STUART P. SHERMAN AND PAUL ELMER MORE

Correspondence, edited by Jacob Zeitlin

(The letters that follow throw light on the central experience of Stuart Sherman's career: his early adherence to the views of Irving Babbitt and Paul Elmer More, and his gradual shift to a position nearer that of their "adversaries". It becomes clear that at the very beginning, when Sherman was fresh from Professor Babbitt's seminars and actively under the tutelage of Mr. More, the differences existed which were to cause the later divergence. This correspondence will appear in "The Life and Letters of Stuart P. Sherman", edited by Jacob Zeitlin and Homer Woodbridge.—The Editor.)

IN FOLLOWING the track of Stuart Sherman's writing one can never lose sight of the dominance in it of a note of faith in the energetic, life-giving powers, of a persistent sympathy with the creative forces which lead to joyous realization. This is the note of his early and enduring enthusiasm for Stevenson; it is the note on which he brings to a close an unpublished essay on Walter Pater, in whom he found a gospel "in accord with an harmonious relation of mind and body, and with a joyous sense of the fullness of life". In his first important piece of criticism he had stated the problems of contemporary literature in balanced terms which still gave to the active forces at least as much importance as to the restrictive. "How to give pleasure without corrupting the heart, and how to give wisdom without chilling it. How to bring into play the great passions of men without unchaining the beast. How to believe in Darwin and the dignity of man. How to believe in the nerves without paralyzing the nerve of action. How to recognize the weakness of man and not forget his heroism. How to see his acts and believe in his intentions. How to renounce his superstitions and retain his faith. How to rebuke without despising him. How to reform society without rebelling against it. How to laugh at its follies without contempt. How to believe that pain is invincible and joy is invincible, too. How to believe that evil is fleeing forever before good, but will never be overtaken and slain. How to look back upon a thousand defeats, and yet cling to the fighting hope." (*Nation,* June 3, 1909.)

The quality of this enthusiasm was bound to undergo some modification when it came in direct contact with the cool, chastening intellect of Paul Elmer More, who became the editor of the *Nation* in 1909 after serving for several years as its literary editor. Sherman admired in Mr. More a critic of wide learning, definite philosophical vision, secure judgment and imperturbable temper, and an editor who inspired his contributors to say the best that was in them. He expressed the feeling that in having him for an audience one had enough, and that if one had his approval one needed no other. The desire to please was all the greater because of the freedom from editorial pressure. Mr. More exacted no conformity of opinion from his writers. Once they had gained his confidence sufficiently to be enlisted among his regular contributors,

they were at liberty to utter their individual views. An editor of this type exerts his influence by virtue of his intellectual force alone, and there is no doubt that Sherman's thinking on literary and social questions was for a number of years deeply colored by his sincere respect for the character and point of view of Mr. More. But, since he could not deliberately accommodate his views and temperament to another's in all important respects, there appear in his utterances of these years a tendency to waver and an inconsistency for which his editor was quick to chide him.

Probably the only essay of Sherman's which Mr. More ever rejected was one on "Rousseau and the Return to Nature". This was by way of being a defense of Rousseau against those critics, American and French, who represent his teaching as an attack on civilization and organized society. Sherman argued that Rousseau's aim was a social system in conformity with nature as it was conceived by his individual reason, that his gospel of the state called for "rational legislation in levelling artificial and hereditary inequalities of rank and power . . . the reduction of anarchy and crime by the substitution in organized society of light and reason for routine force", and "the triumph in the individual of a spirit of obedience to self-imposed law over blind instinct". He further maintained that the reason for Rousseau's tremendous influence was that in advocating a "return to nature" he was in accord with the master spirit of his own time and of our time, and that the only effective way to criticize him was to show that he did not accomplish what he set out to perform—this being the line followed by Burke, Johnson and Reynolds.

Ostensibly this article was written in the interest of critical fairness to the ideas of Rousseau. Actually one cannot fail to observe in it a certain sympathy with these ideas, with the democratic aspirations and the passion of social reform. The coöperation of Rousseau with the temper of his age is also, in Sherman's view, evidence of some positive virtue. To Mr. More the ideas in the essay did not seem sufficiently clarified by reflection, and he courteously asked Sherman to reconsider the matter. Sherman replied as follows:

Urbana, Illinois,
Feb. 14, 1912

My dear More:

The truculent jest with which you preface your rejection of my article rests upon a common confusion of ideas. You suggest that my manuscript, on reaching Urbana, returned to nature. On the contrary, sir, it returned to reason!

