

Esther Gould's Book Corner

Are You Interested in books of Fiction, Biography, Travel, or History? For lists write to ESTHER GOULD c/o your local paper.

THE PROFESSOR GROWS OLD

"THE PROFESSOR'S HOUSE"
By Willa Cather.
Alfred A. Knopf.

It has been said of Willa Cather that she has remarked that nothing which has happened to her since she was 20 years of age has seemed to be material for her art. If this be true it would perhaps explain the quality of remoteness, of trying to recapture something, which is so apparent in her writing.

In "A Lost Lady," the story of a woman who never really existed, this subtle quality found its perfect expression, in Miss Cather's latest book, "The Professor's House," the expression is less perfect.

Miss Cather has written in this book of the inner life of a man, a professor in a midwestern university. Godfrey St. Peter's exterior life has been one of great excitement, a happy marriage to a charming woman, the growing up of two daughters, a more or less bitter struggle against the forces of commercialism in the university, these have made up the part of his life that the world has seen.

But against these as a pleasantly colored and ever present background, St. Peter has lived a vivid and absorbing life in the old third floor study which he shares with two wiry and bearded dress forms. These are the allies of Augusta, the sewing woman, who occupies the study during the professor's off hours. Here St. Peter wrote his brilliant work on the early Spanish adventurers in America, here or in his beloved garden, he and Tom Outland talked far into the night.

In Tom Outland Miss Cather has once more created a character through the eyes of others. This boy with his unusual background and his vigorous original mind gave to St. Peter, outside of his own creative work, the only thing in his life which was entirely above the commonplace,—exactly as he had dreamed in his boyhood that life would be. Outland's death in the War is Fate's assurance that this one thing in a lifetime of things, shall be kept inviolate.

We see the Professor first when all this is over. But in retrospect we live it again with him, during those years in which he is learning that his zest in living and his youth have somehow slipped from him. At the moment when he faces and accepts that fact we leave him.

It is effective writing, with a strength

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and subtlety not easy to put into words—it must itself be read. It has, as one critic has expressed it, an "arrowy perfection".

IN DARKEST AFRICA

"MY AFRICAN NEIGHBOURS"
By Hans Coudenhove.
Little Brown & Co.

We enjoy having William Beebe tell us of strange little insects and animals who live their bizarre lives without help from or reference to us. It is with the same sort of enjoyment that we can read this book "My African Neighbours", by Hans Coudenhove.

The author is a man who writes with a great deal of charm of style, who is extremely well versed in the arts both ancient and modern and yet who has "Never seen an airoplane, or a dirigible balloon, or a motor-bus, or a taxicab, or a motor-boat, or a wireless apparatus, or a cloud picture, or the president of a republic, or a portrait of Einstein, or a Bolshevik." We are just beginning to think that happiness still exists on earth when he goes on to say that he has not slept in a bed for 12 years, and for one period of five years did not sit down to a meal with another human being.

But this isolation has given Mr. Coudenhove ample opportunity for a study of the strange neighbours which he has chosen. He tells us of their folkways and superstitions, their remarkable modesty which makes them unable to answer a direct question, allowing the most stupendous news to come out casually, reminding one of the story "There ain't no news except the dog's dead."

He brings out their strange psychology, their shrewdness, in regard to some things and gullibility in others, as for instance when many believed

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that the World War was caused by a dispute between the "Sultans" of the English and the Germans as to the relative merits of their mounts, a black and a white mule.

Mr. Coudenhove at one moment gives descriptions of the beauties of the country which bear out Mr. Carl Akeley's prophecy that Africa is the future playground of the world, then he turns to giving us science mixed up with humor.

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By R. T. M. SCOTT

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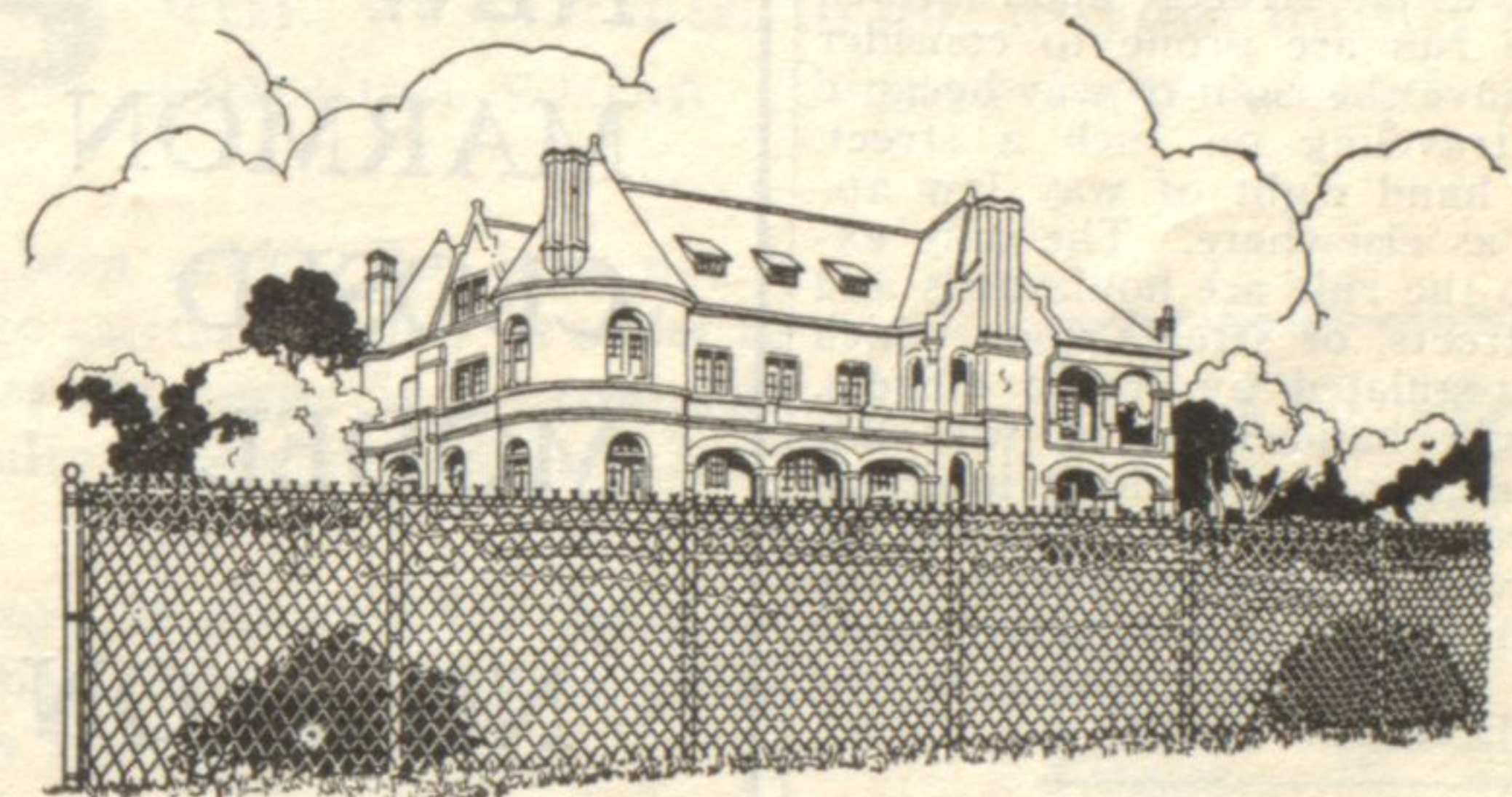
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