

LINCOLN LORE

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IDA MINERVA TARBELL, 1858-1944

An effort was made a few years ago to select the ten outstanding women in America, and it was not surprising to find in the final list, the name of Miss Ida M. Tarbell. Unless one has read her autobiography, under the title, *All in a Day's Work*, published in 1939, there may not be a full appreciation of the extent of her travels, the scope of her acquaintance with some of the most famous people of Europe and America, and the broad culture she acquired through her investigations in the fields of the social and natural sciences.

Three years of biographical training in France, where she interviewed such distinguished Frenchmen as Pasteur, Alphonse Dandel, Alexander Dumas, Francois Coppee, Jules Simon and Zola, contributed very much to the production of her first popular biography, a study of Napoleon.

Her contributions to *McClure's Magazine* soon won for her a place on its editorial staff, and she played no small part in the remarkable success of the magazine over a period of years. S. S. McClure was primarily responsible for Miss Tarbell's induction into the literary field of Lincolniana, and, although entering it reluctantly and with some misgivings, she was able to contribute more factual data on the subject than any of her predecessors with the possible exception of Lincoln's own secretaries, Nicolay and Hay.

Few people realize the tremendous volume of historical and biographical information about Abraham Lincoln that came from her pen in the form of books, monographs, magazine articles and newspaper features. It would be difficult to enumerate the great number of items in the last two classifications.

The Life of Abraham Lincoln, first published in two volumes, but later extended to four volumes with illustrations, will remain her most important work, although *The Early Life of Abraham Lincoln*, published in 1896, and *In the Footsteps of Lincoln*, 1924, are also authoritative source books in their respective fields. Other Tarbell titles, familiar to Lincoln students, follow:

He Knew Lincoln, 1907; *Father Abraham*, 1909; *Selections from the Letters, Speeches and State Papers of Abraham Lincoln*, 1911; *In Lincoln's Chair*, 1920; *Boy Scouts' Life of Lincoln*, 1921; *He Knew Lincoln and Other Billy Brown Stories*, 1922; *A Reporter for Lincoln*, 1927. Her stories have been translated in foreign tongues and transcribed into braille.

Two of the most important collateral books found in the libraries of Lincoln students, although seldom associated with Miss Tarbell, are the results of her industry and editorial ability. It was while Charles A. Dana was editor of the *New York Sun* that Miss Tarbell wrote quite every word of his *Recollections of the Civil War*, which she felt was the most important piece of ghost writing she ever did. The subject matter for the book was secured from interviews with Dana, three times each week for a period of about two years. Few people realize when they read Dana's *Recollections* that they are reading another Tarbell book. In fact, Dana died before his *Recollections* came from the publishers.

Miss Tarbell was also primarily responsible for the publishing of the important, three-volume work, known as the *Recollections of Carl Schurz*. She not only sold Mr. Schurz on the idea of publishing his reminiscences, but acted as his "editorial representative."

Miss Tarbell was primarily a journalist, and her magazine contributions reveal her to have been quick to ob-

serve the human interest angles in every story. It is generally conceded that her Lincoln articles, profusely illustrated, prepared for McClure's, created a new interest in the study of the more intimate incidents of Lincoln's life. The many original photographs of the prairie lawyer, which she discovered and published, reveal a Lincoln, until then unknown, to the people.

While some groups may remember Miss Tarbell because of her Rockefeller and Standard Oil book, her Henry Ford and the Golden Rule story, or her political comments, etc., long after the contribution in these fields are forgotten, she will be remembered for her Lincoln writings. She admitted that she "fell in love with the city of Paris" in her early years, but in the latter years, it was not her first love to whom she was giving her loyalty. Nor did the colorful figures, preeminent in American finance, whom she knew so well, appeal to her as did Abraham Lincoln, who became her chief source of inspiration.

She says in mapping out her work in the latter part of her life, "I wanted to do my part toward making the world acquainted with the man who I believed had best shown how to carry out a program of cooperation based on consideration of others—that was Abraham Lincoln. There was a man, I told myself, who took the time to understand a thing before he spoke. He knew that hurry, acting before you were reasonably sure, almost invariably makes a mess of even the best intentions. He wanted to know what he was about before he acted, also he wanted all those upon whom he must depend for results to know what he was about and why. Whatever he did, he did without malice, taking into account men's limitations, not asking more from any one than he could give. . . . The more people who knew about Lincoln, the more chance democracy had to destroy its two enemies, privilege and militancy. I proposed to take every chance I had to talk about him."

For the last twenty-five years of her long life, of over four score years and five, the interest in Lincoln, kindled in her earlier days, never abated. She wrote when over eighty years old, "The more I knew him the better I liked him, and the more strongly I felt we ought as a people to know about how he did things. . . . Feeling as I did and do about him, I have kept him always on my work bench. There has never been a time since the War (First World War) that I have not had a long or short piece of Lincoln work on hand."

Ida M. Tarbell was keenly interested in the Lincoln National Life Foundation from its very beginning and she was one of the guest speakers at the dedication of the manship bronze statue of Lincoln. When the Foundation Advisory Group was formed, she graciously accepted the invitation to become a member and was active in the Foundation projects until her death.

How well the editor of *Lincoln Lore* remembers Miss Tarbell's last participation in a Lincoln Pilgrimage, when she joined the group of Lincoln students passing through New Jersey, enroute to the colonial homesite of Mordecai Lincoln, located in that state. We are happy to know that she deeply appreciated a certificate presented at the conclusion of this pilgrimage conducted by the Lincoln National Life Foundation. In the next to the last chapter of her autobiography she makes this acknowledgment, "I have never had an honor which pleased me more than a certificate from this group naming me Lincoln Pilgrim number one." The editor of *Lincoln Lore* who signed the above mentioned certificate would as willingly subscribe his name to the certification that Ida M. Tarbell also has been out Lincoln Student, number one.