

Putnam's

Born in Brunswick, ME on February 7, 1814, George Palmer Putnam was 15 when he moved to New York City. There he was hired as a clerk and assistant to Jonathan Leavitt, a bookseller and publisher whose partner at the time was Daniel Appleton. Putnam found his natural element in this environment of books and book business, and by the age of 19 he had become a published author and the founding editor of a magazine—both while still employed by Leavitt.¹ Working at night at the Mercantile Library, Putnam compiled a collection of what he considered to be the most important facts of human history. Published in 1832, his 400-page *Chronology* turned out to be a sales success. Also in 1832 Putnam began producing the *Bookseller's Advertiser*, a periodical containing new book announcements, reviews, and statistics of the book trade—an early precursor to *Publisher's Weekly*. The *Advertiser* ran for about two years. (Tebbel B, 36f)

In early 1836, Putnam was invited to join John Wiley's publishing company, which was renamed Wiley & Putnam after Putnam contributed \$150 to become junior partner. (Greenspan, 54) The two partners' interests were complementary: Wiley's publishing interests were in technical and religious subjects, and he enjoyed bookselling, while Putnam's interests were more literary and he enjoyed publishing. (Putnam, 32) According to Putnam's son, George Haven Putnam, Wiley was "a clear-headed and shrewd business man,"

... disposed, however, to discourage as visionary and doubtful not a few of my father's publishing schemes... It is quite probable that, for the conditions in force in the early 'forties, Mr. Wiley's judgment was better than that of my father. (100)

But when the two partners agreed on a course of action, they often succeeded. They both saw opportunity in transatlantic publishing, and in March, 1836, Putnam left for Europe, where he met with several British and European publishers, taking a closer look at whether Wiley & Putnam might profit from a European branch. Putnam returned full of enthusiasm, Wiley was agreeable, and Putnam established an office in London, where he spent the next decade. Putnam sailed between England and the United States several times during that period and on one of his trips back to New York (in 1841) married Victorine Haven. Their first three children were born in London.

Wiley & Putnam's London office made money in a number of ways. Two lucrative activities were importing American books for sale in Britain and Europe, and purchasing British and European books for American buyers. Many of Putnam's largest customers were colleges and libraries, including Harvard, Yale, and the University of South Carolina (Greenspan, 66ff). The company also acted as the British agent for American publishers. Emerson and Fuller's *Dial*, for example, was published in London by Wiley & Putnam.

It was in Putnam's temperament, as well as his financial interest, to promote American literature, and in 1845 he published an apologia, *American Facts*, a compendium designed to counterbalance British misconceptions about American culture and literature. (Greenspan, 130f)

From time to time Wiley & Putnam negotiated with British publishers for American rights. This was a risky and relatively uncommon venture, since piracy was legal and rampant in the U.S. Putnam also made a number of direct contacts with British authors. Acquaintance with Thomas Carlyle resulted in an agreement authorizing Wiley & Putnam to produce the American edition of Carlyle's works. (Jacobsen, 77) But Carlyle was disappointed in his American royalties—books had become much cheaper in the U.S. than they were in Britain.

¹ Attraction to books and learning ran in the family. Putnam's mother was a schoolmistress. Among his cousins were the three Peabody sisters, Elizabeth, Mary, and Sophie. Elizabeth was a bookseller and publisher. Mary married Horace Mann, the educator. Sophie married Nathaniel Hawthorne. (Putnam, 40f)

The wave of inexpensive books that appeared in America during the 1840s was as revolutionary in its implications as the emergence of the Penny Press had been a decade earlier. The market for books turned out to be unexpectedly large when cost was reduced from the traditional price of one or two dollars to 25 or 12.5 cents—a reduction made possible by declining printing and paper costs and aggressive competition. The new calculus changed publishing: not every publisher was successful at the lower price points, but every publisher, including Wiley & Putnam, had to consider whether to compete or withdraw.

Wiley & Putnam, like several other publishers, including the Harpers, competed by producing a modestly-priced “library.” Beginning in 1845, the company brought out two popular book series: the Library of Choice Reading and the Library of American Books, both of which were compiled and edited by Evert Duyckinck. The Library of Choice Reading drew from international sources, while the Library of American Books included domestic writers such as Margaret Fuller, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edgar Allan Poe, and John Greenleaf Whittier (Jacobsen, 81f). Duyckinck left in 1846 to edit the weekly *Literary World*, which Wiley launched in a joint venture with Appleton, and the last books in the two series were produced in 1847.

