IDA TARBEll'S SECOND LOOK AT STANDARD OIL

IDA M. TARBEll

Edited by Ernest C. Miller*

IDA Minerva Tarbell was a remarkable woman who lived an active and productive life during one of the most amazing periods of American business development. As the second of those writers known as the "muckrakers," she was, in the eyes of early oildom, the most accurate and responsible of them all, and is best remembered today for her monumental work, *The History of the Standard Oil Company.* Certain it is that of the early writers who wrote either for or against Standard Oil, none was so well equipped to do the job as was Ida Tarbell.

Miss Tarbell was born in a log cabin in Erie County, Pennsylvania,

* Ernest C. Miller of Warren, Pennsylvania, has been an oil man all his life and is today vice-president of the West Penn Oil Company Inc., and of the West Penn Oil Company (Canada) Ltd. He is the author of three oil books and many pamphlets pertaining to early oil days. In Volume 31 of the Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine Mr. Miller was the author of "John Wilkes Booth in the Pennsylvania Oil Region" and "Early Maps of the Pennsylvania Oil Fields." —Ed.

1 The first is generally assumed to be Henry Demarest Lloyd whose article "The Story of a Great Monopoly," appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly*, March, 1881, pp 317-334.

Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* provided the name "muckraker." In this work, the Man with the Muckrake was more occupied with raking filth than with future happiness. Theodore Roosevelt first made use of the term in a speech on April 14, 1906. The term may be defined as applying to a group of writers (chiefly 1904-1910) who roused the public by exposing corruption and greed in business and politics and by attacking social evils.

2 *The History of the Standard Oil Company* was first issued in book form by McClure, Phillips & Co., two volumes, in 1904; next in a two volume edition by Macmillan in 1925; two volumes in one by Macmillan in 1933; again in 1937; and finally by Peter Smith, New York, in 1950. In England, editions appeared in 1905 and 1925. The book was also translated into Chinese.
in November, 1857. Before she was three years old, her parents moved to the vicinity of Rouseville, where her father, Franklin S. Tarbell, erected a shop and made tanks for the booming oil business that was ushered in following Drake's successful well, drilled near Titusville late in 1859.

The Tarbells prospered and when Ida was thirteen the family moved into Titusville. After attending Titusville High School, she struck off for Meadville, Pennsylvania, to enter Allegheny College from which she was graduated in 1880.3

Following a brief period as a teacher at the Poland Union Seminary at Poland, Ohio, she joined the staff of The Chautauquan, a magazine published in Meadville. Eight years of editorial work was followed by three years' study at the Sorbonne in Paris. While abroad, Miss Tarbell wrote short articles and collected much material for later writings. Her first book, Madam Roland, was written during her Paris sojourn. During her years abroad she was so active that she was able to support herself from her writings and the quality of her work brought her to the attention of S. S. McClure.

Upon returning to the United States in 1894, she spent thirteen years as an associate editor of McClure's Magazine and then, as a member of a group, joined in purchasing and publishing The American Magazine. Over the years she was a frequent contributor of magazine articles. Between March, 1900, and February, 1918, some 116 articles from her pen appeared in magazines, and during her lifetime she wrote more than twenty books.4 These volumes ranged from a biography of Napoleon to extensive works on Abraham Lincoln, and others on Elbert H. Gary, Owen D. Young, and even a few juveniles.

After 1915, Miss Tarbell was free of editorial connections and commenced spending one or two months yearly as a lyceum lecturer; she had a wide variety of topics as a Chautauqua lecturer ranging from her work in France during World War I, the Paris Peace Conference and the League of Nations, to industrial leaders and industrial subjects.

Having lived a quarter of a century in the very heart of the world's first oil region, and with her father engaged in oil production and oil

3 Her mother, Esther McCullough, had been a district school teacher in Erie County, Pa., and had also taught in a private school at Poughkeepsie, N. Y. Her father attended the academy at Jamestown, N. Y. and had been a teacher. The opportunity to attend Titusville High School was one of the reasons Franklin Tarbell moved into the town.

4 Reis Library of Allegheny College, Meadville, Pa., has bibliographies of Tarbell articles and books.
tank building, she learned the language and problems of the oil fraternity from infancy. Her training and experience in research enabled her to handle this information in a competent manner. With her keen mind and camera-like eyes, Ida Tarbell had witnessed all that an oil environment could offer. She found that not all oil prospectors make a fortune; indeed, her father's partner in oil production failed and shot himself, and Franklin Tarbell had to pay off the remaining notes. The effort nearly ruined him.

