers, giving the Rockefeller version of events. Many critics faulted Lee for playing fast and loose with the facts when he grossly overstated the pay given to strike leaders by the union, dished out scabrous stories about Mother Jones’s supposed early career as a brothel madam, and blamed the Ludlow Massacre on an overturned tent stove instead of militia gunfire. The literary fraternity skewered him: Carl Sandburg published an article called “Ivy Lee—Paid Liar”; Upton Sinclair memorably branded him “Poison Ivy”; and Robert Benchley later mocked him for suggesting that “the present capitalist system is really a branch of the Quaker Church, carrying on the work begun by St. Francis of Assisi.” [51]

Initially, Lee repeated the error that had landed the Rockefellers in trouble in the first place: He relied upon slanted reports from CFI executives. After some embarrassing gaffes, he traveled out West in August 1914 and returned with a more balanced picture. Lee discovered that Bowers and Welborn had issued distorted information and that CFI employees were too cowed to voice complaints. “It is of the greatest importance,” he advised Junior, “that as early as possible some comprehensive plan be devised to provide machinery to redress grievances.”[52] Whatever his truth-shading tendencies, Lee probably helped to bring about more humane policies at CFI.

Under the joint tutelage of King and Lee, Junior regained his equanimity and even launched a publicity offensive for improved labor relations, a transformation evident when he testified in January 1915 before the U.S. Commission on Industrial Relations at New York’s City Hall. Assembled by President Wilson, the commission was composed of representatives of employers, employees, and the public. The hearing was chaired by Senator Frank P. Walsh, a reformist Missouri lawyer who had won his spurs defending

Jesse James. With an impressive mane of hair and a histrionic manner, Walsh was gunning for Rockefeller. To coach Junior for this event, King gave him a brief reading list on trade-union history and issued a delphic warning: “I reported . . . to him, that there appeared no alternative so far as he was concerned, to his being either the storm centre of a great revolution in this country or the man who by his fearless stand and position would transfuse a new spirit into industry.” [53] For his part, Lee insisted that Junior not skulk around and behave guiltily. When the question arose of which door Junior would enter upon arriving at City Hall, Jerome Greene said, “Oh, the rear door of course.” At once, Lee jumped to his feet. “The days of the rear door philosophy are over. Mr. Rockefeller will have to enter through the same door as everyone else.”[54] When Junior, clad in derby and chesterfield coat, arrived at City Hall, looking pale and tense, he strode down the center aisle, pausing to shake hands with Mother Jones and other Colorado union organizers.

The next three days of arduous testimony provided a catharsis for John D. Rockefeller, Jr. During the first day’s testimony, he still professed ignorance of the CFI situation. He endorsed the right of labor to organize but also the right of capital to resist. At day’s end, when he strolled down Broadway to his office, he was trailed by masses of jeering demonstrators. Even though Police Commissioner Arthur Woods assigned special details to 26 Broadway and West Fifty-fourth Street, Junior declined this special protection. “Father never was afraid of anybody,” he explained. “He was the most completely fearless man I ever met, and I don’t want the public to think that I had to have police around me to protect me.”[55]

The second day held surprises for Junior’s detractors. He buttonholed Mother Jones—who had been jailed in Colorado for nine weeks and escorted from the state at bayonet point—and invited her to visit his office. Responding in a friendly manner, she told Junior that she had never believed he knew what “those hirelings out there were doing. I can see how easy it is to misguide you.” Junior kidded her about throwing compliments his way. To the delighted roar of press and spectators, Mother Jones retorted, “I am more inclined to throw bricks.”[56] On the stand that day, Junior delivered the mea culpa so long awaited by the public when he admitted that he had taken too narrow a view of a director’s responsibilities. “I should hope that I could never reach the point where I would not be constantly progressing to something higher, better— both with reference to my own acts and . . . to the general situation in the company. My hope is that I am progressing. It is my

desire to."[57] Mackenzie King later identified this testimony as the turning point in Junior's life.

Such public confessions of error were alien to Senior, who interpreted criticism as the martyrdom of the just. In Junior's place, he would have reacted with cool defiance or expedient forgetfulness. Yet he saw that his son was following King's advice, exhibiting uncommon courage, and accomplishing a critical shift in the family's public posture. Moved by his son's strength, Senior bequeathed to Junior another eighty thousand shares of CFI stock, which gave him effective control of the company. If he had been scanning the heavens for a sign that his son was strong enough to carry the burden of a colossal fortune, this was it. He said later of his son's testimony:

They tried so hard to badger my son, to harrow him into saying something that they could use against him, against us. It was like the trial of Joan of Arc. I don't know where he got the answers, his language, so quick, so instant to every question. . . . He surprised us all. He seemed to answer like one inspired. Indeed, I believe that his sainted mother must have inspired him; he was so kindly, so right in his attitude and all his statements. [58]

For most reporters, Junior came across as frank and sincere, if a trifle stuffy. Walter Lippmann, however, accused him of mouthing commonplaces.

Those who listened to him would have forgiven him much if they had felt that they were watching a great figure, a real master of men, a person of some magnificence. But in John D. Rockefeller, Jr., there seemed to be nothing but a young man having a lot of trouble, very much harassed and very well-meaning. No sign of the statesman, no quality of leadership in large affairs, just a careful, plodding, essentially uninteresting person who justifies himself with simple moralities and small-scale virtues. [59]

It was a savage indictment and one repeated frequently over the years. But it failed to appreciate how bravely this pedestrian young man at age forty had managed to appease both a venomous public and an all-powerful father. He had repudiated his father's principles without seeming to repudiate the man, an ingenious strategy that opened up fresh possibilities for the family. To see how far Junior had traveled beyond his reactionary mentors, one need only cite a hysterical memo that Gates wrote after the Walsh testimony, deploring Junior's leniency:

I do not so understand Christ that he adopted any spirit of conciliation toward those who came to him in the spirit of these Unionists. . . . I would have engaged an array of the most brilliant and able counsel to be gotten in New York—men not afraid, if necessary, to make a scene in court. . . . If necessary I would have carried the matter so far as to invite arrest, and I would have resisted arrest, and been carried struggling—shrieking from the court room for the purpose of getting my case vividly, powerfully, before the people of the United States.[60]

How much Junior had evolved beyond such die-hard opposition was also made clear when Mother Jones visited him at 26 Broadway. The eighty-four-year-old, cheerfully vulgar, Cork-born rabble-rouser liked to rally striking miners while outfitted in boots and bonnets and peering at them humorously through granny glasses. Now, having helped to turn the Colorado strike into an anti-Rockefeller vendetta, she stood face-to-face with Junior. She teased him that she had pictured him with a hard jaw and firm-set mouth, clutching for money. Mimicking this, she added, "When I saw you going on the stand, and listened to the evidence, and saw the kind of man you are, I was filled with remorse. I felt I had done you a great injustice."[61] Having paid tribute to Junior's sincerity, Mother Jones did not mince words about his employee-representation plan, which she called "a sham and fraud."[62] But after the bitter stalemate of past years, this meeting represented a major advance in mutual confidence. After the chat, Ivy Lee invited in reporters, and Junior, his face reddening shyly, said, "Gentlemen, I know it is my duty as a director to know more about actual conditions in the mines. I told Mother Jones that, of course, there should be free speech, free assembly, and independent, not company-owned, schools, stores and churches in the mine field. I am going to Colorado as soon as I can to learn for myself." [63] The promised two-week trip was made in September 1915, an overdue rite of passage that would complete the partial conversion begun in New York.

When Junior journeyed to southern Colorado, he betrayed the feverish urgency of a man on a spiritual quest. In a second round of hearings in May, Frank Walsh had released subpoenaed copies of correspondence that had passed between Junior and CFI executives during the strike. They showed Junior in his most militantly antiunion mood, implicating him more deeply in management than he had admitted and making the expiatory trip to Colorado even more essential. Having always shrunk from contact with his anonymous foes, Senior confided to a friend that he would give a million dollars to spare

his boy exposure to peril in Colorado. He tried to prevail upon Charles O. Heydt to carry a gun, but Junior, determined to prove his courage, refused either weapons or bodyguards. The eight reporters who tagged along were requested, as a security precaution, to keep his itinerary a secret.

The trip pointed up critical differences between Senior and Junior. For Senior, vast wealth had permitted a retreat to his estates, whereas for Junior it underscored the need for greater openness. Instinctively, he behaved like a head of state, always cordial and generous in public—a style he transmitted to his children. Unlike his father, he did not wish to be eternally at war with the American public and had the courage to make the necessary midcourse corrections; in this last respect, he was a stronger person than his indomitable father, who had always dug in his heels and become intransigent when attacked.

Throughout his life, Junior had shadowboxed with unseen enemies who suddenly became three-dimensional human beings in the Colorado mining camps. Now, he would mingle with workers whose fate he had governed from afar. First, the caravan stopped at Ludlow itself, a haunted, windblown spot, now denuded of its tents. Emerging from their cars, Junior, King, and the reporters solemnly approached two railroad ties, nailed together in a black cross, marking the spot where the two women and eleven children had been suffocated in the pit. Afterward, they rode to the first of eighteen CFI coal towns, where they lunched on beefsteak, beans, and mashed potatoes. Entering into the spirit of the place, Junior and King responded to Ivy Lee's suggestion and bought two-dollar suits of denim overalls from a company store before descending a coal shaft.

At one coal-mining camp, Junior delivered a short talk to workers in the local schoolhouse then suggested, with uncharacteristic spontaneity, that they clear the floor and hold an impromptu dance. As a little four-piece band struck up "The Hesitation Waltz," he grabbed a miner's wife and gaily stepped onto the floor. Too well-bred for tokenism, Junior spent the evening dancing with each of the twenty or so women in attendance—an ironic sequel for a young man once so bashful at Brown that he hesitated to dance at all. Nobody was more flabbergasted than Abby, who tracked his progress in the press. "From the papers I gather that your dancing has been one of your greatest assets," she wrote to him. "I will never demur again."[64]

On October 2, 1915, in the town of Pueblo, Junior addressed two hundred

CFI workers and managers. “This is a red-letter day in my life,” he began. “It is the first time I have ever had the good fortune to meet the representatives of the employees of this great company, its officers and mine superintendents, together, and I can assure you that I am proud to be here, and that I shall remember this gathering as long as I live.” [65] Preaching his gospel of cooperation, he laid out his plans for a joint labor-management grievance panel along with new committees for health, sanitation, mine safety, recreation, and education. Significantly, nobody would be fired for joining a union, and there were promises of new housing, schools, and recreation centers. Taking a down-home approach, Junior laid three heaps of coins on a table to represent workers, managers, and directors then tried to show how each group siphoned off coins, leaving nothing for dividends on the $34 million Rockefeller investment. In the end, Junior must have been fairly persuasive, for 2,404 of 2,846 miners voted for his plan in a secret ballot. On the other hand, possibly from disdain for this paternalism, 2,000 miners boycotted the vote.

Selling the plan to management was no easier. After initial resistance, Welborn accepted the grievance mechanism and introduced other innovations, but L. M. Bowers opposed this reform, and Junior realized he had to cashier Gates’s uncle. “One of the most unpleasant tasks I ever performed was to get his resignation,” he said. “I shall never forget the three or four hours I spent with him in my house here trying to get him to retire amicably—for he could be a nasty enemy.”[66] At this point, Junior’s relations with Gates began to cool forever. The tradition-minded Junior never formally deposed the old gods—his father and Gates—but instead staked out new directions with new advisers. When E. H. Weitzel, CFI’s fuel manager, complained about his clemency toward unions, Junior shot back: “Your attitude in this respect is definitely paternalistic, an attitude which on general principles I am sure you will agree it is unwise for any corporation to maintain. . . . Paternalism is antagonistic to democracy.” [67] Junior had defected, at least halfway, to the enemy camp. But his representation plan was, at best, only a middling success. In the following years, the company weathered four more strikes before the UMW finally won recognition in 1933. Junior’s species of “company union” was outlawed by the Wagner Act in 1935.

For Junior, the Colorado trip was a trial by fire from which he emerged triumphant, converting the worst moment in the family history into something more promising. As King told Abby during the tour, “From now on he will be

able to devote his time to advancing the vast projects . . . [relating] to human beings, without being thwarted at every step by . . . the voice . . . of popular prejudice."[68] Although much of what Junior had done was likely anathema to him, Senior cheered his son's journey of reconciliation. "Yes, it was excellent," he told an old friend. "I could not have managed it better myself."[69]

After the Colorado trip, Junior became a prophet for improved labor relations throughout American industry, an evangelical role he enjoyed more than browbeating unions. Seizing the high ground, he sold his stock in U.S. Steel during a 1920 strike when management would not annul its policy of twelve-hour days, seven days a week. Junior and King introduced employee-representation plans at both Standard Oil of New Jersey and Standard Oil of Indiana. Abby even contributed to trade unions and to funds for striking workers—which her husband thought was going a bit far. As a nationwide drive to retain the open shop swept American business in the 1920s, many industrialists looked upon Junior as a dangerous liberal, even though many trade unionists saw his company unions as traps for unsuspecting workers.

In one respect, Junior's work with Mackenzie King proved a setback for the family: It fueled popular suspicion of the Rockefeller Foundation. From the outset, the family had insisted that it would be a public trust, not a vehicle to promote Rockefeller causes. Because King's work was underwritten by the foundation, though, it looked as if the Rockefellers had exploited their philanthropy to lend a veneer of legitimacy to their business activities. After public hearings into the matter, the foundation decided to avoid economic issues and concentrate on public health, medicine, and other safe areas. To boost faith in the foundation's autonomy, in July 1917 Rockefeller waived his future right to make founder's designations.

If the Ludlow Massacre was a turning point in Rockefeller family history, much of the credit must go to Mackenzie King, who emancipated Junior from strict obedience to his father. He strengthened Junior's tenuous faith in his own judgment, making him feel that he was strong enough and fit enough to manage the family fortune. King probably did not exaggerate when he said of Junior in his diary: "I really think he feels closer to myself than to any other man he knows."[70] Politically, Mackenzie King emerged both well paid and unscathed from his detour into the Rockefeller universe. In 1919, he was elected leader of the Liberal Party in Canada and two years later became prime minister, serving in that post off and on for a record twenty-two years

and forging much of the modern Canadian welfare state. Like many counselors to the Rockefellers, he had enjoyed the satisfaction of serving both his conscience and his bank account.

CHAPTER 30

Introvert and Extrovert

The Ludlow saga was intertwined with the final, troubled phase of Cettie's life. When demonstrators stormed the Pocantico gates, Rockefeller grew alarmed because, among other reasons, his wife lay terminally ill inside. Junior was about to make his trek of atonement to Colorado when his mother died on March 12, 1915, forcing him to postpone it until September. One of the first sympathy notes came from Mother Jones: "The sympathy of one whom thousands of men have called 'Mother' is with you at this time when your heart is filled with sorrow for her who called you 'Son.' "[1] A month later, Senator Aldrich, who had retired from the Senate in 1911, died of a stroke, steeping Junior and Abby in the thick gloom of double mourning.

Cettie had been withering away for many years. When she took up winter residence at 4 West Fifty-fourth Street in late 1909, she was already restricted to a wheelchair, so that Junior and Harold McCormick had to hoist her up the front steps. Largely bedridden, requiring round-the-clock nursing, she was inexplicably reluctant, like her husband, to consult the eminent physicians at the Rockefeller Institute. As her diaries show, she suffered from a gruesome host of afflictions, including pneumonia, shingles, pernicious anemia, and sciatica. She was pestered by so many ailments that it is impossible to come up with a single, clear diagnosis.

Senior's response to her chronic troubles was ambivalent. He was often loving and infinitely patient. At dinner parties, he would pluck a flower, excuse himself, tiptoe up the stairs, and present it to her, along with some amusing tidbit of table talk. "He was the most affectionate and thoughtful man in illness and sorrow I have ever known," said his son. "No woman could have been more tender."[2] During Cettie's siege, they remained an old-fashioned couple, sweet and unfailingly courtly with each other.

Yet for all his devotion, Rockefeller was often away, refusing to modify his seasonal rotation of houses. During the winter of 1909–1910 at West Fifty-fourth Street, for instance, Cettie inscribed in her diary: "John Sr. is at Pocantico coming down Sundays."[3] Though he stayed away for long patches

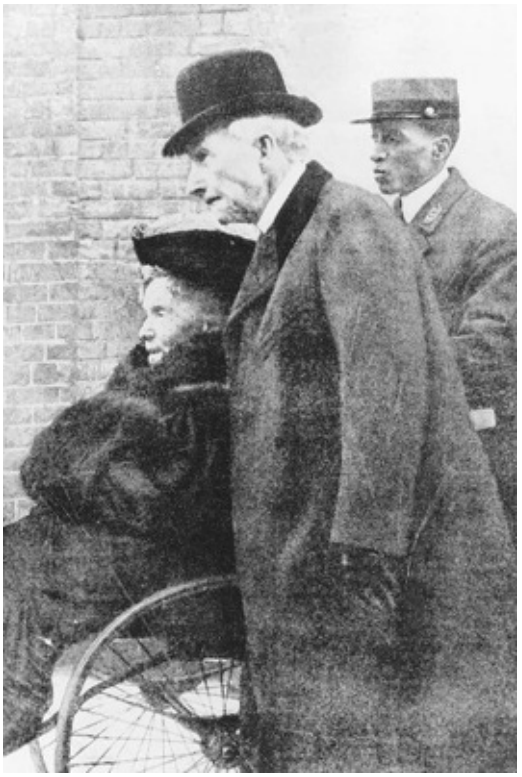
— sometimes weeks at a stretch—Cettie expressed no bitterness.

During the summer of 1913 at Forest Hill, with Dr. Biggar in constant attendance, Cettie's condition deteriorated as lumbago, pleurisy, congestive heart failure, and bladder and rectal problems were superadded to her already long list of maladies. In this cheerless season, sister Lute grew ill and took to a wheelchair, though she recovered by the spring. When doctors warned Rockefeller that Cettie was too frail to leave Cleveland, he was caught in an excruciating predicament, for his seasonal rotation demanded his presence at Pocantico in October. If he stayed through February, he could be listed as a Cleveland resident and face severe tax penalties. Nonetheless, he repeatedly postponed the trip due to Cettie's frailty. Making the best of things, he drove Cettie around the grounds each day in an old-fashioned open phaeton or newfangled automobile. "John so very cheerful and comforting and glad I am slowly improving," Cettie told her diary.[4] During one visit to the Euclid Avenue Baptist Church, Rockefeller was addressing the congregation when his gaze alighted upon Cettie's pale, upturned face, and he was moved to a personal utterance. "People tell me I have done much in my life," he said. "I know I have worked hard. But the best thing I ever accomplished and the thing that has given me the greatest happiness was to win Cettie Spelman. I have had but one sweetheart and am thankful to say I still have her."[5]

In February 1914, John preceded Cettie to Kykuit to ensure that the remodeled house would accommodate her comfortably. Perhaps with a premonition that she would never see Cleveland again, Cettie postponed her departure for New York. When one employee softly prodded her, she balked. "I don't want to go yet," she said. "This is where the children used to be, and Mr. John's little rocking chair is upon the attic floor." [6] The journey east in February proved an unspeakable ordeal. When the train stopped at Philipse Manor in North Tarrytown, Cettie, attended by doctors and nurses, was lifted to a waiting automobile. Once she was settled in at Pocantico, Senior promptly resumed his self-imposed routine and rushed off to his Lakewood haunt for his usual spring retreat. Without reproach, Junior wrote him, "Mother misses you, but is glad to feel that you are having a good rest, and while she will welcome you home, realizes that you should have this change."[7]

Dismayed by his wife's sickness and perhaps feeling faintly guilty, Rockefeller tried to offset his absences with extravagant romantic gestures.

On their golden wedding anniversary in September 1914, he brought a brass band to Kykuit, placed them on the lawn, and had Cettie carried from the house to Mendelssohn's "Wedding March."



John D. Rockefeller attends the ailing Cettie, who was confined to a wheelchair in her final years. *(Courtesy of the Rockefeller Archive Center)*

During her last Pocantico winter, strengthened by a brew of barley, oatmeal, and milk, Cettie seemed to rally, so that Junior and Abby felt confident enough to join Senior at his new winter retreat in Ormond Beach, Florida. As workmen painted the master bedroom for John D.'s return, Cettie was in better spirits than she had been in for a long time. On March 11, 1915, she asked for a wheelchair, wanting to tour the garden and smell the flowers. During this fleeting reverie, she downed a glass of milk, pronounced it good, then wearily sank back on her pillow, feeling faint and weak. Lute and Dr. Paul Allen maintained an overnight vigil at her bedside, and the two sisters were clasping hands at 10:20 A.M. the next morning when Cettie expired. At Ormond Beach, Rockefeller received two telegrams in rapid succession: the first announcing that she was dying, the second her death. Though he had gotten accustomed, by degrees, to the possible imminence of her death, he was still stunned by the finality of the news. When he shuffled back to the breakfast table with the news, John and Abby saw something they had never seen before: Senior was openly weeping.

Returning by train from Florida with his son and daughter-in-law, Rockefeller was amazed by the many expressions of sympathy he received from railway officials and conductors along the route. As Abby said, “He was wonderfully calm and brave but it was a great shock to him.” [8] At Pocantico, Rockefeller found Cettie laid out peacefully where she had died and for a long time stared pensively at the woman who had shared the unprecedented achievements and tumult of his life. Alta came to Pocantico but not Edith, who was studying with Carl Jung in Switzerland. Seven years later, Rockefeller reconstructed for her his impressions of Cettie’s death, saying that “she triumphed gloriously when the end came, and to the last view we took of her, her face bore that angelic radiance.” [9]

Rockefeller was always sentimental about his wife, and as he reminisced about their early married days on Cheshire Street in Cleveland, he would take out and lovingly handle the first dishes they had purchased. While grappling with both grief and wistful memory, he had to endure an infuriating tax battle with the city of Cleveland. He had been a legal resident of New York since the 1880s and paid all his taxes there. During the winter of 1913–1914, Cettie’s illness had forced him to prolong his stay at Forest Hill beyond February 3—the tax-listing day that determined taxable residence in Ohio. Rockefeller’s extended sojourn had been dictated solely by the medical emergency.