Putnam returned to America the same year, parted on good terms with Wiley,² and set up his own shop three doors down the street. The existing book stock was divided between the former partners mostly on the basis of their personal interests: Putnam kept the fiction, Wiley the technical and scientific titles. (Jacobsen, 95) In addition to publishing, Putnam also maintained a bookstore, and part of his stock included books and periodicals imported from Britain. (Putnam, 125)

Soon he had the good fortune to sign Washington Irving to the new Putnam imprint. Irving’s contract with Carey, Lea, & Blanchard had lapsed, and Putnam offered a generous royalty, making the new arrangement profitable both for Irving—Putnam later claimed to have paid Irving \$20,000 in the first four years of their relationship—and himself. (Putnam, 125) Irving stayed loyal through Putnam’s later bankruptcy and Putnam remained close to Irving until the author died in 1859. Putnam’s other authors included Fennimore Cooper, James Russell Lowell, Poe, Bayard Taylor, and “Elizabeth Wetherell” (nom de plume of Susan Warner), whose sentimental novel, *The Wide, Wide World*, was a huge best-seller in 1851. (Tebbel B, 38f) In 1936 Van Wyck Brooks called it “a swamp of lachrimosity... a malarial book,” but at the time it sold like hotcakes. (416)

In 1852 Charles Frederick Briggs and George William Curtis suggested to Putnam that they should launch a magazine dedicated to American literature. (Mott II, 419) Briggs and Curtis shared Putnam’s literary patriotism and their timing was good. Putnam had been considering a publication for more than a year—the Harpers’ success could not have been lost on him—and Briggs and Curtis approached at a time when the publisher was prospering and looking for ways to expand his business. (Greenspan, 287f; Putnam, 208) The decision to proceed was made during dinner at Putnam’s house on 16th Street. The guests included Caroline Kirkland, George Sumner, and Parke Godwin, as well as Curtis and Briggs. (*Putnam’s* 1/68, 1)

Briggs became editor of the new venture, bringing more than a decade of experience and expertise in magazine publishing. He had written sketches, criticism, and a serial novel for the *Knickerbocker*, and contributed to a number of other periodicals as well, including the *New World*, the *Democratic Review*, and the *Boston Miscellany*. (Wiedman) He had also partnered with John Bisco and Poe on the weekly *Broadway Journal*, launched in 1845 with the goal of encouraging nonsectional and apolitical American literature. Briggs, Biscoe, and Poe quarreled and separated, and the magazine lasted barely a year, but its contents were well regarded then and still are. (Wiedman). Briggs went on to work at the New York *Mirror* and at *Holden’s Dollar Magazine*, where he was editor from 1847 to 1850. By 1852 he had written four novels, the last of which, *The Trippings of Tom Pepper*, satirized various New York literati of the 1840s.

² Wiley’s company became John Wiley & Sons and remains in family hands today, still specializing in science, business, and technology.

Briggs must have been an interesting and challenging personality. Poe called him a man of mystery, and Putnam's biographer, Ezra Greenspan, described him as a "temperamental individual who had little of Putnam's personal serenity and habitual optimism." (308) He adopted the name "Harry Franco" (from the title of his first novel) and his colleagues often called him by his nickname. He and Lowell were close friends, but even Lowell described him as "mock-crustaceous." (in Greenspan, 312) Learning that Lowell and his staff at the *Atlantic Monthly* had declined a good story that ended up in *Harper's*, Briggs said, "You incomparable idiots! Do you go in when it rains?" (Trowbridge 11/07, 584)

Curtis, who became literary editor, was well-connected to Ralph Waldo Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne and the writers in their circle—he had lived at Brook Farm, and he and his brother helped Thoreau build his cabin at Walden Pond. (Featherston) Curtis had contributed to the *Dial*, the *Present*, and its successor, the *Harbinger*, before spending four years abroad between 1846 and 1850. He worked at Greeley's New York *Tribune* when he returned to the U. S., and he wrote three travelogues while employed there. (Kennedy) Curtis had also contributed several essays to a gift book Putnam published in 1852, *Homes of American Authors*.

Parke Godwin was recruited as political editor. Like Curtis, Godwin had ties to Associationism and the communal social philosophy of Charles Fourier, and by extension to the periodicals that supported these movements. Godwin had contributed to the *Present*, the *Phalanx* (which he helped found in 1843 with Albert Brisbane) and the *Harbinger* (for which he was associate editor, with John S. Dwight and George Ripley.) (Wennersten ; Mott I, 764) He had also launched a weekly newspaper of his own, the *Pathfinder*, which ran for 15 issues between February 25 and June 3, 1843. (LOC) Named after the Cooper novel, the *Pathfinder* was divided into three sections, the Political Pathfinder, covering social topics ; the Literary Pathfinder, containing criticism and excerpts ; and the Commercial Pathfinder, which covered stocks, prices, and other business issues. (LOC ; Cook)

Godwin had joined the New York *Post* in 1837, and in 1840 was given an ownership share by editor William Cullen Bryant. (Cook) In 1842 Godwin married Bryant's daughter Fanny, but his relationship with Bryant alternated between warm and cool: Bryant was strongly opposed to Fourierism, and as Godwin became more involved with the movement he grew more estranged from Bryant. Godwin sold his share in the paper in 1844.³ (Cook) After leaving the *Post* he was appointed to a four-year position in the New York Custom House, a reward for his help with the Polk campaign. Godwin's work at the *Harbinger* ended when the magazine closed in 1849. He had just returned from an extended trip to Europe in 1852 when Putnam and Briggs drew him into the fold.