Miss Tarbell witnessed the meteoric rise and fall of the fabulous oil centers of Pithole, Petroleum Centre, and later, of Cherry Grove in Warren County, and other northern fields. She personally knew lease men, drillers, pumpers, producers, teamsters, pipeliners, cooperers, brokers, refiners, and oil bankers; she knew their backgrounds, their families, and their problems in petroliana. More important, she recognized what could happen to oil producers when squeezed by too low a price for crude oil and too high a cost for transporting it and its finished products to market.

Generally unknown is the fact that part of the time during which she was preparing her Standard Oil history, Miss Tarbell had a desk in the Standard Oil office at 26 Broadway, New York City. She had ready access to Henry H. Rogers, one of the Standard's strongest executives, who made accessible records and reports unavailable elsewhere, and freely discussed points at issue. Mr. Rogers also arranged interviews with other Standard Oil leaders.

One reason for Rogers' aid was that in the early 1860's he had been a neighbor of the Tarbells near Rouseville, had known Franklin Tarbell personally, and, as a former independent oil man, could appreciate the problems they had encountered. Of course, the more immediate reason was his desire to present the company side of the picture in his own way to the investigating author.

During her lifetime, Miss Tarbell never lost her interest in the history of oil. In 1938, at the age of 81, she wrote an introduction for Paul H. Giddens' book The Birth of the Oil Industry. Her introduction, which covered thirty-nine pages, was found to be so clear and comprehensive that except for minor details it is unnecessary to read the rest of the book.5

Following Ida Tarbell’s death on January 7, 1944, her sister, Sarah Tarbell, informed Allegheny College that the Tarbell papers were to be divided between the college library and the Drake Well Museum at Titusville. In the fall of 1944 a representative from Allegheny journeyed to the Tarbell farm at Bethel, Connecticut, and roughly divided the papers into two groups: one pertaining to oil and another containing all the other documents. These were forwarded to the museum and the college.6

The papers sent to the museum remained in their shipping cartons untouched for ten years.7 Late in 1954, Thomas J. Garin, the present curator of the museum, in going through the Tarbell collection, came upon a manuscript of eighteen typed pages titled “Recent History of the Standard Oil Company, or The Oil Age.” The subtitle was “Chapter I—Twenty Years Ago.”

It was soon established that this chapter had never been published. One of the very first people to examine the paper was Dr. Frank Sur- face, a consultant for the Standard Oil Company of New Jersey. After a thorough examination of the article, as well as of other materials written about the same time by Miss Tarbell, he determined that after a twenty-year span Miss Tarbell had altered her views very little regarding Standard Oil.

But there can be no doubt that Ida Tarbell had long contemplated another volume on that company, for her autobiography carries these words:

> The chief piece of writing I planned to do I have never finished. That was bringing ‘The History of the Standard Oil Company’ up to date. . . . I talked two or three times with George Wickersham, the Attorney General who brought the suit, and he always cautioned me not to hurry, to let the decision have a chance to work out. . . . The time came, along in 1922, when Mr. Wickersham said, ‘You had better go at it.’8

Miss Tarbell explained that the book could no longer be found on the market—some said Standard Oil had purchased and destroyed the plates,—but this she did not believe.9 Her brother, Will, searched Philadelphia for a copy and failed to find one; antiquarian bookmen

6 Letter, Dr. Paul H. Giddens, St. Paul, Minn., to Thomas J. Garin, Drake Well Memorial Park, August 18, 1955.
7 In fairness it should be said that the influx of petroleum materials to the museum has been large, space too small, and help very limited. At this time a staff is needed to classify thoroughly the museum’s holdings.
doubted that they could locate any for him.\textsuperscript{10} Huey Long, running for Governor of Louisiana, wrote her that he would gladly pay $100 for a copy, since he had been unable to find one in his state.\textsuperscript{11}

A year after Mr. Wickersham had told her to “get at” the work, Miss Tarbell wrote her brother: “I am still too deep in the Lincoln to think about bringing the book up to date (SO), although I am more and more convinced that it should be done.”\textsuperscript{12}

McClure's Magazine was being revived just at this time, with S. S. McClure again in charge. He thought the revised story of Standard Oil would prove attractive to the public and would also greatly benefit the magazine. And so Miss Tarbell started her work, produced about twenty thousand words, and then found “McClure’s” had suspended for good. Needing funds, she dropped the Standard Oil work and turned to the story of Judge Elbert H. Gary. She had no regrets, however, for she wrote, “Repeating yourself is a doubtful practice, particularly for editor and writer. I feel now there was no hope of my recapturing the former interest in the former way. The result would have smelt a bit musty.”\textsuperscript{13}

That Miss Tarbell intended to drop the Standard Oil theme forever, following the cessation of McClure’s, is open to considerable doubt, for five years after she halted the work, she wrote Mr. A. W. Green of Chicago:

