

# BOOKS

By WINNIFRED REEVE

(Onoto Watanna)

If you have read "The Prairie Wife" and "The Prairie Mother," you will wish to read "The Prairie Child" by Arthur Stringer. If you have not read the above stories you are advised and adjured to do so. They are not only capital fiction, but a faithful portraiture of life on the prairie, depicted by a Canadian who is a genius with the pen, and who knows from experience of what he writes.

Arthur Stringer is unquestionably one of our greatest Canadian novelists. He is more than that, for Mr. Stringer is claimed in the United States, as being one of the greatest American novelists. Of course, we know, though we won't tell on him across the line, as long as he continues to send back whispered word to us that he is homesick and loves us best, that he belongs to us. He may also be said to be probably our most popular novelist. Besides being an author, Stringer is a poet, and there are many critics who insist that he is a better poet than an author. At all events he is one of the most versatile writers of the present day. It is hard to realize that the same author wrote "The Wine of Life," the intricate and often ghastly detective and mystery stories, the prairie books, the love lyrics and the slashing, thrilling stories of cowboy life.

"The Wine of Life" was a piece of realism that centered about the Bohemian and art life of New York, of which few writers know more than Stringer, since he has lived in it. The book was a fairly recent production, and although it belonged to the type of sex tale very much in vogue just now, curiously enough it was shoved clear out of sight by his more popular stories of prairie life. It was a clever, bitter portrait, unsparing and glittering.

I am not going to give here the plot of "The Prairie Child," for that the reader must discover for himself. I merely recommend it.

This article is concerned rather with Stringer himself than any one of his novels, though "The Prairie Child" is lately from the press.

Arthur Stringer's popularity is due not merely to the fact that he has a strong, hot pen, and can express himself graphically, but to his own inherent human nature and bigness of character. Somewhat of that forceful, impetuous, impatient nature is visible in his writing. He wastes few words. There is little padding in Stringer's tales. Everything leads up to the ultimate climaxes. He has the technique of the finished craftsman, a sure poetic gift and the imagination and discriminating sense of the artist. He has been singularly favored of the fates, for he is that anomaly, a man endowed with more than the average share of good looks plus a brain. True, he served his apprenticeship of hard labor and knows what it means to tighten his belt, but his is a buoyant personality and he blithely tramples his way over all impediments in his path.

He was known in New York as the literary Apollo. Flattery and adulation slipped away from him like the water on the proverbial duck's back. He is big, good-natured, hearty and boyish. Homage tickled him, but did not upset or spoil him. It elated and pleased him to have fortune showering her choicest favors upon him, and he promptly shared the good things that came his way with the less fortunate fellows than himself, for like his imagination, Arthur's heart is as big as his native Canada. He is always saying something nice about another author or artist, and giving a boost or rooting for another.

I first met Arthur Stringer at the seventieth birthday dinner of Mark Twain, to which a hundred or more authors had been bidden by George Harvey, now ambassador to Great Britain, and then president of Harper & Bros., publishers. Stringer had the seat next to mine, and Marjorie Benton, author of "Bambi," whispered to me that I was lucky as Stringer was a case of "Handsome is as handsome does."

It seems a great many years ago, and yet, when he came west about two years ago and made the trip to our ranch in the foothills, though he was heavier, and there was a bit of becoming grey at his temples, the boy of those days still smiled kindly and engagingly at me from his eyes, as we chatted of old times and mutual friends.

Before closing, I am going to repeat a delicious story he once told me of his first wife, Jobyna Howland, a remarkably beautiful actress, who was the original Gibson girl. Jobyna was a product of the city and the stage. At the time she was married to Arthur, she knew little or nothing concerning country life. In spite of the sophistication anent Broadway and city matters, she was singularly guileless and innocent and there was something touchingly naive about her, a certain quality of feminine helplessness. She was the kind of lovely creature that needs a strong man to lean on. Arthur was the strong man, and he acted swiftly. He removed this exquisite piece of statuary as far from the allurements of Broadway as he could get her, viz., to his farm in Canada. Now Jobyna had never been on a farm and Arthur's was a lovely place; the kind with beautiful lawns, tennis courts, etc., etc. However, even Jobyna realized that it lacked certain essentials that are connected with farm life. So after she had disported herself among the beauties of nature, Jobyna said to her newly wedded spouse (then at his handsomest):

"Arthur, don't you think that if we are to live on a farm, we ought to have a cow?"

Arthur did think so. In fact, he was at that stage where he thought whatever she thought. Accordingly a message was despatched for Jem Smith who in due time arrived at the Stringer "farm," accompanied by a Jersey heifer with a three months calf at her heel. Jobyna inspected said heifer and then, in a business-like tone to the farmer:

"Mr. Smith, how many quarts of milk does this cow give per day?"

"Thirty or thirty-five, ma'am," replied the farmer.

Jobyna gasped. Plucking her husband's sleeve, she drew him to one side.

"Arthur," she whispered. "Don't you think the little one would give enough for just you and me?"

In a way, Calgary feels a special interest in and affection for Arthur Stringer. He lived in this city for some time, and has always been excessively loyal to this part of the country. Calgary was long the home of his father, one of our old timers. His brother, Bert Stringer (Carbon Coal) resides on Royal avenue; a sister is the wife of Clarence Loughheed, son of Sir James and Lady Loughheed. Another sister is the wife of David Crombit, one of the officials of the C.N.R. Another sister married one of our best known and most popular residents in the person of Duncan Y. Stewart.