

Miss Ida Minerva Tarbell was given the American people for its sins. Of all the weapons with which that dull creature whom we call society may be goaded into proper activities, satire is often the most stimulating. For nearly two decades Miss Tarbell has been our most brilliant satirist.

At this stage one should make an apology. To scourge society for its crimes of indifference and stupidity carries its own penalties. Jeremiah is not generally reputed to have reached a Hebraic Nirvana at least in this life, and his fellow prophets were not happier. Aristophanes, it is true, led an existence gay enough, and Erasmus and Voltaire were not sad beyond their fellows. But from Dean Swift on the gift of clear vision and biting words has been of evil omen.

Therefore it should be said forthwith that Miss Tarbell is very much more than a social satirist; she is emotionally a woman of the old school, and doubtless is more contented on her farm attending to the chores than she is in her editorial offices in New York.

She is not a "new woman."

Yet in pioneer fashion this editor demonstrated the advantages of higher education for women. With that mass of young women who flocked into the colleges in the late '70's and the early '80s, Miss Tarbell took her place, and in 1893 was graduated from Allegheny College at Meadville, Pa. Then for eight years she was an associate editor of the Chautauquan, and but for a break in her career she might have been a part of those unrecorded thousands who never rise above mediocrity.

This interruption came because she needed perspective, a Weltanschauung. So she went to Paris and for three years took courses at Sorbonne and at the College de France. When she returned to the United States in 1894 she became a member of the old McClure staff, and her work immediately was nationally significant. She was 37 years old when she "arrived," but the waiting was justified by the rapid achievements of the next few years.

The first six years after her larger work had been begun Miss Tarbell put into her "Life of Lincoln." The long study of the reactions of that unselfish American when confronted by the greatest property interest of the developing nation must have influenced her very powerfully. She did Lincoln and she did him capably; her work is still rated as one of the keenest interpretations of that great figure by historical critics. That is high praise, for few works of even ten years ago are accepted by contemporaneous historians.

Turning from a consideration of Abraham Lincoln she plunged immediately into the welter of big business. In popular parlance she became a muckraker. The implications in her case, albeit, are not fair. The muckraker never cleanses a situation; his eyes never look to the stars. Miss Tarbell never lost sight of them and she never touched what she did not improve.

The nation had to be awakened, and this woman was one of the most insistent sentries. Her articles on business and her volumes on the Standard Oil Company are classics as they were revolutionary. Colonel George Harvey sometimes is given the credit for electing Woodrow Wilson. I think historians will stress the generalship of Miss Ida M. Tarbell in that campaign. Her work was done long before Wilson became a possibility, but those scathing articles in the days when the old McClure's was a fighting machine were powerful in clearing the road for the economic progressives of whatever political faith.

The revolution for which she fought has come. She conceived it to be her duty to tell the truth as she was trained to see it. She iterated it, "nothing but the truth", ugly and cruel, and relentless as it was. In that climactic article on "Commercial Machiavellianism" she expressed the creed against which she was crusading. The words taunt us still.

"Success is a paramount duty. It can be attained in the highest degree only by force. At times it requires violence, cruelty, falsehood, perjury, treachery. Do not hesitate at these practices, only be sure they are necessary for the good of the business and be very careful to insist upon them always as wise and kind and that they work together for the greatest good of the greatest number."

This

which was so powerful in her attacks on the Standard Oil Company she put into her studies of the tariff. Our Democratic President is reaping much credit for the apparent success of tariff reform. The vivid essays on the outworkings of protection which Miss Tarbell published during many years were influential in persuading the people to the President's view. Without this preliminary work he would be much less strong.

The present chapters of Miss Tarbell's activities are more dangerous ground. As once she was the satirist of brutal business, so now her keen analysis is playing upon the feminist movement, and she is somewhat aloof from many of the women she has led. With the items of humanitarian reform she has no quarrel; in truth, she is a part of the social service movement, but with militancy she parts company.

Miss Tarbell's rebellion was intellectual; the insurgency of the feminists is emotional and ethical. To me the analogy between the newer and the earlier revoltees in religion is apposite. The old agnostic threw aside the supernatural, but never thought of questioning the Christian ethical system. The modern unbeliever casts the same doubts over the ethics of Western Europe. It is a question of how far one is willing to go.

This is an evolutionary world, and except in primates evolution is slow. Perhaps Miss Tarbell is right. She wrote:

"A few women in every country have always, and probably always will find work and usefulness and happiness in exceptional tasks. There are, sometimes, those who are born with what we call 'bachelor souls' -- an interesting and sometimes even charming tho always an incomplete possession. More often they are women who by the bungling machinery of society have been cast aside. There is no reason why these women should be idle, miserable, selfish or anti-social. There are rich lives for them to work out and endless needs for them to meet. But they are not the women upon whom society depends; they are not the ones who build the nation. The women who count are those who outnumber them a hundred to one -- the women who are at the great business of founding and filling the natural social centres which we call homes.

"Humanity will rise or fall as that center is strong or weak. It is the human core."

It is a difference of attitude which must ultimately rest with the judgment of the facts. The world isn't ready yet to generalize about women; the men of the world certainly are not qualified for this task. Justice and too, expediency now demand that women be given the complete franchise, both in politics and in the larger social relations. The facts the future furnishes will be the criteria of the wisdom of the procedure. No advocate of the people had had a greater reverence in the treatment of facts than has Miss Ida Minerva Tarbell. By their arbitrament doubtless she is willing to abide.