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clearly. At times I feel as though success has been far from me in that
field, but then again I think of the numerous people who have failed
after trying to achieve that desire in life. There were many times
in your class when you made me feel that if one tries and always
looks ahead with the feeling of success ahead, that one will
ultimately gain that success. I want to thank you for making me
feel that way. You not only helped me continue in the field that
I am pursuing, but you have given me hope of someday achieving
some success in my field.

In closing, I would like to say that it has been a privilege
knowing you and later in life to learn much and receive that fine
and lovely like how it is described you are one of the group
of greatly respected Americans.

LETTER TO MISS IDA M. TARBELL

Michael T. Kaserro

English 18 (Biography)

May 18, 1930

Letter to Miss Ida M. Tarbell

Dear Miss Tarbell,

Some time ago I spoke to you about my collection of books. Due to my collecting, I decided a course in biography would aid my understanding my collection of biographies. I was especially interested in learning something about contemporary biographers. In this respect I believe that you failed me as you limited your course to a biography of Abraham Lincoln. This really is no fault of yours, as a study of contemporary biographers was merely my own interest and probably I could pursue this interest myself.

I was thankful for the complete history of Lincoln that was given. Lincoln has always stood foremost in my opinion among the great men of this country. Up to my entering the course, I knew relatively little about Lincoln, his life and his character. I don't believe there is any person as well qualified to teach the life of Abraham Lincoln as you are. As you say, Lincoln is not merely a figure-head to be studied, but he personifies all the attributes that make for a powerful and respected character. At times I think of Abraham Lincoln as a mythological character, who was created to present to the American people as the ideal patriot and man. Just as the romanticists create a hero, I think of Lincoln as a hero created to pull the American nation through the Civil War.

In talking this course over with other students and deciding just exactly how one goes about telling what one got from this course, many hints were given me. One was that I should write a outline of the course, but I thought that since you were looking for opinions and not repetitions of what was given in class I will try to give my honest opinion of the course.

As I said earlier in this paper I was interested in learning the techniques of the contemporary biographers. There were moments when I thought that you would get into the subject that I wanted to know about. At one time during the course you mentioned Carl Van Doren, Marquis James and others and I was hoping that you would enlarge on these people and tell us something about their style of writing. I have copies of their books and have numerous other biographies. I have your ~~my~~ book on the Life of Abraham Lincoln. I have been unable to read it all but those articles that I have read from the book urge me to continue reading it.

The part of your course that I am most thankful for were the first few lectures on how to write and biography and how to thoroughly understand the man. Not that I ever intend writing biographies, but I believe that those lectures will be of help when I am trying to understand a biography and the character or characters concerned. Your system for understanding characters and for developing the man should be very helpful when reading a biography.

My major interest is the drama, but one knows that many characters of importance are taken from men in history. When playing one must know the person they are portraying. What better help is there than finding that character or a similar character woven in the pattern of history. When one is to play the part of Napoleon in the play Conquest, unless that person is thoroughly familiar with the man himself, I can't see how he could play the character correctly on the stage. The same goes for the playwright for he must know the man about whom he is writing before he can proceed making a character of him.

So as you say it is with the biographer. He must understand the man himself before he can ably write a biography concerning the man that is correct and with due reverence to the man.

I especially enjoyed your opinion of Robert Sherwood's Abe Lincoln in Illinois. I tried very hard to see the play when I was in New York but it seems as though the crowds are rushing for seats. Still I don't feel as though I have missed much. I have read the play and can't see that Sherwood has too much dramatic material in his play. There is so much that is dramatic in Abe Lincoln's life that to pick some of the minor details as Sherwood has done can make for a splendid play. I attribute the play's success to the manner in which the play is presented and the excellent acting of Raymond Massey. First of all Sherwood ends the play at much too weak a point in Lincoln's life. Maybe the story concerns itself with Lincoln's life in Illinois, but Sherwood lacked the dramatic power to lift the audiences from their seats at the closing curtain.

Probably I have sidetracked a bit, so I shall get back to the course. I especially liked the manner in which the course was conducted. Miss Tarbell, you have a certain compelling way about you that makes one want to listen. There are certain professors here that waste excess energy trying to get students interested, and then you come here (minus the experience in teaching that our professors have) and beat them at their own game. You don't need that excess energy to interest your students. Some days it is you yourself that interests me and other days your subject have a certain strength about it that you compel the student to listen. To steal the words of Dr. Schultz, you have a certain forward look about you. Instead of thinking of the past, you keep saying that there are so

many things that you want to do in the near future. I like this impression of always looking ahead. If I can accomplish as much as you have in your years, and still be able to look ahead than I shall have gained everything that I have desired in life. ~~II~~

My future has been rather vague. I have been interested in drama for some time, but the aspects of being success are rather cloudy. At times I feel as though success lies ahead for me in that field, but then again I think of the numerous people who have failed when trying to achieve that desire in life. There were many times in your class when you made me feel that if one tries and always looks ahead with the feeling of 'success ahead' that one will ultimately gain that success. I want to thank you for making me feel that way. You not only helped me continue in the field that I am pursuing, but you have given me hope of someday achieving some success in my field.

In closing, I would like to say that it has been a privilege knowing you and later in life to think back and remember that Miss Ida M. Tarbell was one of my teachers. I am sure that the students and faculty alike deem it an honor that you are one of the group of greatly respected Alleghenians.

Thank you ever so much,

Michael T. Enserro, '40.