I am working on my third volume of 'History of the Standard Oil Company' but it has not been possible to set a day for its completion. It is a grave piece of work and I have had many other things on hand...\textsuperscript{14}

But replying a decade later to a letter of inquiry from Mrs. C. H. Attwater, Miami, Florida, she indicated that by this time she had probably given up further work on the Standard Oil Company. She wrote:

I regret to say there is no third volume. I undertook to write one a number of years ago and authorized my publisher to make a statement—and he did—that a third volume would soon follow the new edition he was bringing out. For one reason and another, chiefly the demands of my journalistic work, necessary to keep up, as well as not too rugged health, have kept me from finishing the book. I hope to do it someday.\textsuperscript{15}


\textsuperscript{11} Letter, Huey Long to Ida Tarbell, August 17, 1923. Allegheny College.


\textsuperscript{13} Tarbell All in the Day's Work, p 364.

\textsuperscript{14} Letter, Ida Tarbell to A. W. Green, May 16, 1927. Drake Well Museum.

\textsuperscript{15} Letter, Ida Tarbell to Mrs. C. H. Attwater, April 17, 1937. Drake Well Museum.
Late in 1955 a new volume on Standard Oil appeared. Written by Ralph and Muriel Hidy under the auspices of the Business History Foundation, Inc., and titled Pioneering in Big Business, the authors had access to every record owned by Standard Oil and thus had the opportunity to present a more accurate story of Standard Oil than ever before. The authors think Miss Tarbell’s Standard Oil work is biased in favor of the independent oil men, yet she receives due credit:

As a matter of fact, considering the circumstances, Miss Tarbell merits a good measure of praise. She put together, for the first time, a readable, coherent exposition of the main lines of development of the Standard Oil combination and of the leading controversies connected with its history.\(^16\)

The impact of Miss Tarbell’s Standard Oil history is explained in these words:

The book probably has been more widely purchased and its contents more widely disseminated throughout the general public than any other single work on American economic and business history.\(^17\)

The announcement and the initial chapter of what was to have been Miss Tarbell’s second look at Standard Oil, are printed here for the first time with the permission of the Drake Well Memorial Park Advisory Board, and Thomas J. Garin, curator of the Drake Well Museum. Appreciation for assistance and use of Miss Tarbell’s letters is also extended to Reis Library of Allegheny College, to Dr. Stanley S. Swartley, curator of the Tarbell Collection, and to Mr. Philip M. Benjamin, Librarian.

**THE OIL AGE**

*First Announcement\(^18\) of a Series of Articles by Ida M. Tarbell,*

*Author of “The History of the Standard Oil Company”*

In November of 1901 McClure’s Magazine began a series of articles on the “History of the Standard Oil Company.” These articles ran through nineteen numbers, tracing the development of the great concern from its organization in 1870 down to the year 1904. In the November 1924 number, McClure’s Magazine will pick up this story

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17 Hidy: *op. cit.* p 652.
18 The “Announcement” was not dated and apparently was never printed in *McClure’s*, which suspended publication in September 1924. It may have been issued in connection with the advertising of the new edition of the “History of the Standard Oil.” We have Miss Tarbell’s own words that it was actually prepared and used by Mr. McClure.
where it was dropped twenty years ago and will bring it down to the present day.

This new serial handles the most dramatic business evolution in the history of this country. It tells the story of oil, transformed from a product for the convenience and profit of men into an international necessity, a thing upon which the safety of nations depends. It takes a business which twenty years ago was the most perfect monopoly the country had seen and shows it by force of public opinion, the energy of a liberal minded President, Theodore Roosevelt, and the persistent determination of thousands of individuals to carry on independent business, legally dissolved into thirty-three companies. It traces this dissolution for years ineffective, the momentum and ability of the company as well as the necessities of trade carrying it ahead on old lines until gradually the spirit of freedom injected into the subsidiaries and the more active outside competition made possible by the legal dissolution produced what we have today, a crumbling monopoly.

The story shows how in the twenty years covered, the world’s demand for oil has grown in a startling way through the invention and development of the automobile and the application of the oil burning engine to the navies of nations. It tells how, contemporaneously with the demand, Nature has answered the need, and how all over the Southwest of this country—Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, California, Wyoming—great oil fields, which fifty years ago were hardly suspected, have poured forth their riches. It points out how foreign fields have been opened and how governments, under the imperative demand of oil supply for the ships of their navies, have entered into a struggle to control for themselves these new reservoirs.