Heine has a poem somewhere in which he says that a lady-love who bids him good-bye and farewell forever in a letter twelve pages long does not really mean what she is saying. It is not in twelve pages that a disillusioned lady gives the *coup de grâce*. You, who are accustomed, like Richard III, to dispose of heads in two lines before you dine, seem to acknowledge a certain toughness or knottiness in the object of your axe in hacking so long at my prostrate trunk.

I take that back. Two motives determined the length of your reply. One merely humanitarian —to let me down easily. The other—a feeling that I had wandered into a very deep labyrinth of error from which I ought even at considerable pains to be extricated.

As the mail-carrier brought your letter to the door I happened to be reading what that eminent illustration of temperamental "Rousseauism," G. Moore, says of Arthur Symons' attitude toward editors. Whenever a manuscript was returned to Symons, says mine author, he was firmly persuaded that the editor was an idiot. I mention the fact to mark my difference from the Rousseauists. I have no such feelings about editors. I believe them all to be inscrutably wise like Providence.

All this is by way of reply to your aspersion of Urbana.

I was not quite certain whether your letter was intended as a justification of Gummere's article or as a quite independent criticism of mine. If the latter, then I think there is very little fundamental disagreement between us—however poorly I set forth my own ideas on the

subject in question, and even though at one point you seem to declare that I have abdicated common sense. But if your letter was intended to justify Gummere, I am bound to say that I do not think you have met my objections. I intentionally narrowed the discussion in the first half of the paper to controverting one specific proposition of Gummere's to the effect that Rousseauism means that "man will be good again if he be set free from communal bonds." I ask flatly where Rousseau teaches that, and I fail to see that you have answered the question. I show that he insists progressively upon the opposite of that theory in his important political treatises—in the *Arts and Sciences*, the *Inequality*, the *Social Contract*, the *Government of Poland*, and in the *Letter to M. Beaumont*. And I cannot see that you have invalidated that evidence. It seems to me that this is a perfectly definite question, not involved with any theories concerning the infra-and-supra-rational intuition, and capable of a perfectly definite answer. I regard Professor Gummere's utterance on this point as a "vulgar error." I hear it every day from people who have never read a page of Rousseau. And I should like to know whether it can be entertained by those who are really acquainted with his works. You are to understand that I ask this question because I cannot see that you have committed yourself on this particular point.

In the second part of my article, still intending to restrict myself to Rousseau's specific *political* doctrines, I argue that the return to nature which he advocates in political institutions is practically identical with a return to reason. I then contend that this "reason" was ably criticized by the Englishmen as inadequate to grasp the laws of nature. I further add that it is too little "instinctive," according to their view; and this statement could be justified by a dozen passages in Burke. And finally, I say that Burke believes there is a wisdom recognizable in the processes of nature which produces social and political institutions superior to anything that pure intellect can contrive. Rousseau, he maintains, and other rationalists, French and English, lack insight into this wisdom of nature which is above reason. Their projects are unsound because they are contrary to nature. They oppose the something not ourselves which makes for righteousness. How is this "something not ourselves" perceived? Burke says by "instinct". Intellect is there as a unifying center of his wisdom but it does not exclude the more or less unconscious "life" of which it is a part; which penetrates it; and which it is ever seeking to penetrate more deeply. Rousseau's reason in his political discourses, which alone Burke considers, *does* exclude the circumambient "life"; it is therefore abstract, unnatural. The opposition here, I maintain, is not between the instinct which is below the reason and the instinct (or if you please the "insight") that is above the reason. It is simply between abstract *reason* and the instinct which is above the reason.

It is precisely at that point, as it appears to my most careful consideration, that your letter confuses the issue by broadening the question. You drop the specific inquiry concerning the opposition between the political philosophy of Burke and that of Rousseau, and substitute a general comparison of the total significance of the two men. I cannot help feeling, in short, that you fall into the trap—part way into the trap, which I tried to uncover and keep clear of. I mean you have poured Rousseau's ideas and his emotions all into one melting pot. To my notion, the opposition between them is fundamental. The relation between them is somewhat analogous to that between the oyster and its shell. Inside all is pulpy, mobile, expansive. Outside, all is hard, fixed, and impenetrable. It is peculiar that a thing so hard should come out of a thing so soft—that, as I said before, a man should have projected a rigid political system that would have been intolerable to his own temperament.

The question is whether Rousseau does return to his own temperament (which we admit was unique) in his political theorizing. My position is that he does not; that he rather turns against it in behalf of that abstract type of reasoning in which he was not unique. In a criticism of this abstract reasoning, I am sure that Johnson's idea of "experience," Burke's idea of "instinct," and Reynolds' idea of "habitual reason" are all pertinent. Nor am I entirely persuaded that Bergson's figurative description of the place of pure intellect had not the slight illustrative value which I attached to it; but I don't stand upon this, and I doubtless made a mistake in including an author from whose writ-

ings—legitimately or not—such inferences can be drawn as that of Sorel.

