

WERNER SOLLORS

Letter from Mary Antin to Mary Austin,
March 11, 1925

Mary Antin, born in Jewish Russia in 1881, was the author of perhaps the most famous American immigrant autobiography, *The Promised Land* (1912). She also published a plea against immigration restrictions, *They Who Knock at Our Gates* (1914), illustrated by Joseph Stella, and such remarkable short stories as "Malinke's Atonement" and "The Amulet". It is little known that Antin underwent a series of crises that started with World War I and extended into the 1920s. In this previously unpublished letter, Antin offers an autobiographical confession of those dark years, at the center of which was her break-up with Amadeus W. Grabau (1870-1946), a famous scientist and the author of such works as "Paleontology and Ontogeny" and *The Rhythm of the Ages*, whom Antin had married, apparently against her father's wishes, in 1901. A German-American Lutheran, Grabau left America, and his wife and their daughter Josephine Esther (*1907), after World War I and spent the remaining years of his life teaching and working in China.

Antin was living in Western Massachusetts, on the experimental "farm" founded by Will Gould, when she addressed her letter to the writer Mary Austin (1868-1934), whom Antin obviously had never met but whose royalty statements their publisher Houghton Mifflin sometimes confused. Austin was still at the peak of her fame for *The American Rhythm* (1923) and other studies of Indian life, for her widely read first book about the desert, *The Land of Little Rain* (1903), for her California novels *Isidro* (1905) and *The Ford* (1917), and for her popular religious books on the life and meaning of Jesus, *The Green Bough* (1913),

The Man Jesus (1915), and *A Small Town Man* (1925). Austin, who had been ill when Antin's letter reached her, seems to have answered Antin and invited her to come West, and Antin wrote her again two years later. Yet Mary Antin was to publish only two more short pieces in the twenty-four years before her death in 1949.

The original of the letter is deposited in the Mary Austin Papers at the Henry E. Huntington Library. It is published here for the first time with the permission of the Huntington Library and of Anne Ross.