It shows the greatest war of all time fought by oil and its products as truly as by powder. The story of how nations supplied themselves during the Great War with the vast quantities of oil products essential for their life is one of vivid interest, and one in which the oil industries of this country, led by the ability of the Standard Oil Company, played a splendid and generous part.

The story includes many strange tales of oil pioneers, their victories and their failures. It tells of the advances in applying science, particularly geology and chemistry, to the industry, and the strides that have been made in organizing and perfecting methods of oil production, refining, transportation and marketing. It covers the story of our Government’s handling of oil lands, the efforts to secure oil reserves providing
for the future of our navy, its handling of the Osage oil fields—the most perfect example of the possibility of government and private interests cooperating in handling a natural resource that we have to show. It takes up the raids and scandals, the daring speculations and the ruthless assaults which have characterized the industry in this period as well as in the earlier years and which by their boldness and rascality have too often obscured the courage, intelligence and steadiness which have brought this great industry to the place it occupies in this country and in the world.

We believe that this story of a period which may be called the Oil Age throws light on both the strength and the weakness of present day business operations and gives valuable suggestions on points where reform and control are needed while at the same time it furnishes a narrative of contemporary industrial life picturesque, human and dramatic.

RECENT HISTORY OF THE STANDARD OIL COMPANY
OR THE OIL AGE 19

BY IDA M. TARBELL

Chapter I

Twenty Years Ago

Dropping back twenty years in one’s thinking and activities and from that point looking over what has happened is always an illuminating and sometimes a startling experience. How often you were wrong, even though sometimes right! How little you saw of what was coming! And yet how clearly all that has happened is written on that old page!

Twenty years ago I wrote for this very magazine a series of articles dealing with the history of oil and its handling as we had known it in these United States: it was the story of how this oil had come to be practically the property of a single concern, the Standard Oil Company. Twenty years have passed and powerful as that great monopoly of 1904 still is, its autocracy is broken and with that breaking have gone forces the gathering of which can be easily enough read on the old page.

19 This is a new look at a subject which was once the theme of national conversation and even national politics. It deserves the light of day because it reveals the thinking of this distinguished daughter of Western Pennsylvania twenty years after her original history was written. It also shows the events she regarded as important in what had taken place in that field.
through the magnifying glass of twenty years, but of which I at least saw then not a trace!

More startling that the steady distribution of control over American oil which the twenty years has finally made an obvious actuality, is the rank among the world’s natural resources which oil holds today compared to that in 1904. Then it was to be sure a tremendous money-maker and an important civilizer carrying light where there had been none—greasing wheels which otherwise could not have been greased—but today!—why today oil is a necessity of governments—an element in national defense as essential as ships and guns. Rulers, prime ministers, diplomats struggle to control its sources. Oil has become one of those fatal things over which men even go to war!

And how has this come about? Drop back to 1904 and see what was doing then. Never before in its almost fifty years of conscious life had oil reached so high and so jagged a peak. You will find things happening on that peak which had never happened before—things very upsetting to the rank and file of Oildom, and you will find the beginnings of things to which the same rank and file gave little or no attention though they were destined to become still more upsetting.

First and most spectacular was the swing in its geography. Up to now there had been a fairly fixed Oil Belt in the United States. Just as oranges belonged to Florida and Southern California, copper to Montana and Michigan—just as there was a wheat belt and a corn belt, so oil belonged in north-western Pennsylvania and its adjacent territory. But in this year 1904 for the first time the oil belt moved from the east to the west of the Mississippi. In Texas in this year more than 22,000,000 barrels had been produced; in California something like 30,000,000 barrels, including one gusher which had started off at 10,000 barrels a day!

It was a disturbance to the oilman’s fixed geographical notions which bewildered and alarmed him. To be sure, for many years he had known that there was oil in the Midwest, on the Pacific slope, but that it could ever be a rival in quantity with oil regions he had developed was only just dawning upon him. Yet it was in the main stragglers from his own world that had brought about the revolution. They were men against whom luck may have turned in the old fields, or for whose adventurous spirits the spaces to be tapped had become too narrow or the business too settled, and so they had gone forth into far wild places, peering and nosing for the black seepages, the salt springs, the sulphur, the
smell of natural gas, the streaks of asphalt along the bottom or sides of streams which they knew to mean veins or pools of oil somewhere below the surface.

The great Union Oil Company of California whose 10,000-barrel gusher I have already noticed as an event of our year was the creation of a man from the Pennsylvania oil fields, Lyman Stewart, known to every old timer. Stewart had gone to California in the 80s and showed his faith in what he saw by staying, leasing and drilling far and wide. He opened famous fields. He organized a company which was to take a brilliant hand in the great oil game to be played in the future on the Pacific coast, but now the important thing to those who knew him in Pennsylvania was that he had "struck a 10,000-barrel well"!