Nonetheless, his political enemies welcomed this chance to vex him. Declaring Rockefeller a legal resident for 1913, the Cuyahoga County tax office assessed him $1.5 million in taxes. Having already paid taxes in New York, he refused to submit to this extortion, even after Ohio governor James M. Cox threatened to subpoena him if he crossed the state line. While Rockefeller stalled, the Cuyahoga commissioners threatened to slap on a 50 percent penalty. Later on, the courts declared that Rockefeller had been assessed wrongfully, but meanwhile he had no choice but to boycott the state.

The way Cleveland dealt with him had long been a sore point with Rockefeller, who believed that no other town so regularly abused him. He thought the city ungrateful for Standard Oil’s economic contribution and railed against “low politicians” who tried to extract taxes from him. “Cleveland ought to be ashamed to look herself in the face when she thinks of how she treated us,” he stated.[10] It irked him that local groups badgered him for money while he was being so mercilessly berated by local reporters and politicians. During his lifetime, he donated more than three million dollars to

several local institutions— including the Euclid Avenue Baptist Church, Alta House, Western Reserve University, the Case School of Applied Sciences, and the Cleveland Orchestra— and gave the land for two spacious parks, Rockefeller Park and Forest Hill Park. Yet these gifts were extremely modest compared to what Cleveland would have received had it not antagonized him. Rankled, Rockefeller transferred his love and loyalty to his adopted town. "New York has always treated me more fairly than Cleveland, much more."[11] How many New York hospitals, museums, and churches would be enriched by Cleveland's blunder!

Because of the virulent tax dispute, Rockefeller could not bury Cettie in the family plot in Cleveland without facing a subpoena and had to postpone the burial. To the press, he contrived a saccharine story that he could not bear to part with her remains. "I want to keep her with me as long as I can," he told reporters.[12] For four and a half months, he stored her casket in the green granite mausoleum of the Archbold family at Sleepy Hollow Cemetery in Tarrytown, which was patrolled at all hours by two armed guards.

The casket was finally moved to Cleveland under top secret conditions. During a pelting rain and hailstorm, two guards were sent down to the cemetery gate to pick up some decorative plants for the vault—a diversionary tactic that distracted them for twenty-five minutes. While they were away, a local undertaker named Vanderbilt drove up to the vault, peeled away the flower-covered pall, removed Cettie's casket from its container, substituted a new empty casket, then replaced the pall and flowers. Once he had executed this switch, Vanderbilt drove out the front gate with Cettie's coffin hidden inside a rough, plain, unmarked box. Driving to the Harmon station of the Lake Shore Railroad, the undertaker loaded the box into a baggage car amid the intermittent flashes of an electrical storm. Nobody associated with the railroad knew the identity of the cadaver, which was accompanied to Cleveland by Vanderbilt and two men from 26 Broadway. One conspirator recalled Rockefeller's peculiarly boyish pleasure at this intrigue: "To plan and carry out the removal of the body without the papers and the public discovering a thing until all was over, was a source of satisfaction to him." [13]

Perpetuating this intrigue at Lake View cemetery, only Senior, Alta, Parmalee, and Aunt Lute stood by when Cettie's coffin was lowered into the earth beside Eliza—with a gap left in between them so that Rockefeller could spend eternity flanked by his two favorite women. Rockefeller selected Christian verse to be read aloud at the gravesite, and this clandestine sunset

burial filled him with emotion. “That was all so beautiful, so lovely,” he said. “It was just as mama would have wished.”[14] It also ended Rockefeller’s association with Cleveland, since two years later the old Forest Hill house mysteriously burned down on a frosty December night. After a failed attempt to create a residential development with houses designed in Norman-château style, Junior transferred the remaining land to Cleveland for Forest Hill Park.

As part of the probate of her will, Cettie’s wardrobe was inventoried and revealed her nunlike simplicity. The most costly item of clothing was a seal coat and muff, appraised at $150. She had a dowdy collection of garments, with 15 suits valued at $300 and 10 hats at $50. Cettie had never replaced the thin gold wedding ring of 1864, which was now valued at $3. As one dumbfounded reporter commented: “Able to have a wardrobe as extensive as Queen Elizabeth’s, she was content with a supply which in quantity and quality could be duplicated by the wife of an ordinarily successful business man.” [15]

Cettie’s death elicited Rockefeller’s last major philanthropic commitment: In 1918, he gave $74 million to endow the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial. To commemorate his wife, he stipulated that this foundation should promote various causes that she had championed, such as Baptist missions, churches, and homes for the aged. But the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial moved beyond the denominational giving she had favored. In 1922, under the direction of Beardsley Ruml, it began to pour nearly fifty million dollars into research in the social sciences. A husky, loquacious young man, always twinkling with ideas, the cigar-smoking Ruml stimulated the growth of many university research centers in social science and was a moving force behind the creation of the Social Science Research Council. By the time the memorial was folded into the Rockefeller Foundation in 1929, it had left an enduring imprint on the academic world in only a decade of existence. As Robert M. Hutchins of the University of Chicago said, “The Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial in its brief but brilliant career did more than any other agency to promote the social sciences in the United States.”[16]

By the time her mother died, Edith had already spent two years in self-imposed exile in Switzerland and was increasingly alienated from her father and siblings. Aside from a single meeting with Junior, she seemed to have no contact with the other Rockefellers during her years abroad. She kept up a sporadic, stilted correspondence with her father that was both warm and

distant, loving and subtly hostile, as she tried to sort out her confused feelings toward him.

Edith and Harold McCormick had a close but tumultuous marriage. It was, in many ways, a classic mismatch: Harold was free and expansive, while Edith was aloof, imperious, and cerebral, very much the mistress of her emotions. Sometimes she found her husband too exuberant, while he criticized her for being standoffish. Their marital tensions were likely aggravated by the death of two of their children: four-year-old Jack in 1901 and one-year-old Editha in 1904, events that cast a shadow across Edith's life. To worsen matters, between 1905 and 1907 she suffered from tuberculosis of the kidney, which fortunately went into remission. Edith became more rigid, a stickler for a frosty sort of protocol, even forcing her children to make appointments to see her. When she went out driving, she planned the exact itinerary for the coachman then refused to speak to him again during the drive. She and Harold constructed a forty-four-room mansion in Lake Forest, Illinois, called the Villa Turicum, which they never occupied, and the unpacked crates of china and chairs lingered dustily in the storerooms. Once a brilliant society hostess, Edith became increasingly immured in their mansion at 1000 Lake Shore Drive, incapacitated by a terrifying agoraphobia.

In 1910, to investigate new sites for an International Harvester factory, Harold spent two summer months motoring through Hungary with Edith, a trip that sorely debilitated her. The following year, at the last minute, she canceled a cotillion ball for two hundred people without any explanation, fostering rumors that she had had a nervous breakdown. Around this time, she also suffered a crisis of religious faith, producing a breach with her father. For a long time, she had suspected that preachers dressed up their personal beliefs as gospel truth. "I never heard a Baptist minister say anything from a pulpit that convinced me he was Divinely inspired," she once remarked.[17] The upshot, she recalled, was that "as the minister finished his sermon one Sunday I walked from my pew and out into the air vowing never to return and I kept that vow."[18] For Edith, it was a bracing moment that allowed her to map her own route to salvation, yet it also estranged her from a family spoon-fed on simple Baptist pieties.

During the summer of 1912, in a ten-week stay at a Catskill Mountains clinic run by a Dr. Foord, she rebelled against the conventional regimen of fresh air and exercise being prescribed for her depression. She was ripe for some daring approach—"My object in the world is to think new thoughts,"

she once stated—ideally one with quasi-mystical ingredients that might substitute for her shattered religious faith.[19] She was primed, in short, for her first encounter with Carl Jung, the Swiss clinical and experimental psychiatrist who had treated Harold several years earlier.

While Jung was in New York in September 1912, Harold's cousin Medill McCormick—an editor and co-owner of the *Chicago Tribune* who had been treated by Jung for alcoholism—introduced Edith to him. As he began to analyze her, Jung liked her mental sparkle but thought her emotional state extremely precarious. Jung diagnosed Edith as suffering from "latent schizophrenia," a hypothesis confirmed for him when she told him about a dream she had of a tree struck by lightning and split in two.[20] Edith responded to analysis like a frustrated searcher who had at last found her destination. According to one version of the story, the bossy Edith urged Jung to move with his family to America, where she would buy him a house and help him to establish his practice. This grandiosity only strengthened Jung's misgivings about Edith as a woman who thought "she could buy everything."[21] Regarding American life as sterile and deracinated, Jung recommended that Edith come to study with him in Zurich instead.

Since Edith spent years under Jung's spell, it is worth noting his intense dislike of Rockefeller. On October 20, 1912, Jung spent the day with Edith at Kykuit, doubtless savoring the chance to study an archetypal figure such as Rockefeller up close. He glibly dismissed the titan as narrow, empty, and sanctimonious. "Rockefeller is really just a mountain of gold, and it has been dearly bought," he said.[22] He thought Rockefeller lonely, obsessed with his own health, and tortured by a bad conscience. At one point, Rockefeller told Jung that the Austrians were bad people. "You know, Doctor, perhaps, of my idea for a standardized price in favor of the Standard Oil Trust; you see what a great advantage it is to pay the same price for oil all over the world—it is for the good of the people—but the Austrians have made a separate contract with Rumania. Those people are very bad."[23] For Jung, who viewed Standard Oil as a monstrous operation, such talk corroborated his worst suspicions. As he later wrote, "We had three great organizations before the war, the famous trinity— the Germany army, the Standard Oil Company, and the Catholic Church. Each considers itself a perfectly moral institution . . . [yet] thousands of decent human beings have been destroyed by the Standard Oil Trust."[24]

Having failed to woo Jung to American shores, Edith consented to sail with

him to Switzerland in April 1913. For weeks before sailing, Jung met with her daily, and he continued the analytic sessions on board. Sigmund Freud, who had grown increasingly disenchanted with his onetime disciple, believed that Jung was scheming for the Rockefeller money and told Sándor Ferenczi that March that "Jung has gone to America again for five weeks, to see a Rockefeller woman, so they say."[25] For the crossing, the Rockefeller-McCormick retinue included Edith's son Fowler and his tutor, daughter Muriel and her governess, plus a clutch of servants; Harold and their other daughter, Mathilde, stayed behind in Chicago. In Zurich, the group settled into a suite at the fancy Hotel Baur-au-Lac, where Edith spent the next eight years. At first, nobody, least of all Edith, thought in terms of such an extended stay. For Fowler, the Zurich summer proved intolerable. "This is a very queer place," he wrote to Rockefeller. "It has rained here this summer almost incessantly and some very peculiar weather phenomenons happen."[26] When autumn came, he returned to America to attend Groton, but Edith tarried in Zurich, consulting Jung daily. In October, Harold and Mathilde went to Europe, hoping to bring Edith back in November, but given her growing attachment to analysis, Harold knew this was impossible. Hence, their two daughters stayed in Switzerland: Muriel was placed in a strict German school, while Mathilde, who suffered from weak health, stayed in a sanatorium.

By late December, lingering in Zurich with Edith, Harold saw the need to defend her protracted absence to her father. In a long letter to Rockefeller, he tried to explain some of Jung's methods, though he was often reticent about the substance of Edith's analysis. "Edith is becoming very *real*, and *true to herself* and is seeking and I am sure will succeed to find *her path*. . . . At any rate, she is in absolutely safe and trustworthy hands for no finer man ever breathed than Dr. Jung. He has an intense admiration for Edith and yet recognizes that she is the toughest problem he ever had to deal with." To head off family criticism, Harold added, "It was a God-send that she met Dr. Jung and that *her family* stood back of her in her resolve and that she felt this assurance." [27]

Served with this warning to be tolerant, Rockefeller tried to be forbearing, but for a nineteenth-century man, Jung's modern approach to nervous jitters sounded like so much mumbo jumbo. In detailed, informative letters, Harold gamely outlined Jung's theory of the unconscious and how he investigated that realm through dreams, reveries, and free association. Rockefeller was diplomatic but obviously befuddled. "I have not been able up to date to get

down satisfactorily to all the underlying principles," he apologized to Harold. "But so long as they exercise a beautiful, helpful, continuing influence for good over the lives, that is the thing."[28]

On December 20, Harold sailed back to America without Edith. Beyond her veneration of Jung, she was immobilized by a travel phobia that made even brief train trips unbearable torments. The severity of her fears can be gleaned from a gossipy account written by her Zurich chauffeur, Emile Ammann, who was driven to distraction by her antics. He portrayed Edith as a vain, haughty, narcissistic woman with a slender waist and bright, piercing eyes. He said she was known for her eccentric behavior, her furs and diamonds, and her beautiful fashions straight from Paris and Wiesbaden. According to Ammann, she was indifferent to her family, brutal with servants, and preoccupied with punctuality in a way that mirrored her father. On his first morning, she ordered him to pick her up at 9:14. After he arrived, she checked her diamond-studded wristwatch. "Ammann," she said, "I ordered you to be here at 9:14. You were here at 9:13. Naturally, that's not the same thing."[29]

Ammann claimed that Edith had been able to sail to Switzerland because Jung had effectively sedated her by putting her in a hypnotic trance. The chauffeur played a pivotal role in the therapy to cure her travel phobia. Jung recommended that Edith board a train and travel as far as she could; sometimes, however, she sprang from the train in terror before it even left the station. But if she could stave off the terror and stay aboard, Ammann would speed ahead in the Rolls-Royce and meet her at the next station; if she felt secure enough to go on, she waved from the train window and he raced to the next station. Sometimes these grueling exercises lasted three hours, leaving both Edith and Ammann exhausted. Jung evidently thought Edith had to conquer her haughtiness as well, for he had her kneel down in her luxurious hotel suite and scrub the floors. Like some self-flagellating penitent, she also walked hatless and dripping through the rain while Ammann trailed alongside her in the car.

If Rockefeller had hoped that Harold would rescue Edith from this life, he was soon disabused as his son-in-law was sucked into the vortex of the Zurich group with its quasi-religious intensity. Returning to Switzerland in September 1914, Harold grew so entranced by Jung that he decided to stay and resigned as treasurer of International Harvester, ceding control to brother Cyrus while remaining a board member. He knew that such an abrupt change

required some explaining. “I am trying to learn to *think,* for I have always had a superabundance of ‘feelings’—With Edith it’s just exactly the other way,” he reported to Rockefeller.[30] Having grown up with both a mentally ill brother and sister, Harold was quick to brood about any deviant behavior in his children, especially the impetuous, twelve-year-old Muriel, who had started analysis with Jung that summer. The following year, Edith announced to her son, “Fowler, this question of analytical psychology is a very important one,” and he, too, was herded into analysis with a Jung associate.[31]

By October 1914, Edith had graduated from straight analysis with Jung and started a course of supplementary study. As Harold reported to his now-restive father-in-law, “She studies astronomy, biology and history, and music. She does not go to see Dr. Jung anymore.”[32] Whatever patience Rockefeller had shown began to evaporate in early 1915 when Edith failed to attend the wedding of Harold’s brother Cyrus in February and did not come to Cettie’s funeral service in March—despite Harold’s talk about all the progress she had made. Rockefeller began to grumble that Edith and Harold were “banqueting” in Switzerland, forcing Harold into extended self-defense: “This is not a tabernacle of joy,” he told Rockefeller, “but a shrine to which seekers only address themselves, and it is in this spirit that I have postponed again my sailing and that Edith still finds herself held.”[33] By this point, Harold had adopted Jung as his guru as well, accompanying him on mountain walks and idealizing him as being “as nearly perfect to my mind as a man can be.”[34] This all sounds rather starry-eyed given Jung’s limited success with Edith. In a letter to his mother, Harold admitted that Edith was still prey to agoraphobia, had not left the hotel grounds for almost a year, and could not travel on a train for more than twenty minutes—hardly a glowing testimonial to Jung’s method.

What complicated relations between Rockefeller and Edith was that in working with Jung, she was trying to extirpate the cool, controlling nature she had internalized from her father. Jung classified Harold as too extroverted and Edith, like her father, as too introverted. As Harold told Rockefeller, “In Edith, Father, I see the near counterpart of your personality. I think she is more like you than any other of your children all attributes considered. . . . She has your purpose and tenacity without one little diminution.” [35] Precisely for that reason, Edith knew the little devices by which her father cunningly walled himself off from people. As she wrote to her father after Cettie’s death, “There is warmth and love in your heart when we can get through all the

outside barriers which you have thrown up to protect yourself—your own self—from the world." [36] On another occasion, she repeated this leitmotif. "I wish sometimes that you would let me get near to you . . . so that your heart would feel the warmth of a simple human sort."[37]

Such straight talk probably made Rockefeller squirm. The human psyche was a boggy, fetid terrain that he never cared to explore, and he had spent a lifetime trying to conceal his motives and emotions. He had been largely insulated from criticism within his own family, and Edith was the first child to press him, however gingerly, on taboo topics. It is testimony to his fatherly love that, despite his complete bafflement about her exile, he tried to respond to Edith with patient sympathy. To her plea for greater closeness, he replied, "I can think of nothing which I would more devoutly desire than that we should be constantly drawn closer and closer together, to the end that we may be of the greatest assistance to each other, not only, but to the dear ones so near and so dear to us."[38] For the most part, he was too shrewd to try to induce outright guilt in Edith about her stay overseas and simply said how much he missed her and that he knew her absence must be for the best.

In 1915, Jung recommended that his followers read Friedrich Nietzsche, especially *The Will to Power,* and Edith and Harold sent a copy to Rockefeller to promote self-awareness. "It cites the theory," Harold explained excitedly, "you exemplify the practice."[39] One can only picture Rockefeller's puzzlement as he thumbed these pages. "I'm sure the book will prove very interesting reading, though it may be far beyond me," Rockefeller replied. "I keep to a simple philosophy and almost primitive ideas of living."[40] In a later letter to Rockefeller— having clearly forgotten the earlier one—Harold explained that Nietzsche was attempting to show how some people need to impose their wills on others. Yet for all their efforts to enlighten him, Harold and Edith never made much progress with Rockefeller, who was comfortable with himself and lived quite nicely with his own repressions.

Increasingly, Edith saw in Jungian psychology a mystic path as well as a therapeutic method. "You on your path have your philosophy and your religion which guide you," she wrote to Rockefeller in words that would have sounded blasphemous to him. "I on my path have my philosophy and my religion which guide me."[41] Edith wanted to use the Rockefeller fortune to proselytize for Jung, and she bristled that her father demoted her and Alta to a subordinate status behind Junior. With a protofeminist consciousness, she

resented the flagrant inequality in the treatment of the son and daughters. In September 1915, she told Rockefeller of her wish to help with his philanthropies. “It is beautiful and enveloping work and John is privileged in a way which Alta and I as yet have not had the opportunity of being. I am sure that as women we are serious minded and earnest and deeply interested in mankind.”[42] When this produced no effect, Edith upped the pressure in January 1916. “As a woman of forty-three I should like to have more money to help with. . . . I am worthy of more confidence on your part.”[43] Rockefeller was not exactly punishing his daughter—he was sending her $2,500 monthly and had already given her and Harold more than $2 million in gifts—but his favoritism toward his son was clear.

What Edith could not admit was that she argued from a weak position. She had cut herself off from her family, skipped her mother’s funeral, often showed little interest in her children, had crippling phobias, and had no immediate plans to return to the United States. She was a spendthrift with a habit of running up debt, which would have only deepened her father’s doubts about her ability to manage money. As Rockefeller said, citing her stay abroad, he regretted that he could not be “more familiar with your benevolences as I have been with John and Alta in respect to their contributions to good causes. This contact and the more intimate knowledge of all that they are doing in this regard has afforded me much pleasure.”[44] Eventually, he doubled Edith’s monthly allowance to $5,000 but went no further for the moment.

That Edith wanted additional money to advance the cause of Jungian analysis became clear in 1916 when she put up $120,000—$80,000 of it borrowed—to rent and renovate a posh Zurich mansion for a new Psychological Club, complete with a library, restaurant, recreation rooms, and guest rooms. The intention was to have a place where analysts and patients could socialize and listen to lectures. When the setting proved too costly, the club moved to more modest quarters on the Gemeindestrasse. Edith also sponsored translations of Jung’s work into English that significantly expanded his influence. Disturbed by this largesse, Rockefeller demanded that Edith send him a list of her chief charitable benefactions. In her reply, she showed that her gift to Jung far surpassed her donations to her two other main causes: the John McCormick Institution of Infectious Diseases and the Chicago Opera Company.

Upon learning of Edith’s contribution for the Psychological Club, Freud,

who had since broken with his heretical disciple, greeted the news with a sneer. “So Swiss ethics have finally made their sought-after contact with American money.”[45] It is easy to understand Freud’s cynicism. After her gift for the Psychological Club, Edith was suddenly allowed by Jung to graduate from an analysand with unusually intractable problems to the role of analyst. That Jung had allowed the phobic Edith to function as an analyst raises some profound questions about Jung’s judgment. By the following year, Edith wrote to her father, “I am teaching six hours a day besides my own studies.”[46]

Edith was also subsidizing writers and musicians. Her most important patronage was of James Joyce, who had found sanctuary in neutral Zurich during the war. In February 1918, Edith set up a bank account for the financially beleaguered Joyce that allowed him to withdraw a thousand francs monthly. Eager to thank his anonymous patron, Joyce managed to ascertain her identity. When Joyce met Edith, she said to him, “I know you are a great artist” then bubbled over with talk about Jungian analysis.[47] In her typical domineering fashion, Edith decided that Joyce should undergo analysis with Jung and she would pay for it. Possibly because he spurned this offer, Joyce found his credit line abruptly terminated after eighteen months. The author did not welcome the volte-face. As Joyce’s biographer Richard Ellmann observed, “It is unlikely that Joyce would allow [Edith] to escape scot-free from artistic punishment; and in the *Circe* episode of *Ulysses,* Mrs. Mervyn Talboys, the society woman with a riding crop and a sadistic bent, may owe something to Edith Rockefeller McCormick, a noted horsewoman.” [48] Even Joyce’s wife, Nora, made Edith the butt of ribald jokes, wondering what kind of sumptuous underwear the rich American woman wore.

