Dear Professor Hoccleve, I should have answered your letter sooner, but I have been half-drowned in a main draft of the third of my 'Maelin' books, and— or if it had been a review of something of my own— was half dreading reading that silly Julian Symons' article, and putting off doing so. Now I have just read it, and all I can say is, you is, try to forget it. This is easier said than done, I know, because these things hurt, and even when one recognizes the motivation, even leaves this judgment in place, they still hurt, and stone is no redress. On to one thinks, but the redress is simply that you know, and the public (who is buying it) knows, that you have written a good book. You also know that Rex Stirk was an incomparably better writer than the pathetic and jealous Symons (or any of the glibly mendacious he admires), and that this is the motivation of the review, and your success + here's thinks the Symons plus, far more than any ephemeral words of this can hurt you. It is typical of the man that he
cynically on Too Stark's 'sexy' novels as 'among the best.' I only read one of them, How Like a Rose, and it was not in the same
stock as The Doorbell Rang or A Family Affair, or indeed any of the lucidly-witten, mature
work. It is also nonsense to say that his style was not comparable to, say, Ross
Macdonald. To my eye at least, A M's style is derivative, strained, and totally predictable.
Can feel him trying. Too Stark's style was —
— flawless.

Ah, well, you don't need me to tell you that! But do, please, ignore the man's
opinions, even if you can't quite ignore his
spite. I have met him; he is a bore, and a
second-rate writer, and has no sense of
style — I mean, he would not know good English if
he saw it. The highest compliment Julian
Symons can pay to any book is to dislike
it.

Does that make you feel better?
believe me, everyone I know rates the
little man as I do. Forget him. You did a good
job. Have a happy Christmas. Yours ever,

Mary Stewart