The point is that with my views of the purely rationalistic character of Rousseau's *political theory* I did not consider it in any way necessary to enter upon a discussion of the difference between the "infra-rational intuition" and the intuition that is above the reason. If I had been discussing Rousseau's total significance, if I had been discussing the *Reveries,* the *Nouvelle Héloïse,* the *Emile,* the *Confessions,* the case would have been very different. The emotional, the temperamental, the instinctive Rousseau cannot be avoided there. If they had been my theme, I should hasten to agree with you that "to imply that Burke and Reynolds stood for instinct and that Rousseau stood for reason is to abdicate common sense." There, we are in the presence of that emotional expansiveness, indefinite and dangerous, and essentially antagonistic to both law and reason. But this is the side of Rousseau that Gummere represented. This is the side from which, as I said myself, probably far the greatest number of "Rousseauists" have issued. But was not there another side?—Rousseau the abstract reasoner who said a multitude of semi-nefarious things about democracy and the liberty of the law? And did not Professor Gummere, and do not many others who ought to know better, absolutely misrepresent what he said?

I am not a "Rousseauist" of either side. I believe that his emotional and his rationalistic tendencies both need to be criticized and opposed constantly to-day. But it does seem to me in the interest of sound criticism that professors who write on these things should distinguish between what he *advocated* and what he *confessed.*

All this merely by way of appendix to my former article, which I really did not see how you could print, and which I should have directed as a personal letter to you if it had not been so long. I don't wish to engage you in a controversy so complex as this might easily become, but I should be glad to know whether I have in these four pages done anything to clear me of the terrible imputation laid upon my common sense.

Very truly yours,
STUART P. SHERMAN.

To this Mr. More reassuringly replied, "Really, you know, I regard you as a fairly sound member of society, only a bit young, and sometimes a trifle alarming to one of my bald habit of mind".

Alluding to the altercation again a few weeks later Sherman indulges in some banter in which one may excusably catch a faint suggestion of sober truth:

In Paradise [he writes] I am sure that what seems to mortal eyes my heterodoxy is seen as orthodoxy on a more subtle ground. And yet at times I cannot help considering what a seductive, impressionistic, temperamental pen is lost to some non-existent "progressive" journal believing in Socialism, Anarchism, Egoism, Cosmopolitanism, and Neo-Romanticism—lost by my early conversion to Orthodoxy, by my membership in the academic order, and by my adherence to your Episcopalian journal!—not to speak of my hostages to fortune and landholding.

After almost a year's interruption, the flow of Sherman's reviews to the *Nation* had been resumed, not perhaps with the earlier rapidity but with all of the earlier force. He had set a sufficiently high standard with his essays on Meredith, Anatole France and Thomas Campion. To reappear with a long discussion of Alfred Austin was a little to endanger the seriousness of his critical position, even though he managed to elicit some amusement from the self-satisfied poet laureate. He fully atoned, however, in the following year, with the essays on George Moore and John Synge. Here he was pursuing his favorite foes—estheticism and exoticism exposing skilfully and brilliantly the unhealthy spots in contemporary literature, penetrating as it were to the diseased marrow of great reputations. Here he was on common ground with Mr. More and Professor Babbitt, both of whom applauded his well-directed shafts. From the latter the essay on Moore brought one of his infrequent bits of commendation: "The critical gift you are developing strikes me as just the kind that is needed in the country and at the present time. I am beginning however to

look on you as a very dangerous man (*fœnum habet in cornu!*) and am going to do my best to keep on good terms with you". Some of the compliments that Sherman received on this occasion he swallowed with a rather wry mouth, particularly those that came from official Catholic sources. He was not at all comfortable with these allies. "I wish," he wrote ruefully to Mr. More, "that Babbitt could in some way learn of this last, for at our latest meeting he still insisted that I showed the unintelligent 'brooding eye' of the Romanticist. We are 'coming on!'" He was both amused and nettled at being dubbed an "Anglo-Saxon ethicist" by a professor of the University of Pennsylvania. The fact was that he felt keenly the artistry and the literary seductiveness of these writers and did not enjoy being charged with bigoted blindness. Replying to an admirer, he says: "The great danger of attacking the creature [esthetic naturalism] is that if you resist his infinite seductive graces and say a word for character, you soon get the name of a callous flamen bleeding art on the hoary altar of morals, and then you are unheeded by those whom you wish to reach".

