From Miss Tarbell's "Recollections"

The most important piece of ghost writing I ever did came in the course of the Lincoln work - Charles A. Dana's "Recollections of the Civil War." Mr. Dana at that time the active head of the New York Sun had had an exceptional war experience dating from 1862 to 1865 as assistant to Secretary Stanton. He had spent much time in the field; he had been with Grant at Vicksburg, with Rosecrans and Thomas at Chattanooga, again with Grant in the Peninsular Campaign.

No man in the administration had had better opportunity of judging Lincoln particularly in relation to the conduct of the war and none was a better judge of character.

Could I get the whole story as far as it concerned Lincoln? I hesitated to ask it. The truth was I was afraid of Mr. Dana. I knew him only on the editorial page of The New York Sun. He was too clever, too quick-witted, too malicious for me to get on with, I feared. They laughed at me at the office when

Found tipped-in in front of Dana's Recollections of the Civil

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I voiced my qualms. Nobody was held higher there than Charles A. Dana. He had been a customer of the McClure Syndicate from the beginning and they believed in his professional integrity, admired his detestation and relentless pursuit of fakers, honored and tried to imitate his editorial motto, "If you see it in The Sun it's so."

"Why should you feel this way," reproved Mr. Phillips. "Mr. Dana is a gentleman."

"Nonsense, "I'll take care of it for you," said Mr. McClure and he rushed to The Sun office. He did fix it and more for returning he told me with glee that Mr. Dana was willing to give his whole war story, that is if I would do the work and arrange some practical plan for the interviews. The first step, of course, was to find what Dana material published and unpublished was in the war records. The editing of the records then under way was in charge of J. Leslie Perry. Mr. Perry did not believe in women fussing with history, particularly with Civil War history.

"How can you understand it?" he shouted at me.

However, I insisted on my rights and nobody could have been more helpful when he considered a thing an obligation of his official position. To the end Mr. Perry's chief satisfaction came when he caught me slipping. "That's what comes from allowing a woman to write history," he would say jubilantly.

Between us we brought together a grist of Dana's dispatches and reports. I crammed on the campaigns and by appointment appeared at the end of Mr. Dana's day about four o'clock in the afternoon for my first interview.

His desk was stripped of everything that pertained to the newspaper but held a row of the latest books, not only in English but in three or four other languages, as well as a copy of The Cosmopolis, an ambitious and rather pretentious review in three or four languages issued for a short time in the late '90's.

Mr. Dana had already repented of his promise to Mr. McClure. "I am not interested in what I did in the past," he said irritably. "I am interested only in the present; I am

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trying to keep up with the world of today. I am studying Russian now - a very fascinating language. I don't want to bother with what I did in the Civil War. What do you propose?"

What I proposed was that he let me come to him with a stenographer and a set of prepared questions say three times a week. He agreed and for a good many weeks of the winter of '96 and '97 I went regularly to The Sun office after the paper was put to press. I encountered only one real bunker and that was the stenographer. I had found a woman who I knew to be expert but I had warned her she must not interrupt Mr. Dana no matter whether she understood or not, get what she could. But she couldn't keep out of the picture. At the first interruption Mr. Dana glared and closed his mouth. I had to drop her but was lucky enough to find an experienced court stenographer who knew that the last thing you did in taking testimony was to interrupt the witness.

By the summer of 1897 I had my manuscript well in shape. Mr. Dana had never seen any of it. "Send me the proofs, I'll read them."

Publication was to begin in November of 1897. Mr. Dana went to London for the summer. I sent the proof of the first chapter over with a good many qualms for it was all in the first person - "I" and "We." It came back with only a few verbal corrections - no comments. He was never to read more of his Recollections. The number of the Magazine which carried the first chapter carried the notice of his death.

We published the entire story and later the articles were put into a book but with no credit to the ghost!

Taking it all in all it was the most impersonal job that I ever had. I do not remember that Mr. Dana ever volunteered a word in all the many interviews I had with him except on the subject in hand and that in answer to my questions. We never talked of the things of which I knew he loved - pictures - orchids - poetry. It was a business like operation from start to finish. Probably it was his way of punishing me for being afraid of him.

Ida M. Tarbell

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