

NETTIE FOWLER McCORMICK BIOGRAPHICAL ASSOCIATION
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CHICAGO

TELEPHONE SUPERIOR 2091

425 Surf Street —

June 18, 1933.

Dear Miss Tarbell:

Two years ago, when the Woman's Journal went under, you very kindly said that if I wished I might come and talk with you about what next, advising me first to "lie fallow." That is my excuse for writing you now when I need advice, though it is a reflection on your constant kindness to speak of an "excuse."

There has been a good deal of "rest" in these two years. I didn't find a way to "lie fallow" — altogether. There were some weeks of job-hunting (a little) and a little writing. Then for nine and a half months I was on the editorial staff of the White House Conference on Child Health and Protection, staying until the work had to stop for lack of funds. Last summer Mother and I came out here, where Miss Bruce and I have been delving into the enormous collection of papers — letters, memoranda, printed matter, no diaries — left by Mrs. Cyrus Hall McCormick, I nearly 30 years ago. Her children — Cyrus H. McCormick, Mrs. Emmone Blaine, Harold F. McCormick — had asked us to study the papers with a view to deciding, with them, whether or not they contain material justifying a biography of her. The papers are held in a large fireproof vault built specially

to hold them, and they spill over into cases in an outer office. During most of the winter and spring we read letters written to (some by) Cyrus Hall McCormick I. which his wife had kept. These are being made accessible to Professor William Hutchinson, whose first volume of the Life of Cyrus Hall McCormick has been published, as of course you know, and who is working on the second volume. Now we are deep in Mrs. McCormick's own letters to her children and in the letters to her which form the bulk of the collection — that is, letters from friends, relatives, and from representatives of the churches, mission fields, schools and numerous other causes to which she contributed. Letters that will show her business activities during the first years after her husband's death in 1884 when she was virtually head, are yet to be read. Meantime we are trying to gather in Mrs. McCormick's own letters from all over the world — a process that takes ^{and we have interviews} time. Already it is very clear that we are dealing with a remarkable personality — mind and spirit; but we are ^{still} far from knowing certainly that there is a book that would stand on its own feet. In addition to her own personality, I should add, there is a very wide reach of influence — literally, world wide — which suggests a rich background, especially as her own life covered the period from 1835 to 1923. Now what I need (aside from a deeper reading in history than I ever had; but Miss Bruce is a historian) is some guidance in applying tests to possible biographical material. Of course one such set of tests lies in the minds of publishers, but that is ahead. And I have thought of the courses in biography that you have given in

she was 27
years his
junior.

various schools, and I'm venturing to ask if any of that material is in available form — in print, or manuscript outline — to be bought (preferably) or borrowed for my private, unofficial, individual use. (I shall probably be alone in the work after the summer.) There — it's out! And if I've asked what I shouldn't, you'll know I didn't know.

If such aid isn't available, would you of your kindness suggest two or three books about biography that might be helpful? I am planning also to read as much biography as I can — especially of American women, more or less in Mrs. McCormick's period; though other biography as well.

And if these questions sound as if I were on the wrong track, perhaps you'll gently push me off it.

It isn't now a question of writing, you see. We are to say whether there is a book, and if so what kind. The question of writing lies ahead, undetermined.

I have just decided to go on here rather than return to an editorial opening in New York that offered — The Girl Scouts magazine. Only time will tell me whether that was wise — my feelings are no guide. I haven't been in normal health during the year, but I'm better, and I don't blame Chicago. — I'm even beginning to like it.

I trust you are well, and happy — which means working. Of course I'm going to read everything of yours I haven't read — perhaps that should be guidance enough! —

With cordial greetings and deep admiration,
Sincerely yours, Virginia Roderick.