It is clear that Sherman was not satisfied with the one-sided mode of presentation which writing for the *Nation* imposed upon him. What he would have liked to do may perhaps be fairly inferred from his approving description of the procedure of a certain French critic, M. Victor Giraud:

> M. Giraud represents that virile and wholehearted criticism which the stricter Hedonic sect assures us is not "literary". Primarily a critic of ideas, his judgment steadily cuts through the book into the life beneath the book. In his court, the æsthetic is only one of many vital questions. His procedure, which is sufficiently systematic, is somewhat as follows: he exposes, first, the origins of a talent in native temperament and external influences; he proceeds then, with careful attention to chronology and frequent recourse to fugitive and uncollected material, to follow the unfolding of that talent and to measure its power in the various *genres;* finally, he brings the results of his analysis together to form a fixed and distinct physiognomy, in which the religious, philosophical, political, moral, and æsthetic lineaments are strongly illuminated by the light of the critic's own convictions. From the individual authors he rises, in the last chapter of *Les Maîtres de l'heure* to a consideration of the total personality and character of the epoch; analyzes in similar fashion its origin and evolution; gives its sharp definition; compares it with other epochs, and judges it.

For this sort of discussion the *Nation* did not allow the needful elbow room. Even when he thought that he had practiced much self-denial, his articles on Moore and Synge were returned as being far beyond normal length. The editor requested that the latter be cut practically in half, admitting that the stuff was all interesting and that the article would suffer from such heroic condensation, but perhaps not so much as the author feared. The author perforce submitted, but not without a pained and rebellious protest at the violence done to his offspring, and he relieved himself at the same time of certain important reflections on the general plight of writers for the *Nation*.

Urbana, Illinois,
December 26, 1912

Dear Editor:

Reeking with the blood of my offspring, I mailed this morning what was once my essay on Synge—a bright happy creature with a high brow and arterial blood coursing through his connective tissues. It is now a mere puddle of gore and bones, head severed from trunk and cast into the sea, joints disarticulated, gobbets lopped off here and there—begob, a regular "suitcase mystery."

Say that I ought to hire a boy to count my words or a writing master to correct my hand. But don't charge me with wilfully and maliciously trying to "put one over" on my editor with this fatally fine script of mine. Would I be pegging away at it from midsummer to December just for the fun of cutting it through the middle in the end of all? I came down from Madison on Sunday noon, where I had been spending a week-end judging a debate, innocent

of all guile, expecting to cut out a paragraph or maybe two, but never dreaming of this horrid length more than you.

I don't feel that the piece has been improved by the pruning. For even the somewhat elaborate introduction with the presentation of the diverse views of the populace, journalists, and experts seemed essential to place the discussion. And in the body of the essay merely to indicate the point of view without developing and illustrating it was peculiarly unsafe. But I leave that now to you. I have never tackled a man so difficult to get at, or so complex to explain in spite of his essential simplicity; I mean complex in his literary relationships and simple in his emotional tendencies.

The general thesis is, as you say, the same as that in your essay on Fiona MacLeod and other Irish essays. And, if you will permit this additional contributorial insolence, I think it has the same fault. I have meditated very frequently upon the "*Nation*-essay"—from the point of view of an outsider. In the space at our disposal it is necessary to be very curt. And I think we contributors—and you as well—are paying a penalty for this curtness. We get the credit for having *no æsthetic appreciation*. It is an unfortunate fact that nearly all the best writers, French and English,—the living writers—have something fatally wrong in their moral and intellectual processes (Correct me, if I exaggerate). We break their necks in a *Nation*-essay and wash our hands of them. We ought to have space to show that we, too, understand all the seductions of their hyacinthine locks *before* we break their necks. I rode up to Chicago Friday with an artist who has sojourned in Paris. "Tolstoy's books," she said, "really haven't anything to do with ART." Well, that is about what they think of our works—pardon the insolence of the plural.

You will understand that I have no desire to *please* this lady or the artists. But it is very essential to our purpose that they should think these essays have something to do with art. As Babbitt so admirably said in his Bergson essay, we should oppose enthusiasm to enthusiasm. Just at this moment I cannot recall a really luminous opposition of enthusiasm to enthusiasm, in the works of I.B., though a long series of brilliant neck-breakings recur to memory. In your own essays as elaborated in book form there are admirable examples. But as they appear in the *Nation*, many of our works seem to such persons as my lady friend mentioned above to have a certain chilling negative force which deprives them of their due weight with the artists.