It was the same in the Midwest. Pennsylvania oil men led the wildcatting. Take this big Texas production—22,000,000 barrels this year as I have noted. The leaders in that field were a famous pair, Guffy and Galey—men who were not afraid to lease a million untried acres and stick to them through dry hole after dry hole. It was oil or bust with them always, and in Texas their daring had had rich reward for it was Guffy and Galey that had brought in one of the greatest wells the world had seen at that date, the Lucas well (named from the man who started it) of the Spindletop pool at Beaumont, Texas. The Lucas well was so wild and so strong that she flowed 500,000 barrels before she could be shut in!

It was the Oil Region that was drilling the West, so Men in Pennsylvania said with both pride and jealousy, but the Oil Region was to learn that it no more had a monopoly in men than in oil. The "natives" in California, Texas, Kansas, Oklahoma were taking a hand in something besides leasing their lands. They were entering every department of the business—entering wherever they could get an opening. For instance, there was a drug clerk in Independence, Kansas—young, eager, keen on oil geology, who in this year 1904 had just left the position for which he had prepared at the State University and begun buying and selling oil leases at twenty-five cents or thereabouts an acre. But the drug clerk was to make himself an international figure in the next twenty years, as well as setting the oil business of his own country on its head several times and making it temporarily at least a national scandal. His name was Sinclair—Harry F. Sinclair.

It was the same everywhere. Men were breaking in from the most unexpected quarters. A down and out mining prospector, slumped in
discouragement before the door of a cheap hotel in Los Angeles, along in the 90s saw a cart passing, loaded with curious black earth. He was quick to note the unusual in soils and stopped the cart driver, fingered the stuff, knew it meant oil, found where it came from, quickly decided to drill, and scratching together the dollars necessary soon had opened the prolific Los Angeles field, and had begun like Stewart of the Oil Regions to lease other lands, to form a company, and like Stewart to become a great power in the west coast development. Later like Sinclair he was to become a national and international oil figure. His name was Doheny—E. L. Doheny.

These persistent and daring wildcatters had done more than loose unheard of floods of oil on a scared and fluttering market—they had raised a grist of new problems, particularly for the government of the United States. Much of the new territory opened by the adventurers was on the public domain—not a little of it Indian lands subject to government control. The first scent of oil and a prospector rushed in in a wild scramble for acreage. Concealing his findings he took up tens upon tens of thousands of acres, all he could get. Michael Cudahy, the meat packer, once had 200,000 acres leased in and around the present city of Bartlesville, Okla. Guffy and Galey had a lease of a million acres running from the Indian Territory northeast to the Missouri line, and in 1896 “an ambitious Easterner secured from Bigheart, Chief of the Osages, a ten years' blanket oil and gas lease on the whole nation—1,500,000 acres.”

The government promptly took a hand in the Indian leasing, cutting the amount one man or group could take to 640 acres. Poor Mr. Cudahy had to give up 199,360 of his 200,000 and it left him with but a single well!

Not only was the oil man greedy of acres; he was impatient of neighbors. He wanted no one loitering about with cattle and sheep and crops and such slow money-makers. He pestered congress until four years before our time, 1900, a policy of withdrawals of possible oil bearing lands from agricultural filing was begun. In three years more than twenty great tracts in California, Oregon, and Wyoming were reserved for oil men only.

“The man with the hoe” is not slow in this country to voice his complaints. He did so now and in the interest of peace certain tracts were restored—but others were withdrawn. It was the inauguration of the policy to which the United States Navy was years later to appeal
in its efforts to secure a future oil reserve for its uses; an appeal to be met with as strenuous resistance from the oil men as theirs was now meeting from tillers of the soil!

While the government was wrestling with the problem the fever for oil had arrived, those who had found oil were asking themselves what they would do with it—or most of it. Now that they had it, the only consolidation the Pennsylvania man had indeed was that the new production was of a poor grade—"little better than tar"—an asphalt base, too thick to run unaided through a pipe line, low in gravity, poor in illuminants. He resented the fact that it should disturb his market by a cent. It was not a competitor, he claimed, and yet he had an uneasy reserve. You could never tell what the Standard Oil Company might not make of a thing you called useless. Had he not sold them one great oil field for a song believing its product unuseable, only to find after he had sacrificed what had cost him years of struggle that they had developed a process for removing the objectionable quality in the crude and kept it secret until they had secured all his holdings. Who could tell what they might not be able to do with this unpromising Western crude.

