Digital Image, 2011. The Ida M. Tarbell Collection, 1890-1944, Allegheny College Pelletier Library

THE SURVEY
112 EAST 19TH STREET . NEW YORK

May 5, 1923.

Miss Ida M. Tarbell,
120 E. 19th St.,
New York, N.Y.

Dear Miss Tarbell:

I came back quite thrilled from my talk at your fire-place. I do not know when I have been so eager about anything. I hope that during this fortnight you will sort of get your second wind after your exhausting spree of lecturing; and that by mid-May it will seem more possible for you to give us these wonderful by-products of your studies of the Lincoln family. Only, I am bold enough to feel that it would be quite the other way around and that your geneological treatment for your newspaper syndicate is, from my point of view, so much spade work preliminary to a rare treatment by you of those social tendencies and things of the spirit which lie imbedded in the soil - or rather the succession of soils - from which Abraham Lincoln sprung.

Unquestionably, I am selfish about it. It would mean a tremendous lift and gift to the Survey Graphic and this conception of ours of making it an instrument of social interpretation that will no longer be confined to convinced groups, but will help leaven the whole lump of American understanding.

On the other hand, I feel strongly that as you have been working over your materials on the Lincoln family for a year past, your impressions, deductions, intuitions - have a fresh edge to them now. It would be a crime to let this fresh edge be dulled by putting off to an uncertain date in the future, your effort to capture them on paper. It

would seem to me that what you might write would be a very natural and easy sequence and flowering out of what you have been doing in these last months; nor would it be alien to the things your mind will be working on in producing that 4,000 words of yours each week on Lincoln himself. We should like to have your treatment quite informal - - so that it would not be a burden.

As I have thought over our talk, my imagination crystallizes in three possible articles. Let me put them down merely by way of suggestion:

1st: The Young Lincolns - how with each generation they pushed out and why; something which would interpret and personify that adventuring, pioneering spirit which has been characteristic of our American zest on this new continent and which has still its tremendously creative part to play; hidden though it may be by all the complexities of our modern life. It seems to me that this would be arresting and enheartening in a day when so many of our American ideals have been torn and buffeted and abused in the war period; and a new generation is groping for a mainspring of purpose: for new social enthusiasms.

2nd: The Line of Freedom - showing how the Lincolns moved from community to community, like the chambers of a nautilus, impelled by this spirit of adventure , but linking with it their search for human liberty - for a freer society - for the free land which would mean not only elbow room, but the right of a man to his conscience; showing how their ideas of freedom and of tolerance gathered head; and found new incarnations; how the New England Puritan community, the free colony of New Jersey, the Amish community of Pennsylvania, the Shenandoah Valley,

Digital Image, 2011. The Ida M. Tarbell Collection, 1890-1944, Allegheny College Pelletier Library

the Kentucky plantations and the Illinois and Indian prairies, all gave new settings, physical and human and spiritual to their search for this grail; how their ideas grew by contact with men of very different strains each of whom had something to contribute; how they were warped with the pioneer struggle; were twisted by their conflict with the Indians; were colored by the experience of the revolution, of the religious debates, etc; how they came through.

Again it seems to me that in a period when there are so many sinister impingements on our liberties, in this pilgrimage you have a very luminous embodiment of the ingrained yearning of the American people for freedom and liberty, reasserting itself and growing because of and in spite of the things which encompass it.

3rd: Splitting the Slavery Rail - an interpretation of the roots of those convictions and that leadership which were to be personified in the Abraham Lincoln - but which had their springs in the experience, not only in the very process which you will have described in the first two articles, but which were especially moulded, not only by Lincoln's boyhood experiences, but by those of his father and grandfather in Kentucky communities in which they lived and first met the issue, when it hung in the balance whether Kentucky was to be a free state or no . I think many of us think of the slavery issue and Lincoln's leadership as a thing that sprung into being almost in full bloom. Here you will show its origins - and that again will be encouraging to those who in our day may be nurturing other social ideals which seem insecure and fragmentary, but which may enfold infinite hope for the future.

It would mean most to us, I think, if we could publish the

Digital Image, 2011. The Ida M. Tarbell Collection, 1890-1944, Allegheny College Pelletier Library

articles every alternate month beginning October 1st - October, December and February. That would mean drafting the first at least this summer. Of course we could start their publication January 1st, but in view of the fact that your book will come out in October, I should like to begin the series then, believing that the two might gain from each other that way. It was tremendously good of you to say that if you could do the articles you would like to make them your gift to The Survey, but I should not want that. Neither could we pay you what one of the great magazines might pay you. You see, we have raised a promotion fund by gift to try out this experiment of the Graphics and it enables us for the first time to make modest compensation. We could not have afforded to commission you to undertake the research which would have produced these articles. But as by-products of your syndicate series and books, they may come, through your generosity, within our reach; and developed at your hands, (whatever we pay) you will be making a large and very genuine gift to us.

We would be warranted in offering $200 an article for the series of three,-the articles, ranging from 5,000 to 7,000 words in length.

You spoke of another article which you had talked over with Harper's Magazine. I do not know how far your negotiations went with them. I could see how your whimsical adventures in gathering the material might be handled as a literary and geneological cruise so that it could appear quite independently in Harper's. On the other hand, they tie up pretty thoroughly with this series. And by sketching the social life and mind of these communities as they stand today, as they stood still while the Lincoln's went forward, you would be handling your personal adventures in research in a way which would bring them within the scope

Digital Image, 2011. The Ida M. Tarbell Collection, 1890-1944, Allegheny College Pelletier Library

of The Survey and would round out the series most admirably as a whole, giving the present day set-up of the scenes in which the young Lincolns followed down their line of freedom. I do not think it would mean sacrificing those whimsical incidents you spoke of at all; but it would enable you to make some very interesting remarks on the imprint left by the feet of the prophets. After all, does a great ethical leader in one generation or devotion to a kindling principle like liberty in generation after generation in one family or in a group of families, or in a people, leave a living heritage in the minds and hearts and the thinking and ideals of those who come after. That Massachusetts town, that Shenandoah country-side, those Kentucky villages, those mid-Western county seats, are after all pretty good samples of America; test tubes of where we get off outside the great cities. Where do we?

I could see that you could therefore, if you would, make the series one of four, rather than three, adding an instalment shall I say, of "The Original Lincoln Highway". We could offer $800 for the four. You perhaps have some photographs of towns and places, or we could get some young artist to go on a pilgrimage to make sketches in line with leads which you could give him.

Please, if you feel just now that your decision must be negative, keep your mind open and take a little more time and see if at the end of a few weeks you may not have a little more elbow room. I find it altogether difficult to tell you how much this series from you would mean to us if you could but attempt it.

Sincerely,

Paul Kellogg

puk mrs

Digital Image, 2011. The Ida M. Tarbell Collection, 1890-1944, Allegheny College Pelletier Library