February 21, 1934

Dear Viola:

You may not believe it but I have been looking forward for many a day to the time when I could sit down at my dictaphone and tell you some things. Probably the main thing will be why you have not had a letter from me before this. I received the fine long one written just after you got to Valencia early in December. I greatly enjoyed the letter. I think you have fascism about right. That Corporate State has something in it for all those who produce materially and the Lord knows that if what we call labor and capital can be brought into harmony where there will be justice and opportunity all around, a demonstration that it can be done, that is so much to the good in this plundering world. I was convinced when I was in Italy that they had the makings of a just, industrial machine, but one never knows how much politics is going to interfere with such a machine. If you turn a whole State into an industrial mechanism, cut out politics, consider only the good of the people, materially, you may get wonderful results, possibly really conquer poverty. It is awfully hard on the talkers and the dreamers and the theorists. I believe Plato when he made his ideal State arranged that there should be no poets in it; a poet would be bound to dream something else, to upset people, and so upset the machine. Well, I know this kind of work has got to be done, that is, the kind that Mussolini has done and is doing. It is an awful cost, this shutting up our mouths, but the trouble is that these mouths all calling for the end of poverty and corruption, etc., etc., have so little idea about how the thing is to be done. There is an awful lawlessness in liberty and free speech. William Allen White has been one of the severest critics that I know of of Italy; he told me a few weeks ago here, after a month there looking about pretty carefully, that "Mussolini had made a man of Italy." There is something in it. Now, if you can make a man of him, enough of a man to loosen his tongue and still not destroy whatever good has been done why it will be all right — will it not? But that will not be in our day.
Nothing much that is good will come in our day. You and I will be out of the world before things are again running on a fairly smooth sea. Of course the sea never is smooth; at the best it is choppy and durable only to old sailors. There seems to be stretches at present when the waves run mountain high and one is constantly in danger of going to the bottom. It is not so sure over here, but I do not criticize. The Lord knows that when a man takes hold of what looked like a hopeless situation and puts courage into a whole people, as Roosevelt has done, there should be too great thankfulness to criticize out loud. The country has been marvelous in giving him full chance. He has been experimenting and is still experimenting. I don't mind the cost. In the first place I have long been convinced that we have got to have a re-distribution of wealth. The truth is that one half of our country - the manufacturing half - has enjoyed his privilege of tariff taxation and heaped up its wealth. Of course there has been amazing achievements, but the other half - the agricultural half - have had no compensative encouragement. I cannot see how we will ever be right until the poor are in balance and it may be that through the devices of the New Deal something will be done. It all looks fishy to me sometimes, though I would not say this out loud. The re-distribution of wealth is going on unquestionably through the re-valuation of the dollar. They are arranging to take up the mortgages of the whole land on long terms, but it doesn't get down to the bottom.

But, dear Rosie, I never meant to go on like this. It is this wretched dictaphone. I feel as if you were right here or that we were sitting out in the garden in Valencia and I was running on. Forgive me.

What I really meant to tell you was why I have not written. I took your letter to the country at Christmas time; I expected to stay a week and I thought I would get you off a good long spiel, but the day after Christmas my brother
had a very serious heart attack. It was terrible weather and we had a hard time getting a Doctor there. When he came he said he was dying. Well, he didn't die, but it took some time to get him back and then we got him to a hospital and then there was a month of anxiety. Awfully hard on Mrs. Tarbell and somehow I feel so responsible, as if I had made all the trouble myself. It comes, I suppose, from the feeling that I have got to decide. Well, it has come out pretty well. We closed the house and Ella has taken an apartment in Bridgeport - very comfortable & and Will is there now. That way he can be near the Doctor and near Sara and me. They seem afraid to go far away. He will always be afraid now - another fear added to those that he has carried so many years in the illness of his - strange, unreasonable fears. But this is a real thing enough. So you can see for those weeks I had no heart to write and no time. And within the last few months I have not been so good - having influenza and staying in the house. However, that is trifling, I think. The fact that I am staying in the house accounts for my having time to dictate this long letter.

