

# MY FAVORITE CHARACTER IN FICTION

By Zona Gale

*Sketched by Anne Merriman Peck*

THE best that I can do in naming a favorite character in fiction is to name the one which is occupying my thought at the moment. One has a new favorite character for every new favorite book. If I tried to name them all I should have to give a party. The character who occupies my mind at the moment is Tom Outland in Willa Cather's "The Professor's House", and this is for the same reason that a little while ago I was thinking most of the protagonist in Johan Bojer's "The Great Hunger". And for years, still earlier, of the bishop who offered up candlesticks instead of candles. And in my little girlhood, of Sydney Carton who said "It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done." I suppose therefore that what I mean by my joy in Tom Outland is that he is one more who can set free whatever is in him by identifying himself with a great idea. Does not the slang phrase "What's the great idea?" seem, as many slang phrases seem, to voice a profound spiritual wonder. What is the great idea? The bishop found it, Sydney Carton found it, and the "Great Hunger" man found it in self identification with an idea. In every case, under whatever guise, the process was the same—the identification of self with some precious idea. To buy the soul of a "thief" with a gift of two candlesticks; to sow rye in an enemy's empty field; to ride off to the guillotine in somebody's place; and to develop a passion for the preservation of the heritage of a desert and of a dead people—these are not so different, since by such things the provincial limitations of self give way to the universal field of group emotion. The provincial self about its own affairs is a fascinating field for literary research; but what *amour* or personal adventure which Tom Outland might have had could be so emotionally thrilling as the passion and the hope and the understanding which he puts into this quest? In him Miss Cather creates a living being, passionately pursuing an objective that has no personal taint. He expresses the love of the unknown which is the basic hunger of the race. He has caught "the Great Idea".

# MY FAVORITE CHARACTER IN FICTION

By Louis Bromfield

*Sketched by Anne Merriman Peck*

THE choice of a favorite character in fiction seems, at the outset, as difficult as the choice of a favorite character from among one's innumerable acquaintances. If it were a question of history, the answer would be easy enough: I should rather have been Voltaire than any other. But that is not quite the same thing. The final answer must be reached, I suppose, by a process of elimination. Primarily the women of fiction interest me far more than the men. Among the men I can think of only two for whom I have a sympathy and liking of the first order—Jude Fawley and Lord Jim. Among the women I know two at least with whom it would be possible to fall in love—Irene Forsyte and Doña Rita of "The Arrow of Gold". Daisy Miller moves me almost to tears and Trollope's Mrs. Proudie seems to me one of the great creations of our literature. George Eliot's Maggie Tulliver is immensely human and moving, and the servant Françoise in Proust's "À la Recherche du Temps Perdu" ought surely to be listed among the great characters. And if ever an author told the truth, he would admit, I am sure, an affection for some of his own characters; else why should he have created them? Frankly I am in love with Lily Shane and have a fine cold blooded admiration for Sabine Callendar and Ellen Tolliver. But they are of course *hors de combat*. There are too the hosts of characters in Dickens, literally scores of them; but the final choice must come among characters who have had the power to dominate circumstance . . . the powerful ones, women like Becky Sharp and Sophia Baines of "The Old Wives' Tale". A choice must be made, so I close my eyes and say "Becky Sharp"—the Becky Sharp of the opening pages of "Vanity Fair", the Becky Sharp who hurled Doctor Johnson's Dictionary back into the face of the startled Semiramis of Hammersmith. It is a gesture I like in dealing with life, a gallant gesture that is refreshing, especially in this day of sad defeated young men and women.