Putnam and the editors believed that an American magazine could succeed using American writers exclusively. Given the popularity of Harper & Brothers' *New Monthly Magazine*, Putnam calculated there must be opportunity in following the same basic model but substituting American content for the pirated British material that formed the bulk of *Harper's*. His decision to proceed with the plan was probably based partly on business logic and partly intended as a "stinging rebuke" to the Harpers, to use historian Frank Luther Mott's description. (II, 421)

In October, 1852 Putnam circulated a form letter to a roster of eminent American writers, asking for their contributions and support:

It is our wish to have the best talent in the country to aid us in the undertaking, [and] to solicit your assistance as a contributor. We purpose to publish monthly a work which shall combine the popular character of a Magazine, with the higher and graver aims of a Quarterly Review... as essentially an organ of American thought as possible...

³ Godwin returned to the *Post* in 1860 and regained a financial interest. He wrote a definitive biography of Bryant after his father-in-law's death in 1878. At that point he left the *Post* for a second and final time, and became editor of the New York *Commercial Advertiser*, a position he retained until 1900. (Cook)

We expect to pay as liberally as the nature of the work will allow... (Putnam, 174f)

Response to the circular was positive: more than 100 authors replied, including Cooper, Emerson, and Thoreau. Longfellow sent a poem for the first issue. Even those who declined to contribute, including Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr. and Richard H. Dana Jr., sent endorsements and good wishes. (Greenspan, 290 ; Putnam, 174ff)

The first issue of *Putnam's Monthly Magazine, a Magazine of American Literature, Science, and Art* appeared in January, 1853. In his introduction to the magazine Briggs wrote:

It is because we are confident that neither Greece nor Guinea can offer the American reader a richer variety of instruction and amusement in every kind, than the country whose pulses throb with his, and whose every interest is his own, that this magazine presents itself today. The genius of the old world is affluent ; we owe much to it and hope to owe more. But we have no less faith in the opulence of our own resources. (1f)

As the magazine's subtitle suggests, the editors did not believe that American literary resources were limited to a single category. Godwin defined literature as "the full and free expression of the nation's mind, not in belles lettres alone, nor in art alone, nor in science alone, but in all these, combined with politics and religion." (in Greenspan, 294)

The editors wrote a significant portion of *Putnam's* contents. The first issue contained seven Curtis pieces, including a humorous sketch called "Andrew Cranberry, Attorney at Law." Briggs contributed several articles, including reviews of Putnam's 1852 gift book, *Homes of American Authors*, and of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom*, examining the circumstances that led to the novel's popularity. The first issue also contained poems from Longfellow and Lowell, the opening portion of Thoreau's *An Excursion to Canada*, a profile of humorist Donald Mitchell by Fitz-James O'Brien, an essay by Greeley on spiritualism, reviews of foreign literature by Charles A. Dana, and the first part of a serialized novel, *Virginia*, by Rebecca Hicks. Richard Kimball wrote the lead article on American interests in Cuba. (Greenspan, 293) None of the material was credited ; this tradition was maintained through *Putnam's* life. The first issue contained an essay on fashion, but no illustration—in fact, it was 1857 before *Putnam's* began to run illustration consistently in every issue, which may be why William Cairns in the *Cambridge History of American Literature* (1921) called the magazine "somewhat heavy and unattractive." (III, 313) Putnam had taken pains to convey the opposite impression. He selected a printer, John Trow, known for quality work, and made sure that new type and fine paper were used. (Greenspan, 290)

The issue contained 120 octavo pages wrapped in pea-green covers, which became a kind of trademark for *Putnam's*. Putnam had purchased the subscription list of the *Whig Review*, originally launched by Wiley & Putnam in 1845 and closed in 1852, and these readers formed the core of *Putnam's* initial circulation. The press run for the first issue was 20,000. Putnam claimed that the figure rose to 35,000 by the summer, but Mott wrote that 20,000 was as high as circulation ever got, and Putnam's son said that circulation varied between 12,000 and 20,000 during the magazine's first four years. (in Greenspan, 294 ; Mott II, 426 ; Putnam, 173) Pricing was typical of the times, at 25 cents per copy and \$3.00 for a one-year subscription.

Putnam's quickly established a reputation for publishing some of the country's best writing, a reputation that has proved enduring. Within a few years of the launch William Makepeace Thackeray called it "the best Mag. in the world." (in Chielens, 328) Of the belief that *Putnam's* had the best content of any contemporary American literary magazine, Greenspan wrote:

...Remarks by respected writers, editors, and publishers repeat that verdict so frequently that it is difficult to contest the conclusion that *Putnam's* commanded unparalleled respect among its

contemporaries. Even in England, the magazine was widely reputed the finest American publication of its type and was sometimes compared favorably with its British counterparts. (298)

Historian Kent Ljungquist said that *Putnam's* "established a standard of excellence that few nineteenth-century magazines could rival." (in Chielens, 332) In 1938 Mott wrote that *Putnam's* "maintained consistently about the highest level which an American magazine had reached up to that time." (II, 426) One sign of the magazine's high reputation was its popularity with writers: the editors received so many submissions that they had to develop a numbering system simply to manage the volume. (Greenspan, 295f)

Several items caught on with the public, which helped boost circulation of *Putnam's* early issues. A feature from the second issue, entitled "Have We a Bourbon Among Us?" raised the claim that an elderly Episcopal missionary to the Indians named Eleazar Williams was in fact Charles Louis, son of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, and heir to the French throne. Supposedly the young dauphin had been smuggled to America during the French Revolution and hidden with the Indians. It was a good story—all the more engaging for its complete implausibility—and the editors ran several follow-ups.

