

The Soddy, by Sarah Comstock, is another story of human failure, breaking

"The Soddy"

off at the point where a man and a woman start out to fight the battle of life all over again. It is a pioneer story, the name being taken from the local term applied to make-shift houses constructed of squares of sod, piled up to form solid twelve-inch walls, that form a successful rampart against heat and cold alike. The workmanship of this story is distinctly good; it conveys, far better than many another more ambitious volume, a sense of the impotence of human effort against the cumulative forces of heat and drought

and parching wind. The special little community of settlers who form the background of this story have fought a losing battle against failures of crops for so many years that they are on the verge of migrating in a body to other, more promising lands. But there is one young girl, who, like her father before her, believes in the ultimate success of perseverance. Her parents are dead, and she is left with the care of a younger brother and sister, yet still fights on single-handed,—until a new settler, a young man from the East, with scant capital, but with a courage that matches her own, woos and wins her, and starts in to plough and plant, with all the energy of ignorance. From this point on, the story is a record of heart-breaking failures, of devastation by fire and drought and winds that in a single night rip up entire fields of young grain by the roots; of plans for irrigation that are thwarted by unscrupulous land agents, who wish to bring about a wholesale emigration. And at last the young Easterner's courage fails, and he accepts the offer of a position in his former home. But the wife is made of sterner stuff; she refuses to return with him, and in sickness and loneliness carries on the fight single-handed. In her eyes, he has lost his manhood, has played the coward, and she feels that it is only by staying and holding on to the farm that she may eventually help him to be true to his better self,—if he ever hopes to win her again, he must come back and renew the fight. And in this her instinct proves true; for, although she is unable to adhere to her resolve not to send for him,—because when her child is born, the doctor knows that nothing short of a miracle can save the mother's life, and a telegram is sent speeding eastward,—yet, as it happens, the miracle does occur, because the husband has for several days been journeying west, and the telegram was not needed. And the reason why this ending, with new responsibilities and a fight to be begun all over again, is a satisfactory and convincing ending, is precisely because the wife has won her battle, the husband has learned his lesson, and henceforth there will be no more wavering, no second desertion of his post.