

Ida M. Tarbell
My Biography

November 27, 1918

Countess Maria A. Loschi,
Hotel Vanderbilt,
New York City.

My dear Countess Loschi:

You asked me when I had the pleasure of lunching with you the other day, to send you some facts about my unimportant life for your little series of articles on American Women.

There is nothing at all unusual about me to tell. I am the most logical kind of a result, given our system of education and our ways of looking at things over here. You see, I grew up in a pioneer community, one brought out of the wilderness by the discovery of petroleum.

It was the opportunity in that discovery which led my father and mother to abandon the plans that they had made for their life and take their chances with the new development. Hundreds of other people in the United States did the same thing.

My father prospered as a result of his venture, and rather a rich town grew out of the soil. These early people had one idea for their children, and that was to give them good schools. These were public schools, and in the I was kept and prepared for what we called a college, which corresponds to the French Lycee. I do not know your Italian educational system well enough to know its counterpart with you.

There was a strong feminist movement in my girlhood, quite as strong as the present, I think. It was called "Rights for Women." One of the rights claimed was that of a profession, and I suppose it was because of this agitation that I insisted on going to college and had professional ambitions. This led me quite naturally, my circumstances being what they were, into an editorial position on a magazine called The Chatauquan. It was in doing the work there that I felt I wanted to write, I wanted to write history and biography and to fit myself more especially I went to Paris in 1891, where for three years I took lectures, and, as a self-imposed thesis, prepared a study of Madame Roland.

This was my first book. I supported myself while

in Paris by writing for American magazines and newspapers, and before I left that led to an invitation from McClure's Magazine to come on to its staff as a special writer and investigator.

We were feeling the Napoleon movement very strong here at that time, and Mr. McClure, knowing my interest in French history, asked me to do a short life of Napoleon. This was what the magazine called successful, and I passed on from that to one of the most interesting pieces of work that I have ever had, a study of the life of Abraham Lincoln. My material was drawn largely from original sources. Before I had finished this life of Lincoln, a hot controversy had grown up in this country over our trusts. They were assuming a proportion which alarmed everybody. Now, I had been born in a country where the father of all the trusts had had its birth, and I had an idea that by tracing the historical development of this particular octopus, the Standard Oil Company, it would be possible to make clear to people in general how such an aggregation as the Standard was made possible. My idea was that it was made possible mainly by privileges which were contrary to our common law, and that if these privileges could be taken away, that the monopolistic power at least would be broken.

The Magazine backed the idea and stood by me through five years of investigation and presentation.

In 1907 a group of my colleagues on McClure's Magazine, headed by John S. Phillips, bought The American Magazine, and there I made a study something along the lines of my History of the Standard Oil Company, of the working of the protective tariff in our times, that is, since the Civil War. I also made for The American Magazine a study of some of the newer ideals which are influencing industrial life in this country, ideals which lead not only to better conditions for the working classes but which aim to distribute more justly the returns of industry, and to give to every man concerned in an industrial project, from the lowest to the highest, a voice in the undertaking.

Now, my dear Countess Loschi, I do not know whether this is the kind of information you want or not. It certainly is not very exciting, simply the story of a woman who very early in life caught from the atmosphere in which she lived the idea that progress and happiness depended mainly upon the effort to understand, to grow, and to be useful. That is, that I have always believed that by working

as nearly in harmony with the laws which govern society and human beings, that one gets not only the most for himself but does the most for others.

If you can get anything at all out of this you are of course quite welcome to it. I am enclosing the picture for which you asked.

Very sincerely yours,