

412 West 110th. Street, Apt. 94

April 3, 1939

Dear Miss Tarbell,

Only I always want to get the "Minerva" in. And I'm quite sure that that special name and the "Ida" that suggests Olympus, both have something to do with your life and your work, your parents being unconsciously prophetic!

You'll laugh at that! All right, laugh. But you see I've just finished "All In The Day's Work," and am still feeling thrilled right down to my toes! Little bits here and there delight me . . . about Mussolini. "He might be--was I believed--a fearful despot, but he had a dimple." And again, about old age: "more, it can be an adventure." I believe that, am finding it out more and more. But this book of yours has put new life into me, in short to use a word my husband was fond of, (to use judiciously,) the word guts! For years I haven't been well or strong, as I was for ~~much~~ of my youth and most of my middle years. For a time I've felt that my real writing days were past -- but your book convinces me that ~~such~~ an attitude is sheer cowardice, weakness. Courage and staying power and sheer guts like yours are or ought to be contagious, infectious. I'm willing them to be. (Though of course individual ability is another matter)

Another thing about this last book of yours; last summer I was absurdly down in mind and body. I read every book about Europe I could lay my hands upon, and got more and more depressed. Hitler, Stalin, Mussolini, Spain, Japan-- it seemed to me that this was a grand time to do one's dying. No ideals left, no faith in anything but material success, material power, conquest-- and always, everywhere GREED, CRUELTY, SELF.

Trying, my trying to write verse, fiction, the only fields I've had any success in, since, after years in an art school, I began to write about art and artists, this seemed absurd, futile. Why not get a little education, read myself to death, and so pass into dream or negation, the end of all effort.

This fall and winter I've felt stronger, recovered a little courage, and now your book gives me a sense of new values. My immediate family have not been long lived; it seemed to me I couldn't have much more time. But now every word in your personal story helps, gives me the idea that it might pay to plan anew, take the attitude that I may live years, do decent work, better in style at least than what I've done in the past, (~~certainly not~~ important-- but some editors have called it "interesting" and "promising," and a few critics were very kind about my few novels. And some have liked my verse you have said kind things! So)

So you, "Minerva," are giving me a new send-off! Maybe it won't last-- but at least I must thank you, and tell you how grateful I am. And remind you that for many years now, since you came to me after my private world went to smash, and said kind understanding things, you've had a high place in my mind and heart, entirely your own.

It's not how often people meet that matters, but how much they give and get when they do meet.

Apart from my personal reaction to your story, my mental satisfaction in your moderation, your sense of justice, your gift for stating facts clearly and in a manner that seizes and holds one's full attention-- these qualities have delighted me. Your willingness to fight for the underdog and yet also give the upper dog his due, your joy in Paris--I too had a wonderful year there--your optimism, despite your clear unshirking vision, the way you've always faced the worst in industrial conditions yet believed in and brought out the decent, the fair, wherever you found it -- this book is the real you--and to me a wise friendly and comfortingly humorous Ida Minerva. And many many people must be telling you the same thing that I'm trying to put over.

Your book is mine--and I want you to write your name in it, please. So if I can come to you for about fifteen minutes, here or even in the country between trains, let me know. Get someone to send me a postcard-- or your secretary to telephone someone morning-- TEL. Academy 2- 4500-- Apt. 94.

Only PLEASE don't let this be a chore or what a German we once knew called his "Cott-Tanned-Duty!"

If I don't hear a word I'll just wait, telephone some time on the chance that you may be in town for a minute, and go right on thanking my thoughtful fairy godmother for letting me know you.

Incidentally, I've been lucky all my life in possessing and keeping wonderful friends-- sheer luck, in no way due to any virtue of mine-- so if any part of this outpouring may seem disheartened or blue forget it! Only don't forget your part in helping to clear the blues away. Queer, the way a printed book may drop you to Hell, or lift you to a friendly hopeful Heaven.

I feel a bit guilty, writing you so many words. But perhaps you will not mind.

With love always.

-your friend Elizabeth W. Stephens

P.S. - I'd like to edit the letter, cut and improve grammar. But I'm too lazy... and you'll read it with a friendly and not a critical or editorial eye!