But the Eastern oil man measured the value of petroleum in those days by the amount of luminants and lubricants it would yield—and was willing to destroy the residuum. The Westerner was little concerned that the bulk of his oil was poor in light-giving and friction-lessening qualities. It was enough for him that it was a powerful heat-maker. His dream was to make it the fuel of the future. The Easterner might pooh-pooh at the heavy black stuff he was taking from the earth but once find a way to use it in the engines of the world and he would sing another song.

Strange how running ahead of great outpourings of Nature there have always been experimenters, inventors, who, when the day of discovery comes, have something to offer. For years and years, ever since the Oil Belt had opened, indeed, men had talked about oil as a fuel, and there had been much experimenting—but it was too valuable and was needed more for other purposes. Nevertheless a few, the experts of 1904, were beginning to talk of one Rudolph Diesel, a Bavarian, and what he called a Rational Heat Motor. He used petroleum for it—any petroleum—from the most perfect distillate to the black residuum. Men had already crossed the Atlantic to see what Rudolph Diesel had done and there were those in the inner circle who were saying in this year
of ours what James Watt had done for the 19th century Rudolph Diesel had done for the 20th; as the one had given his name to the Steam Age so would the other to the Oil Age.

This wise, simple, cultivated Bavarian headed an industrial revolution. What a pity that he should have disappeared so suddenly and mysteriously from sight! In October of 1913 it was reported that he committed suicide in crossing from Amsterdam to a British port. He was on his way, so it was said, to consult an English firm which was to handle a new development of his engine—something for submarines. Four years later, in 1917, when fury and hate were busy exploiting suspicions, Dr. Rudolph Diesel's disappearance was widely advertised in this country as murder—murder by the German government, bent on keeping from the English any knowledge of his new invention. The report has been denied, and though I have made wide inquiry in this country among those of his profession, I have been unable to get any satisfactory answer as to what really became of the man.

But it was not Dr. Diesel's engine that the great majority of those who talked of oil as a fuel were considering in 1904—it was something much simpler. These oil burners that inventors had been for years pestering men to test out in their steam boilers, what about them? That was a matter of tremendous importance out in California and Texas. It seemed so important to Mr. E. L. Doheny that he busied himself with an oil burner for a locomotive. Certain Western railroads were experimenting—successfully it was said—with this liquid fuel, as were ship owners along the Pacific coast, hard put to it to get coal. In this year 1904 a real sensation of the port of New York was the arrival there of the steamship Nebraska which had traveled 12,745 miles from San Francisco to New York on oil!—and California oil! She was going back on oil—Texas oil! Curious crowds flocked to see her. The Nebraska showed her boilers clean as a whistle—her books showed that the run had cost hardly two-thirds of the coal she would have burned and that labor cost had been halved. Moreover, the conditions under which labor was done were vastly more tolerable. Then, too, cargo space had been saved. It was not surprising that any dangers or disadvantages that had developed were forgotten with such a showing.

"Now," said the oil producers of California and Texas, "let us suppose that all the vessels on our coast burn oil, this 30,000,000 barrels a year that California is producing, this 22,000,000 from Texas may then find a market." It was said that so possible did this seem to certain
coal men of the Northwest that they closed their mines! But the cautious said, "These are only freak developments. They won't last. You will have to reconvert your boilers."

But it was not only progressive private ship owners that were experimenting with oil at this time. The United States Navy was interested. It had long kept a sharp eye on the results the British Admiralty was getting from oil fuel on torpedo boats; it had studied the experiences of private ships like the *Nebraska* and in 1901 it began tests of its own with the avowed purpose of fixing for all time the relative value of coal and liquid fuel for naval purposes. What was called the Liquid Fuel Board was established in the engineering department of our Navy, and under Rear Admiral George W. Melville, a series of tests running over two years was made by officers and men, in co-operation with various civilians, interested purely in the problem, not in gain for themselves.

The report of this work came out in our year 1904, and was declared by experts to be "one of the most extended and careful series of tests ever conducted either under government or corporate auspices." One valuable feature of the Melville report is the observation of a naval officer on the way oil behaved as a fuel on a 7,000 mile voyage of the *Mauposa* of San Francisco. The company had given him every facility of observation and permitted the publication of his findings in the government report, although they said that in doing it they were giving to their competitors information which had cost them at least $50,000!

