

bravely by so sound a critic as Stuart Pratt Sherman.

AMERICANA

HAVING avowed from the lecture platform that foreign influence, if properly absorbed, would make the American literature of the future one of the richest in the world's history, we added that certain foreign tendencies when allowed to run riot seemed to us in danger of vulgarizing and overshadowing the American tradition.

An angry letter pursued us from one of the most brilliant women of a large town, who reads the modern reviews, we suspect, and is probably a social leader.

"What do you mean by the 'American tradition'?" she writes, and proceeds in all seriousness: "Does not everything typically *American* stand for all that is ugly and vulgar? Does it not destroy beauty? Hasn't it created our Rotary Clubs, our ugly buildings" — and she goes on. Who can blame her? Is she not inspired by some of our most eagerly read leaders of opinion? The answer to her question is plain enough — *no*.

We have no intention of defending Rotary Clubs, although another woman in the middle western city told us the other day that half the men she knew had never been able to express themselves on anything but golf and business until they began to go to Rotary Club meetings a few years ago. Now they find tongue for the discussion of ethical and civic problems and even occasionally a book or two. Nor is there space here to define the American tradition. It has been mentioned

Does the aggrieved lady think that our literature will be ennobled by holding up the word "American" to scorn? Is it not a pity that certain of our smart critics can find no other word to describe the futile, the silly, the mediocre in current thought and writing? Why do H. L. Mencken and his coeditor (who are not always loath to admit American things fine) label as "Americana" paragraphs culled from the press of the country at which they would level the wise finger of derision? Do this lady and her advisers consider American the art of George Bellows, of Stanford White, of Cass Gilbert, of Robert Frost, of Willa Cather, of Edwin Arlington Robinson? Are the works of Emerson, Hawthorne, Poe, Mark Twain, "Americana"? Or must we label them typically European in order that they shall not be considered vulgar?