Edith certainly had her ridiculous aspects. She was an unlikely cross between the *grande bourgeoise* and the impractical bohemian, a dreamer caught up in the cultlike atmosphere of Jung’s practice. Yet in the Rockefeller family, she was a pioneer, the first to peer into the mysteries of human nature and confront social inhibitions and moral restraints that had long been held sacrosanct by the family.

It seemed at first that the mutual interest in psychoanalysis might bridge the temperamental divide between Edith and Harold. He was patient, compassionate, and eager to see his wife freed from the demons that beset her. “I must tell you in a word how lovely Edith is developing,” a rhapsodic

Harold wrote to his mother in September 1917. “You would not know her.”[49] Indeed, Edith seemed to be thriving in Zurich, her caseload of patients growing. “New patients are coming to me all the time and I have had some fifty cases now,” she told her father in 1919. “I hear in a year twelve thousand dreams.”[50] This pleasant interlude might have lasted forever if Harold had not been named president of International Harvester in 1918, pulling him back into the workaday world of Chicago.

Psychoanalysis had stimulated both Edith and Harold to experiment freely with their lives. Like other novices, Edith converted Jungian analysis into a license for wildly uninhibited behavior. Jung himself did not believe in or practice monogamy. “Ammann,” Edith told her chauffeur, “if your unconscious causes you to love several women, you need not feel any guilt. . . . Psychoanalysis will conquer all.”[51] She posted Emma, her private secretary, at the threshold of her hotel suite to safeguard her trysts. One day, Harold showed up without warning and brushed past Emma before she could stop him. A startled Edith began to shout, “Harold, I . . . shan’t have it. You’re not to come to my rooms without first having Emma announce you.”[52] Now that Harold and Edith lived far apart, each had numerous opportunities for escapades.

Edith’s liaisons managed to skirt scandal until a young Austrian named Edwin Krenn came onto the scene. A man of shadowy antecedents—Edith described him as the son of a famous European painter—he was short, blond, chubby, and always foppishly attired. When he arrived in Switzerland and entered analysis with Edith, he did not have any apparent means of support. Edith not only financed him but helped him to obtain Swiss citizenship. She was convinced that he was an architect of genius, and they became constant companions, driving together in the afternoons, attending theater in the evening, then retiring to her hotel suite for private dinners. According to Emile Ammann, Jung warned her of the scandal that might erupt from this love affair. “This is my problem,” Edith replied curtly, “and I can do what I please.”[53]

Alone in Chicago, Harold was highly susceptible to alluring women. Since he and Edith had recently made a five-year commitment to support the Chicago Opera Company, many pretty, aspiring singers passed his way. In September 1919, when the Chicago Opera performed in New York, a Polish singer named Ganna Walska tracked him down at the Plaza Hotel. Even

though he was now balding and pudgy, Walska claimed that she swooned over his "wonderful boyish blue eyes."[54] A voluptuous woman with a hypnotic gaze, Walska wore ponderous jewelry and oversized hats and fancied herself a femme fatale; much like Edwin Krenn, she was a gold digger who wrapped herself in a cloud of exotic mystery.

In 1920, the two McCormick daughters, alarmed by their mother's affair with Edwin Krenn, pleaded with Harold to come to Zurich at once. By this point, Harold was already smitten with Walska and had little incentive to terminate the match, but he perhaps went to Switzerland, in part, because of Rockefeller's concern about the perilous state of Edith's finances. Bent upon showing that she possessed her father's business flair, she had blundered into one catastrophic deal after another. In late 1919, a German scientist had come to Switzerland peddling a secret process for hardening wood, which was supposed to make it usable for everything from railroad ties to telegraph poles. Even Jung initially encouraged Edith in the venture. She set up a company, appointed herself board chairman, and invested $100,000, promising to boost that amount to $1 million. Rockefeller pleaded with Harold to stop her. "I am opposed to Edith having anything to do with the project at all. I fear that it will result in great loss and trouble. I most earnestly entreat her to discontinue this not only but not to engage in any business schemes."[55] There was a touch of the willful adolescent about Edith, chafing at daddy's authority, and Rockefeller's intervention probably backfired. He quickly proved to be prescient: After the German scientist left Switzerland, Edith could not reproduce his results, and eventually she had to write off a $340,000 investment. Edith also piled up staggering debts to support the Chicago Opera and gave a $300,000 piece of property to Cook County for a zoo; Harold, Rockefeller, and Junior first learned of this last act of munificence in the morning papers. By early 1920, Edith's debts had ballooned to $812,000, and her father was obliged to tide her over with a transfer of Standard Oil of New Jersey stock.

However sharp Rockefeller was in criticizing her finances, he was even more concerned about his daughter's negligence as a mother, especially toward his favorite grandson, Fowler. As lovingly as he could, he prodded Edith to devote more time to her children. As he told her in April 1921:

Edith dear, the financial question, while important, is not important when compared to the other question—the great question of your being present with your children. And how sadly they need your presence, and how very

solicitous we are all for them! In this connection I may add that you could have been a great comfort and help to your mother and me. But this sinks into insignificance also, when we consider the dear children. . . . I am not lecturing. I am not scolding. I love you, Edith dear; and I am still hoping.[56]

By late August 1921, Edith had sufficiently overcome her travel phobia that she was able to book passage for America, where she planned to visit her father upon arrival. She had not set eyes on him for eight years, yet when she docked in New York, she told him that she wanted to bring along two companions: Edwin Krenn and his old boarding-school chum, Edward Dato. Properly offended—and possibly privy to rumors about Edith's affair—Rockefeller insisted upon seeing Edith alone. She grudgingly agreed to venture to Lakewood alone to see him. It took ten years for Edith to explain to her father why she never arrived on the agreed day. "When I got to the ferry, a terrific thunder storm broke the terrible heat and my nerves which had been sorely tried by the difficult divorce conditions of my arrival in New York added to the treatment of my children, broke down and I was forced to turn back instead of going to you."[57] This was as close as father and daughter came to seeing each other during the last nineteen years of Edith's life. Despite eight years of intensive study with Jung, Edith still could not fully conquer her travel phobia, at least when it came to seeing her father.

A month after Edith returned to Chicago, Harold filed for divorce. Like her father, Edith harbored hopes for a reconciliation, but Harold had the stronger legal case: His lawyer, Paul Cravath, had brought over from Europe a witness who had apparently observed Edith's infidelities. This unidentified witness was convincing enough that Alta suggested that her sister make an early settlement. By Christmas, Edith was forced to sign a harsh divorce settlement, stipulating that she would receive no alimony and would pay Harold $2.7 million for their homes, plunging her further into debt. (In 1922, Edith still owed $726,000 to the banks, despite having received more than $14 million from her father over the years.) As if to register sympathy for his son-in-law, Rockefeller sent Harold a $1,000 Christmas check even as his daughter was signing the punitive papers. Though Edith pressed him to cut off communications, Rockefeller stayed in touch with Harold, but they saw each other less frequently as time passed.

Upon returning to Chicago, Edith planned to establish a center for Jungian psychology, possibly housed in the Villa Turicum. Not particularly modest about her aspirations, she explained, "It was pointed out to me that,

psychologically, Chicago will be the greatest center in the world. That is why I have come back to live."[58] Before long, Edith attracted one hundred patients to her private practice, many of them socialites enticed by the Rockefeller and McCormick names. Perpetuating her interests in astrology and the occult, she paid fantastic sums for horoscopes and hosted occasional séances; at one session, she swooned into a trance then announced that she was the reincarnated spirit of Tutankhamen's child bride. Also feeding the curiosity of prospective patients was Edith's rumored liaison with Krenn. As in Zurich, they made daily rounds together: They lunched together, then shared language tutors, followed by late-afternoon tea and evening movies. Some observers thought Krenn might be involved in a homosexual affair with Dato, although it is impossible to verify the truth of these assertions.

Still persuaded of her business acumen, Edith started a real-estate venture in late 1923, headed by her European companions and called Krenn and Dato. Once again, she proved as gullible and impulsive as Rockefeller had feared. To float the venture, Edith deposited $5.23 million ($45 million in today's money) in an entity called the Edith Rockefeller McCormick Trust, naming Krenn and Dato as cotrustees. Seeing Edith about to step off another cliff, Rockefeller wrote to her, "I shall expect later on that you will have great disappointment in connection with these real estate transactions, and it would give us all great humiliation to find a duplication of the experience which you have already had in your business adventures with foreigners." [59] The warning was not heeded. Though Edith planned to build affordable housing for the poor near Highland Park, Krenn and Dato's flagship venture was to be a 1,500-acre haven for millionaires on Lake Michigan called Edithon, complete with a marina for owners' yachts. For the town's design, Krenn ransacked the styles of Atlantic City and Palm Beach. Trapped in Chicago by her travel phobia, Edith could not visit the building site or inspect the books or even stop by the Krenn and Dato offices. When Edith proudly mailed her father the firm's prospectus, he must have groaned inwardly, and he issued yet another jeremiad. "While you are a brilliant and mature woman of great mental capacity, I cannot forget you are my own flesh and blood. Therefore, it seems my duty to warn you of the pitfalls and vagaries of life."[60] Rockefeller had already heard reports that Edith was again borrowing heavily and that midwestern creditors were in New York, inquiring about her net worth. Yet Edith took umbrage at her father's well-meant concern: "I cannot refrain from telling you that I have been pained by your expressions of doubt as to the way my business Trust is managed and as to my two partners. Both Mr. Krenn and

Mr. Dato are men of the highest integrity."[61] By 1927, as they lurched toward disaster, Krenn and Dato waded deeper into debt. The firm was not strong enough to withstand the 1929 crash, which left Edith with piles of unsold real estate. She never recouped her huge losses.

Throughout the 1920s, Edith kept reassuring her father that she would visit him but never made the trip. One is finally left to wonder whether her travel phobia provided her with a handy excuse to avoid a problematic relationship. Father and daughter often exchanged brief, loving letters and never lost touch, but they continued to disappoint each other. Edith wanted a modern father, not the antique figure she got. She tended to approach him as an oracle but then was hurt and baffled by the advice she received. Edith never expressed any remorse for having deserted her father during the last twenty years of her life. She had long been liberated from such outmoded concepts.

John D. Rockefeller with his adored grandson David in the 1910s. *(Courtesy of the Rockefeller Archive Center)*

CHAPTER 31

Confessional

If Rockefeller gave way to many lonely moments after Cettie's death, he was also liberated from the marathon ordeal of her illness. In the coming years, even as his shrunken frame grew spindly, he seemed lighter and more ebullient, more Bill's son than Eliza's. Though he lived a solitary life in many ways—Cettie and Bessie were dead, Edith was in Switzerland or Chicago, Alta was often at her Mount Hope farm, and Junior was busy disposing of his fortune—he assembled a substitute family around him.

Until her death in 1920, his prim, precise sister-in-law Lute pitched in as his hostess. But the most enduring presence after Cettie's death was the buxom Fanny Evans, Rockefeller's cousin from Strongsville, Ohio, who served as his housekeeper and companion. Rockefeller engaged in wry banter with Evans, who was thirty years his junior. As they sat at opposite ends of the dinner table, Rockefeller took a wicked old man's delight in both ribbing and flattering her. "I am constantly calling her an angel to her face," he told his son, "which causes her to throw up both hands and register somewhat of incredulity."[1] They saluted each other as "Mr. Rockefeller" and "Mrs. Evans," though he sometimes called her Aunt Fanny. They conspired in the fiction that he had to submit to her tyranny because she governed his social calendar—a useful device for getting rid of people who stayed too long. Among the supporting actors was the smartly attired Swiss valet, John Yordi, who did everything from overseeing his master's diet to entertaining him on the organ. (He specialized in hymns, of course.) Invested with dictatorial powers, Yordi was authorized to stop Rockefeller from engaging in anything too strenuous.

After all the agonizing effort expended by Junior and Abby on Kykuit, John and Cettie spent little time there. Cettie died soon after the renovation was complete, while he preferred his Lakewood hideout in the spring and Florida in the winter. His romance with the southern latitudes blossomed during his February golf vacations in Augusta, Georgia, where he could hop a trolley car or wander the streets without bodyguards. For all of Pocantico's magnificence, he felt caged and cut off from the outer world there, held

hostage by his wealth. Had he not gotten too chilly on the golf course each morning, he might have selected Augusta for his winter home. When a friend then sent euphoric letters extolling the climate of Seabreeze, Florida, Rockefeller contacted the U.S. Weather Bureau and ascertained that Seabreeze regularly soaked up more winter sunshine than Augusta. Since this would extend his golf season, he made an exploratory trip there with Dr. Biggar in 1913 and found the weather just splendid. Rockefeller spent several winters at the nearby Ormond Beach Hotel, created by Henry Flagler, taking up a whole floor with his entourage, and then finally bought a house in Ormond Beach in September 1918. One must note a small irony. For years, Flagler had begged him to come to Florida, but only after Flagler's death in 1913 did Rockefeller regularly visit the state, again suggesting his tacit disapproval of his friend's divorce and ostentation in later years.

As he aged, Rockefeller felt the tug of his Puritan roots and made a fetish of simplicity. "I am convinced that we want to study more and more not to enslave ourselves to *things* and get down more nearly to the Benjamin Franklin idea of living, and take our bowl of porridge on a table without any table cloth," he wrote.[2] At Ormond Beach, a popular resort sprinkled with hotels, Rockefeller tried to return to comparatively humble living. He settled on a three-story, gray-shingled house across from the Ormond Beach Hotel that was called The Casements in tribute to its awning-covered windows. Afraid that the price would soar exorbitantly if his interest was known, he had an associate purchase it, and he took up winter residence there starting in early 1919. Simply furnished, the house was shaded by towering palms and had well-tended terraces sloping down to the Halifax River, an ocean inlet that paralleled the beach. Unassuming by Rockefeller standards, the house had eleven guest bedrooms to handle his growing brood of descendants, though it never teemed with as many family members as Rockefeller had hoped. Showing his old love of tinkering with houses, he would grab a walking stick and outline additions to the house in the wet sand or make quick sketches with a stubby pencil. A veteran sun worshiper, he installed an enclosed sunporch, which enabled tourists to view him, like some American waxwork, sitting inside. Most of all, he wanted to flood the place with music and furnished the house with a Steinway piano, a Victrola, and a lovely church organ. "I reverence a man who composes music," he once exclaimed after listening to the music of Richard Wagner. "It is a marvelous gift." [3]

Rockefeller liked to welcome visitors while sitting in Eliza's old rocking chair. The Casements had no guards or gatehouse, just a protective hedge, and

reporters constantly marveled at its apparent lack of security. “It would have been the easiest thing possible for a Corsican to slip a stiletto into [Rockefeller’s] side any minute,” said one local reporter. [4] Though the house was not quite as unguarded as it looked—two watchmen stayed inside and another two patrolled the grounds, while Yordi also acted as a bodyguard—Rockefeller strolled around the town unattended, a geezer wrapped in a scarf and tweed cap on cool days. One day, a small boy called out to him, “Hello John D.,” and Rockefeller commented, “It would have been nicer if he had said, ‘Hello Neighbor John.’ ” [5] The townspeople thereafter catered to him by calling him Neighbor John, an honorary title that he cherished. As one reporter wrote, “At Ormond he is looked upon somewhat in the aspect of an idolized old mayor, or school teacher, or even minister.”[6] He often motored the six miles to Daytona Beach, where he sat in a hooded white wicker chair, curtained from sun and breeze, watching racing cars speed over hard-packed sand.

Rockefeller indulged his two consuming pastimes: God and golf. Each Sunday morning, he donned a black derby and cutaway coat and attended the nondenominational Ormond Union Church, where he sat erect in a pew midway up the aisle, belting out hymns with gusto. Afterward, he lingered ouside the church, courteously greeting fellow worshipers and passersby. He always trusted the citizens of Ormond Beach and mingled freely with them. Once a year, he deftly slipped into the pastor’s hands an envelope that contained a check covering both his salary and church operations for the year.

At Ormond Beach, Rockefeller for the first time developed true friends, not just golf cronies or acquaintances. He was belatedly learning to live more fully, more freely, than ever before. His most frequent companion was the ancient Civil War general Adelbert Ames, a ramrod-stiff West Pointer who had been wounded at Bull Run, served as a Mississippi governor during Reconstruction, and returned to battle as a volunteer brigadier general during the Spanish-American War. On the golf course, Ames, who was four years older than Rockefeller, was amused by the petty economies practiced by his thrifty friend. Around water holes, Rockefeller insisted that they switch to old golf balls and marveled at profligate players who used *new* balls in these treacherous places. “They must be very rich!” he told Ames. [7]

Often in a lighthearted mood at Ormond Beach, Rockefeller did not mind mugging for newsreel cameras when celebrities made courtesy calls. Henry

Ford dropped by without an appointment and was informed that Rockefeller appeared at the public golf course at exactly twelve minutes past twelve each day. The two men met and clasped hands at that precise instant. Ford was struck by Rockefeller's calm, leathery face and keenly observant eyes. "As soon as I saw his face I knew what had made the Standard Oil Company," he said.[8]

Rockefeller was also visited by humorist Will Rogers, whose dry, folksy quips were not unlike Rockefeller's own. Rogers had breakfast at The Casements twice, followed by golf. When Rockefeller gave him a souvenir dime, Rogers replied, "You know, after the company this little dime has been keepin', I'm afraid it's gonna be plumb lonesome in my pocket." [9] And when Rockefeller beat him at golf, Rogers said, "I'm glad you beat me, John. The last time you were beaten, I noticed the price of gasoline went up two cents a gallon."[10] That Rogers dared to joke about such matters—and that Rockefeller dared to throw back his head with laughter—says much about his growing relaxation. The fearsome corporate outlaw was fast becoming a beloved old storybook figure, a certified American character, and his more cheerful mood reflected that.

On Sunday evenings, resplendent in a well-tailored tuxedo, Rockefeller attended the weekly concerts at the Ormond Beach Hotel and often invited visiting divas such as Mary Garden to join him for golf the next morning. With Cettie gone, he could play the gallant openly and liked to disappear with his new lady friends for long afternoon drives.

Benjamin Franklin once observed, "I believe long habits of virtue have a sensible effect on the countenance," and Rockefeller's nature became engraved in his aging face. The finely wrinkled, papery flesh told of frugality, the steady gaze of resolute purpose, the masklike face of cunning and craft. He was an ideal subject for a portrait artist, but for a long time he betrayed an ascetic distaste for personal representation. Junior and Abby admired portraits of the Widener family executed by John Singer Sargent, and in 1916 they suggested to Rockefeller that they hire Sargent for five portraits—three of John senior, one of Junior, and one of Abby. The bookkeeper in Rockefeller promptly asserted itself. "What about Kohlbach?" he asked. "The price seems very, very high, but I am willing to consider this question further with you."[11] Junior noted that Sargent, who had studied in Florence and Paris and was the son of expatriate American painters, was possibly the greatest living portrait

painter and that Kohlbach, a minor figure, was not in his league. For his part, Sargent was reluctant to do the great man—he was tired of portraits and wanted to devote more time to watercolors—and consented at first only as a favor to Junior.

When the sixty-one-year-old Sargent began to paint Rockefeller at Ormond Beach in March 1917, he discarded the stereotypical images. Instead of painting him in somber business black, he captured him in a casually elegant mood, wearing a blue serge jacket with a white vest and slacks. The face was thin but not yet gaunt, the eyes pensive, and the pose softer and more relaxed than in Eastman Johnson's 1895 painting. By setting Rockefeller against an unadorned backdrop, Sargent stressed his simplicity rather than his royal wealth. Rockefeller was so pleased that he sat for a second portrait at Pocantico. Sargent found Rockefeller highly evocative and reminiscent of strong-willed figures in ecclesiastical history: "He seemed to me most like an old medieval saint with a great deal of intellect. . . . I was struck first of all by his thoroughbred appearance, the fineness of his type, the fine, keen ascetic type, one might say, and his expression of benevolence."[12] The two men talked about the brickbats flung at Rockefeller over the years, and Sargent said that while Rockefeller felt their injustice keenly, he had attained a state of philosophic resignation.

Sargent recommended that Rockefeller hire the sculptor Paul Manship, and they, too, developed an easy working relationship. At Lakewood and Pocantico, while Manship chipped away, Rockefeller diverted him with tales of his career and explained the heavenly sanction behind his wealth. "He would repeat to me several times how he considered the fortune that he had acquired as having been given to him as a responsibility, that he must not do with it except for the good of man."[13] Drawn to the busts of Roman emperors and Renaissance potentates, Manship also saw in Rockefeller the simple but august power of old Vatican prelates. "He struck me as being an extraordinary man, and I would say to myself, 'If he'd lived in the Middle Ages, he'd have been Pope at Rome.' You know, he had that kind of intensity and concentration and with his Baptist upbringing and intensity of belief and his genius, his power, I felt sure that would have been the case." Manship executed two busts of Rockefeller. In one, the titan seems a saintly figure, thin face upturned, eyes lifted meekly heavenward—a highly unusual bust for a magnate. And in the second bust, Manship sculpted Rockefeller's harder look, face stern and lips tightly compressed. The two sculptures side by side form a composite portrait of Rockefeller, forever torn between heaven and earth,

earthly gain and eternal salvation.