The Melville report left little doubt about the advantages of oil over coal as a fuel for ships. Even the serious difficulty of providing a satisfactory and safe structural arrangement for carrying an adequate supply did not seem to the observers insurmountable. There was, however, in Rear Admiral Melville's judgment, a final reason for declaring that oil could never be adopted as a standard naval fuel: the "available supply of the world's production of crude petroleum that could be used for fuel would not meet over three per cent of the world's demand for coal and other combustibles." Nevertheless, he advised that at least one vessel, fitted to burn liquid fuel exclusively, be kept on the Pacific coast. "For," he warned, "it may be in the Pacific rather than on the Atlantic where our greatest naval battles of the future will be fought. The coal of that coast is of inferior quality. The time may come when command of the sea will depend quite as much upon an adequate reserve of fuel as upon a reserve of ships. Therefore, while there is not enough oil
to justify adopting it as a naval fuel, enough could probably be obtained in an emergency to help out.” That is about what the report amounted to.

There you have it. Lack of faith in the bowels of the globe, those bowels that never yet have failed us. The Melville report of 1904 settled it for even the hitherto hopeful Army and Navy Journal, which commented: “No doubt England will now be checked in her experiments.”

But the editor did not know England. It was only a short time before he was obliged to say, rather reproachfully: “Notwithstanding the conclusions reached by engineering experts of the United States after protracted experiments that the uncertainty of the natural supply of crude petroleum makes it inadvisable to adopt that commodity for fuel purposes on warships the British naval authorities have decided to install apparatus for the use of oil fuel on all battleships of the Atlantic Fleet as well as on those of the new King Edward VII class.”

But if the British Admiralty did not accept all of the conclusions of the Melville report in 1904, it never failed to recognize it. Five years later when a representative of our Navy was sent to Great Britain to see what they were doing in the way of engineering development he was told by officials that our Liquid Fuel Board report was an “Admiralty Bible!”

But there was another demand beginning to show itself at this moment—a demand not for crude and heavy oil, such as that of the West but for whatever light products might be secured from those oils—naptha and gasoline. A new means of road transportation had come, and though many wise people were saying that it had about reached its limit, being of course like the bicycle more or less of a craze, good only for sport, there were others who said, No, we have by no means seen the end of the new development. It was the automobile—the automobile still without a self-starter, still put up in winter, which had just made its first trip across the continent. This trip had taken many weeks, and the hardy trans-continental pioneers were looked upon with something of the same wonder we accord the men that are now trying to climb Everest or fly around the world!

However, there were those who were prophesying that we were going to see an automobile which would be something more than a plaything for sportsmen and millionaires—there was a man in Detroit, Michigan, saying so. For a number of years this man had made a
nuisance of himself in the streets of the town—a curious, abstracted individual, risking his own and other people's lives experimenting with a “gasoline buggy.” Henry Ford was his name. At first he had tried for speed like the rest and got it; his strange creation shrieking like a maniac had left the fastest known machines a half-mile behind on the Detroit race track. But now he was working for utility. “Crazy,” “unpractical,” builders said, but he showed his faith by building in 1904, 1708 of his utility cars ($250 for runabouts, $100 extra for tonneau!”) He leaned to another “crazy” notion—ONE model. Now—twenty years after—there seems to have been something in Henry Ford's head than was believed for this year (1924) he will turn out fully twenty times as many of this “one model” in a single day as he did in the three hundred working days of 1904!

It was clear even then to reflective oil men east and west that if Henry Ford and others should make a practical car it would take up a good many barrels a year of what they spoke of as “overproduction.”

But it was not with Doheny and Stewart in California or Guffy and Galey at Spindletown, or Rudolph Diesel in Munich or Admiral Melville in Washington or Henry Ford in Detroit the average man thought in 1904 when oil was mentioned. He was excited neither over the Western outpouring nor the demands for it. What did disturb him was that, as far as he could see, whatever the wealth coming from the lavishness of Nature and the inventiveness of the human mind, it was sure to be centered in one small group of men. Let the earth be as generous as she would, man as marvelous as he could; it would all in the end redound to the increase of the power of those who ruled Oildom, of that Perfect Monopoly, the concern known as the Standard Oil Company, or as the crowd preferred to put it, the man who had made the Standard Oil Company, John D. Rockefeller. He was the one who was going to profit from all this wealth! What was not his at the start was sure to be his at the end—that was the grim conclusion of the day. And so, for the man in the street, all this amazing new development was spoiled. Instead of reflecting upon the marvel of the earth and the wonder of men's brains he fretted and fumed because of his conviction that it was not for the good of all but for the good of the few.

His indignation would have been less pronounced, no doubt, if it had not been that he saw every industry in the country rapidly doing or trying to do just what the Standard Oil Company had so successfully done—that is, secure control in its particular field. In this year where
we are, an explanatory and authentic tabulation and classification of the trusts of the country was first published. It showed 450 of them including "lesser" and "greater"—450 with a capitalization of over twenty billions of dollars and this whole flock interwoven and interlocked: and in their interlocking no concern was so strong and far reaching as this same Standard Oil Company.