But lightly sensational material wasn't *Putnam's* usual stock in trade: more typical was what Mott referred to as "sophistication, cultivation, and intelligence." (II, 426) In addition to Greely, Longfellow, Lowell, O'Brien, and Thoreau, who were in the premier issue, *Putnam's* contributors in its first several years included Cooper (posthumously), Edward Everett Hale, Holmes, Julia Ward Howe, Henry James Sr., John P. Kennedy, Herman Melville, Charles Eliot Norton, Francis Parkman, Taylor, Francis H. Underwood, and Charles Dudley Warner.

Godwin's political writing, which began running in mid-1853, was opinionated and sometimes blunt. He helped draft the first platform of the Republican party in 1856 (based in part on an earlier essay he had written for *Putnam's*), and made enemies throughout the South with his repeated criticisms of slavery—Godwin described Southern reaction to his articles as a "scream of protest" that grew into a "fierce howl of rage." (in Mott II, 423) Divisiveness had not been *Putnam's* original goal—the *Virginia* serial in the first issues may have been a conscious attempt to draw Southern readers to the magazine. But he stood by Godwin. "Brace up my lads! Put her head one point nearer the wind and crowd on sail!" is how Godwin described *Putnam's* response. (in Mott II, 422) A sign of the country's impending disunion is the fact that *Putnam's* had more subscribers in Ohio than in the entire South by the mid-1850s. (Spiller, 515)

Politics aside, much of *Putnam's* other material had broad and longstanding appeal. Two series by Curtis were particularly popular. The first, later collected as *The Potiphar Papers*, was a set of humorous satires on New York society; the second, collected as *Prue and I*, were fanciful and sentimental ramblings of a fictional "homebound, wife-doting" narrator. (in Chielens, 330) Frederick S. Cozzens, a New York wine dealer who was *Putnam's* neighbor in Yonkers, NY also contributed a popular series on country life published as the *Sparrowgrass Papers*. (Putnam, 228)

Melville was profiled in the second issue of the magazine, recognition that helped establish his reputation. Much of Melville's short fiction was originally produced for *Putnam's*, including *Israel Potter*, *Benito Cereno*, "Bartleby the Scrivener," and other stories collected later in the *Piazza Tales*.

In its first two years the magazine paid Melville \$674.50 for his submissions, about \$5.00 per page. (Greenspan, 297) The standard rate at *Putnam's* was \$3.00 per page for prose and \$10.00 to \$25.00 for a poem, depending on length. More popular writers, like Melville, were sometimes able to negotiate higher prices, up to \$10.00 per page. Longfellow received \$50.00 per poem. (Greenspan, 297; Putnam, 174)

On at least two occasions, material originally published in *Putnam's* was pirated by British periodicals, and then re-pirated by Americans. In one case a story from *Putnam's* was copied without attribution by a London

magazine called *Eliza Cook's Journal*, and was copied from there into *Harper's*. Putnam sent *Harper's* the issue of his magazine with the original article, along with a note that the editor had "evidently made a mistake." (Putnam, 171f) A poem by Longfellow, "Two Angels," was appropriated in Britain without credit by *Bentley's Miscellany* and then reprinted in the U.S. by *Littell's Living Age*, which credited it to *Bentley's*. Putnam, a lifelong advocate of international copyright, used these occasions as an opportunity to obtain publicity for both the cause and his business—by a letter published in the New York *Post* in the case of the Longfellow poem. (Putnam, 189f)

Putnam's never attained the popularity of *Harper's*, whose circulation had passed 100,000 by the time *Putnam's* was launched, but it seems to have been a profitable business in the early days. Putnam told his son George that, aside from author payments, he made no cash investment in the magazine for the first two issues. (Putnam, 173)

Putnam was very much a hands-on publisher, and since his primary interest was in the quality of the contents, he worked closely with his editors. Sometime in mid-1854 he and Briggs had a falling-out, and by October he had dismissed Briggs. Putnam assumed the role of editor-in-chief, and Curtis and Godwin continued in their positions. (Greenspan, 314)

At about the same time that Putnam was deciding what to do with Briggs, Curtis was being courted by the Harpers, and in 1854 he began sharing the *Harper's Monthly* "Editor's Easy Chair" column with Donald Mitchell. (Greenspan, 313) Curtis remained at *Putnam's* for three more years, but also continued to work with Harper & Brothers, and he went on to have a long relationship with *Harper's Weekly*.