As he loosened up in his later years, Rockefeller showed a real aptitude for image-making. His great brainstorm was undoubtedly his decision to dispense shiny souvenir dimes to adults and nickels to children as he moved about. On his morning rounds, Rockefeller dispensed dimes to household employees or caddies on the golf course. Contrary to myth, it was Rockefeller, not Ivy Lee, who dreamed up this gimmick. Lee's signal contribution was to get him to make this private practice a public trademark.

Rockefeller added his own symbolism to the coin distribution. He delivered brief sermons along with the coins, exhorting small children to work hard and be frugal if they wanted a fortune; the coins were for savings, not indulgence. "I think it is easier to remember a lesson when we have some token to recall it by, something we can look at which reminds us of the idea," he remarked.[14] He informed children that the nickel represented a year's interest on a dollar. For someone of Rockefeller's sententious nature, this was a very comfortable persona to adopt.

When he ventured forth in public, Rockefeller often had one pocket bulging with nickels, the other with dimes, while the faithful Yordi carried a backup mint. It has been estimated that Rockefeller distributed between 20,000 and 30,000 coins, and many recipients cherished these mementos, wove them into amulets, or displayed them at home. Because he hated signing autographs, which he thought a stupid custom, and was often ill at ease in public, the dimes gave him a handy ritual to smooth his dealings with strangers and enabled him to hide behind banalities. His grandson David noted, "Here was a means of quickly establishing a basis of conversation and rapport with people he saw, which he enjoyed."[15]

Rockefeller devised myriad uses for the dimes. Whenever somebody excelled at golf, out popped a dime. When Harvey Firestone slipped in a long, tricky putt, Rockefeller stepped over merrily, coin in hand. "Beautiful! Beautiful! That's worth a dime."[16] Dimes were given for well-told tales at dinner. If somebody spilled something, Rockefeller poured dimes over the stains as a tip for the person who mopped it up. Sometimes, he teased people by holding back the dime or dropping a horse chestnut into their palms instead, telling them it was good for rheumatism. Old newsreels capture Rockefeller handing out dimes in papal fashion, saying in a reedy voice, "Bless you! Bless you!" as if dispensing communion wafers.

By the time Ivy Lee appeared, Rockefeller had become, implausibly, the darling of feature writers, who found him colorful and easy to dramatize. Lee ensured that the coverage remained understated and devoid of unseemly self-promotion. He perpetuated the policy of letting recipients announce large gifts from Rockefeller and was scrupulous that the titan not play favorites or grant an exclusive interview to one paper that might antagonize another. Such trust did Lee develop with the press corps that many reporters let him vet their stories for accuracy, permitting a more controlled portrait of Rockefeller. Nevertheless, Rockefeller retained a healthy skepticism about the press, and his new openness was largely a cosmetic adaptation of a basically suspicious nature. As one newspaper observed, “So averse is Mr. Rockefeller to being quoted, even indirectly, on public questions that he does not discuss such subjects even with friends, and it is an unwritten rule that guests content themselves with anecdotes and small talk.”[17]

If Ivy Lee enjoyed excellent rapport with Rockefeller, it was because he understood his operating style. He saw Rockefeller as a man of superior judgment who was far more adept in reacting to ideas than in initiating them. Whenever Lee laid any proposal before Rockefeller, he was required to list all opposing arguments. Faced with two sides of any question, according to Lee, Rockefeller had an unerring ability to make the right choice.

Encouraged by their ability to shape public opinion after Ludlow, Junior and Lee dusted off the long-dormant idea of an authorized biography of Senior. For Junior, refurbishing the family image was complicated by the fact that he did not know what had happened at Standard Oil and took his father’s integrity as an article of faith. When talking about the infamous South Improvement Company, Rockefeller made this startling confession in the 1910s: “Most of what my son knows of this situation is his memory of what he has read in [Ida Tarbell’s] book, with only here and there a statement of fact by me.” [18] That Junior had been kept ignorant of such critical matters might have been one reason that Rockefeller agreed to undertake the three-year interview with William O. Inglis. As Rockefeller told Inglis, “I have gone into it because my son, very conscientious, has heard all this talk and cannot answer it himself and wants to have all the facts at hand.” [19] The Rockefeller family had long been riddled by strange silences, especially about Standard Oil. Among other things, Inglis asked Rockefeller all the sensitive questions that Junior had never dared to pose himself.

With Rockefeller serenely confident about his place in history, Junior and

Lee knew they would have to ease him by imperceptible degrees into any biographical project. In early 1915, Lee approached his old friend Inglis, a genial New York *World* editor who often golfed with celebrities and then published appreciative profiles about them. The Brooklyn-born Inglis wrote sports and feature stories, had an agile style, and was sufficiently malleable to toe the Rockefeller line. At first, Rockefeller refused to golf with him, even though Lee assured him that "you can be sure that anything he writes will be absolutely friendly."[20] When this gambit did not work, Lee wrote to Rockefeller later in the year, "He would print nothing at all that he did not let us see in advance of publication." [21] Rockefeller at last acquiesced, and Inglis produced, as expected, an admiring story.

In May 1917, a month after the U.S. entry into World War I, Rockefeller invited the newsman to golf at Forest Hill but did not commit himself to a biography. Inglis found him a bit more stooped and wrinkled but sunburned and radiating an air of command. He was amazed when Rockefeller announced out of the blue, "We shall not take up anything controversial. A great deal of mud has been thrown at me in the past. Much of it has dried and fallen off since then. To take up those questions now would only revive bitter controversy." [22] For the next six weeks, Rockefeller golfed with Inglis and recounted innocent boyhood memories in a noncommittal fashion. At the end of this probationary period, Rockefeller agreed to sit for an unprecedented, open-ended private interview. "You have won the old gentleman's confidence by keeping quiet," Lee told Inglis, "and now you can go down to Lakewood and ask him any questions you like."[23] If Flagler had not died in 1913 and Archbold in December 1916, Rockefeller might well have declined this chance to talk, for the proposed biography would violate their policy of never responding to critics. As Rockefeller told Inglis, "If my old associates, Mr. Flagler and others, were here, they'd say, 'Why, John, what's come over you? —wasting your time like this!' "[24]

Between November 1, 1917, and December 13, 1920, under conditions of the utmost secrecy, Inglis interviewed Rockefeller for approximately an hour each day, usually before breakfast or golf. (At one point, Rockefeller cooled on the project, which lapsed from July 1919 to November 1920.) Trailing Rockefeller from estate to estate, Inglis extracted a verbatim transcript of 480,000 words from his taciturn subject. His method was quite unusual. He would read aloud portions from Lloyd and Tarbell—both of whom Rockefeller professed never to have read—then record Rockefeller's

responses. With his usual conservation of energy, Rockefeller often reclined on a lounge, shut his eyes, and seemed inert as Inglis read a passage; just when Inglis thought he was fast asleep, his eyes would pop open and he would deliver an exact response to the selection. Inglis also roamed about upstate New York and Cleveland, gathering anecdotes about Rockefeller from his boyhood haunts of Richford, Moravia, Owego, Strongsville, and Cleveland.

At first, Rockefeller regarded the interview as a private record for the family archive, but he was galvanized as he articulated, for the first time, his own defense. By March 1918, Inglis reported this change to Lee: "He says that he now feels it his duty, no less to his family than to himself, to put on record the truth about so many incidents which have been falsely reported."[25] The daily exploration transported Rockefeller back to his glory days. One morning, he told Inglis of a dream he had had: "I was back again in the harness, desperately in earnest and hard at work in the endeavor to meet embarrassing situations, to overcome the difficulties."[26]

Junior was relieved by his father's enthusiasm. "I had never even dreamed of your pursuing the matter with the persistence and continuity of which Mr. Inglis writes," Junior told his father. "I thank you a thousand times for what you are doing."[27] It tells much about Junior's underlying motivation and insecurity that he specifically asked Inglis to quiz Senior about Ida Tarbell. "To be able to take the words out of her own mouth and prove the case against her is of the utmost value," Junior instructed him.[28] In responding to Tarbell, Rockefeller alternated between biting criticism and his express desire to avoid unpleasantness. "But let us avoid anything controversial," he told Inglis. "We don't want to start another set of Tarbells and such people with their slanders."[29] The Rockefeller that emerges from this transcript is alternately wry and genial, fiery and sardonic. An articulate man, he had worked out elaborate justifications for his actions that he had never shared with anyone, the vital inner reflections in which he reconciled his business and religious beliefs. The interview shows the extraordinary energy he invested in rationalizing those actions and forging exculpatory positions. If he felt no need to explain himself to the public, he had a powerful need to justify his behavior to himself. With Inglis, Rockefeller delivered an extended defense of trusts probably unique among those who created them. Yet even in this confession-box setting, Rockefeller was often voluble rather than candid; the habit of secrecy was too deeply ingrained. He voiced no regrets about his

anticompetitive practices and seemed incapable of true self-criticism. To hear Rockefeller tell it, Standard Oil was now a beloved organization, worshiped by the masses for bringing them cheap oil. “It is conceded today that the whole performance from beginning to end was one of the most remarkable, if not indeed the most remarkable, in the annals of commercial undertakings of all times.”[30] Never once in the three-year interview did Rockefeller refer to the 1911 dismemberment, and he bizarrely talked of Standard Oil as if the trust still existed. When Inglis volunteered to read aloud the 1911 Supreme Court opinion, Rockefeller declined. “No; I have never heard the decision read. I shirked it; left it to the lawyers.” [31]

Throughout the interview, Rockefeller contended that cooperation had triumphed over competition in American life—which might sound odd coming so soon after both the 1914 passage of the Clayton Antitrust Act—which outlawed unfair trade practices, such as interlocking directorates—and the 1915 creation of the Federal Trade Commission, which policed anticompetitive measures and enshrined competition as the central tenet of American economic life. But lest it seem that Rockefeller had succumbed entirely to self-delusion, we must recall that the Inglis interview commenced shortly after the United States entered World War I. In a reversal of past antitrust policy, the government urged the Standard Oil companies to pool their efforts, leading Rockefeller to gloat that “the Government itself has adopted the views [that the Standard Oil leaders] have held all these years, and notwithstanding the Sherman law and all the talk on the other side, the Government itself has gone further than any of these organizations dreamt of going.” [32] In February 1918, an Inter-Allied Petroleum Conference was created to coordinate oil supplies, and Standard Oil of New Jersey, which provided one-fourth of all Allied oil needs, worked closely with its bitter rival, Royal Dutch/Shell. Oil’s strategic importance was now universally recognized, and 80 percent of that oil came from American companies. When Lord Curzon, a member of the British war cabinet, rose at a postwar dinner in London and stated, “The Allied cause had floated to victory upon a wave of oil,” Rockefeller was elated, certain that his own pioneering work in the field had contributed materially to the victory.[33] In all, Rockefeller gave $70 million to the war cause, including $22 million from the Rockefeller Foundation to rescue Belgium from famine after the German invasion, and his generosity elicited loud hosannas from a once wary public. For Rockefeller, Germany’s defeat signified nothing less than God’s final blessing on Standard Oil. “There must have been a Providence ruling over these aggregations of

great funds which have been used with such conspicuous benefit in helping to liberate the world from the bondage of the arbitrary military power which was threatening to crush out the liberties of mankind everywhere."[34]

So the general backdrop to the Inglis interview must have strengthened Rockefeller's confidence in his own rectitude. As Inglis waded through Lloyd and Tarbell, Rockefeller pounced on many errors but also listened to many long passages in silence, tacitly acknowledging their truth. As if unable to mouth the names Lloyd and Tarbell, he would refer mockingly to "the distinguished historian" or some other scornful description. He saw Lloyd as reckless, hysterical, and inaccurate. "Tarbell is much more dangerous," he said. "She makes a pretence of fairness, of the judicial attitude, and beneath that pretence she slips into her 'history' all sorts of evil and prejudicial stuff."[35] He largely responded to her charges with ad hominem attacks, dripping with a fair amount of male chauvinism. "Like some women, she distorts facts, states as facts what she must know is untrue, and utterly disregards reason."[36] At first, Rockefeller noted how Tarbell would praise him to establish the credibility of her subsequent criticism, yet as the interview progressed, he had to concede that her impartiality was not just a pose. "Say, I'm amazed at her writing, all the time!" he exclaimed at one point. "There's so much in it favorable to the Standard Oil Company. What with all her prejudices . . . it is really surprising that she would be willing to speak so favorably and give so much credit to the Standard Oil Company and its leaders." [37] Without citing a shred of evidence, he manufactured a cockeyed fantasy that Ida Tarbell was now tortured by guilt for having defamed him. "And if she could only cause the general public to forget what she said and the venomous way she said it, would she not live a more peaceful life, and wouldn't she die a more peaceful death? Peace to her ashes!"[38]

Though Rockefeller tried to sound statesmanlike, his anger leaked out around the edges. Even though the Lloyd and Tarbell exposés had led to the breakup of Standard Oil, he insisted of these critics that "their writing fell flat and proved a boomerang to them."[39] The more he talked, the more bottled venom surfaced, until he was spewing hatred at "socialists and anarchists" who dared to attack him. "They are a stench today in the nostrils of all honest men and women. They are a poison; and I would have them go and colonize and live out their theories and eat one another up; for they produce nothing, and they subsist as suckers on what honest men, frugal and industrious,

produce."[40] This was a voice that Rockefeller's family and closest confidants never heard—the raw, uncensored Rockefeller who had been so carefully muzzled by the Christian Rockefeller. In the last analysis, the Inglis interview was a talking cure as the titan dredged up buried pain whose existence he had long denied. He was not a Christian martyr but a man with a very human vulnerability and an understandable need for catharsis.

Inglis was taken in by Rockefeller's charade of candor. Instead of engaging in extemporaneous discussion, Inglis stuck to the safe, prescribed format of reading from Lloyd and Tarbell then recording the responses verbatim. He expressed no discernible desire to examine Standard Oil files or Rockefeller papers and lazily received most of the history through the filter of Rockefeller's memory. Though he interviewed many relatives and business associates, they knew that he had been sent by Rockefeller, and, not surprisingly, they tended to remember him in a rosy glow.

Junior soon saw that Inglis was being seduced by the easy life on the Rockefeller estates and would be tempted to prolong his work. Inglis later admitted that he had been lulled by the narcotic power of his boss's monotonous but pleasant daily routine. Finally, in early 1924, after seven years of work, Inglis finished his biography, which presented a sanitized, adulatory version of Rockefeller's life. Junior had the good sense to circulate it to reliable judges, including William Allen White, the Kansas newspaper editor, and George Vincent, president of the Rockefeller Foundation, both of whom delivered a damning verdict. White said it was "too toadying and reverential" and advised the Rockefellers not to publish it.[41]

Following a suggestion from Ivy Lee, Junior naively rushed the manuscript over to Ida Tarbell in her apartment on Gramercy Park in Manhattan. They had worked together at an industrial conference arranged by President Wilson in 1919 and developed a cordial relationship. "Personally I liked her very much," Junior said, "although I was never much of an admirer of her book."[42] Tarbell reciprocated this fondness, telling a friend, "I believe there is no man in public life or in business in our country who holds more closely to his ideals than does John D. Rockefeller, Jr. In fact, I will go so far as to say I do not know of any father who had given better guidance to a son than has John D. Rockefeller."[43] Over the years, Tarbell had become more conservative and sympathetic to business—in 1925, she published a laudatory biography of Judge Elbert H. Gary of U.S. Steel—yet she found the Inglis biography

evasive and one-sided and recommended that it be shelved. With immense disappointment, Junior consigned the manuscript to the Rockefeller archives forever.

An unusually ebullient John D. Rockefeller, Jr., returns from Europe aboard the S. S. Mauretania, December 1925. *(Courtesy of the Rockefeller Archive Center)*

CHAPTER 32

Dynastic Succession

Though heir to the throne, Junior had now waited many years to assume his rightful place, and this had made it only more difficult for him to win the respect of others. H. L. Mencken, among other skeptics, was fond of pointing out that Junior's eminence was purely derivative. "He is attended to simply because he happens to be the son of old John, and hence heir to a large fortune. So far as the records show, he has never said anything in his life that was beyond the talents of a Rotary Club orator or a newspaper editorial writer, or done anything that would have strained an intelligent bookkeeper."[1]

Despite their mutual devotion and intertwined lives, father and son were separated by a reticence that neither could overcome. They corresponded frequently, embraced warmly when they met, and enjoyed a solid rapport; when his boy was to come for dinner, John senior evinced a visible eagerness for him to arrive. Yet their relationship was also hobbled by an old-fashioned reserve, with neither of them capable of any real ease or spontaneity. "Neither Father nor I had the temperament which gives itself freely," said Junior. "We talked about whatever we had to talk over—never discursively." [2]

One day at Ormond Beach, Inglis happened to mention to Rockefeller how much Ida Tarbell's account supported his own version of events, and it prompted this melancholic remark: "I wish you would tell that to my son. . . . I must say that I have never had time to become really acquainted with my son. He has been very busy always."[3] When Inglis transmitted this to Junior, Junior was touched but blamed his father for their constrained relationship. "There is no subject that I have not always been happy to discuss with Father," he explained to Inglis, "but as you yourself have observed, he is inclined less and less to discuss subjects which he does not himself initiate; hence our serious interchange of view is perhaps more limited than might otherwise be the case."[4] Rockefeller could not suppress his controlling nature even with the son he so dearly loved.

The tension latent in their relationship flared up when Junior displayed a serious interest in art. Enough of a Calvinist to consider artworks idolatrous,

Rockefeller saw collecting as both wasteful and egotistical. Despite Abby's prodding, Junior could not stop feeling guilty about his new hobby. "When I first began buying art objects," he conceded, "I had a feeling that perhaps it was a little selfish. I was buying for myself instead of giving to public need."[5] Then he grew enthralled by the exquisite Chinese porcelains owned by J. P. Morgan that were being exhibited at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. For Junior, they represented an ideal art form, for they were expertly crafted and devoid of any subversive themes or sensuality. After Morgan died in 1913, Joseph Duveen, the art dealer, bought the collection, put it up for sale, and offered Junior the first pick of any pieces. Junior coveted so many pieces that the total cost to buy them would have exceeded one million dollars. Like a trembling, sweaty schoolboy, he wrote to his father in January 1915 and asked to borrow the money. He tried to show that he had proceeded in the most painstaking Rockefeller style. "I have made many visits to the Museum and have studied carefully the most important pieces. I have also sought expert advice regarding them. Such an opportunity to secure the finest examples of Chinese porcelains can never occur again, and I want to avail myself of it."[6]

Instead of honoring or even gratifying this unusual request, Rockefeller played the proud philistine and turned it down cold. But Junior was now past forty and would not simply let the matter drop, as he would have in the past. In an anguished letter, he vented his frustrations:

I have never squandered money on horses, yachts, automobiles or other foolish extravagances. A fondness for these porcelains is my only hobby—the only thing on which I have cared to spend money. I have found their study a great recreation and diversion, and I have become very fond of them. This hobby, while a costly one, is quiet and unostentatious and not sensational. [7]

Faced with this unprecedented revolt against his judgment, Rockefeller not only had the good sense to relent but gave his son the money outright. Deeply touched, Junior responded with profuse, breast-beating gratitude. "I am fully conscious of the fact that I am in no sense worthy of such munificence on your part," he wrote his father. "Nothing that I have ever done or could do will make me worthy."[8] When Junior received the porcelains at West Fifty-fourth Street, he sat down on the floor and rolled them about, fondly studying them and searching for cracks or marks of repair. Had Junior not established at this point his right to collect art, free of parental interference, he might never have been emboldened to create The Cloisters or Colonial

Williamsburg. To demonstrate that his new interest was not frivolous, Junior developed great expertise on Chinese porcelains and put together one of the outstanding collections in private hands.

The friction over the Chinese porcelains highlighted Rockefeller's pressing need to make some final disposition of his fortune. Even though Junior had a net worth of about $20 million in early 1917, it was not generating much income. He had received large blocks of stock in American Linseed and Colorado Fuel and Iron, but the latter paid little or nothing in dividends and had only ensnared him in controversy. He also owned real estate in Cleveland and New York plus railroad and gas bonds. Junior's combined salary and allowance provided him with several hundred thousand dollars a year—which was a fantastic sum for any ordinary mortal but small beer for the son of the world's richest man.

It was likely the Ludlow Massacre that convinced Rockefeller that his son had the fortitude to manage the family affairs. "There was reason for Grandfather to feel uncertain in terms of how much Father could handle until Ludlow came along," David Rockefeller later observed. "I think it was a searing but very much of a learning experience for him as well as one that toughened him."[9] Rockefeller's decision to transfer the money was probably clinched in 1916 and 1917 when the federal government twice boosted inheritance taxes. Characteristically, Rockefeller had waited a long time to decide to transfer his money to his son, but once he began to strip himself of wealth, he acted with electrifying speed, as if pleased by this act of renunciation. On March 13, 1917, he gave his son 20,000 shares of Standard Oil of Indiana, inaugurating the biggest intrafamily transfer of money in history. On July 10, 1918, he gave 166,072 shares of Standard Oil of California; two weeks later came large blocks of stock in Atlantic Refining and Vacuum Oil. On February 6, 1919, Junior received 50,000 shares of Standard Oil of New Jersey, followed by another 50,000 shares on November 20. In 1920, Rockefeller bequeathed thick heaps of New York City and Liberty Bonds. These transfers occurred without poetry or preamble, accompanied only by terse, businesslike notes. For example, on February 17, 1920, Rockefeller wrote: "Dear Son: I am this day giving you $65,000,000 par value of United States Government First Liberty Loan 3½% bonds. Affectionately, Father."[10]

In possession of these miraculous gifts, Junior was left staggered, dazed, speechless. Before 1917, Rockefeller had given $275 million to charity and

$35 million to his children. (In November 1917, he estimated that if he had kept and invested all his money until that time, he would have been worth $3 billion, or well in excess of $30 billion today. That would have put Rockefeller second only to William Henry Gates III, with $40 billion, among the billionaires listed by Forbes magazine in its 1997 ranking of the richest Americans.[11]) Between 1917 and 1922, he gave away another $200 million to charity and $475 million to his children, with almost all of the latter going to Junior. A profound dichotomy now opened in the Rockefeller family between the dutiful son and the wayward daughters and sons-in-law—a dichotomy so deep that the world would think of Junior's descendants alone as the real Rockefellers. (Of course, they also had the Rockefeller name.) By keeping the fortune in one compact mass, Rockefeller enabled his son to magnify its impact. The poor little rich boy was now the planet's foremost heir. Within the space of five years, Junior's net worth soared from $20 million to about $500 million—more than the $447 million that his father had given to the Rockefeller Institute, the General Education Board, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial combined—and equivalent to $4.4 billion today. Thus, for all their public-spirited generosity, the Rockefellers still retained control over a great deal of the fortune, though much of it would be distributed to deserving parties over time. After disbursing so much, Rockefeller left himself with pocket change—somewhere in the neighborhood of twenty to twenty-five million dollars—for playing the stock market.