I submit this rather as a question than as a criticism, and it is a subject for an essay rather than a letter. I can only "indicate the point of view"—and that with inward hesitation. Sometime when your labors have lightened I should like to have your opinion on the subject. The question rose again in my mind when I had finished the Synge essay. I do not refer to the condensed version. Even in those fifteen original columns I had said hardly a single word to indicate that I had felt for a moment the powerful, and to a certain extent perfectly legitimate, seduction of the man's extraordinary literary talent. The question then in brief is, whether the *Nation*-essay is not as a rule defective for its own purposes on the side of æsthetic appreciation.—I warn you not to leap to the conclusion that this thing has suddenly occurred to the troubled mind of the "Middle-Western Ethicist." It has lain there smouldering for years—as a pure question of critical method. . . .

Very sincerely yours,
STUART P. SHERMAN.

Mr. More's reply was soothing and justificatory:

In the first place let me say that you have refuted yourself. An essay which brings so much commendation as your Synge certainly cannot be abnormal. Not only have all the men in the office here been delighted by it, but Bryce wrote me that he saw such work nowhere except in the *Nation*. I do not say that this essay and some others might not be better if they were longer, but the improvement in both cases would be less than you think. And the hard fact remains that the *Nation* is not a general magazine and only by some sacrifice can give a meagre nine columns to an essay. The side lights, the romantic appreciation, suffer no doubt; but most of the people who complain of the resulting "harshness" would be satisfied with nothing less than an overflowing measure of gush—and an overflowing measure of gush is not likely to be

found in any journal, or magazine, over which your humble servant presides. . . . After all, an excess of judgment over "appreciation" is no bad thing these days, and "enthusiasm" makes me afraid.

A week later the old wound is revived by a threatened mutilation of one of his industrious notes on the *New English Dictionary*, and Sherman gives his editor an account of the prodigious labor which had gone into the making of his modest-seeming contribution.

Urbana, Illinois,
January 24, 1913.

My dear More:

I am becoming a nuisance—I am already a blasted nuisance. This N.E.D. note is marked "Sherman One." Does that mean that the rest of my dissertation on "sentiment" was set up? Obviously the thing was far too long. If I do that again, you had better drop me from your contributorial staff. My only question is whether you have thrown away my better half—that in which I get ahead of the *Oxford Dictionary* on a half-dozen forms of the word *sentiment*.

Let me tell you that is no holiday job. You inquired when I saw you last where I got hold of these unrecorded words. I have a note on this latest exercise and can answer the question. In preparation for the discarded sheet I read hundreds of pages in nearly all the following authors and turned over a large number in all of them:

1. Locke; 2. Hobbes; 3. Cudworth; 4. Norris; 5. Shaftesbury; 6. Mandeville; 7. Shenstone's prose; 8. Gray's letters; 9. Young's prose; 10. Vol. of 17th century sermons; 11. Edwards' Works; 12. Wesley's sermons; 13. Society for Reformation of Manners 1698; 14. Gildon's *Post Bag Opened;* 15. Dugald Stewart; 16. Blair's *Rhetoric;* 17. Gisborne, *Female Sex;* 18. Burke, Reynolds, Chesterfield; 19. Beckford—*Elegant Enthusiast;* 20. Walker—*The Vagabond;* 21. Westbrook *Vale of Glendor;* 12 volumes of British Essayists.

Total: c. 40 vols.

When you are asked how the *Nation* preserves its high level, you can say "Oh, our contributors frequently read forty or fifty volumes in preparation for a single sheet of manuscript, which we frequently discard!"

Sherman's correspondence with Mr. More continued to be conducted in terms of mutual friendship and respect, even though the two men were aware of the divergence of their feeling about important matters. On more than one occasion Mr. More assumed the privilege of an older man to admonish Sherman of the perils in his intellectual make-up. When the latter mentioned a philosophical novel he was meditating, Mr. More remarked that he would take great delight in reviewing it and showing "how a certain hesitancy in fundamental principles made it piquant and *troublant* but not quite clear in the final impression conveyed". Mr. More received with surprise and incredulity Sherman's enthusiasm about state universities and his faith in the possibilities of popular institutions. That was the dangerous romantic streak which he sought to combat in him. When toward the end of that year Sherman submitted his essay on William Cobbett, the editor saw his opening and scored a palpable hit. In that essay Cobbett is treated as a portent of the new democracy—"a tremendously efficient, unscrupulous, materially-minded, half-educated egotist of talent . . . too serious for the pleasures of life, too over-bearing for society, too busy to eat his meals like a Christian. Risen from the masses, he understands them, and inwardly despises them as unintelligent rabble. Yet when he has promulgated a half-informed opinion, he is willing to appeal for support to the brute members of the totally uninformed. Secretly desirous to hold first place in the seats of the mighty, he despises those who are really his superiors in breeding and culture, and does not understand them. Missing the preëminence which he thinks is due him, and agreeing with Wesley that it is better to rule in hell than serve in heaven, he is ready to seize upon the proletariat as upon the jawbone of an ass, and make havoc of all that thwart him". "In his hands," the mournful essayist concludes, "is

our salvation, and in the day of his triumph Heaven pity those who are left in the minority."

