

Dimpled Despot Found In New Roman Premier

Miss Tarbell Says Commanding Figure In Evidence Everywhere—Influence Nation Wide

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Ida M. Tarbell discovered Mussolini's dimple. "Despot? Sure! But he's a dimple with a dimple!" Miss Tarbell declared Tuesday evening at her lecture, "Impressions of Mussolini and the Italian Situation." Under the auspices of the Birmingham branch of Universal Women, she was lecturing at the club about her recent four months' stay in Italy.

And Mussolini kissed Miss Tarbell's hand with a true continental flourish at the end of their hour's talk. "It was almost like a tea party," so she described the interview which she avoided for five weeks because she wasn't particularly interested in seeing this overbearing Roman emperor. "I couldn't escape him!" she continued. "Why, that man was everywhere. When I rested my slipper on the opposite seat of my Pullman, a hand rushed up to me and cried: 'Mussolini says that isn't the place for a foot!' And if I hadn't lowered it, I might have been fined 20 lire. A friend of mine who refused was fined. When my chauffeur dashed across a railroad in an isolated country, a guard held up the car, saying: 'Mussolini says you must stop at that crossing!' His name is everywhere—and his power. I found that Mussolini is everything good to one group and everything bad to the other. I expected to find a blustering demagogue. Instead, I found a dimple."

Miss Tarbell described his spirit of "getting things done" as extending to perfect railroad schedules, new highways, improved houses for the poor—into every phase of Italian life. Following her personal interview, Miss Tarbell hunted out his relatives, schoolmates, old teachers. They gave her the answer: "He never could live unless he had his own way." Questioning a leader of the opposition, Miss Tarbell received this answer: "The man is dangerous. But my two sons, 17 and 18, would give their lives for him." Summing up the man's appeal to the masses and his power, Miss Tarbell declared: "He has given youth something to live for!"

The first morning after her arrival

in Rome, Miss Tarbell saw signs of a great economic war. Its purpose is increase in production which every chauffeur, every scrubwoman takes as an individual concern. The fascist in pursuing its ideal of "no class distinction" is attempting to build up a corporate state, wherein each individual's standing is based on his contribution to public welfare. Their ideal, if enforced, will eliminate political parties and professional politicians. "But on the surface the Italians themselves are not perturbed over Mussolini's power. For 2500 years they have tried every kind of despot known to man. And Mussolini is just a new variety!"

Miss Tarbell found the press functioning, though censored. She saw the natives winning the "wheat battle," which they are waging for increased production. In her zigzag trips across every corner of Italy, she saw Italians working eagerly, bending from their crops to give the fascist salute. "I practiced the salute in my room at night," Miss Tarbell confided. "I was told I would be arrested if my hand was not just this flat and my thumb at just this angle." She put the bunch of lavender sweet peas on the table to flash the salute before her audience.

Deftly depicting the dozens of cross currents in Italy today, Miss Tarbell ended her lecture with a double prophecy as to the future. "Fascism will gradually become the government or the country will revert to its old monarchy. No one can be sure yet which will happen."

Miss Mary Foster, president of the local university women, introduced the speaker, who is editor, author, historian, publicist. Miss Tarbell, who is engaged this winter in writing the story of her Italian observations, made a special trip south for her Birmingham lecture because, she added, "I am too interested in your city and its industrial problems to disappoint the friends who expected me." The lecturer is the guest of Miss Winifred Collins, head of the social service department of the T. C. L., with whom she made a week's survey here several years ago.