

BOOK OF THE WEEK.

THE PRAIRIE MOTHER.*

The title of this book gives the key to the story, which purports to be penned by the person chiefly concerned—namely, the Mother herself.

It opens with a scene in the maternity ward whither she had been taken from her prairie home for the birth of her child, and gives some clever attempts to describe her sensations under an anæsthetic.

"I opened my eyes and saw a pea-green world all around me. Then I heard the doctor say: 'Give 'er another whiff or two.' His voice sounded far away as if he were speaking through the Simplon Tunnel. I took my whiff or two. I went down again into the pea-green emptiness and forgot about the pain and the hateful clink of steel things against the instrument tray, and about the loganberry pimple on the nose of the red-haired surgical nurse, who had been sent into the labour room to help. I went wafting off into a feathery-pillow pit of infinitude.

"Then I ebbed up out of the pea-green depths again, and was troubled by the sound of voices, so thin and far away I couldn't make out what they were saying.

"I saw a face bending over mine, seeming to float into space. It was the colour of a half-grown cucumber, and it made me think of a tropical fish in an aquarium when the water needed changing."

Finally, she identified the loganberry pimple and realised where she was.

"They were all smiling, the doctor, the tall young nurse, and the carrot-top with the loganberry beauty spot. There was perspiration on the forehead of the young nurse under the eaves of the pale hair crowned with its pointed little cap. She was still smiling, but she looked human and tired and a little fussed.

"Is it a girl?" I asked her. I had intended to make the query a crushingly imperious one. I wanted it to stand as a reproof to them, as a mark of disapproval for such untimely merriment. But my voice, I found, was amazingly thin and weak.

"It's both," said the tired girl in the blue and white uniform. And she, too, nodded her head in a triumphant sort of way as though the credit for some vast and recent victory lay entirely in her own narrow lap.

So, in addition to little Dinkie, aged nearly three, she has to face the prospect of return to her prairie home with too little babies, with only Iroquois Annie to assist.

I had to stay in that smelly old hole of a hospital and in that bald little prairie city fully a week longer than I wanted to, but they thwarted my purpose, and broke my will and kept me in bed until I began to think I'd take root there." But once back at Casa Grande she could see they were right, for a "vague feeling of neglect and desolation took possession of me, for I missed the cool-

handed efficiency of that ever-dependable 'special.'" But "she lightened the girths of her soul," and everyone who reads the book will have to acknowledge that she did it to some purpose.

She had a perfect genius for nicknames. In addition to Dinkie, there is Dinky-Dunk (her husband) and Popsey and Pee-Wee, the twins. She herself has a variety of nicknames.

At the outset of the story, Dinky-Dunk announces that "our whole applect has gone over," and she meets the beginning all over again with a courage, humour and resource that are truly delightful. She had a very different life before her marriage, but she "promptly put the lid on disturbing reminiscences." There should be no *post mortems* in this family circle; no jeremiads on what has gone before.

"I am the wife of a rancher who went bust in a land boom and is compelled to start life over again. We'll no longer quarrel about whether Dinkie shall go to Harvard or McGill. There'll be much closer problems than that I imagine before Dinkie is out of his knickers."

Dinky Dunk let her down badly in the matter of his cousin, Lady Alice, who came out to try prairie life, and when she offered him a hundred and fifty dollars a month to become her ranch manager his wife practically told him to choose between them.

"Do you think you're doing the right thing?" I demanded of my husband, confronting him with a challenge on my face and a bawling Pee-Wee on my hip. "While you're being lackey for Lady Alicia Newland I'll run this ranch, and I'll run it in my own way."

"I saw him push his chair aside and stride away from the caved in Yorkshire pudding, and the roast beef that was as cold as my own heart, and the indignantly protesting Pee-Wee who in some vague way kept reminding me that I wasn't quite as free-handed as I had been so airily imagining myself. For I mistily remembered that the Twins, before the day was over, were going to find it a very flatulent world. But I wasn't crushed. For there are times when even wives and worms will turn, and this was one of them."

She sets to work to run the ranch in a very efficient manner, and Popsey and Pee-Wee are fixed up in a carrying basket in front of the plough, but all her hopes are crushed by the ruin of her crops in a hailstorm.

This unusually delightful book ends with the re-instatement of Dinky-Dunk as husband and father. "There's a heap of good in my humble-eyed old Dinky-Dunk, too much good ever to lose him, whatever may have happened in the days that are over."

H. H.

A WORD FOR THE WEEK.

Those are not always lost days when our hands are not busy, any more than rainy days in summer are lost because they keep the farmer indoors. They are growing days.

*By Arthur Stringer. Hodder & Stoughton.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)