Putnam's Monthly was well established by 1854, but its owner had made some bad business decisions roughly coincident with the magazine's launch and growth. The worst decision was probably the significant investment Putnam made in the Exhibition of the Industry of All Nations, a world's fair held in New York in a "Crystal Palace"—the New York fair, which opened in July, 1853, was modeled on the landmark event held in 1851 in London.

Putnam lobbied hard and successfully to be named official publisher of the event, and contracted to produce two publications—a periodical, the *Illustrated Record*, to be published at intervals as the event progressed, and a catalogue in illustrated and non-illustrated editions—printed at the fair on two large steam presses, in full view of the attendees. The event turned out to be less popular than expected. Putnam spent \$40,000 on the *Illustrated Record* alone, which was significantly more than he had spent launching *Putnam's Monthly*, and it took him years to sell all of the periodicals and catalogues that he had printed. (Greenspan, 331) The fair ended in bankruptcy in November, 1854, and Putnam was faced with a severe credit squeeze beginning in mid-year. (Greenspan, 334)

To raise money, Putnam decided to sell his magazine to a new publishing venture recently established by Joshua Dix, a former clerk at G. P. Putnam & Company who had obtained American rights to reprint Charles Dickens's British weekly, *Household Words*. Dix and his partner, Arthur Edwards, acquired *Putnam's Monthly* in March, 1855 for \$11,000. (Greenspan, 315) Dix and Edwards's purchase was helped by an infusion of \$5,000 in capital from Frederick Law Olmsted, who joined their company as partner in March. (Rybczynski, 134)

Olmsted, who had just returned to New York from a long trip through Texas and the South, had acquaintances on both sides of the sale. He knew Dix through a mutual friend, and Putnam was a relative by marriage—Putnam's wife Victorine was his cousin. (Rybczynski, 134 ; Putnam, 197) Olmsted was almost 32 when he joined Dix, Edwards & Company, and had been a working journalist for several years: articles commissioned from the *New York Times* helped pay for his trip through the South, he had published a book with Putnam & Company (*Walks and Talks of an American Farmer in England*), and he was preparing his *Times* articles to be published as books.

The ownership transition was smooth, and to most readers probably indiscernible. The new owners had no reason to tamper with a magazine that had been widely praised, and they didn't make any major alterations. Dix, Edwards & Company's offices were in the same building as G. P. Putnam, so even the address remained the same. (Greenspan, 315) Curtis and Godwin continued as before, with Charles A. Dana assisting as literary editor. The position of managing editor was filled by Olmsted, who stepped in and found he enjoyed the work. In his first few months he met Emerson, Irving, Longfellow, Lowell, Norton, Stowe, and Thackeray. (Rybczynski, 137)

Dix, Edwards & Company had optimistic plans for continued expansion, and in early 1856 Olmsted traveled to the U.K. to investigate the possibility of establishing further business relationships between his company and British publishers, just as Putnam had done two decades earlier. (Rybczynski, 142f) But in the midst of his negotiations he began to hear disconcerting news from New York about diminishing capital, "errors" in the books, and declining circulation. Olmsted returned home in October, 1856 to find that not only were the rumors true but that the national economy was sliding into a depression as well.

Curtis put some money into the company, but his efforts only postponed the ultimate reckoning. (Rybczynski, 145) In April, 1857, Dix, Edwards & Company's creditors forced a reorganization: Edwards and Dix left the company, and Curtis, printer J. W. Miller, and (temporarily) Olmsted were placed in charge.

Curtis obtained \$10,000 from his father-in-law, Francis George Shaw, to keep the company afloat. Olmsted left in July, 1857. (Rybczynski, 149) Unfortunately, Shaw's investment turned out to be no more fruitful than any of the prior investors', and the business went off the rails for good within a few months. *Putnam's Monthly* merged with *Emerson's United States Magazine* in October. Shaw was held responsible for the company's full debt, which was six or seven times larger than his original investment, and Curtis, although he had no legal obligation to do so, ended up assuming the liabilities, which took him almost 20 years to repay. (Cary, 88)

Emerson's, which became *Emerson's Magazine and Putnam's Monthly* following the merger, had begun life in May, 1854 as the *United States Magazine*, a monthly whose editorial content covered a broad range of subjects, mostly nonfiction, sometimes illustrated with woodcuts on colored paper (Mott II, 449). Printer and publisher J. M. Emerson bought into the business in August, 1854, adding his name to the title. As *Emerson's Magazine and Putnam's Monthly* the new magazine produced 11 issues, the last of which was November, 1858.

