

TIME

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Anna Katherine Green

She Enjoys Writing; Conrad Does Not

Forty-five years ago Anna Katherine Green published *The Leavenworth Case*. That mystery story still sells. In 1923 she publishes *The Step on the Stair* in which love and romance vie for place with crime and mystery. Critics have said that this novel, written when she has passed her seventy-fifth birthday is one of her best, that it returns to the manner and method of *The Leavenworth Case*, was better than *The Filigree Ball* or *The House of the Whispering Pines*. At any rate, soon after publication, it was found on the best-seller lists.

The other morning I found Anna Katharine Green (Mrs. Charles Rohlf) of Buffalo, at the sedate Murray Hill Hotel. An active, agile little woman, she is, who says that she presumes that *The Step on the Stair* is her last book; but almost winks when she says it. She is a born story-teller. True, one does not find much of what is ordinarily known as fine writing in her books; but, neither does one find arid stretches. They are yarns built with a genius for amazing effects and drawing out suspense.

She says that the reason she began writing her novels of detection and of mystery was not because her father was a lawyer, nor because she heard stories of trials and pleadings in the courts; but because she wanted to write stories.

"Sometimes I don't write a word for five years," she told me. "Then I have an idea which must be developed. I feel like writing."

This last fact seems to be true of the yarn-spinner. The writer who takes his trade seriously as art with a capital "A" finds the process of creating a masterpiece onerous. Take Joseph Conrad, for example, who made a statement on his arrival here, or was so quoted, that he had never learned to enjoy writing. But the *raconteur*, whose one guide is a brilliant imagination who lets his only guide be the swift telling of a tale of life, love, mystery and the complications along the side lines. That must be real joy.

Of course I started to tell Mrs. Rohlf of nights spent breathlessly in finishing one of her novels. She smiled, graciously.

"That," she said, "One hears often; but, honestly now, don't you think taking *more* time to a book is more of a compliment. When I like a book very much I grudge each page that I turn over."

Well—how many times have you gone over your shelves on a rainy night, when you were tired and depressed, looking vainly for another story that would pick you out of the mire as quickly as a Conan Doyle, or a Mary Roberts Rinehart or an Anna Katherine Green? What better compliment is there, Mrs. Rohlf, than that? J. F.