The inconsistency in spirit between this and the earlier utterance was sufficiently striking, and the rebuke which Mr. More then administered was lacking neither in truth nor kindness:

. . . Your dislike of Cobbett as an "incarnation of [various epithets] democracy" bewilders me a bit. What else should he be, or anyone else be? Are you too developing a heinous love for the "patrician element" in intellect and character? Do you know that with all your genius (for you have a touch of that, my dear boy) you have not yet quite found yourself? There is a sort of intellectual Armageddon (the Professor's vocabulary is catching) fighting about us, though the fighters on one side are piteously few, and a staunch man is bound sooner or later to pronounce "under which king". We attack the enemy as Romanticism, and get abused for callousness to things of the imagination; we attack it as unrestrained democracy, and are called Snobs, or reactionaries or haters of the people; we attack it as pragmatism, and are simply not understood. Meanwhile, you, who could knock down five good men in buckram any day, are skirmishing gaily and shooting your bolts a little at random. When "the literary critic fifty years hence" comes to deal with S.P.S., what is he going to say? This may sound as if I were trying to make a poor joke out of your commendation of my paper on Norton; but I'm not; your praise in that particular gave me something more than pleasure. But I have been asking myself just why that essay should have appealed to you in so peculiar a way, and have been wondering whether it is not for the simple reason that I let myself go in it. Well, it is no doubt a good thing to let oneself go occasionally, but is it not true also that the special evil of our day is just the universal "letting go"? And is not the first office of the critic to stand against that intellectual ease? I do not mean to imply that your work shows any signs of letting go in its intellectual fibre; there is plenty of brain work in it always and sturdy discipline, but sometimes I ask myself whether you have not an inclination to avoid the central problem. (December 24, 1913.)

There was really no effective reply to this, and Sherman's answer is in the nature of a counter-attack upon the vulnerable points in his opponent's position. After allowance is made for his irrepressible urge toward irony (had not Mr. More himself spoken of him as "our finest ironic pen"?) his letter throws light upon his leaning toward the humanitarian attitude and upon his conviction of the importance of enthusiasm in the critic's equipment.

Urbana, Illinois,
January 6, 1914.

My Dear More:

Mr. Holt wrote me a note the other day saying that he was sending me a copy of the new *Review,* and asking me to write something for it. This alleviated a little my oppressive sense of sin after reading your Christmas-even sermon. One man, anyway, I said to myself, thinks me unpopular enough to be serviceable in the grand cause of "reaction." And I have written him a very graceless note, of which I hope he will have insight enough to perceive the gratitude. But to my surprise I find two cards thrust in, one bearing your compliments, the other the Editor's. What, then, are you? Is this to be the Abbotsford of your journalistic retirement?

You intimate that my young friend Nevins has a certain Scottish seriousness of temper. Now that is the very temper to make a good Tory writer. He is serious, reverent, aggressive, positive, potentially dogmatic. You can put a good cutting edge on a young man like that. I am essentially skeptical, indecisive, tolerant, irreverent, with an inarticulate sense of comedy. I get the point of the new *Review;* but I am not stout enough, bald enough, rich enough to forbear asking what is the use, with Armageddon howling around us, of *being unpopular only four times a year.* The *Nation* is a good fighting weapon; to what soft-hearted, sympathetic, unsifted, humanitarian Christian do you relinquish it?

I frankly admit that on some essential points I have not found myself. I can't entirely follow

you in your article on the New Morality. (By the way, Showerman, whom you have let in, is in my opinion also only an academic skeptic in wolf's clothing.) I can't follow you where you speak of sermons on the "obligation of the individual soul to its maker and judge." (We have an Episcopalian clergyman in town who preaches that: his vestments are washed by the ladies of his flock; he refuses to administer the sacraments in outlying districts which he cannot reach before seven in the morning; and I have a deep presentiment that Jane Addams will be a ministering angel when he is howling. By a singular coincidence he too thinks but meanly of the great Chicago settlement worker.)—But to return to your phrase. Is it a metaphor? Doubtless as you use it, it is not; but for me God is still a metaphor by which I objectify an inner sense more exacting than any external authority. And yet, as I see the matter, every "obligation of the individual soul to its maker" runs somewhere through the heart or liver of a fellowman. Isn't it possible to take up a position of friendliness to both the first and second commandments? You decide for the first; Jane for the second. You condemn her for neglecting the individual's obligation to his maker. She would condemn you for neglecting yours to your fellowmen. And the gulf widens between your followers and hers. Now, if it must come to a choice, I should prefer to be numbered with the seraphim. I have no natural spontaneous desire to embrace the rascal many. But I am not yet convinced that it is impossible in an even-tempered fashion to love, like Mr. Roosevelt, my God on the one hand and my people on the other. It is perfectly obvious, to be sure, that God is getting in these days far less attention than his people. It is *easier* to restore the balance by throwing one's whole weight upon the extreme end of the short beam. But isn't it more *critical* to get somewhere about the middle of the plank, and to try to heave the whole thing back upon a central pivot? Or is that just a metaphor too? I confess that I am pretty much at sea in the whole matter; and also that your article is a most impressive argument for the angels and a noble piece of English. I progress very slowly in this direction because my "religious experience" of late years has been very thin.