Olmsted went on to make his reputation as a landscape architect, designing New York's Central Park and dozens of other public spaces throughout America. He had one more fling with the magazine business. In 1864 he and E. L. Godkin began laying plans for the launch of the *Nation*, which published its first issue a year later and today is America's oldest continuously-published weekly magazine. In the original discussions Olmsted was to be publisher, but several projects intervened, and when he joined the staff in 1867 it was as associate editor. (Rybczynski, 220) Olmsted owned one sixth of the business, backer J. M. McKim owned one third, and Godkin owned one half. Olmsted left the *Nation* after a few months, but retained his ownership share for five years and remained close friends with Godkin. (Rybczynski, 278f)

Putnam's Redux

Following the 1855 sale of *Putnam's Monthly*, Putnam's company incurred further setbacks, and in the economic slowdown of 1857, Putnam left the publishing business altogether. But the economic expansion that followed the Civil War lured Putnam back into the world of books and periodicals, and in 1867 he and Briggs decided to relaunch *Putnam's* (this time named *Putnam's Magazine* instead of *Putnam's Monthly*). The first issue of the second series was January, 1868. Putnam's son, George Haven Putnam, had joined Putnam's new publishing venture, and he was followed by brothers John Bishop in 1871 and Irving in 1872, at which

point the company became G.P. Putnam & Sons.⁴ In addition to Briggs, the magazine's editorial staff included Edmund Clarence Stedman as associate editor and book reviewer, and S. S. Conant in the fine arts department. (Mott II, 428f) Frederick Beecher Perkins joined the magazine in its second year. (Putnam, 363)

Business conditions had changed in the intervening decade—and in particular, the postbellum magazine marketplace was more competitive. The younger Putnam wrote:

At about the time of the reissue of *Putnam's Monthly* three new magazines came into the field, all backed by ample capital—*Scribner's*, *Lippincott's*, and *The Galaxy*. The competition for the service of most important and effective contributors became more serious than that for subscribers... Authors who, in the days of the first *Putnam's Monthly*, had been content with from three to five dollars a page, were now in a position to secure from ten to twenty, while for special contributions much larger payments were made. The competing magazines were also making provision for large outlays for illustrations... (362)

Ironically, all three of the competitors that Putnam mentioned were modeled on and influenced by the original *Putnam's*—at least to some degree. *Lippincott's* was launched in Philadelphia in 1868. *Scribner's* was launched in New York in 1870. The basic plan of both magazines was to harness the resources of their publishers, like the Harper and Putnam magazines, and they shared similarly high standards in their selection of contents.

Scribner's and *Lippincott's* will be profiled below, but the *Galaxy* merits a quick digression. It was launched in New York in 1866 as an alternative to the *Atlantic Monthly*,⁵ which was seen, not unreasonably, as favoring New England writers. (Mott III, 361) The *Galaxy's* founders were two brothers, William Conant Church and Francis Pharcellus Church, owners of the *Army and Navy Journal*. The *Galaxy* was launched as a semi-monthly, but changed to monthly after its first year, and in its second year the Churches sold the magazine to Sheldon & Company, although they stayed on as co-editors.

Assisting the Churches were managing editor F. B. Perkins (who later joined *Putnam's*) and a shifting roster of department heads, including George E. Pond, who covered politics and other subjects under the nom de plume of Philip Quilibet; E. L. Youmans, later founding editor of *Popular Science*; a third Church brother, John, who was a Columbia professor and editor of the *Engineering and Mining Journal*; Charles Astor Bristed who wrote "Casual Cogitations" under the nom de plume of Carl Benson; and Mark Twain, who ran the humor department, "Memoranda," for a year beginning in May, 1870. (Mott III, 363f)

The Churches paid a premium to acquire Twain's services: he charged the *Galaxy* \$2,000 per year on the strength of his recent popular success, *The Innocents Abroad*. According to Mott, this is twice as much per page as the *Galaxy* paid its next-highest contributors. (III, 364) From the Churches' perspective hiring Twain was a worthwhile investment. By 1871, the *Galaxy* had achieved 35,000 circulation, its high water mark. (cf. Rowell's 1870-1875) One year was enough for Twain, however. He grew impatient with the monthly routine and felt that his magazine work interfered with book writing. He was succeeded by Donn Piatt, and the department's name was changed to "The Club Room." (Mott III, 368)

One of the *Galaxy's* most frequent contributors was Richard Grant White. Others included Eugene Benson, Rebecca Harding Davis, J. W. DeForest, Henry James, Jr., Thurlow Weed, Gideon Wells, and General George Armstrong Custer, whose submissions ended in 1876. (Mott III, 368ff) True to its founders'

⁴ Putnam's heirs sold G.P. Putnam & Sons in 1930, after the death of George Haven Putnam, but the imprint remained active. The company was eventually acquired in 1996 by the Penguin Group, a division of the British publishing conglomerate Pearson PLC. Penguin currently uses the imprint on a line of children's books called G.P. Putnam's Sons Books for Young Readers.

