The American Magazine
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New York

Editorial Rooms

Amherst, Mass.
April 19 1912

My dear Miss Tarbell:

I received your letter to-day just after writing one to S. S. P. I had from him the other day a letter - phrased in his gentle way - implying that somehow I had lost confidence in him. And I wrote him - as I had felt I should have done before - repelling the impatience I expressed in New York and assuring him that I had not lost confidence in him, that I had known him far too long and too well. In my own impatience I forgot for the moment the very difficult problems that he annually has to meet.

I had come back, as you remember, from close contact with the raw edge

over

of life here at Lawrence – where things seemed clear & plain – and it seemed to me that there had been not only a smoothing off of the rough corners of what I had written but in one instance that I was made to say something quite different from what I had actually said. I did not feel that the article was extreme: that it erred rather upon the side of understatement – and when these changes were made I could not help feeling momentarily impatient. Then when Mr. Fisher wrote asking me to make another essential change I felt that I must make a stand somewhere.

I think you know me well enough to know that I aimed not make a fight on mere trivial grounds, or seek a silly quarrel which might endanger not only my own livelihood but that of some of our friends – and I can see the wisdom of having the

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division come, if it comes at all (as I hope it may not come) upon some big and dramatic thing. But do such things come that way? Aren't they more often the result of some little thing coming on top of a general situation? I do not see, indeed, quite what you mean by a demonstration.

And the thing is not merely the cutting of a phrase or paragraph as you suggest, but it goes deeper — to the right of these men to dictate what a writer shall or shall not say upon questions which he deems vital. You know how well we have long worked together, but you may not realize what great store I set upon the help of J. S. P. & how gratefully I have accepted many of his suggestions for modifications in my

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articles – having the highest respect and admiration for his sincerity and wisdom. But when I felt that the changes were not the full result of his own fine judgment but were suggested from behind, it made me very uncomfortable. And then Fisher wrote asking me to make the change, not because my statement ~~it~~ was not true, not just, not fair, but because, as he said, "some business men might take exception to it." Now it seems to me, Miss Tarbell, that this is not a small or trivial matter. It's the very essence of the point at issue in the nation. Are we to trim our editorial expressions to the exceptions of "some business men"? If those men are to be the editors why should I hope to write satisfactorily ~~to~~ for them – or you – or Hock?

Now, I do not want you to think for a moment that I desired to intimate even remotely that J.S.P. was cowardly in

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consenting to the changes. The thought never entered my head, for I could see just how naturally it came about.

But in the past the argument for changes has been upon high grounds — that the statement was not true in the widest sense, or if true it might be more persuasively presented, or, it might be more politic, for the general force of the whole article not to develop a certain angle of the truth at all. No one has been more willing to listen to such arguments than I have. Indeed, I gladly changed a number of statements in this very article about the rich men of Boston because J. S. P. well argued that the same statements might be made about nearly all of our rich men & that when

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applied to Boston men alone they sounded too hard & broad. Now that was fair & square. But when statements are objected to because "some business men may take exceptions to them", it is wrong. It cannot be excused. And though it may seem trivial, I cannot stand for it.

Now, I don't want any fight and I hope devoutly it won't come, but if it does come I shall meet it the best way I can; and I hope that in any event we may all stand together. I have never worked with or known any group of people for whom I felt a greater affection or in whom I had a greater trust than in you all. And if you think I am making any mistakes, or that I can make it easier for J.S.P. or for the magazine, I wish sincerely you would advise me.

Sincerely yours,

Ray Stannard Baker

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