I suppose my last year's article on "Education by the People" is still rankling in your breast. In this field my experience has been tolerably thick. In the microcosm of the University and in our relations with the state I have almost daily had glimpses into the dark bosoms of "good government" on the one hand and "democracy" on the other. I believe that I have no illusions in these realms! In any given assemblage of a hundred men there are perhaps five dreamers with no experience who are, in the innocence of their hearts, really "democrats." The other ninety-five are an aggregation of individuals, each one of whom would like to run things himself. At the first taste of power, any one of them would knock the other ninety-nine on the head, and cease forever to babble of majority rule. In a certain sense, democracy is a grand theatrical spectacle; from another point of view it is a side-splitting farce. (I wish I had the indiscretion to tell you a little inside history of our educational democracy in Illinois. But I will save that for a private colloquy.) But if you happen to be living in a "democratic" government and wish to have your way in it, you must use upon the people either Gatling-guns or infinite patience and flattery. The latter method is more approved by experience. Furthermore, I sincerely believe that the use of flattery and patience will in the course of fifty thousand years have a more refining and uplifting influence upon the people than the more virile approach which I have suggested as the alternative. In other words, I consider myself here a pretty good Tory at heart. A Radical, building on the Unknown, is naturally and necessarily a doctrinaire, precise and emphatic in the enunciation of his views. Your Tory prospers by speaking a little loosely, indirectly and jovially from the easy chair of experience—when he is in a room-full of Radicals.

This horribly drawn out hodgepodge was intended only to lead up to the announcement that in literary criticism I am a mystic! You irritate me, sir, by failing to get my point about the Norton article. I shudder to think that, uncorrected, my previous letter may provoke you to further "reaction." Quite seriously speaking at last, I believe that the critic's power, like the poet's, is at its highest something that can-

not be defined or analyzed. It is the going forth of his hitherto closeted spirit after the thing that it loves. You say, "Is not 'letting go' the very vice which criticism needs to take its stand against?"—or words to that effect. To which I rhetorically reply, "Yes, so long as he is in the rings of Inferno, and all the way up the steeps of Purgatory till he knows himself *'puro e disposto a salire alle stelle';* but when he stands at last in the presence of the Celestial Rose, for God's sake let him show his soul of adoration, let him fluently and mellifluously admit that he likes it, and not hold himself frigidly in expectation of caterpillars." Even the critic, it seems to me, has no right to come into the world and condemn the world, unless from time to time he can flash a vision upon the damned. The uncritical may justly complain that this would be "very gross behavior and very weak dealing." If he is bent on staining the "childhood of their joy" he must really reward them when they are men. But I fall again into foolish metaphor, which is difficult to avoid in these high mysteries.

Very sincerely yours,
STUART P. SHERMAN.

On Mr. More's withdrawal from the editorship of the *Nation,* at the beginning of 1914, Sherman felt the relaxation of his powerful stimulus. Henry Holt was now launching the *Unpopular Review* and, thinking the opportunity good for enlisting Sherman in his forces, invited him to write something that would be congruous with the aims of the new journal. Sherman's refusal "to contribute to its unpopularity" is in reality another reply, moderately ironic, to the rankling accusation of Mr. More.

Urbana, Illinois
January 4, 1914.

