224 Sullivan Street
New York City
GRamercy 5-9068

June 19, 1939

Dear Miss Tarbell:

Having just laid down your challenging and satisfying autobiography, I am moved to express my gratitude for your having written it.

There were many reasons why your experiences were of particular interest to me. For one, my family suffered as did yours from the methods, motives and power of the Standard Oil Company and its subsidiaries, in California. For another, your articles, and Grayson's, H. I. Phillips's, and Fannie Kilbourne's and other stories in the American were the very best friends of my impressionable youth in the 1920's. Meeting the staff through you was like being reunited with old friends. The American Magazine was my Bible--I waited and read and re-read, then clipped my favorite articles and stories. My file of those clippings is still one of my dearest possessions. You cultivated my taste for biography, and more than any other journalist shaped my desire and determination to become a biographical writer. When, in 1934, I wiggled my way from secretary to writer in radio, it was, I fancied, as the Ida Tarbell of a new medium! Then, too, your book must be gratifying to any idealist who has come to grips with reality. To me it is especially so, coming as it has at the close (I hope the close is at hand) of a period of considerable personal confusion and doubt--of self and others. Your reaffirmation of faith in democracy and man, your respect for America's essential integrity and intelligence, carries more solace and encouragement than you can possibly be aware.

To introduce myself, I am a writer with some four years' writing experience on the Coast, in radio and magazines. I've specialized in personality sketches, review columns, and commentator scripts for NBC. I learned something of research problems and technique in writing a thesis on Insanity Parole--inspired by being the accidental witness of a murder by a paroled maniac in the Hollywood radio station where I worked--and accordingly I have the profoundest respect for your thoroughness and eyesight in covering the prodigious material you've studied in the course of your career.

Before returning the first of the month to Hollywood, however, I wonder if I might call to "talk shop" with you? I well realize how presumptuous and inconsiderate fans can be, how selfish such requests are. And yet, "hope eternal" is always with us--and I'm terribly eager to meet and talk with you, for I'm so sure you know the answers to many of the questions I've been pondering, about man and his behavior and his potentialities. You love people in the same way I do--the same characteristics of people inspire awe and admiration and contempt in us. And so many people, apparently, see no wonder, no greatness, or no degradation in these qualities!

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What strange alchemy of character is it, for instance, that causes an experience to temper one man with patience and tolerance, whereas the same experience produces only cynicism and bitterness in his brother? Do sensibilities shocked into emotional bankruptcy ever recover ability to feel (as you say your curiosity recovered), or is so much of what we consider insensitivity really emotional paralysis? Can a generation, or at least some individuals of a generation, which has lost its first grand fire and sunk into apathy and cynicism, as you observed, recover any of that fire and faith and energy and proceed, the wiser for its temporary defeat? Is indifference ignorance, or fear, or an undersupply of energy? Is psychology doing anything for people, providing any answers to the problems of individual adjustment--or is psychology merely putting behavior under the microphone, and limiting itself to analysis and classification? Is psychology just asking the questions that only faith can answer?

These, I know, are somewhat abstract questions whose answers we can only speculate--but if you have the time and inclination, and it would not be too great an imposition, I would enjoy and appreciate exceedingly the chance to hear you speculate upon them. Dare I hope for that opportunity?

Eagerly yours,

Erma Taylor

(Miss) Erma Taylor

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