⁵ The *Atlantic Monthly* was also heavily influenced by the original *Putnam's*. It was launched a few weeks after the original *Putnam's* was discontinued in 1857, and has been referred to as a continuation of *Putnam's*, at least in spirit.

commitment to transcend sectionalism, the *Galaxy* drew roughly one third of its American content from New England writers, one third from New York writers, and one third from writers in the rest of the country. (Chielens, 139) British material ran as well: three Anthony Trollope novels were serialized in the *Galaxy*, including *The Eustace Diamonds*. (Chielens, 140) Historian Edward Chielens also notes that the *Galaxy* was sympathetic to Walt Whitman at a time when many critics were hostile. The magazine published six poems by Whitman and several essays about him. (140f)

In its first six years, each issue of the *Galaxy* came with “embellishments”—that is, engravings. Aside from a few by Winslow Homer, the illustrations tended to be crude, and the magazine’s portraits were lampooned by Twain in his “Memoranda” column for January, 1871. (Mott III, 379) The embellishments ended in 1872.

By 1875 the *Galaxy’s* circulation had dropped significantly. In 1878 it ceased publication and, in a case of the hunter becoming the prey, its subscription list was purchased by the *Atlantic Monthly*. (Mott III, 381)

As the younger Putnam pointed out, heightened competition was no easier on the relaunched *Putnam’s Magazine* than it was on the *Galaxy*. That the cost of content was a primary concern demonstrates how dramatically American publishing had changed in the space of a single generation. In the 1840s only a handful of authors were able to earn a living by their pens, and most magazines (with a few exceptions, such as *Graham’s* and *Godey’s*) were paying \$2.00 or less per page for prose. In the single year 1870 Twain made as much from the *Galaxy* (one source of his income among many) as Poe earned on average from all sources in five years. (Hutchisson, 186) Ljungquist wrote that the goal of the revived *Putnam’s* “was to support a broad nationality of letters, to sustain the progress of American literature begun by the old series.” (in Chielens, 331) To some extent, the mission had already been accomplished: life in letters had become a viable career choice and not an avocation, and the best writers were making a very successful living from their work.

In the first issue of *Putnam’s* new series, January, 1868, Briggs wrote, “The work stopped for a while, but anxious inquiries have constantly been heard as to when it would reappear.” (2) Many familiar names showed up in the revived magazine’s early issues, including Curtis, Godwin, and Taylor. (Greenspan, 441f) Putnam himself added some memoirs under the title of “Leaves from a Publisher’s Letter Book.” He may have hoped to reassemble the full triumvirate of Briggs, Curtis, and Godwin, but the Harpers had a lock on Curtis, the New York *Evening Post* had reclaimed Godwin, and Briggs left at the end of the first year. (Greenspan, 441; Mott II, 429)

Putnam didn’t have difficulty finding other good columnists, although none was quite at the level of Curtis or Godwin. Articles from Henry Tuckerman supplemented Conant’s coverage of fine arts, and Van Buren Denslow, from the New York *Tribune*, handled political news, opening with a 13-year retrospective in the first issue of the new series. (Greenspan, 443) Stedman, the associate editor and book reviewer, was a prolific contributor, a gifted critic, and a skilled editor who became chief editor after Briggs’s departure. (in Chielens, 331 ; Mott II, 429). He was raised in Connecticut and his earliest jobs were with local newspapers. Stedman moved to New York in 1855 and became war correspondent for the New York *World* during the Civil War, but his first love was poetry. Searching for a livelihood that would leave time for his literary pursuits, he bought a seat on the New York Stock Exchange, and, while working his day job on Wall Street, produced several volumes of his own poetry, edited collected works of Walter Savage Landor and Austin Dobson, and contributed to various magazines, including *Putnam’s*. (Appleton’s V)

The heart of Putnam’s problem with the revived magazine wasn’t simply inflation in the cost of content—it was the challenge of assembling content so as to make it fresh, appealing, and engaging. The newer magazines attracted and held their audiences in ways that went beyond the point Putnam had reached 15 years earlier. Putnam stuck to the formula that had made the original *Putnam’s Monthly* one of the most respected magazines of its time, but the formula no longer packed the same punch. In 1867, when the revival of *Putnam’s* was still just a rumor, the *Nation* had commented, “In general, our standard of excellence in

periodical literature has risen, and the old *Putnam's*, if it were to appear now, might seem less good than before." (in Greenspan, 441)

When the new *Putnam's* did appear, with 128 pages wrapped in familiar pea-green covers, it may have looked a little dated. Compared to the illustrated magazines proliferating after the war, it was type-heavy and dense. It didn't find a large audience—the revived *Putnam's* seems never to have had more than about 15,000 circulation and probably averaged closer to 13,000 or 14,000. (Putnam, 362) Rowell's directory for 1869 lists *Putnam's* at 15,500 claimed circulation, notwithstanding the July, 1868 purchase of the subscription list of the *Northern Monthly*, which was rolled into *Putnam's*. (Greenspan, 448)

In late 1869 Putnam tried to raise capital by forming a separate Putnam Magazine Company, with a group of new investors that included William Cullen Bryant. (Greenspan, 448) This failed to pan out. Putnam then brought in Parke Godwin in April, 1870, but Godwin, on leave from the *Post*, didn't have enough time to make a big impact. (Mott II, 430) By the fall of 1870, *Putnam's* third straight year of losses, its publisher had run out of options. He sold the magazine to Charles Scribner, and its subscription list was combined with *Scribner's Magazine*. The last issue of *Putnam's* second series was November, 1870. In that issue Putnam printed a little balance sheet, showing that the magazine's second incarnation had cost about \$100,000, roughly a third of which was payment to contributors. (in Mott II, 430)

George Haven Putnam called the closure a shock and disappointment to his father. In fact, the elder Putnam died a few years after the magazine's sale—in December, 1872, aged only 58. The company passed to his sons, under whose management it ran for another six decades.