My Dear Mr. Holt:

I have read with great interest about two-thirds of your new Tory quarterly, and have received with a keen sense of honor the invitation to contribute to its unpopularity. It has been a pleasure to detect in the anonymous harmony the unpopular notes of Messrs. More, Shorey (?), and Showerman. The authors of the leading articles could consistently be hanged together. But what in thunder can the enquiring reader make of the shameless bid for the suffrage of the great vulgar multitude in "En Casserole's" divagations on tobacco? Unless my divining rod dips falsely, there lie beneath that passage the deep waters of popular seduction gushing eternally from the heart of the publisher. Furthermore—ain't y'goin' t' have any literchoor? My own struggles for unpopularity have hitherto been directed mainly towards the destructive criticism of successful works of poetry and fiction. In the course of twenty years, if I lived, I had hoped to be recognized as the William Gifford of America. And yet a Christmas letter from More, who, as I take it, has a hand in the *Review,* gently intimates that my critical conscience still lacks the requisite hardness—is still vitiated by traces of popular viscosity and flabby good nature. Till I have reformed these faults, I fear that it is useless for me to offer any contribution. But I do not despair; I feel myself ossifying day by day; when these processes are complete, I shall send you something stiff, truculent, and devilishly distasteful to everyone with an income of less than 3000 dollars per annum.

With heartiest good wishes for the success of the enterprise, I am,

Very sincerely yours,
STUART P. SHERMAN.

It is possible that Holt did not catch the precise meaning of this letter. While it conveys clearly enough the writer's irritation, it will easily bear two interpretations as to his actual leanings. The publisher at any rate persisted for some time in efforts to draw Sherman out on such subjects as "Inspired Idiocy" (naming Plato, Ruskin, and Tolstoy for treatment under this heading) and "Demagogues, or the History of Popular Uprisings". Sherman repeated that he would have a try at the *Review* when his evolution into a thorough Conservative was complete, and that he was still evolving. In another letter, after replying to a suggestion that he settle down in New York in a manner to impress upon publishers the niggardliness with which they rewarded

his kind of writing, he outlines an "ironical-satirical article" in which the arrows fly with a much directer aim.

Urbana, Illinois
March 16, 1914

Dear Mr. Holt:

You New York editors seem to have got the notion that the Middle-Western professor is salaried by the state to assist you in resisting the Eastern "uplift." Now I will admit that your temptations to write "rippling" articles are very seductive, and I will make you a proposition. If you for your part will guarantee me complete leisure for writing and a salary of 4500 dollars, I for my part will go to New York and undertake to furnish you annually by my unaided pen not less than 500 dollars' worth of copy! I name 500 dollars to be on the safe side: by working steadily for nine months, I believe that I could raise the sum earned by my kind of writing to 900 dollars.

Now with reference to More's certification of my ability to deal with demagogues, I think he must be growing irresponsible since he left the helm of the *Nation*. (And, by the way, do you mark how the *Nation* is promising to blow its lid off?) Demagogue *is* a jolly subject, but, as I wrote you before, I am under a vow to undertake nothing new at present. You ask whether I have anything else simmering. I regret to say that I have, and it looks to me rather like a horse of the same color.

I have been thinking of an ironical-satirical article called "The Decadence of the American People"—or some such matter—with the subtitle "A Chapter in History." The conceit is to write in the style of Macaulay or Gibbon—which of course I can assume at will—one of those "brilliant" chapters of generalizations on the condition of the country in 1914. It would contain such sections as:

I. *Universal corruption* in all branches of government: Call for a "saviour of the people"; failure of democratic régime.

II. *Condition of religion* in intellectual, middle and lower classes: "atheism"; social reform; Holy Jumpers, etc.

III. *Society:* Luxury, dissipation, extravagant and fantastic diversions, etc. Dress, dances, theatre.

IV. *Morals and Crime:* in city and country.

V. *Poverty and Wealth:* Horrid miseries of the lower class; obscene wealth of the "capitalists," etc.

Now all these terrible generalizations would be based directly upon the daily newspapers from the various parts of the country, and each lurid statement would be supported like a well-documented history with footnotes referring to the source of information.

Points of the satire:

1. Satire on the methods of classical historians.

2. Exposure of the value of newspapers as sources of historical information.

3. *Reductio ad absurdum* of calamity-howling.

All this could lead up, if desired, to the ironical conclusion that the dissolution of the existing society calls for the abandonment of the Constitution and a new deal—the cards to be re-shuffled, if you please, by one of the sanguine and popular demagogues of the day.

Is this, in another form, something like your own proposal?

Very sincerely yours,
STUART P. SHERMAN

If there is nothing here clearly intended for Mr. More, there are several stings for Mr. Babbitt. Curiously enough Mr. Holt still could not or would not see the point. "Your 'Decadence of the American People,'" he replied, "might turn out to be something extra bully. Of course the occasional fool would have to be told you are not entirely in earnest." When a year passed and the desired article was still unwritten the dark thought crossed Mr. Holt's mind that Sherman might be a Socialist. As to this he received a solemn assurance, but the gap between the position of the *Unpopular Review* and of Socialism left Sherman with ample space for the exercise of a free intellectual criticism. There is little doubt that he was in no mood to enter the camp of the conservatives and to accept their label.