Digital Image, 2009. The Ida M. Tarbell Collection, 1890-1944, Allegheny College Pelletier Library

RESOLUTION ON THE PASSING OF

IDA MINERVA TARBELL

The death of Ida Minerva Tarbell on January 6, 1944, in her eighty-seventh year, not only deprived Allegheny of its most illustrious graduate, but removed from the life of the nation the dean of its women authors and one of its most distinguished citizens. Throughout the country many groups have paused to pay homage to her whose passing has bereft and saddened them. In no group has her passing left a greater, a more irreplaceable vacancy than in the Board of Trustees of this College, with whom and for whom she served so long and so well; and of no other person concerned with the life and progress of her College can it be said that her active interest and affection continued throughout a period of all but seventy years.

The life and achievements of Ida M. Tarbell are too well known to need retelling here. Rather we would express, so that it may forever be a part of our records, our gratitude for her continuing service to Allegheny College and our grateful recognition of the honor that has been ours because of the loyalty to and faith in the College she so often expressed in the world in which she was an honored, a respected, and authoritative and a long-to-be-remembered voice.

Miss Tarbell was, in the finest and deepest sense of the phrase, a great woman. Of this fact Allegheny may justly be proud. For it was to no small degree under the inspiration of her Allegheny teachers and disciplined by their stern methods that she began her conscious search for truth as a prospective young scientist, hoping that the feeble microscopes of the seventies and eighties might somehow lead her toward that distant and elusive Truth she never ceased to seek.

Maturity came to her slowly; but it came with such a continuity of all-round inner growth that there seemed to be no sharp break in the direction of her life when, for her microscope, she substituted the powerful lens of her own capacity for clear thought. From the rocks and plants and mud puppies that found their way beneath the lens of the "magnificent binocular" in Jeremiah Tingley's biology laboratory in Bentley, she gradually turned the intensity of her interest to human beings. Tattered notebooks unearthed years later, brought to light the fact of her slow, unconscious change of allegiance from the science of geology and botany and zoology to the science of society. Slowly but inevitably her search for Truth found its permanent focus on the human species, and the lens through which she viewed it grew into one of the clearest and most discerning of her generation.

She had known, when she left Allegheny in 1880 for a school teacher's job in Poland, Ohio, that she would never abandon her search for the beginning of life - a point where, she used to explain, she expected to find God.

Ten years later she puzzled over why she must learn so slowly when others knew so quickly. Slowly she climbed toward some distant summit that can be described only as her source of truth. Undaunted by what seemed to her a snail-like pace, she continued to climb because she wanted to know, to understand. She learned to climb by climbing. And, unlike most of those who had seemed to her young eyes to leap from truth to truth so quickly, she ceased visibly to climb only when she ceased visibly to live.

Miss Tarbell's approach to life, and to the writing through which she achieved her livelihood, was that of the student rather than that of the reformer. It was that of one, who, interested in the effect of certain human beings upon other human beings, but primarily in the effect of our own actions upon ourselves, must find the reasons that motivate actions and, through the revelation of these reasons, let them teach whatever they had in them to teach. Her approach was that of an exceedingly honest person who understood early the continuity of life - of a person who knows that what one does today is dependent upon what others have already done, and that whatever any individual accomplishes can be, at best, but a link in an endless chain whose only value is to make the matter at hand a little clearer today than it was yesterday.

We would, therefore, in these resolutions which memorialize her contributions to the College, stress the challenge of her life, to the College, rather than attempt to enumerate the more materialistic gifts which have been recorded elsewhere. Valuable as the Lincoln Collection will always be, it can never match the proportions of her gift of inspiring, creatively, the lives of many individuals who have helped this college keep alive the honest, unimpeded search for truth which motivated her own life and made it great. She could have conceived of no greater tribute from us than an affirmation of our will to make and keep this College an institution forever dedicated to the free pursuit of truth.

Three still-unanswered mysteries, she tells us in her Autobiography, set her to her life's task: the mystery of the most fruitful life for women in civilization, the mystery of the true nature of revolutions, and the mystery of God, which, despite its mystery became, she says, the greatest of her realities. These problems were never unrelated in her mind. Each of them is a little clearer today than they were yesterday because she forged a bright and shining link in the long chain of knowledge by which men and women find their blundering way toward truth. And Allegheny's task, as she saw it, is to release young minds for life work on their own mysteries.

As trustees of this College we can offer nothing less to the memory of this woman than the honest searching of our own hearts and minds as we endeavor to guide this Institution into ways to release the creative powers of those who come to it seeking knowledge.

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BE IT RESOLVED, then, that in Miss Tarbell's passing we record the joyous, the fearless and creative quality of her spirit, and affirm our dedication to its enduring reality.

Miss Yost
Class of 1915

Submitted by Mr. Sturtevant

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