In 1917, Rockefeller formed special trusts at the Equitable Trust for Alta and Edith, depositing twelve million dollars apiece in their accounts ($140 million apiece today) and terminating their allowances. This money, if more than enough to make them comfortable for life, seemed a bagatelle beside Junior's cache. In defending this blatant imbalance, Junior later argued that his father had favored him because he could "carry on his philanthropic and charitable work in the same spirit which had activated him, and . . . anything he gave me would be administered with the same sense of duty and stewardship which impelled his giving."[12] In a way that would have been impossible for Alta and Edith, Junior adopted his father's principles and functioned as his surrogate. Rockefeller told his son, "What a providence that your life should have been spared to take up the responsibilities as I lay them down!"[13] Rockefeller was increasingly buoyed by the admiration of this son who viewed him as a heroic figure in business and philanthropy. As he told Inglis, "I really think I could not have had so good and true a son as he is if I

had been half so bad as the prejudiced and interested ‘historian’ [Tarbell] would seek to make me out.”[14] For Rockefeller, only a good tree brought forth good fruit, and Junior’s virtue was therefore incontrovertible proof of his own.

By the time that Junior inherited his golden treasury, he and Abby had brought forth a large, energetic family of six children, having added Laurance (1910), Winthrop (1912), and David (1915). After Laurance’s birth, Junior and Abby decided that 13 West Fifty-fourth Street could not accommodate this growing tribe, and in 1911 they bought the property at 10 West Fifty-fourth Street. Having finished with Kykuit, William Welles Bosworth—the landscape architect whom John senior found so infuriatingly extravagant—constructed a nine-story mansion for the younger Rockefellers that resembled a miniature city. Lavishly appointed with a rooftop squash court and playground, an art gallery, a music room, two drawing rooms, and an infirmary, it was one of New York’s largest private residences. The family occupied the new domicile beginning in September 1913.

To escape the sultry Manhattan summers, Junior and Abby began to spend summers on Mount Desert Island in Maine in 1908. A favorite getaway of the rich since the 1880s, it was now colonized by several Rockefeller intimates, including Charles Eliot, Simon Flexner, and Christian Herter. John and Abby were so enchanted by the island’s rocky, rugged beauty that in 1910 they bought a hilltop house called the Eyrie in Seal Harbor on the quieter southern side of the island. Set on a granite bluff overlooking the harbor, the Eyrie was a heavily gabled, Tudor-style cottage in the same sense that Newport mansions were cottages—that is, it was a colossal affair. Starting with the original 65 rooms, Junior expanded the place to palatial scope until it contained 107 rooms, 44 fireplaces, 22 bathrooms, and 2,280 windows.

When Junior and Abby first visited Mount Desert Island, it was a pristine place that still banned autos, and they could explore any number of wild, unspoiled places on foot or horseback. Junior took special delight in constructing carriage roads on his property. During these Maine summers, he developed a special feeling for wilderness, which inspired in him feelings of religious awe and perhaps memories of the lakes and ravines of his Forest Hill boyhood. For a man sorely taxed by responsibility, these solitary haunts refreshed an overburdened mind.

In 1916, President Wilson created the Sieur de Monts National Monument

on the island, which became Lafayette National Park in 1919—the first national park created in the East—and then was renamed Acadia National Park in 1929. To serve the cause of conservation, Junior not only donated thousands of wilderness acres to the park but personally charted fifty-seven miles of auto-free carriage roads (engineers calculated the grades), studded with charming stone bridges and gatehouses that blended seamlessly into the scenery. From his father, he had learned the art of opening vistas and making the roads as unobtrusive as possible. While some environmental purists faulted Junior for tampering with nature, he had a democratic vision of how the parks might be of use to ordinary people. Whereas he often seemed wearily dutiful at philanthropic board meetings, he showed an undisguised zest for scenic preservation. It was an early sign of what became a continuing interest: preserving ancient beauty from the encroachments of modern life. At the same time, he tried, whenever possible, to retreat from the chaos of modern urban life into the peace and dignity of an uncorrupted rural past.

Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, unlike her husband, was attuned to the modern, the daring, and the spontaneous. “Mother would love to have an idea and say, ‘Let’s go do it,’ ” said her son David. “She enjoyed the unexpected very much.”[15] She could be satirical or flippant and admired the saucy young flappers of the 1920s. “I love to see the old hypocrisies being shattered,” she said.[16] Never fearful or inhibited, she was pleased by impulsive behavior and once said of her grandchildren, “I love even their naughtiness, their funny wants and their plots to get them, which I can see lurking in their minds.” [17] Such an attitude perplexed Junior, who was irritated by the high jinks of small children.

Though she adhered to her father’s economic conservatism, Abby helped to broaden the political spectrum for the Rockefeller family. She was a liberal Republican who supported Planned Parenthood, the United Jewish Appeal, and the League of Nations. After the Ludlow Massacre, to improve labor relations, she contributed up to a third of the annual budget of the National Women’s Trade Union League. In the 1920s, she also teamed up with Standard Oil of New Jersey to create a community center, the Bayway Community Cottage, for refinery workers in Elizabeth, New Jersey, and frequently stopped by its baby clinic. After one trip, she told her daughter Babs, “I held twenty-five naked, squirming babies today in our new baby clinic at Bayway, some of them took the occasion to drench me thoroughly. Most of them were fat, rosy, and cheerful, but once in a while they all began

to howl at once. I had a wonderful time."[18] She was the major benefactor of the Grace Dodge Hotel in Washington, D.C., a 350-room hotel for professional women operated by the YWCA and staffed entirely by women, down to the bellhops and elevator operators.

Abby was vocal in her passion for social justice, and this had a lasting influence on her descendants. While staying with Senior at Ormond Beach in 1923, she wrote a letter to her three oldest sons that throbbed with outrage at discrimination. "It is to the everlasting disgrace of the United States that horrible lynchings and brutal race riots frequently occur in our midst. The social ostracism of the Jews is less barbaric, but . . . causes cruel injustice. . . . I long to have our family stand firmly for what is best and highest in life."[19] Though Junior subscribed to many of Abby's views, he was guided more by abstract codes of conduct than visceral sympathy with the oppressed.

Abby made sure that her children did not flaunt their wealth, and she turned down one son who wanted extra travel money in college by telling him, "The boys who cannot afford to go away will feel restless and envious."[20] Constantly vigilant against the disfiguring effects of wealth, she lectured Laurance when he was only thirteen on the perils of having too much money: "It makes life too easy; people become self-indulgent and selfish and cruel." [21] Abby once told Nelson, "I am sure that too much money makes people stupid, dull, unseeing and uninteresting. Be careful." [22] During World War I, Abby directed five hundred workers of the Red Cross auxiliary that operated out of 4 West Fifty-fourth Street, which Senior had obligingly vacated to aid the war effort. She stationed her white-uniformed children in the basement to roll bandages and had them tend victory gardens at Pocantico.

In running their various households, Abby often chafed at Junior's niggardly style but submitted for the sake of marital harmony. She waited until the January white sales to buy new linen, and when the children went off to school, she had to telephone them clandestinely from the bathroom, since her husband considered these calls superfluous luxuries. One son observed pointedly, "His calls were business and therefore justifiable, hers were personal, and possibly frivolous. "[23]

If John junior and Abby had a marriage of passionate intensity, it was because his buttoned-down life required one great release. He beamed in her presence, could not take his eyes off her. "I never knew a man more

completely attached to the woman he married," said Tom Pyle, the game warden at Pocantico. "When they were grandparents, in the latter quarter of their lives, he still treated her with the adoration and devotion of a young lover."[24] Many people found something unhealthy about his constant need for her, which one daughter-in-law later said "seemed almost primitive and uncontrollable."[25] Even when traveling, Junior hovered over her with a proprietary air, refusing to share her company with others. Once when they were away, Abby wrote to a son, "Your father is afraid that I shall become intimate with too many people and will want to talk to them, so generally we eat in what I call the old people's dining room where he feels I am safer."[26]

Even at home, Junior tried to monopolize Abby, and he cast a jealous eye on his six children as potential competitors for her time. Always warm and natural with the children, Abby did not abandon their upbringing to servants and governesses. She played cards with them, read to them, took afternoon tea with them, and tucked them into bed at night. A convivial lady married to a professional homebody, she followed the example of countless other women in her position and tried to shape her sons into model husbands, devoid of the faults of her own husband. Junior, perhaps subconsciously, saw her attention to the children as time stolen from him, and this could make him seem to be a grouchy, schoolmasterish father. "We grew up realizing that we had to compete with Father for her time and attention," his son David said. "He expected her to be available when he needed her and his needs seemed insatiable."[27]

Whatever its drawbacks, it was generally a happy marriage. While they would have bruising quarrels over modern art, they were devoted to each other and shared many pleasures, including theater, concerts, and film as well as walking, riding, and driving. After evenings out, they loved to return home and sip hot chocolate in the intimacy of Junior's dressing room. During these cozy moments before bed, they practiced the latest dance steps learned from their Arthur Murray teachers, read aloud from a Victorian novel, or sat back and listened to music on the Victrola. Whatever her frustrations with her husband, Abby thought him a man of sterling probity whom she respected as well as loved. As she once wrote, "I feel sorry for all the women in the world who haven't as good husbands as I have." [28] And for Junior, Abby added many brilliant colors to the palette of what might otherwise have been a monochromatic life.

For the six Rockefeller children, their grandfather was a boon companion whom they remembered in various guises: as a wit, a clown, an ace raconteur, a frisky codger on the golf course, a cracker-barrel philosopher. Already in his eighties when some of them entered their teens, he seemed a spry fellow who joined readily in their games, whether playing hide-and-seek in the shrubbery or bounding across the room in blindman's buff. He was probably no less colorful a specimen for his descendants than Devil Bill had been to his grandchildren. Like his siblings, John III remembered grandfather's playfulness: "A very wonderful person with a sense of humor; he loved to tell jokes, starting out with something serious. He was warm, friendly, and accessible, and he never preached."[29]

Junior taught his children to venerate their grandfather, and as they grew up they were slightly astounded to discover that this jolly old eccentric had pulled off one of the biggest feats in business history. From an early age, they were aware that unusual controversy attached to the family name, since reporters and photographers were constantly caught vaulting the Pocantico fences. On May Day 1919, during a reign of anarchist terror, Rockefeller, J. P. Morgan, Jr., and other prominent Americans were sent letter bombs that were intercepted by the post office, yet no special guards were posted at Kykuit. "We always had to live with the fear that something would happen to the children," Junior said, and he adopted a policy of never permitting them to have their pictures taken by strangers, lest it give ideas to terrorists or criminals.[30] He kept them out of the papers so assiduously that they remained faceless to the general public until they entered college. Sometimes, after receiving menacing calls, the children were shadowed by guards.

On Sundays, the six grandchildren often strode from Abeyton Lodge over to Kykuit to dine with grandfather, the five boys wearing mandatory uniforms of stiff Eton collars, dark coats, and pin-striped pants. Like a pastor receiving his flock, Rockefeller greeted each grandson as "Brother." Seated at the head of the table, he spouted tales from his past and mimicked people, gesturing with a spotless white napkin. The grandchildren whooped at his deadpan humor. The contrast between the lighthearted Senior, who seemed so relaxed, and his intense, edgy son probably did not help Junior with his children.

Yet Rockefeller's insouciance also masked deeper concerns. Breakfasting with his grandchildren, he dispensed a nickel and a kiss to each, accompanied by a little pep talk. "Do you know," he would ask, "what would hurt grandfather a great deal? To know that any of you boys should become

wasteful, extravagant, careless with his money. . . . Be careful, boys, and then you'll always be able to help unfortunate people. That is your duty, and you must never forget it."[31] The grandchildren credited their conceptions of philanthropic stewardship as much to their grandfather as to their father.

Despite his rigidity, Senior had derived real pleasure from being a father, while Junior took it all too seriously. A number of factors made Junior an inflexible parent. The controversies around his father had molded him into a man of granite respectability who found it hard to lighten up with his own family. He was overly tense and disapproving when faced with unruly impulses in his offspring. Since they were to spend their lives in the public spotlight, he wanted his children to mirror his own starchy sense of rectitude. This mattered to him so desperately that he ruled his family with a quiet tyranny, inspiring more fear than affection. Sometimes, he lashed out unexpectedly, showing flashes of anger or ridicule that he screened from the world. He tried to imitate his father's style as a parent, but he could not do it with John D.'s good humor. "I was always so afraid that money would spoil my children and I wanted them to know its value and not waste it or throw it away on things that weren't worthwhile," Junior said. "That was why I insisted that my children keep accounts just the way I did and I think the effect has been good."[32]

On Saturday mornings, stomachs aflutter, the children filed one by one into Junior's study and had their account books scrutinized. Although they received only a thirty-cent allowance—much less than their friends—they had to account for every penny. They were fined a nickel for omissions and awarded a nickel for scrupulous record keeping. They were expected to spend a third of their money, save a third, and donate a third to charity. Bound by these rules, the Rockefeller children acted like destitute waifs and constantly scrounged small change from friends. As Nelson lamented, "I can honestly say that none of us has ever had a feeling of actually being rich—that is, of having a lot of money."[33] Like Junior as a boy, they often dressed in old clothes and were denied ordinary trips to theaters or the movies until they were well into their teens.

In a repetition of his own upbringing, Junior gave the children opportunities to earn pocket change at Pocantico or Seal Harbor. They made money by killing flies (ten cents per hundred), buffing shoes, working in the garden, or trapping attic mice (five cents per mouse). The six children were taught to garden, sew, and cook—once a week, they had to prepare dinner

together—and were encouraged to master hand tools. Each studied a different musical instrument, with one evening per week given over to hymn singing. Even family vacations became tutorials in personal responsibility, with one son assigned to buy railroad tickets, another to run errands, a third to handle the luggage, a fourth to book hotel rooms, a fifth to shine the shoes, and so on.

Junior naively imagined that he had a fine, open relationship with his children, but they saw him as a forbidding figure, and Abby had to defuse tensions festering below the surface. She ended up serving as interpreter for them, saving the day with straight talk, common sense, and wisecracking humor. She also helped the children to please Junior in practical ways. When he wished them to memorize biblical verse, she printed out extracts on flash cards for them, and she also tidied up their account books before the weekly paternal audit.

Junior wanted to saturate the children with sermons and religious tracts. Each morning at seven forty-five, even with guests present, the butler circulated a stack of Bibles on a silver tray. Junior read a portion of scripture and asked others to read aloud before they touched breakfast. Trying to keep alive the Sabbath tradition, he led his children, single file, on Sunday nature walks around Pocantico, lecturing them on trees and wildflowers and meting out fines for those who fell out of line. One Sunday in the 1920s, he deliberated long and hard about whether to allow his children to play tennis on the Sabbath. He consented only under pressure from Abby. The children were baptized, but they never turned into such regular churchgoers as their parents or grandparents, and the Baptist Church never formed the focal point of their lives.

CHAPTER 33

Past, Present, Future

Blessed with his father's longevity, Rockefeller outlasted all his sib-lings. Though Frank was vice president of two Cleveland steel companies in his later years, he never got over his antipathy to John and raged against him till his dying day. In 1916, John gave a thousand dollars apiece to Frank's three daughters and contemplated forming trust funds to provide each of them with a lifetime income. Nevertheless, even on his deathbed, following a stroke in early 1917, Frank still ranted against his oldest brother. "I was with him constantly and was there when he died," said one of Frank's friends. "You can understand the depth of his feeling when I say that his greatest fear during those last days was that John might try to come and see him."[1] After Frank died in April 1917, John and William attended the Cleveland funeral at Lake View Cemetery, where Frank was lowered into the plot he had chosen apart from the rest of the Rockefellers. Frank's wife, Helen, and his three daughters had no plans to perpetuate his crazy vendetta and after the funeral cordially received John, who canceled his dead brother's outstanding loans.

In his last twenty years, Rockefeller felt the subterranean pull of tender boyhood memories. In June 1919, right before his eightieth birthday, he and William loaded up three Crane-Simplex touring cars and set out for the verdant Finger Lakes region of their boyhood. They returned to Richford, Moravia, and Owego and so cherished the memories that they reenacted the trip every year until William's death in 1922. The Moravia house, with its splendid view of Owasco Lake, now lodged convicts from the Auburn prison who were working, by a bizarre coincidence, on the nearby Rockefeller Highway. On Rockefeller's last visit, gazing at the old frame house, he doffed his cap, bowed his head, and declaimed with an actor's panache, "Farewell old home!"[2] Several days later came news reports that the house had burned to the ground, probably from a faulty chimney. Affected by the news, Rockefeller jotted down in a short-lived diary that he kept, "That was the scene of our first business venture, when we engaged in the raising of a flock of turkeys."[3] He had traveled so unimaginably far beyond his rustic boyhood world that his life seemed unreal to him at times.

In June 1922, following one of these upstate jaunts, William Rockefeller consulted doctors about his problems with a raspy throat and was diagnosed as having throat cancer. In this weakened state, he decided to canter briskly through Central Park one day, contracted pneumonia, and died shortly afterward. In a letter to Henry Clay Folger, Rockefeller eulogized his brother as a "strong, resourceful, kindly man."[4] Though always overshadowed by John, William left a sizable fortune of about $200 million ($1.8 billion today), eclipsing the estates of Payne Whitney and Thomas Fortune Ryan. Yet aside from a million-dollar gift for war relief, William had shown no charitable impulses, even though John had pleaded with him to endow educational or medical projects. Virtually all of William's estate went to his four children: Emma Rockefeller McAlpin, William Goodsell Rockefeller, Percy Avery Rockefeller, and Ethel Geraldine Rockefeller Dodge.

By 1922, Rockefeller had lost his parents, his four brothers and sisters, his wife, his eldest daughter, two grandchildren, and the vast majority of his old business partners. As he wistfully told Henry Clay Folger, "The ranks of the older associates are thinning out and we of the Old Guard naturally draw closer together."[5] He understandably dwelled on his own mortality. In July 1919, on his eightieth birthday, Junior wanted to give him a Rolls-Royce, but he asked how much it would cost and took the $14,000 check instead. As part of the festivities, Rockefeller told the press that he devoutly wished to live to one hundred and credited his good health to golf and a daily tablespoon of olive oil. The white-haired Dr. Biggar repeated his long-standing prophecy: "Mr. Rockefeller will live to be 100 years old."[6] Rockefeller and Dr. Biggar shook hands on a pact that they would play a round of golf on July 8, 1939. Dr. Biggar, alas, canceled the appointment: He expired in the 1920s while his celebrated patient, touting the Biggar gospel of fresh air and five daily periods of rest, soldiered on. Because of Rockefeller's abstemious eating style, along with a substantial loss of bone mass, his weight dipped below one hundred pounds. Once tall and rangy, he was now a wizened little man, no taller than his son.

Despite his rather eerie, cadaverous look, Rockefeller still gazed shrewdly at the world, his eyes alert as he sized up newcomers. He tried to banish gloomy thoughts and admit only joy and pious gratitude for God's bounty. Though somewhat lonely and susceptible to occasional bouts of depression, he would rally and emerge more ebullient than before. Typically surrounded by six or eight people at golf or meals, he cultivated the company of younger

people, especially younger women. On his eighty-sixth birthday, he wrote the following sugary verse:

Four generations of Rockefellers in 1928. From left to right: John D. Rockefeller, Sr., John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Abby (Babs) Rockefeller Milton, and Abby Milton. *(Courtesy of the Rockefeller Archive Center)*

I was early taught to work as well as play,
My life has been one long, happy holiday;
Full of work and full of play—
I dropped the worry on the way—
And God was good to me every day.[7]

Throughout his life, the mutable Rockefeller had continually re-created himself while adhering to certain core principles. As H. G. Wells wrote, "Manifestly he has grown and broadened at every stage of his career."[8] Perhaps the most startling transformation came in his behavior toward women as he sloughed off the old Victorian inhibitions. Free from Cettie's restraining influence, Rockefeller became positively ribald. When an old colleague, William T. Sheppard, introduced him to a Mrs. Lester one day, Rockefeller said suggestively, "Mr. Sheppard, your friend, Mrs. Lester, is very easy to look at." Junior stood there aghast. "I beg your pardon," he apologized to

Mrs. Lester, “but my father has picked up some slang phrases without understanding their meaning.” Evidently no prude, Mrs. Lester shot back, “Oh, Mr. Rockefeller, you do not need to apologize for your father.” [9]

It was a rare golf party that did not include a lady golfer for Rockefeller’s delectation, and when he got off a good shot he erupted into a little mock Charleston, telling the lady, “You ought to kiss my hand for that.”[10] When crowds clustered about him in public, Rockefeller conspicuously waved at the pretty young women. “He was like a little boy in his playtime,” noted one photographer.[11] Rockefeller, for the first time, had an identifiable lady friend: Mrs. Ira Warner of Bridgeport, Connecticut, the stout wife, then widow, of an optical-instruments manufacturer and a constant visitor at both Kykuit and Ormond Beach.