Putnam's Third Act

The second series of *Putnam's* was not the company's last fling with magazine publishing. In 1898 G.P. Putnam & Sons acquired a magazine called the *Critic*, founded in 1881 by Jeannette and Joseph Gilder, sister and brother to Richard Watson Gilder, editor of the *Century*. (Mott III, 548) The magazine was modeled on a British journal of the same name. (cf. LOC) Book reviews were central to the *Critic's* content, but the *Critic* also published poetry, drama criticism, reviews of fine art, and news notes. Although launched as a fortnightly, it went weekly at the beginning of its second year. (Mott III, 548)

The *Critic* published quite a few of Joel Chandler Harris's Uncle Remus stories, and, like the *Galaxy* 20 years earlier, it welcomed Whitman—many of his essays collected in *Specimen Days* and *Democratic Vistas* were first published in the *Critic*. Other contributors included Thomas Bailey Aldrich, Richard Gilder, and Edward E. Hale. (in Chielens, 122) Mott notes that the *Critic* was generally friendlier to American than to British writers. (III, 549f) It was a journal for the literati. Stedman wrote in a letter to the editor, "You maintain a high and impartial standard of criticism, and have brought out the talent of new and excellent writers." (in Mott III, 551) Linked to their high standards was low readership: the *Critic* never had more than about 5,000 circulation, even though two magazines' subscription lists were purchased and rolled into the *Critic's*: first *Good Literature* in 1884 and then the *Literary World of Boston* in 1905. (Mott III, 551 ; in Chielens, 124)

The Gilders stayed on after the Putnams bought the *Critic*. Jeannette's column "The Lounger" was enlarged and featured more prominently. Other changes under the new ownership were more dramatic—the *Critic's* frequency was reduced from weekly to monthly, and illustrations were added, giving it more the character of a magazine than a journal.

In 1906 the company decided to revive *Putnam's Magazine*, and the *Critic* became the cornerstone of this third incarnation, the full title of which was *Putnam's Magazine and the Critic: A Magazine of Literature, Art, and Life*. The first issue was October, 1906. "The Lounger" continued, as did the focus on literature ; that is, on "authors and authorship... books and publishing," as Mott described the contents. (II, 431) The new

Putnam's was illustrated, and over time the amount of fiction began to increase. This brought a level of popularity that the *Critic* had never achieved, and circulation rose over the first few years to about 120,000 by 1909. Contributors to the third series of *Putnam's* included Henry Holt, Henry James, Don Marquis, and Caroline Wells. (Mott II, 431)

As respectable as its content and its legacy were, the third series of *Putnam's* was not a commercial success, and the April, 1910 issue was the last. Like the *Galaxy*, it was swallowed by the *Atlantic Monthly*.

George Putnam contributed in many unique ways to American publishing, even though his accomplishments embody a set of contradictions. He had a lifelong commitment to promote American writing and publish the best American authors—though sticking to his principles may have compromised his company's financial performance. His son wrote, "Losses were undoubtedly brought upon my father's business through an unwise optimism in regards to the requirements of the reading public. It was his tendency or temptation to overestimate the capacity of the public to absorb higher-class literature." (Putnam, 459) Yet Putnam's business failures seem also to have made him more optimistic of eventual success. His son said:

When we first began work together in 1866, I was interested to note that the conservative or pessimistic side of the partnership must depend upon the younger member. In spite of previous trials and disappointments, my father, in beginning for the second time his publishing career, was still ready to be hopeful and optimistic, sometimes unduly optimistic, as, with a closer calculation of resources and a much smaller amount of creative ability and of business imagination, his junior was disposed to think. Such a combination of optimism and conservatism in the make-up of a firm is always desirable, but it is less usual for the younger member to be the one who holds back and doubts. (441)

When Putnam began his long career the country was full of literary patriots, including many well-intentioned publishers. He accomplished something far beyond the abilities of all but a few—he not only encouraged the best American writers and published some of the country's most enduring literature, but he put bread on their tables and his own. In purely financial terms he was not the most successful publisher of his time, but he succeeded on many other levels and ranked among the most respected.

A sign of his extraordinary publishing abilities is the fact that his company was able to launch two successors to the original magazine, both of which entered the world with their high reputation already established by the original. Although the third incarnation was launched than 50 years after the original *Putnam's Monthly*, American readers knew implicitly what the revived *Putnam's* would contain and would stand for.

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