The average man of 1904 felt he was being swallowed—would be swallowed unless—unless "T. R." won out—for in this year "T. R." Theodore Roosevelt, then President of the United States, was in the thick of the most exciting and no doubt to him enjoyable fight of his life.

It was no fresh fight. Theodore Roosevelt's challenge of the trust had been given years before when as governor of New York he had so attacked sundry and various "interests" for what he believed to be operations contrary to the public good that these same interests and certain leaders of his party had decided to sidetrack him by making him vice-president—a political manoeuvre which up to this time had been comparatively successful. He had resisted valiantly—he'd rather be anything, he said, "a professor of history!"—but they put him away, and six months after his supposed interment, the death of William McKinley put him at the head of the nation.

Roosevelt was quick to prove that being president meant no slackening of his anti-trust activities. However he did repeatedly insist that that he was not after "Big Business" because it was big. He was continually reiterating his lack of sympathy with those people who confused size and monopoly. What he proposed to do, he explained again and again, was to find out what concerns were not working in harmony with accepted Democratic and ethical principles and then to punish them according to laws already on the statute books, and no honest man or corporation could object to that!

In order to get the information needed to settle the first point Mr. Roosevelt asked Congress for a Department of Commerce in which there should be a Bureau of Corporations with full power to investigate a suspected or complained of trust.

In the meantime he took his first chance to test certain clauses in the Sherman anti-trust law—on the books since 1890 but so far sterile. All the courts had done under that law, Roosevelt said in later life, seemed to prove them zealous in securing the rights of the very men who were most competent to take care of themselves.

Here he was referring to the Knight case in which the device of
buying up the stock of various companies and consolidating them into a holding concern was declared by the courts not to be commerce and therefore not to be touched by the Sherman law. Roosevelt did not think the decision common sense. He thought, as he said later, that it was as necessary to reverse it in the interest of the public against monopoly and privilege as it had been to reverse the decision in the Dred Scott case in the interest of the people against slavery and privilege. Lawyers had told him it couldn't be done, but he found he had an attorney-general, Philander Knox, that was willing to try it. The upshot was that five months after he had succeeded to the presidency, the country was electrified by the announcement—news even to all the members of Mr. Roosevelt's cabinet, but Mr. Knox—that the Government was bringing suit under the Sherman law against the Northern Securities Company—a recent union or merger of several railways of the Northwest.

Not since Mr. Cleveland put out his Venezuela letter had a president so energized the country. The business world raged and threatened. Mr. John Pierpont Morgan whose banking house had financed the Northern Securities Company hastened to Washington where, according to Joseph Bishop, Mr. Roosevelt's biographer, the following conversation took place:

20 And the suit went on—also the business world's harsh criticisms of Roosevelt!

While the Northern Securities case was in the courts a fight on the proposed Department of Commerce now before

21 and the leader of this opposition was the Standard Oil Company—a fact which made the public in general the more sure it was desirable! Ironically enough it was the Standard's opposition bunglingly over done that hastened the passage of the measure. They had sent many private letters and telegrams of protest to members of Congress as they had a right to do. Some of them fell into Roosevelt's hands. He published them—and the bill went through in a hurry! And everybody said that

20 This omission of material is presented exactly as found in the original Tarbell manuscript.
21 Ibid.
T. R. would not be running true to form as he did not now turn his big new gun against the Standard itself, which had led in the fight against his casting such a weapon.

But the Bureau had to be organized before there could be effective work, and, as so often happens in war, the first open hostility did not come from the main army. It came now from a State—a State which has a reputation for acting promptly and noisily whenever she thinks her rights challenged—the State of Kansas.

Not the least event of importance in oil in the year 1904 was the rising of Kansas against the Standard Oil Company. Years before, in the oil regions of Pennsylvania, men had risen at various times against the concern—generally to be laid low. To be sure, there were certain practical, though comparatively small results from these outbreaks, but it had been years now since a whole community had had the spirit to get up and protest.

They started well in Kansas in 1904. Their chief interpreter and prophet the man who had always shown us much of the best—and some of the worst—of the soul of the State, William Allen White, said about this time, the question being up as to whether crude oil or water from the spring from which John Brown had slaked his thirst was the more appropriate for Christening the battleship Kansas, that while both suggestions were good, the really characteristic liquid to use was vitriol.

"Kansas," said Mr. White, "always had her heart filled with vitriol, ready to pour on those she happens to hate for good and sufficient reasons."

While Mr. Roosevelt was waiting for his Bureau of Corporations to get into the running, Kansas was pouring vitriol on the Standard Oil Company, and whether she had, as her prophet says, "good and sufficient reasons" is what we shall examine in our next chapter.