Rockefeller increasingly used the afternoon drives as opportunities for hanky-panky. Wearing thick black or amber goggles to screen out the sun, he sometimes borrowed a veil from one of the lady passengers and laced it dramatically across his face and wound it around his ears. He sat tightly wedged in the backseat between two buxom women, usually neighbors or visitors, with their laps covered by a blanket, and he became notorious for his hot schoolboy hands roving under the blanket. The man who had been a model of self-mastery now seemed, on occasion, an itchy-fingered old satyr. Tom Pyle, the head gardener and gamekeeper at Pocantico, steered the second car in the daily motorcade and was often astonished at his employer’s outrageous behavior. When Rockefeller’s car stopped one afternoon at a traffic light, a young woman riding in the backseat with him suddenly burst forth and scrambled back to Pyle’s car. “That old rooster!” she said. “He ought to be handcuffed.” Pyle noted that some local matrons enjoyed the hot seat and frequently returned for more. “I never decided whether different women received different treatment or whether some found it acceptable to be pinched by a ninety-year-old multimillionaire.” [12]

As if he were living his life backward, Rockefeller belatedly entered adolescence in his ninth and tenth decades. It was as if, after all his preternatural exertions, he had attained the one thing denied him: a carefree childhood. Growing younger in spirit, he became something of a clotheshorse with an extensive wardrobe of dandyish costumes. He now owned sixty stylish suits and several hundred ties and sometimes changed outfits three times a day. To Junior’s astonishment, he squired ladies to concerts and

dances at the Ormond Beach Hotel. “What a gay person you are becoming: An opera one night and the Governor’s ball another,” he wrote his father. “I do hope things will quiet down before Abby and I arrive.”[13] Around this time, Rockefeller also developed a strange fondness for antic behavior. One evening, when the dinner talk turned to corns, Rockefeller said, “I never had one and to prove it I will show you my foot”—then he peeled off his shoe and stocking and placed a bare foot on the table. [14]

As he and his guests drove through the Florida countryside one afternoon, they nearly ran out of gas but found a rural filling station nearby. When a husky country woman appeared, the chauffeur asked for five gallons—which struck her as too small for this mammoth vehicle. Where were they going? she asked. Leaning forward in the backseat, Rockefeller piped up, “My dear woman, we are on our way to heaven. And we’ll get there sooner or later.” She peered at him dubiously. “Yer may be on yer way to heaven, whoever you are,” she told Rockefeller, “but I warn yer you’ll never get there on five gallons o’ gas!”[15] It became one of Rockefeller’s favorite tales. Often, if there were empty seats in the car, he picked up hitchhikers or pedestrians to keep the stream of conversation flowing.

Each year, Rockefeller threw an annual Christmas party at Ormond Beach for his neighbors. The Casements was illuminated with a radiant star of Bethlehem over the door and glowing candles twinkled in each window. Rockefeller appeared in a tuxedo, bowed, pronounced seasonal greetings, and distributed gifts. He then led the group in Christmas carols and tooted party horns along with the children. Rockefeller increasingly warmed to strangers. One day, George N. Rigby, the local newspaper editor, wrote an article titled “Ormond the Different,” a panegyric to the town’s friendliness. When Rockefeller went to congratulate him, they chatted outside the newspaper office, beside a railway siding. As people on the train recognized Rockefeller, they pressed their faces to the windows and started taking pictures. Far from minding this attention, Rockefeller seemed to bask in it. Back in the car, Mrs. Evans reproachfully asked whether he had not made a spectacle of himself. “Of course,” he said. “But I wanted to prove that the article Mr. Rigby wrote, ‘Ormond the Different,’ was true.” [16]

After a life spent fleeing the press, Rockefeller proved an instinctive master of the new cinematic medium. Curt Engelbrecht, a photographer for the Hearst newsreel company, Movietone News, pursued Rockefeller until he

agreed to pose for the cameras. On his ninetieth birthday in 1929, Rockefeller donned a foppish light-gray cutaway suit, white vest, and boutonniere and spent two hours slicing an oversize cake and ad-libbing before the cameras. As Engelbrecht recalled, “He had a lot of fun playing the star of the production, and he was not ready to stop until the last foot of film had been used.”[17] In movie theaters across America, audiences saw John D. Rockefeller on the screen, walloping golf balls with a fierce but clumsy stroke and leading cronies in a rousing medley of hymns. People suddenly found something endearing about this anachronistic old gentleman who had graduated to the status of an American legend.

Why the sudden change in Rockefeller’s image? The titan was always a touchstone for American attitudes toward money, and the nation worshiped it in the 1920s. The passage of time had also spread a mellow glow over his depredations, which seemed to belong to an earlier, half-forgotten era. He also represented an increasingly honored American type: the practical, thrifty, laconic men who had established the country’s industrial base. Now succeeded by salaried managers and corporate bureaucrats, these first-generation industrialists retrospectively took on a new heroic sheen. Perhaps the most obvious reason for Rockefeller’s enhanced stature was that the public now associated him far more with philanthropy than with Standard Oil. The press, once hostile to him, formed his biggest cheering section. “It is doubtful whether any private individual has ever spent a great fortune more wisely than Mr. Rockefeller,” Pulitzer’s *World* editorialized in 1923, while the Hearst press, not to be outdone, stated, “The Rockefellers have given away more money and to better advantage than anybody else in the world’s history since the ark stranded on Ararat.”[18]

Even as Rockefeller became sporty and dapper in the Roaring Twenties, keeping up with the times, his son clung to dark business suits and starched white shirts. Now in his fifties, graying and bespectacled, Junior began to look like a museum piece. In 1923, as if taking refuge in a more comforting past, Junior had his office at 26 Broadway renovated by Charles of London, who installed oak paneling from an English Tudor mansion, bookcases with leaded glass panes, an Elizabethan conference table, and a Jacobean refectory table. While the Standard Oil companies raked in money from the auto boom, Junior preferred horse-drawn carriages and balked at setting foot inside an airplane.

Nothing made both father and son seem so old hat or controversial in

certain quarters as their emphatic support of Prohibition. Not only had they never tasted liquor in their lives, but they had steadily supported the Anti-Saloon League and given it $350,000 since its founding in 1895. Before enactment of the Eighteenth Amendment in 1920, Rockefeller had doubted that prohibition would work. “It is a vile agent of destruction,” he said of drink, “yet men will go on making it and selling it. It is the right hand of the devil.”[19] Yet whatever their private skepticism, the Rockefellers were strongly associated with temperance. To connoisseurs of bathtub gin, Junior seemed a rich, stuffy prig who denied the worker a glass of beer. “One glass of beer may lead to another,” he declared. “Therefore, I say one glass is one glass too many.” [20] By 1926, Junior had sufficient doubts about the course of Prohibition that he withdrew his support from the Anti-Saloon League, but it was several years before he entirely retracted it.

Saddled with the burden of managing half a billion dollars, Junior had little time left over for diversion. An unexceptional man thrust into exceptional circumstances, he accepted his fate with reluctance. As Frederick Gates said, “He would have preferred . . . to cut loose from his father’s fortune and make for himself like other men a wholly independent career. But he was an only son, the heir of colossal wealth, dedicated from his birth to overwhelming burdens, not to be evaded.”[21] The constant pressure of the Rockefeller philanthropies was a responsibility from which he could never escape, and he continued to be plagued by stress symptoms, including migraine headaches, stomach ailments, and sinus infections. Very often, he came home from work with dreadful headaches and had to lie down in his bedroom for an hour, his brow covered by a soothing compress. As his father had feared, the weight of the Rockefeller fortune often seemed to overwhelm him.

In late 1922, tormented by headaches, nervous exhaustion, and even temporary deafness, Junior checked into the Battle Creek Sanitarium of Dr. John H. Kellogg, an eccentric visionary who prescribed a vegetarian diet and spartan regimen for patients. Junior heard the inevitable: He worked too hard, suffered from strain, and should set aside more time for recreation. Upon leaving the sanitarium, he was still too weak to return to work and contracted a severe flu; to recuperate fully, he went down to Ormond Beach and spent several months with his father. For the next twelve years, unable to release the nervous tension inside him, Junior seldom went for more than two days without an excruciating headache.

The demands of spending his father’s fortune were never-ending. During

the 1920s, Junior's annual income fluctuated between $35 million and $57 million. Since he diverted 30 to 40 percent for charitable purposes, he was dispensing, on average, $11.5 million per year—or more than the Rockefeller Foundation's annual grants.[22] Junior had to grapple with the increasingly unwieldy structure of the overlapping Rockefeller philanthropies. This fragmentation had partly come about in order to head off the political criticism that would have greeted a single, all-encompassing foundation. In a sweeping and long-overdue reorganization in 1929, Junior supervised the absorption of the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial and the science and humanities programs of the General Education Board into the Rockefeller Foundation.

Just when he needed advisers most, Junior was abruptly deprived of them. By 1923, Frederick T. Gates was taking insulin treatment for diabetes at the Rockefeller Institute and had to resign from the foundation; he died of pneumonia in Phoenix in February 1929 after acute appendicitis. He had given the Rockefeller philanthropies much of their fervent vision as well as their tenacious attention to detail. After Starr Murphy died in 1921, Junior needed a new general counsel and three years later drafted his old fraternity brother Thomas M. Debevoise, a man of such daunting formality that Junior's sons christened him "the Prime Minister." But Junior still needed a strategic thinker of the stature of Gates or of Mackenzie King, whom he still saw periodically but who was now too busy for frequent consultations. Junior found his ideal theoretician in Raymond B. Fosdick, who served as his trusted friend, lawyer, adviser, and finally biographer. The two had met in May 1913 when Junior was forming the Bureau of Social Hygiene and Fosdick was a crusading mayoral aide who had worked with Lillian Wald at the Henry Street Settlement. After World War I, Fosdick sailed to France with Woodrow Wilson and served as a civilian aide to General Pershing before being appointed Under Secretary General of the League of Nations by Wilson. After the Senate vetoed U.S. participation, an embittered Fosdick resigned and lobbied for the global body, advocating a "planetary consciousness" and "collective intelligence."[23]

As a good Republican, Junior had initially refrained from endorsing the League, but under Fosdick's tutelage, he shed his isolationism and gave two million dollars for its new library and liberally endowed its health organization. To foster international harmony, he undertook projects ranging from support for the new Council on Foreign Relations, which was founded in 1921, to creating International Houses at four universities. (Each Christmas,

he and Abby hosted a reception for one hundred students from the International House at Columbia University.) Junior's largest single donation of the decade was a twenty-eight-million-dollar gift to create an International Education Board that would grant fellowships in the natural sciences and transpose the work of the GEB to a global plane.

During a trip to France in June 1923, Junior and Abby were startled by the deteriorating state of the Versailles palace: Iron fences rusted, water dripped from the ceiling, statues were crumbling in the garden. Junior offered the French prime minister, Raymond Poincaré, a million dollars to refurbish the Versailles roof and gardens; make emergency repairs at Fontainebleau; and restore the splendid Reims cathedral, scarred by wartime bombing—an offer the French could not very well refuse. Though shocked by his preference for Perrier over champagne, the French adored Junior's self-effacing manner, so at odds with their cartoon image of the bumptious American millionaire. When he drove to Versailles from Paris late one afternoon, the guards at the visitors' entrance told him that the palace was closed. Refusing special treatment, he got back in his car and returned to Paris—a modest act that won him plaudits across France and helped to offset some controversy over his purchase of the famous Unicorn tapestries. Junior spent millions more in France and contributed to a new building for the American Church overlooking the Seine. Suddenly an omnipresent philanthropist, he restored the library of the Imperial University of Tokyo after the 1924 earthquake; paid for the excavation of the Agora, the ancient Athenian marketplace; set up an oriental institute at the University of Chicago; and financed the Palestine Museum in Jerusalem to conserve biblical artifacts.

After his mother's death in 1915, Junior also widened his sights in the religious arena and adopted a more experimental, open-minded approach. As early as the tainted-money controversy, the Rockefellers had tried to shed their exclusively Baptist orientation. After seven religious-service organizations pooled their resources to aid American troops during World War I, the atmosphere seemed auspicious for interdenominational work. Senior believed that denominations had value but should all report, on the Standard Oil model, to one centralized governing body, whereas Junior believed that churches could operate more efficiently if they were not broken up into denominations. He sponsored studies that showed surplus churches in rural communities and proposed consolidation to trim excess capacity. Starting in 1920, he spearheaded the Inter-church World Movement, which encouraged unity among the various Christian denominations. Like an

electioneering politician, he went on an exhausting fund-raising tour of twelve cities. This ecumenical effort turned into a fiasco when he raised only three million dollars—one-third of that coming from the Rockefellers; most of the denominations cynically exploited the movement to siphon off money for their own sectarian purposes.

In December 1917, Junior delivered a speech at the Baptist Social Union that struck orthodox folk as rank heresy. Sketching out a new, unified church, he said, “It would pronounce ordinance, ritual, creed, all non-essential for admission into the Kingdom of God or His Church. A life, not a creed, would be its test; what a man does, not what he professes; what he is, not what he has.”[24] Adopting a position that would have sounded blasphemous to his mother— and that he would never have voiced while she was alive—Junior now believed that people who manifested Jesus’ moral spirit were religious, whether or not they practiced Christian rituals.

In the early 1920s, the Baptist Church was rent by vitriolic clashes between southern fundamentalists and northern liberals over the proper interpretation of the Bible, a heated debate that culminated in the 1925 Scopes monkey trial. Throwing off his diffidence, Junior inveighed against the “narrow and medieval creed” of the fundamentalists, whom he accused of breeding enmity and division. This was sharper, more self-confident criticism than Junior had ever expressed and by the mid-1920s he openly doubted the literal interpretation of the Bible, regarding it as incompatible with modern science. By this point, even Senior was coming around to figurative interpretation. For fundamentalists, such heretical views diluted religion to a watery form of social work, and in 1926, in a mounting reaction, the Southern Baptist Convention reaffirmed the Genesis account of creation and unequivocally rejected the theory of evolution.

Junior was backed up in his views by a new influence: Harry Emerson Fosdick, the older brother of Raymond B. Fosdick. In 1924, when Cornelius Woelfkin retired as pastor of the Fifth Avenue Baptist Church (which had moved to Park Avenue two years earlier), Junior saw an opening for a charismatic leader who would courageously lead the congregation toward interdenominationalism. As a young pastor, Fosdick had championed the Social Gospel and preached to the dispossessed in lower Manhattan slums and Appalachian shantytowns. Even something of a muckraker in his early days, he had admired the work of Lincoln Steffens, Ray Stannard Baker, and other colleagues of Ida Tarbell. In 1922, he delivered a controversial sermon, “Shall

the Fundamentalists Win?" that was such a strong, unadulterated statement of modernist beliefs that he was nearly tried for heresy by the Presbyterian Synod. Sometimes tagged a socialist and once branded "the Jesse James of the theological world," Fosdick denied the virgin birth, the inerrant Bible, and the conventional version of the Second Coming.[25]

In 1925, Fosdick, who was actually a Baptist, left the First Presbyterian Church because of his iconoclastic views. Junior wooed him at the height of this controversy. It was very rare for Junior to court trouble, and Fosdick was thunderstruck by his invitation to him to head the Park Avenue Baptist Church. During their meeting, the left-leaning Fosdick confessed to misgivings about becoming the pastor of such a swank church. To entice him, Junior floated the idea of creating a new church to serve a more heterogeneous community. Still, Fosdick demurred. When Junior pressed him for a reason, Fosdick blurted out, "Because you are too wealthy, and I do not want to be known as the pastor of the richest man in the country." Embarrassed silence ensued. Then Junior replied, "I like your frankness, but do you think that more people will criticize you on account of my wealth, than will criticize me on account of your theology?"[26] Both men laughed, and a close relationship was started.

Even before the ground breaking for a new church began, Fosdick threw open the Park Avenue Baptist Church to new members, including those not baptized by immersion. A year after his arrival, Junior initiated a project that had long tantalized him: building a great interdenominational church in New York City. With Junior himself chairing the building committee and donating ten million dollars to the project, a site was selected in Morningside Heights for what would become the Riverside Church. The Gothic building, designed by Charles Collens and Henry C. Pelton, was inspired by the cathedrals of Chartres and Laon.

Formally dedicated in 1931, the church was an ecumenical shrine that seemed to bridge both the spiritual and temporal worlds. Instead of saintly statues lining the chancel screen, one found scientists, doctors, educators, social reformers, and political leaders, including Louis Pasteur, Hippocrates, Florence Nightingale, and Abraham Lincoln. Statues of Confucius, Buddha, Mohammed, and Moses stared down from archivolts above the main portal, while Darwin and Einstein occupied honored niches. After a few years, the congregation was both interdenominational and interracial, with fewer than a third of the members coming from Baptist backgrounds. Once exponents of

the old-time religion, the Rockefellers had now advanced into the vanguard of liberal Protestantism and were loudly denounced by conservative theologians for desecrating the true church. The Baptist Bible Union said of Riverside Church that it was "obviously part of a plan to extend to the whole Baptist denominational life the influence of the Rockefeller Foundation, which already had succeeded in converting nearly all our educational institutions into hotbeds of modernism."[27] Thirty years after left-wing social reformers had vilified the Rockefellers, the family, under Junior's influence, was now being excoriated from the right. In 1935, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., who had been the principal lay donor to the Northern Baptist Church, made his last annual gift. "What gives me pause," he said in his valedictory letter, "is the tendency inherent in denominations to emphasize the form instead of the substance, the denominational peculiarity instead of the oneness of Christian purpose."[28]

In 1924, John Jr., Abby, and their three oldest boys made a swing through the American West in a private railroad car, stopping to camp along the way. Outside the Northeast, Junior was seldom recognized, and he thrived on the anonymity of the open road. When they arrived at Yellowstone National Park, the family was greeted by park superintendent Horace Albright, who was startled to see the Rockefeller boys pitching in to assist the porter with the luggage. As Albright escorted them around the park, Junior and Abby were chagrined by tree stumps and fallen timber that littered the roadside. Later, in a letter to Albright, Junior offered money to clean up and beautify these thoroughfares. On their second day, Albright drove the Rockefellers to see the craggy, snow-capped Grand Tetons. Struck as with the sudden force of an epiphany, Junior decided to preserve this exquisite view for posterity.

On a subsequent visit to the Grand Tetons in 1926, Junior and Abby recoiled at the creeping blight of hot-dog stands, gas stations, and gaudy billboards that were beginning to clutter the countryside around Jackson Hole. As Albright recorded in his journal, "I believe Mr. Rockefeller had a genuine distaste for the garish advances of civilization—and what's more he feared them. So he took every opportunity he felt possible to step in and save his fellow humans from the onslaught of the crippling effects of industrial society."[29] The son of America's foremost industrialist now worked assiduously to save nature's monuments and preserve the spirit of America's preindustrial past. It was a propitious time to do so: The National Park Service had been created by Congress in 1916 with a large mandate to

promote and regulate national parks and monuments but without an adequate budget to accomplish this. The first two directors, Stephen Mather and Albright, cultivated philanthropists as a way to rectify this.

Lacking his father's hostility toward government and imbued with a Wilsonian sense of public service, Junior, under Albright's tutelage, formed a unique partnership with Washington to save wilderness areas. Upon returning home, Junior began to buy thousands of acres in the Jackson Hole Valley with an eye to creating a new park—an idea anathema to many local cattlemen, hunters, and dude-ranch operators who saw this as meddling in their businesses. To minimize political opposition and keep land prices down, Junior made the land purchases through a front group, the Snake River Land Company. Though he accumulated 33,562 acres and yearned to hand them over to the National Park Service, his bountiful gift was consistently spurned due to fierce, shortsighted local opposition. Only in 1943 did President Roosevelt create the Jackson Hole National Monument and accept the Rockefeller land, which was merged into an expanded Grand Teton National Park in 1950. Once infected with preservation fever, Junior gave money to buy vast acreage for the Shenandoah National Park in Virginia and the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in North Carolina and Tennessee, plus a major tract to connect them via the Skyline Drive threaded through the Blue Ridge Mountains.

If Horace Albright was one of Junior's environmental gurus, the other was Henry Fairfield Osborn, president of the American Museum of Natural History. As founder of a group called the Save-the-Redwoods League, Osborn sounded the alarm about the impending destruction of redwood forests in northern California, which were being felled rapidly by lumber companies. When one company started to chop down redwoods on Bull Creek Flat, an especially fine stand, Junior supplied one million dollars to stop the logging and save the virgin woods. He later gave money to save other redwood forests, along with $1.5 million to preserve thousands of pristine acres of sugar pines in Yosemite Valley. Closer to home, he assembled seven hundred acres of land along the New Jersey shore of the Hudson River that he donated to the Palisades Park Commission. What makes these conservation efforts notable is that Junior was putting his own stamp on Rockefeller philanthropy and having a striking national, even global, impact. His conservationist impulse was quite different from the forward-looking, scientific spirit that his father had exhibited in medical research and education.

Junior's veneration of the past and implicit discomfort with the modern era were exemplified by several restoration projects in his later years that again marked a break with his father's legacy. He seemed at times not so much to want to study the past as to inhabit it, taking on its recaptured dignity. His most celebrated exercise in time travel came through the Reverend Dr. William Goodwin, a professor of sacred literature at William and Mary College, who met Junior at a Phi Beta Kappa banquet in 1924. Goodwin tried to pique Junior's interest in his personal obsession: restoring the old colonial capital of Williamsburg, Virginia. A monomaniac on the subject, Goodwin often ambled about the town in a moonlit reverie, communing with eighteenth-century ghosts. Though Junior turned him down, the Episcopal clergyman sensed that he had stumbled upon the one man in America willing and able to implement his fantasy. For the next two years, Junior had to steel himself against Goodwin's maddeningly persistent entreaties.