I think of you in a sunny land. You have escaped a harsh old man winter by going to Spain. We have had it the coldest I have ever seen here - days and days of it. My chief anxiety has been Sara who refuses to come out of her studio this winter, and has been fighting the cold up there all through this hard period. I really think she has gotten a certain excitement out of it - a feeling of something strong and really dangerous. That place of hers was never built for the winter. She stokes her furnace, keeps her fireplace going, besides various little helps like oil stoves and electric reflectors. When we were getting Will out of the hospital and settled I went up and stayed with her to be near at hand and to get rid of this terrible town which does wear on me. Stayed two weeks and nothing so quiet and peaceful could be. Perhaps Sara is the wise one and I am just the fool.
There is not much new. A few weeks ago there was a Knox College dinner, one in the interest of a fine old building on the campus—a building in front of which Lincoln spoke. It has always been a pet of mine, so they asked me to come and say a word in the interest of their campaign for raising money to restore it—there was danger of its falling to pieces. I went and B.B. was there. Oh, Rosie, nothing more pitiful could have been in the little speech he made. They had had experience with him; they wanted to keep the meeting on the campaign, not on B.B. and his glories. They gave him five minutes. He came with a portfolio of papers, the most intimate and personal kind—stories of his early life—troubles over Harriet—friendship with J.S.P. and on and on. Everybody tried to stop him, commanded him to sit down and he ended up by insisting on reading a letter that he had written Mather at the time of the break-up of the magazine, insisting that J.S.P. and I had advanced salary for a few months and telling Mather how much he thought he owed to us.

In the course of his talk he said two or three times, "Of course I never could have done any of this without John." I thought I should die before it was over. It was so heart-breaking, and there was that big crowd of younger people who knew nothing about him excepting that once he had been the head of a great magazine which had passed out of existence. There were only a few of us that had the background to place what he was saying, but that he cannot understand. I hear he is as full of hope and vim as ever. The first thing he said to me that night when I got there was what we have heard so often, "Miss Tarbell, I never was so well in my life as I am now. My powers are at their height, the book I am writing is going to be the greatest piece of work I have ever done." I hope he believes it and that he will continue to believe it. But I don't. The thing is to keep him in that faith in himself and to make it possible for him
to assist in the Union League Club when he came to town and play dominoes with the old fellows who like him, have passed their seventy fifth birthday, but unlike him have no dreams of present day grandeur. Lord help us all!

I suppose you have heard of the going of Mrs. Van Rensselaer. To my great sorrow it happened when I was in the country. I did not know about it until the night after the funeral. Helen Moore wrote me. I am enclosing a copy of what she said. I was deeply attached to her; she belonged to such a different world, but there was always a bridge over and we came and went naturally on it. I saw her some six weeks before her death, so I was quite reconciled to her going, for it was clear that she was beyond help. Her palsey was terribly accentuated. She was not allowed to get out of bed and was irritated at her handicaps, but holding on to art and life with little despairing cries, but not seeing or understanding this or that — her instincts as sound as ever. Her brother, a horrible old G.O.P., was there and she knew as well and said as spritely as ever in her life that he was all wrong about Franklin R. It leaves a gap in my world, but I suppose these gaps will multiply pretty fast from now on. But thank God I can remember the day when they were filled.

But Rosie, when are you coming back? Of course I shall never get over to see you, never see the Cathedral at Barcelona or all that new Spanish art, but it does not seem to matter much. I find the most interesting thing to look at nowadays is this New Deal and I like to be on the ground. Not that I have anything to do with it — nothing at all. I haven't been in Washington except on errands and I am not so keen for the crowds that are doing most of the work. However, all that will sift out in the long run.
Of course, we have got a group and a good many of them are around the President in Washington that see an honest to God socialistic state coming out of this. But I dont, not yet. But why get scared even if we do take a turn at a socialistic state? We haven't done so well with democracy. And then on the whole, I think we have done well with it all. We have learned a lot of things, but we haven't learned to pass on the things we have learned.

But I have started off again and this time I am going to stop for sure and only tell you that I hope you are well, that you are happy and that someday you are going to come back to us.

Always affectionately,

Ida M. Tarbell