In the spring of 1926, when Junior decided to speak at the Hampton Institute, Goodwin saw a chance to waylay him to Williamsburg. When John Jr. and Abby arrived, he took them about town, a clinging, heavy-breathing cicerone. At one point Junior asked innocently whether plans existed to preserve the old buildings; at this, the minister must have seen a ray of divine sunlight. As he sheepishly said, "I found it exceedingly hard at the time not to burst forth in the presence of Mr. Rockefeller into unfolding my cherished dream."[30] He soon swamped Junior with artistic renderings of how the restored town might look.

When Junior consented to underwrite the project the following year, he estimated it would cost five million dollars and he faced the familiar dilemma of buying up land without triggering a real-estate boom. With the Rockefeller involvement concealed, Goodwin referred to his patron by the code name "Mr. David." As lawyers, real-estate agents, and property owners flocked to Goodwin's office in suspicious numbers, the rumor mill churned with guesses about the project's rich backer: Henry Ford, George Eastman, J. P. Morgan, Jr., and Otto Kahn were all mentioned. When this speculation grew counterproductive, Goodwin gathered the local citizenry and announced, "It is now my very great privilege and pleasure to announce that the donors of the money to restore Williamsburg are Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr., of New York."[31]

As always, the Rockefeller method was to start slowly, test the concept, and then expand. True to this approach, Junior planned to redo one building at a

time. He never dreamed he would resurrect the whole town, but the idea of meticulously restoring the past cast a potent spell over his mind, and he became fantastically engrossed in the most minuscule details. As he told his subordinates, “No scholar must ever be able to come to us and say we have made a mistake.”[32] At one point, the resident architect reminded Junior that everything wasn’t spotless in the eighteenth century. “But Mr. Rockefeller did not like that at all,” he recalled. “He wanted everything to be perfect.”[33] Junior had a special affinity with this lovingly retrieved world. “I really belong in Williamsburg,” he once said. He and Abby bought an elm-shaded manor house, Bassett Hall, where they spent two months each year and where Abby created a firstrate collection of American folk art.[34]

As a form of recreation rich in social value, Colonial Williamsburg captivated Junior and grew into such a passion that he eventually spent fifty-five million dollars on it. “I gave more time, thought, and attention to Williamsburg than I did to any other project I ever undertook—far more than I gave to Rockefeller Center. . . . The more I did the more complete the project became and the greater my interest became.”[35] Senior never discussed Colonial Williamsburg with his son and, in solipsistic fashion, tended to edit out of his mind what he himself had not originated, even though Junior’s projects were perpetuating his legacy and enormously enhancing the Rockefeller image. Nevertheless, when Junior was later honored by the Virginia legislature, he became choked up and departed from his prepared text to say, “How I wish my father were here! I am only the son.”[36] Such self-abnegation had become a habit—never mind that John D. had ignored the project. In 1934, President Roosevelt opened Colonial Williamsburg to the public.

Another project conceived in an analogous spirit was The Cloisters museum, which reflected Junior’s long-standing interest in medieval art, with its hierarchy, exacting craftsmanship, and strong spiritual content. His West Fifty-fourth Street home was decorated with gorgeous medieval tapestries, including the Hunt of the Unicorn, and his collection expanded after William Welles Bosworth introduced him to a highly romantic sculptor named George Grey Barnard. Barnard traveled through France and Italy each summer, scooping up Gothic statues and other medieval treasures and bearing his trophies back to New York. The Cluny Museum in Paris gave Barnard the idea for a medieval museum in upper Manhattan which came to be known as The Cloisters (later the Barnard Cloisters). In 1914, this one-man museum

opened on Fort Washington Avenue in a small brick building. Barnard created for visitors a full-blown medieval fantasy: Robed figures would lead visitors through a shadowy, churchlike interior perfumed with incense and echoing with medieval chants. By the time Barnard put up his entire collection for sale in the 1920s, Junior had already purchased one hundred Gothic pieces from him, storing most of them in delivery tunnels at Pocantico.[37] The Metropolitan Museum of Art took the entire collection, with money provided by Rockefeller.

As a boy, Junior had frequently taken horseback rides along the Hudson to a high, wooded point that enthralled him. Even then he had vowed that he would someday buy the land and give it to the city. Now such an opportunity presented itself. Having bought the Cornelius Billings estate and other parcels near Barnard's museum, he offered them to the city for a park. Five years later, the city accepted this gift for a new Fort Tryon Park and honored Junior's proviso that four elevated acres be set aside for a new museum, The Cloisters, to house the medieval art collection of the Metropolitan Museum.

As with Colonial Williamsburg, Junior loved the demanding scholarship that went along with the creation of the medieval museum. He paid for a building that ingeniously blended cloisters from five French monasteries as well as many pieces that he had previously bought from Barnard. As he was reviewing plans for The Cloisters one day, he noticed a room marked "Tapestries" and asked James Rorimer, the curator, what he had in mind. "Oh, something like the Unicorn Tapestries," Rorimer said airily. Junior grimaced. But, in an act of supreme sacrifice, he eventually parted with his precious tapestries. By the time the Cloisters opened in 1938, Junior had donated or underwritten the cost of more than 90 percent of the art displayed.

The greatest friction between Junior and Abby arose over the subject of modern art, which exposed fundamental differences in their personalities. Junior seemed to be unnerved by the outlaw, bohemian side of modern art, its free experimentation with form and content. While he was stubbornly mired in the past, as if escaping the strife associated with his father's career and the Ludlow Massacre, Abby embraced change and responded to the freedom and spontaneity of the new European art. She was enamored of German Expressionist paintings, with their bold colors, grotesque themes, and nightmarish sensuality. When she began to collect such works, Junior found them raw and harshly unappealing. Banishing the forbidden art to an upper-floor gallery at 10 West Fifty-fourth Street, he often struck a patronizing tone

when talking about Abby's picture collection. "These were strange, irresponsible objects that she was bringing into his home," said their son Laurance. "He did not approve of them."[38]

Many things about modern art—including the sometimes garish colors, dreamlike imagery, and violent or distorted forms—disconcerted this inhibited man. "I am interested in beauty and by and large I do not find beauty in modern art," Junior said, preferring the classic beauty of, say, Chinese porcelains. "I find instead a desire for self-expression, as if the artist were saying, 'I'm free, bound by no forms, and art is what flows out of me.' "[39] Junior must have identified the freedom inherent in modern pictures with Abby's emancipation in collecting them, for otherwise it is hard to account for his vehement resistance to her avocation. Frustrated by her husband's hopelessly blinkered vision, Abby found compensation in her sons, especially Nelson, who shared her love of these threatening objects.

For once heedless of her husband's wishes, Abby joined with Lillie P. Bliss and Mary Sullivan in 1929 to found the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), which provided an outlet for the talents of many wealthy New York women. It was a brave act at a time when most Americans still sneered at such artistic innovation. At first, the museum rented gallery space in the Heckscher Building before moving to a West Fifty-third Street house owned by the Rockefellers. Even as the museum grew in popularity, Junior kept up his deprecating tone. "I showed Papa the pictures and the gallery today," Abby wrote to Nelson, "and he thinks that they are terrible beyond words, so I am somewhat depressed tonight."[40] Filling the breach left by his father, Nelson was named chairman of the museum's Junior Advisory Committee in 1930—he was only twenty-two and still in his last semester at Dartmouth—and ended up as its president.

Notwithstanding his hatred of modern art, Junior became the museum's chief benefactor, donating a total of six million dollars in endowment grants and land. So considerable was the Rockefeller largesse behind MoMA that one historian has written that "since the beginning" it has "been a Rockefeller responsibility, a protectorate, one might almost say." [41] Modern art nevertheless remained contentious at home. Distressed that her budget allowed her to buy just one small Matisse painting and drawing, Abby instructed an intermediary, "Please tell him [Matisse] the only reason I have no more is my inability to acquire them."[42] To remedy this, Abby invited

Matisse to dinner in December 1930 and the French master grew impatient that someone of Junior's cultural attainments could be so insensitive to the beauty of Cézanne, van Gogh, Picasso, and Braque. One editor present, Frank Crowninshield of *Vanity Fair,* registered Junior's tactful response, saying that "the philanthropist, who had listened very politely, regretted quite as politely, and in the most polished French, that he must still appear adamant. Then, with an engaging burst of confidence, he added that Mr. Matisse must not altogether despair, because, though he might still seem to be stone, he suspected that Mrs. Rockefeller, thanks to her very special gifts of persuasion, would eventually wear him down to the consistency of jelly."[43] Unfortunately, this charm was strictly for public consumption and Junior kept up his stony obduracy.

Overriding Junior's objections, Abby served as MoMA's first treasurer and gave the museum its first fund for acquiring art. She was a blithe, energetic, ubiquitous figure in the museum's maiden years. All this prodigious work only alienated Junior further, a disapproval so noticeable to the young director, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., that he once told Abby, "Remember me cordially to Mr. Rockefeller (who I find hard to forgive his granite indifference to what interests you so much)."[44] Philip Johnson was no less scornful: "He was a bulldog, a very strong man, one who would say, 'As my wife you can do this and not that.' "[45] Since Abby's involvement with MoMA coincided with the years in which her children graduated from college, married, and started jobs, it grated on Junior that he could not now have his wife all to himself. "We children, who had been his competition, were on our own now—presumably our needs were no longer a threat to him," said David. "But here was the museum, more complex than ever, demanding her energy, and it rankled."[46] Having bequeathed a stunning 181 artworks to MoMA in 1935 alone, Abby attained a new celebrity status and was featured on the January 1936 cover of *Time* magazine, which named her "the outstanding individual patron of living artists in the U.S."[47]

Abby's work gave the family an important presence in art patronage that it had largely lacked to date because of Senior's conspicuous indifference to painting, inherited by his son. However much he inwardly writhed with displeasure, Junior kept the money spigot open. After Lillie Bliss died in 1931, her collection came up for sale—brimming with twenty-four Cézannes, nine Seurats, eight Degases, and so on. She had left it to the museum with the proviso that it have an endowment fund sufficient to ensure its permanence;

Junior gave $200,000 and Nelson $100,000. In 1935, to encompass this swelling collection, the trustees voted for a new building to be fashioned by Philip L. Goodwin and Edward Durell Stone in the International Style. For the site, the Rockefellers provided land on both West Fifty-third Street and West Fifty-fourth Street and contributed 60 percent of the building-fund money. The homes of Senior and Junior were razed to make way for the museum and the adjoining Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Sculpture Garden. In early 1938, Junior and Abby moved into a new apartment at 740 Park Avenue. For Junior, it must have been the ultimate affront that his nine-story mansion had been demolished to make way for modern art.

A soaring nocturnal vision of Rockefeller Center. *(Courtesy of the Rockefeller Archive Center)*

CHAPTER 34

Heirs

Senior's worst forebodings about the fates of his grandchildren seemed to materialize during the 1920s, especially with the McCormicks. He had long doted on his grandson Fowler, who had become a friend, acolyte, and traveling companion of Carl Jung, whom he lauded as a "God figure" in his life.[1] Having weaned Fowler away from conventional mores, Jung might have inadvertently prepared the ground for Fowler's unorthodox marriage. In 1921, the tabloid press feasted on the racy divorce of James Stillman, Jr., and Anne "Fifi" Stillman. Fifi—a striking redhead with a flirtatious manner and volatile temper—was a siren to young men, and Fowler became smitten with her when he roomed with her son Bud at Princeton. Scenting danger, Edith warned her father in 1922, "There is always a pitfall for a rich young man in a much older, designing and fascinating woman."[2] To Rockefeller's horror, Fowler later married Fifi, a divorcée who was eighteen years his senior and had four children. Although he occasionally received the couple (who remained childless), Rockefeller was heartsick over the match and doubtless blamed Edith's self-absorption for her children's troubles.

Beautiful and temperamental, Edith's daughter Muriel had her mother's headstrong nature. When Rockefeller sent her a birthday check in 1922, she mailed it right back, professing outrage that he would express his "loving feeling in such a materialistical manner."[3] Since her parents were leading patrons of the opera, Muriel decided to become a diva and appeared with her mother at a fund-raising luncheon. "Following the luncheon," reported one Chicago paper, "after the coffee had been drunk and the men guests were lighting up their cigars, Miss McCormick drew a slender ebony cigarette holder and cigarette from her gold mesh bag and joined the smokes."[4] Adopting the stage name of Nawanna Micor, Muriel studied opera with Ganna Walska, acted briefly on the New York stage, and even tried her luck in Hollywood before turning to interior decorating and marrying Elisha D. Hubbard, the son of a former bank president.

Rockefeller received more warmth from her sister, Mathilde, a bright,

winning young woman and the only McCormick child exempted from analysis with Jung. Fearful that Mathilde would fall prey to some scoundrel in Switzerland, Rockefeller told her: “We want you all to be true Americans and to love your own country and not to be enamored with the allurements that come especially to our American girls sometimes by the fortune hunters of the world.” [5] Rockefeller had the talents of a sibyl in these matters. In 1922, Mathilde, seventeen, decided to marry her Swiss riding master, a forty-five-year-old widower named Max Oser. Having paid for Mathilde’s expensive riding lessons, Edith felt betrayed and was sure the treacherous Oser was out to bilk them. As she told her father, Oser had only taken an interest in Mathilde because she was “the daughter of wealthy parents and the granddaughter of the wealthiest man in the world. As we unfortunately all too well know, all of the children are flattered and toadied to by people of none too worthy characters, who hope thereby to get money from them.”[6]

Forgetting her own recent escapades, Edith mounted her high horse and sounded like a conservative, self-righteous mother, suggesting that Rockefeller withhold money from his grandchildren to make it “less possible for them to be taken in by swindlers and by evil minded people.”[7] “We have our sorrows,” Rockefeller replied to Edith. “How thankful I am that dear mother is spared them.”[8] He was sufficiently swayed by Edith’s argument that he discontinued many of the annual gifts he had routinely been making to his grandchildren.

Refusing to accept the match with Oser, Edith attempted to scare the daylights out of Mathilde, telling her that the twenty-six-year age difference between her McCormick grandparents had yielded a terrible legacy of mental illness among their seven children. “Two died young and two are insane,” she pleaded with her daughter. “Do you not see how unjust it is to bring children into the world doomed to insanity?”[9] Not relenting after Mathilde’s marriage in 1923, Edith refused to see Max Oser or even her own grandchildren for many years. When the couple visited America in 1929 in an attempt to close this breach, Edith told Mathilde that she still had no desire to see her grandchildren. “Children really aren’t at all important,” she informed her daughter, “they’re just necessary for procreation.”[10] Edith grew so spiteful that when Mathilde and Max planned to visit Senior, Edith telegrammed ahead to her father: “I would appreciate very much if you did not receive the fortune hunter Mr. Oser in your home.”[11] About to celebrate his ninetieth

birthday, Rockefeller was in no mood to snub a beloved granddaughter, so he graciously received Max, Mathilde, and their children at Lakewood. Rockefeller even slipped into a confidant's role with Mathilde, who poured out her troubles about Edith. After being reviled as a robber baron for so many decades, he enjoyed playing the sage, soft-shoe grandfather.

Rockefeller continued to feel highly protective toward his granddaughter Margaret, who reminded everybody of Bessie as she grew up, making her an object of special concern. She had grown up in a lonely, bookish atmosphere with her father, Charles Strong, who kept Margaret away from America—to Rockefeller's everlasting dismay. Paralyzed from the waist down by a tumor on his spine, Charles was confined to a wheelchair cushioned with a rubber pillow, and this made his life only more cerebral. While staying in his Paris apartment or his villa at Fiesole, Charles and his close friend George Santayana shared a paternal solicitude toward Margaret, who was always encircled by suitors. Her marital plans provided grist for speculation between these two weighty philosophers.

It was Santayana, not Strong, who gave away the bride when Margaret married the fashionable George de Cuevas in a Paris church in 1927; Margaret thought that her father would disapprove and got married while he was out of town. After her solitary, repressed home environment, Margaret was swept up in de Cuevas's warmth, spontaneity, and charm. Almost invariably labeled a Spanish nobleman, de Cuevas was neither Spanish nor noble but the scion of a Chilean banking family that was richer in land than cash, and he was clever in plotting ways to remedy that deficiency.

In January 1929, Margaret gave birth to a baby girl named Elizabeth (followed by a son, John), and later in the year she and George headed off to America "to see the old man Rockefeller, now 90 years old," as Santayana described their plans. "He has already treated Margaret generously—she has $75,000 a year—but gratitude is the hope of favors to come, and no doubt they will do their best in Florida to make a good impression, to be passed on from the old gentleman to John D. Jr. who now holds the purse-strings."[12] Later on, George de Cuevas jested that he had trekked off to the Florida jungles to play golf to provide for his children. He knew the proper line to take with Rockefeller and portrayed Margaret as a poor waif who needed protection. Margaret and George moved to America with their two children in the 1930s, a stay punctuated by return trips to Paris and Florence, and for several years they lived near Rockefeller in Lakewood, much as Charles and

Bessie had done three decades earlier. In his will, Rockefeller offered striking proof of his concern for the welfare of Bessie's daughter. Since he had already distributed almost all of his money to his philanthropies and children, he left an estate of only $26.4 million, with $16.6 million of that skimmed off by state and federal taxes. In a decision that took many people by surprise, the chief recipient of the remaining money was Margaret Strong de Cuevas—a tribute both to Margaret and to her now sainted mother.

With Junior's six children, Rockefeller suffered much less anguish, for they were brought up under their father's unswerving discipline. In his desire to have a shining, spotless family and cleanse the Rockefeller name, Junior became a hard and often unforgiving parent. Of the children, Babs, the sole daughter, was most often at loggerheads with her parents. She felt that Abby doted on her sons and that Junior singled her out for a disproportionate share of pent-up rage. Junior was poorly equipped to fathom youthful revolt, especially when it came from an emancipated daughter. Tall, lithe, and slender, a true child of the Jazz Age, Babs looked terrific in flapper outfits and cloche hats, enjoyed high-speed chases in her sports car, adored tennis, and patronized Harlem jazz clubs. She also adroitly managed to evade her chaperons, and on the night Uncle William died in 1922 it took time to track her down at a Long Island party. She hated churchgoing and mockingly recalled "the fannies waving" during morning prayer.[13] In keeping her accounts, she settled for a slapdash job and refused to follow tradition and hustle for pocket change. "I can always get a dollar from Grandpa," she boasted to her brothers, knowing her grandfather's weakness for the ladies. [14] At Brearley and Chapin Schools, she showed little initiative and resented her father's caustic comments about her report cards, not to mention his meddlesome calls to school to check up on her progress.

Junior offered his children a $2,500 reward if they did not smoke before age twenty-one, and for Babs he tossed in a car as well, yet she started to sneak cigarettes at fifteen. After inhaling a single cigarette in October 1922, Babs, nineteen, sat down and wrote to her father as if confessing to some monstrous crime: "This is going to be the hardest letter I have ever had to write. . . . I've smoked, thereby losing my car. Mama told me to take it up to Tarrytown tomorrow and put it away." When Babs brazenly continued to smoke, Junior volunteered to double her allowance if she abstained in the future. Even after she set her bed ablaze while smoking in bed, she still was not cured of the habit, and Junior was horrified when she added a taste for bootleg liquor.

Babs saw her father as a tense man who converted everything into a test of morality and his personal authority. Like her brothers, she found redeeming qualities in her grandfather, including good-humored sympathy, that were sorely missing in her father. Twice during the winter of 1923–1924, Babs was dragged into traffic court for speeding, and twice she pleaded guilty. While Junior would not countenance this, Senior dropped her a comforting note, admitting that he was partial to fast cars himself. The clashes with her father scarred Babs. As Laurance's daughter later said of a talk with Babs about her upbringing,

I cannot convey the tone of bitterness that crept into her speech. . . . She constantly said that [her father] meant well and expressed her admiration for [him], and yet it is clear that she feared and hated him. He never got angry in the sense of raising his voice or losing his temper. When he got angry, he would get very sarcastic as she recalled. She viewed him as a man who was incapable of enjoying himself.[15]

On May 14, 1925, Babs married a young lawyer and childhood friend: the handsome, easygoing David Milton. Twelve hundred people, including Governor Al Smith, attended the wedding at 10 West Fifty-fourth Street, with Ivy Lee hovering in the background, making sure photographers did not snap pictures of Babs in her wedding gown, lest anyone accuse the Rockefellers of ostentation. In the press, the story was predictably served up in hackneyed prose as a fairy-tale union of the "world's richest bride" and a "penniless law clerk."[16] Later, with more truth than diplomacy, Babs pronounced the day after the wedding "her first day of freedom." As a vast, expectant throng craned their necks outside, Babs and David slipped out a back door. When Junior saw the crowd standing outside, he asked if they would like to come in and see where the wedding had taken place. Pretty soon, he and his sons were squiring curiosity seekers, twenty at a time, to tour the flower-filled rooms. Eighteen years later, following in Edith's footsteps, Babs divorced her lawyer husband. She then married Dr. Irving Pardee, a neurologist, and, after he died, Jean Mauzé, a senior vice president of the United States Trust Company. In her later years, she was a substantial contributor to the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center and other New York City institutions.

From his first breath, John D. Rockefeller III had grown up in the long shadow of dynastic expectation. When he was born, one New York paper joked that Wall Street brokers were debating whether the event would "buoy the market or merely hold it steady."[17] Tall and lean, with a long, craggy

face, John had a tightly wound personality, which he inherited from his father. Shy and introspective, he was severely self-critical. Like his father, he aspired to be a paragon of virtue and, also like his father, paid a terrible emotional price for it. For all their similarities—or perhaps because of them—Junior and his eldest son had a relationship fraught with tension. John III felt overshadowed by his father and dejected by a sense that he could never measure up to his lofty standards. Babs claimed that John III was the most keenly injured by Junior's "primly correcting supervisory stance."[18] John chafed at his father's limitations, noting once in his diary, "F[ather] always has own way. He is . . . broad in business relations, but so narrow in some of his family details."[19] Unlike Babs, John showed no flashes of rebellion and swallowed his anger.

John went through several private schools, including the Roger Ascham School, the Browning School, and the Loomis Institute, but, unlike his younger brothers, he was not allowed to attend the progressive Lincoln School, which had been started in 1917 with a grant from the General Education Board. Embarrassed by his large jaw and convinced that the right side of his face was deformed, he began to manifest in adolescence the same litany of psychosomatic ailments (headaches, stomach pains, and so forth) that afflicted his father. In early 1922, he developed such torturous earaches that he had to spend the winter with his grandfather in Florida, where he enjoyed the old man's waggishness on the golf course. Senior added a bright touch of eccentricity to his dour world. He filled up his diary with dreary self-deprecation: "I have no personal attraction. Nobody wants to sit next to me at the table or anything." "I have no real friends here at school." "Wish I was more popular." "I wish I was different in many ways than I am." "Am much too self-conscious at all times."[20] He had inherited Eliza's puritan conscience without Big Bill's saving levity.

As an adolescent, John saved or donated half his income to charity and had little inkling of the magnitude of the Rockefeller fortune. According to legend, he was steering a decrepit rowboat at Seal Harbor one day when a neighbor's son said, "Why don't you get a motor boat?" Taken aback, John replied, "A motor boat! Gee whiz! Who do you think we are—Vanderbilts!" [21] At Princeton, he was not among the few hundred students who owned a car. One tale, perhaps apocryphal, claims that John was derided when he tried to cash a check at an Italian restaurant on Nassau Street in Princeton; he had accepted checks signed by George Washington and Julius Caesar, the owner

explained, but he was not such a dunce as to take one signed by John D. Rockefeller. Although the 1920 appearance of F. Scott Fitzgerald's first novel, *This Side of Paradise,* had certified Princeton's reputation for fast living, John III did not drink, smoke, curse, or study on Sunday. During receptions at his eating club, he would only brush the silver loving cup against his lips when it was passed around in order to avoid contaminating contact with liquor. While his classmates drank themselves into oblivion, John taught English to immigrants at a local settlement house or volunteered at the YMCA. Even at Princeton, he was already serving on the board of the Dunbar National Bank, a black-managed bank in Harlem supported by his father and other businessmen. Probably more popular at Princeton than he realized, John nonetheless portrayed his undergraduate years as a lonely purgatory. Crippled by his conscience, he dwelled morbidly on his own imperfections in his diary. "Am afraid I have an inferiority complex— really know I have. Never feel as if people—both boys and girls—wanted to be with me."[22] "Can't keep smile on my face which is most embarrassing. Muscles tremble. Give anything to be over it." [23] In his final bleak college entry, John recorded, "Guess the reason I am glad to get through college is because I have made rather a mess of it; also haven't really made hardly any friends."[24]

After graduating, John traveled around the world before taking up his duties at 26 Broadway, where he placed himself at his father's disposal. The family office was now an enormous bureaucracy staffed by more than one hundred people, including lawyers, accountants, money managers, and real-estate experts. If Rockefeller had let Junior wander confusedly during his early years at 26 Broadway, Junior handled his son in a much more direct and stifling manner. During John's first day at work on December 2, 1929, Junior held a press conference to introduce his son then proceeded to dominate the discussion. Each time the reporters posed a question for the lanky, fidgety young man, Junior answered for him. Though Junior had soon placed his son on fifteen boards, including the Rockefeller Foundation and the Rockefeller Institute, and given him a small, adjoining office, John seldom saw his father. Obsessive and driven, John III worked around the clock, six days a week, delving into everything from juvenile delinquency to population control. Like his father in his early years, John III was often the token Rockefeller on charity boards, and all the responsibilities took their toll.

This high-strung young man needed a woman who could save him from his nervous system, as Abby had with Junior, and he found an ideal partner in

Blanchette Ferry Hooker. The Vassar-educated Blanchette was a beautiful heiress, sweet and charming, who behaved with a dignified but unaffected manner. Her father had founded the Hooker Electrochemical Company while her mother had inherited money from the Ferry retail seed business. John III was such a bashful wooer that to speed things up, Junior gave him the key to a private cottage at Seal Harbor and encouraged him to take Blanchette there. The couple were finally married on November 11, 1932, before 2,500 guests at the Riverside Church.

During their courtship at Seal Harbor, Blanchette learned just how guilt-ridden John was when he handed her a comprehensive list of his faults then asked her to reciprocate. She saw that her future husband was bowed beneath the weight of the family name and fortune, and she helped him to strike out on his own. It was not easy. Like his aunt Edith, John III had suffered from intermittent bouts of agoraphobia in school, a condition that worsened after his marriage. When he and Blanchette went into society, he occasionally submitted to dizzy spells that nearly sent him into a dead swoon. Though the condition eventually subsided, as long as it lasted John and Blanchette seldom ventured out to public functions.

The least-known of the brothers, John was the most conscientious philanthropist. Besides the Rockefeller Foundation, he chaired Lincoln Center and the Population Council and become the most significant force behind the Asia Society. Avoiding limousines and luxury hotels whenever possible and often traveling under the fictitious name John Davison, he refrained from any self-aggrandizement. Oddly, like his father, John could not abide his wife's fondness for modern art and, taking a leaf from Abby, Blanchette firmly defied him and became president of the Museum of Modern Art. Also like his father, John reacted to the controversial Rockefeller legacy by acquiring a conscience that was a punishing taskmaster. His daughter said, "He was someone who suffered from never doing things just for enjoyment." [25]

If John III seemed imprisoned by the abundant family rules, Nelson seemed heedless of the inhibitions that ruled their father's life. Nelson's brash exuberance only sapped John's confidence further. As the latter recorded in his diary, "Nelson dances very well. I am rotten." "Nelson always makes a big hit."[26] While his brothers were rangy, the young Nelson had Junior's short, square frame. Named after Senator Aldrich, he inherited the Aldrich charm and extroversion, and alone of the six children he exhibited a flamboyant craving for publicity, a cheerful egotism in a family that frowned on self-

assertion. A naturally commanding figure, Nelson behaved less like a student at the Lincoln School, where he zipped about in a flashy Ford roadster, than a principal. He accosted one startled new teacher with an invitation to call on him if she needed any information because "you're new here and I've been around for quite a while."[27] Not since Big Bill had there been such a fun-loving, narcissistic Rockefeller. Junior often winced at Nelson's cocky antics, while Abby strongly identified with his "frank and outspoken" nature and clearly favored him over the other children.[28]

A popular student at Dartmouth, Nelson made the soccer team and was elected vice president of his junior class. Even then, he was ingratiating himself with people, sharpening his political skills. With his worn corduroy pants and sagging sweaters, he tried to blend into the crowd, but he was a star in sack-cloth and converted the Dartmouth president, Ernest Hopkins, into a pal. He did not drink, taught a Sunday-school class, got high enough grades to make Phi Beta Kappa, and humbly rode a bike instead of a car.

After his parents scotched his dream of becoming an architect, Nelson majored in economics. For his honors thesis, he wanted to write an essay that would vindicate his grandfather and Standard Oil and was eager to hear the story from the patriarch's own lips. A wonderful raconteur about so many events, Rockefeller carefully avoided serious discussion of his business history. "I was thinking the other day that Grandfather has never mentioned the Company to us," Nelson wrote to his father, "nor has he ever told us anything about his stupendous work in organizing the Company and leading it for so many years."[29] To remedy this omission, Nelson asked if his father could set up a talk, saying it "would be an outstanding and unforgettable experience in our lives."[30]

While Rockefeller mulled this over, Junior mailed his son the hagiographic Inglis manuscript, which Nelson found engrossing. "It was thrilling!" he told Junior. "For the first time I felt that I really knew Grandfather a little—got a glimpse into the power and grandeur of his life." [31] Nelson did not realize that he was only reading a pretty family fiction; the Rockefeller children were being duped, inadvertently, by family public relations. As for Rockefeller, though flattered by the request, he declined to speak to his grandson, leaving Nelson—like Junior and the other Rockefellers—no better informed about Standard Oil than any well-read stranger. Senior's behavior guaranteed that anxiety over the fortune's legitimacy would spread to his descendants,

strengthening their guilty consciences. In his thesis, Nelson, coached by Inglis, flatly denied that Standard Oil ever drove competitors from business unfairly. “These companies were treated with extreme fairness and in many cases with generosity,” he wrote, dismissing as mythical that Standard Oil had amassed power “through local price discrimination, bogus independents and espionage.” [32]

In 1929, Nelson turned twenty-one on the same day that Rockefeller reached ninety. “The 90 makes my 21 seem mighty small and insignificant,” he wrote his parents, “just like a little sapling standing by a mighty fir. But the sapling still has time to grow and develop and someday it might itself turn into a tree of some merit. Who knows?”[33] Nelson leaped at any chance to golf with Rockefeller in Florida and was an attentive audience for his yarns and witticisms. After one 1932 visit, Nelson told Junior that Rockefeller “certainly is an extraordinary man, about the finest I know. There are few people that I really admire as being all-round success, but he leads the list. His point of view and outlook on life are so perfectly grand. And what a sense of humor!”[34]

In the autumn of 1929, in his can-do, take-charge style, Nelson declared that he would marry a childhood friend, Mary Todhunter Clark, known as Tod. Thin and aristocratic in manner, she was a granddaughter of George Roberts, a former president of the Pennsylvania Railroad. Junior was irate that Nelson had not consulted him and consented only after Abby lobbied him. Nelson and Tod went to Ormond Beach to see Rockefeller, who gave his blessing after golfing with this young lady from the Main Line suburbs of Philadelphia. Tod struck observers as witty and intelligent, an excellent mimic and fine sports-woman, if rather cool and self-contained. On June 23, 1930, Nelson married her in Bala Cynwyd, Pennsylvania, while police restrained a thousand spectators outside. At the last minute, Rockefeller could not come and sent $20,000 in securities instead. More and more, he refrained from trips that might threaten his health.

For their honeymoon, Nelson and Tod spent two weeks in Seal Harbor, where they were attended by twenty-four servants. As a wedding gift, Junior treated them to a nine-month around-the-world trip that took on the trappings of a state visit. At each port of call, they were escorted by Standard Oil officials who introduced them to prime ministers and other dignitaries. For Nelson, the meeting with Mahatma Gandhi in India had one severe

shortcoming: “He showed no interest in me whatever,” he complained.[35]

During the summer of 1931, Nelson started work at 26 Broadway, where he felt crowded out by Junior’s phalanx of advisers. In an abortive venture, he launched a company for marketing merchandise and discussed the project at length with Rockefeller in Florida. “Every morning we’d take turns reading Psalms before breakfast, which consisted of floods of orange juice,” said Nelson. He made his mark by hustling tenants for Rockefeller Center and ended up as the project’s chief panjandrum. During his eventful career, he served as an assistant secretary of state for Latin America under Roosevelt and undersecretary of health, education, and welfare under Eisenhower. When sworn in as governor of New York in 1959, he took the oath of office on the Bible of his great-grandmother Eliza. After thirty years and five children, the marriage to Tod ended in divorce in 1962. When he married Margaretta “Happy” Murphy the following year, many people thought his marital history had irreparably harmed his presidential ambitions, and he had to settle for the vice presidency under Gerald Ford.

When Laurance was born in 1910, the family chose this strange spelling of his name to honor the ailing Cettie. “This we do so as to make it as much like Laura as possible,” Junior told his mother.[36] Everybody said the thin, sharp-featured Laurance looked more like Senior than any of the other children did. Bright and laconic, with an incisive wit, he also had his grandfather’s enigmatic detachment. However, he lacked the “power to concentrate on difficult and routine tasks,” as Junior said when Laurance was at the Lincoln School.[37] The boy took up photography, built a wooden auto powered by a motorcycle engine, and showed a flair for gadgetry. As a philosophy major at Princeton, Laurance shed many of his boyhood religious beliefs in the face of rational scrutiny. While studying at Harvard Law School, he developed pneumonia during his first semester and had to spend the winter with Senior at Ormond Beach. Because he had qualms about the social philosophy of the law and had to struggle to get through his finals, he decided to drop out without taking his degree.

In 1934, Laurance married Mary French in Woodstock, Vermont. A charming Vassar graduate of quiet strength, Mary was the granddaughter of Frederick Billings, a president of the Northern Pacific Railroad. Mary’s brother had roomed with Nelson at Dartmouth. Laurance had his grandfather’s sound instinct for business opportunities and the same unwavering confidence in his own judgment. When he inherited Rockefeller’s

New York Stock Exchange seat, he became the youngest member of the exchange. At twenty-eight, with his friend Captain Eddie Rickenbacker, Laurance joined a syndicate to buy Eastern Airlines, eventually becoming its largest shareholder. He also took a sizable stake in the McDonnell Aircraft Corporation, which surged ahead on the strength of aviation contracts during World War II. He was later involved in the Viking rocket and other aerospace projects, and enjoyed flying his own plane. After the family made its first trip to the Grand Tetons in the early 1920s, he became entranced by conservation no less than his father had been. “I was the youngest one there, and therefore the most impressionable,” he said. He later created vacation resorts in places of unspoiled scenery, managing them through a company called Rockresorts that eventually owned some of the world’s most gorgeous vacation spots.

Winthrop’s life nearly started out with an embarrassing blunder. Junior and Abby were about to christen him Winthrop Aldrich Rockefeller (after Abby’s brother) when they realized what his initials would spell and scrapped the middle name. He was a chubby, maladroit boy who bore the brunt of Nelson and Laurance’s sadistic urges. When he developed kidney trouble, his two older brothers considerately reminded him that another young cousin named Winthrop had died of kidney disease.[38] Abby felt protective toward her vulnerable son and once said of him, “Abuse only makes him angry and much worse, while for love and kind treatment he will do anything.” [39]

There was something ineffably sad about Winthrop’s youth. Squirming under his father’s stern rigor, he longed for escape to a less-taxing world. Easily distracted, he did poorly at Lincoln and Loomis, where he enjoyed playing practical jokes and chasing girls. A big, handsome, hulking boy—at sixteen he was six-foot-one and weighed 185 pounds—he lacked the energy and drive that came so effortlessly to his more dynamic brothers. Winthrop later admitted that as a Yale undergraduate, he had mastered only two subjects: how to smoke and how to drink. At first, he could not keep down more than three drinks without getting sick: “Unfortunately, I later got over that.”[40] At Yale, he played cards and—committing one of the cardinal Rockefeller sins—began to neglect his account book. In the middle of his freshman year, Winthrop realized that his prodigality might cost him his allowance, and he negotiated a large rescue loan from Babs.

During the 1933 summer vacation, he toiled as a roustabout in the Texas oil fields for Humble Oil, which was now owned by Jersey Standard, and he felt more at home doing manual work among these rough, simple men than he

had among his Yale classmates: “That was what I had been looking for! . . . men working with their hands, producing something real. . . . I was fascinated by everything I saw—I wanted to become part of it, to do what they were doing, to prove to myself that I was as good a man as any of them.”[41] If a tonic for his morale, the Texas adventure did not enhance his school performance, and he continued to favor booze and cards. At one point while Winthrop was in Texas, a New Haven publican named Curly Levine made the mistake of sending him a telegram at West Fifty-fourth Street. Junior read the message and secretly contacted Yale president James R. Angell, who informed him that Curly was mixed up with gambling and shady elements. When confronted, Winthrop broke down and confessed to his horrified parents, “Curly is a Jewish bartender in a speakeasy in New Haven where I have gotten liquor while I was at college. ” [42] In his junior year, Winthrop was expelled from college after being discovered in the shower with a young lady.

After Yale, Winthrop resumed work for Humble Oil in the Texas fields. When he announced the news, Rockefeller, whatever his reservations, expressed pleasure at a family member being back on the Standard Oil payroll. When Winthrop visited Lakewood to tell him about Humble’s advanced production methods in Texas, the old man listened patiently, then said, “Well, brother . . . I appreciate that—but I must remind you that the important thing is the figures.”[43] In his amiability, Winthrop reminded people of Rockefeller, and perhaps for that reason he was very sensitive to the contradictions of the old man’s personality: “There was always an indefinable aloofness, a detachment that I cannot describe. He was warm, human and real —his every act was an act of warmth—and yet this other quality was there.”[44] The other brothers did not see this subtle discrepancy between the inner and outer man.

For three years, Winthrop enjoyed the camaraderie of the Texas roustabouts and smoked, drank, and philandered. Winthrop was “big and broad-shouldered, like a friendly young Koala,” said one contemporary magazine writer. [45] In this schizoid existence, he worked and ate with other workers during the week and lived on seventy-five cents an hour, then dined on weekends at a country club with the company president. Winthrop welcomed his transient experience of ordinariness in Texas. As he once noted with regret, if your name is Rockefeller, “you can almost feel the prices rise when you walk into a store.”[46]

Returning to New York, Winthrop trained at the Chase National Bank, worked for the Socony–Vacuum Oil Company—the former Standard Oil of New York—and served as a vice chairman of the Greater New York Fund. These jobs drew less press attention than his evening prowls through café society. As one reporter remarked, Winthrop "handled all the night life" for the Rockefellers.[47] As his drinking and womanizing crept into gossip columns, Junior scolded him, but Winthrop resented his father's autocratic manner and attempt to perpetuate what seemed an obsolete way of life. After one quarrel, Winthrop said bitterly, "By God, if I ever have children, I'm going to *talk* to them, not just make an appointment to see them and then get up after five minutes to go get a haircut."[48]

In 1948, after dating actress Mary Martin, Winthrop married a voluptuous blonde named Barbara "Bobo" Sears—née Jievute Paulekiute, the daughter of Lithuanian immigrants. Junior and Abby boycotted the Florida wedding, and the marriage scarcely lasted the year. When Winthrop later bought a large spread, Winrock Farm, in Arkansas, Junior found one excuse after another not to visit. Much to the surprise of his family, Winthrop was elected Arkansas governor in 1966, the first Republican to manage that feat in ninety-four years.

Like Winthrop, David was pudgy as a child but was spared the rough attention of his older brothers. Like a miniature banker, he moved with serene self-confidence and punctiliously kept his account books. Smart, docile, and cherubically round-faced, he was adored by Rockefeller, who loved to croon carols with him at The Casements. As Rockefeller told his son after one of David's holiday visits, "He is a worthy son of worthy parents, and his grandfather dotes on him."[49] David reciprocated the affection, calling his grandfather "the least dour man I've ever known, constantly smiling, joking, and telling shaggy dog stories."[50] Senior once told John Yordi that David was the grandchild who most resembled him.

As the youngest son, David was solitary, yet he compensated for this by creating a self-contained world, collecting butterflies, moths, beetles, and grasshoppers. (Eventually, he developed a world-famous trove of forty thousand beetles.) By the time he graduated from the Lincoln School, he was, like Rockefeller, outwardly genial and inwardly reserved. Steady and methodical, he experienced no scandals or crises at Harvard, graduating cum laude in 1936 after having written his senior thesis on Fabian socialism. After

a postgraduate year at Harvard and another at the London School of Economics, he completed a doctorate in economics at the University of Chicago. Though his thesis, “Unused Resources and Economic Waste,” dealt with issues of corporate concentration that had preoccupied his grandfather, David arrived at free-market conclusions and criticized monopolies as counterproductive. While paying tribute to Standard Oil for imposing order on an anarchic industry, he agreed with the court’s 1911 decision to break up the trust. As he later argued, “Some units [of Standard Oil] are now bigger and better than grandfather could ever have imagined even the whole company would be.”[51] This preference for neoclassical economics reflected changes both in the Rockefeller family and in the American business community.

Upon leaving Chicago, David worked for eighteen months as an unpaid secretary to Mayor Fiorello La Guardia of New York. He had the wisdom to marry a feisty, red-blooded woman, Margaret “Peggy” McGrath, who complemented his more detached personality. She came from a comfortable but not blue-ribbon family and had little tolerance for grandiosity like Nelson’s. With a sometimes fiery temper and activist bent, she donated her time to worthwhile causes, including saving the Maine shoreline, raising cattle, and working on behalf of farmland conservation. David dedicated his career to the Chase Manhattan Bank, rising to the chairman’s post and becoming an eminent, peripatetic international banker. As he told an interviewer, he was “the first member of the family since Grandfather who has had a regular job in a company and has devoted a major part of his time to being in business.” [52]

CHAPTER 35

See You in Heaven

The world's richest man never lost the thrifty boyhood habits that had made him the nonpareil of American business. One day at Ormond Beach, he was studying the blazing hearth when he turned to Michael, the butler, and asked, "How long are those sticks of wood?" Fourteen inches, Michael replied. "Do you think they would do just as well if they were cut twelve inches in length?" Michael conceded this was possible. "Then the next time the wood is being sawed have it made twelve inches in length." [1] Since twelve inches gave sufficient light and heat at less expense, it became the new household standard. His frugality was deeply rooted. One Christmas, he was delighted when his son gave him two dozen golf balls and some fountain pens—his idea of wonderfully practical gifts.

Rockefeller had now lived so long and grown so famous that a number of promoters sought to cash in on his fame. In 1930, Sarah S. Dennen, secretary of the Coney Island Chamber of Commerce in Brooklyn, New York, tracked down the Richford house in which the titan had been born. Wind now blew through the chinks of this tottering clapboard dwelling. She had a vision of sudden riches: She would dismantle the house and ship it to Coney Island, where an estimated five million annual paying customers would tour this new shrine of American capitalism. Cringing at the thought, Rockefeller took legal steps to stop the commercialization of his name. After Dennen had bought and dismembered the structure, Rockefeller's lawyers marshaled state and local authorities to prevent the house from moving over public highways; the heap of numbered planks made it only as far as Binghamton.

During the Wall Street boom of the 1920s, Rockefeller took a guilty thrill in playing the stock market, despite Junior's reproaches. If his son was present when somebody alluded to his trading, Rockefeller, like a naughty child, would shift the subject. As the market surged, he jovially passed out dollar bills as bull-market dividends to companions. After breakfast, he often announced, "Well, I guess I'll see what I can do to keep the wolf away from the door," then scurried over to his office to get fresh quotes by telephone or telegraph.[2] When the market either swooped or soared, a messenger tracked