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W. N. U., DETROIT, NO. 47–1923.

The Brown Mouse

By HERBERT QUICK

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"THEY'LL GET JIM"

SYNOPSIS.—Jennie Woodruff refuses to marry Jim Irwin, young farm hand, because of his financial condition and poor prospects. He is intellectually above his station, and has advanced ideas concerning the possibilities of school teaching and farming, for which he is ridiculed by many. In short, Jim is an off ox. He flocks by himself and reads books and has a philosophy of his own. But there are latent powers in him unsuspected even by himself and Opportunity comes knocking at his door. Jim is nominated for school-teacher, as a joke. The joke results in his election. He visits his scholars. Jennie is nominated for county superintendent of schools. Jim speaks at a public meeting, condemning rural school methods.

CHAPTER VII—Continued.

Newton explained for the tenth time that Jim had done so many things that no teacher was supposed to do, and had left undone so many things that teachers were bound by custom to perform, that Newton's father and Mr. Bonner and Mr. Peterson had made up their minds that they would call upon him to resign, and if he wouldn't, they would "turn him out" in some way.

"What wrong's he done committed?" asked Raymond. "I don't know what teachers air supposed to do in this kentry, but Mr. Jim seems to be the only shore-enough teacher I ever see!"

"He don't teach out of the books the school board adopted," replied Newton.

"But he makes up better lessons," urged Raymond. "An' all the things we do in school he'ps us make a livin'."

"He begins at eight in the mornin'," said Newton, "an' he has some of us there till half past five, and comes back in the evening. And every Saturday, some of the kids are doin' something at the schoolhouse."

"They don't pay him for overtime, do they?" queried Raymond. "Well, then, they orto, instid of turnin' him out!"

"Well, they'll turn him out!" prophesied Newton. "I'm havin' more fun in school than I ever—an' that's why I'm with you on this quittin' trapping—but they'll get Jim, all right!"

"I'm having something betteh'n fun," replied Raymond. "My pap has never understood this kentry, an' we all has had bad times hyeh; but Mr. Jim an' I have studied out how I can make a betteh livin' next year—and pap says we kin go on the way Mr. Jim says. I'll work for Colonel Woodruff a part of the time, an' pap kin make corn in the biggest field. It seems we didn't do our work right last year—an' in a couple of years, with the increase of the hawgs, an' the land we kin get under plow . . ."

It was still an hour before nine—when the rural school traditionally "takes up"—when the boys had stored their traps in a shed at the Bronson home, and walked on to the schoolhouse. That rather scabby and weathered edifice was already humming with industry of a sort. In spite of the hostility of the school board, and the aloofness of the patrons of the school, the pupils were clearly interested in Jim Irwin's system of rural education. Never had the attendance been so large or regular; and one of the reasons for sessions before nine and after four was the inability of the teacher to attend to the needs of his charges in the five and a half hours called "school hours."

The day passed. Four o'clock came. In order that all might reach home for supper, there was no staying, except that Newt Bronson and Raymond Simms remained to sweep and dust the schoolroom, and prepare kindling for the next morning's fire—a work they had taken upon themselves, so as to enable the teacher to put on the blackboards such outlines for the morrow's class work as might be required. Jim was writing on the board a list of words constituting a spelling exercise. They were not from textbooks, but grew naturally out of the study of the seed wheat—"cockle," "morning-glory," "convolvulus," "viable," "viability," "sprouting," "iron-weed" and the like. A tap was heard at the door, and Raymond Simms opened it.

In filed three women—and Jim Irwin knew as he looked at them that he was greeting a deputation, and felt that it meant a struggle. For they were the wives of the members of the school board. He placed for them the three available chairs, and in the absence of any for himself remained standing before them, a gaunt shabby-looking revolutionist at the bar of settled usage and fixed public opinion.

Mrs. Haakon Peterson was a tall blonde woman, slow-spoken and dignified, and Jim felt an instinctive respect for her personality. Mrs. Bronson was a good motherly woman, noted for her housekeeping, and for her church activities. She looked offener at her son, and his friend Raymond, than at the schoolmaster. Mrs. Bonner was the only one who shook hands with Jim, but he sensed in the little, black-eyed Irishwoman the real commander of the expedition against him—for such he knew it to be.

"You may think it strange of us coming after hours," said she, "but we wanted to speak to you, teacher, without the children here."

"I wish more of the parents would call," said Jim. "At any hour of the day."

"Or night either, I dare say," suggested Mrs. Bonner. "I hear you've the scholars here at all hours, I m."

Jim smiled his slow patient smile.

"We do break the union rules, I guess, Mrs. Bonner," said he; "there seems to be more to do than we can get done during school hours."

"What we came for, Mr. Irwin, is to object to the way the teachin's being done—corn and wheat, and hogs and the like, instead of the learnin' schools was made to teach. I c'n see an' the whole district can see that it's easier for a man that's been a farmhand to teach farm-hand knowledge, than the learnin' schools was set up to teach; but if so be he hasn't the book education to do the right thing, we think he should get out and give a real teacher a chance."

"What am I neglecting?" asked Jim mildly.

Mrs. Bonner seemed unprepared for the question, and sat for an instant mute. Mrs. Peterson interposed her attack while Mrs. Bonner might be recovering her wind.

"We people that have had a hard time," she said in a precise way which seemed to show that she knew exactly what she wanted, "don't want our children taught about nothing but work. We want our children to learn nice things, and go to high school, and after a while to the Juniversity."

"Aren't your children happy in school, Mrs. Peterson?"

"I don't send them to school to be happy, Yim," replied Mrs. Peterson, calling him by the name most familiarly known to all of them; "I send them to learn to be higher people than their father and mother. That's what America means!"

"They'll be higher people—higher than their parents—higher than their teacher—they'll be efficient farmers, and efficient farmers' wives. They'll

"We Object to the Way the Teachin's Being Done."

be happy, because they will know how to use more brains in farming than any lawyer or doctor or merchant can possibly use in his business."

"It's a fine thing," said Mrs. Bonner, coming to the aid of her fellow soldiers, "to work hard for a lifetime, an' raise nothing but a family of farmers! A fine thing!"

"They will be farmers anyhow," cried Jim, "in spite of your efforts—ninety out of every hundred of them! And of the other ten, nine will be wage-earners in the cities, and wise to God they were back on the farm; and the hundredth one will succeed in the city."

The guns of Mrs. Bonner and Mrs. Peterson were silenced for a moment, and Mrs. Bronson, after gazing about at the typewriter, the hectograph, the exhibits of weed seeds, the Babcock milk tester, and the other unscholastic equipment, pointed to the list of words, and the arithmetic problems on the board.

"Do you get them words from the speller?" she asked.

"No," said he, "we get them from a lesson on seed wheat."

"Did them examples come out of an arithmetic book?" cross-examined she.

"No," said Jim, "we used problems we made ourselves. We were figuring profits and losses on your cows, Mrs. Bronson!"

"Ezra Bronson," said Mrs. Bronson loftily, "don't need any help in telling what's a good cow. He was farming before you was born!"

"Like fun, he don't need help! He's going to dry old Cherry off and fatten her for beef; and he can make more money on the cream by being about three more of 'em. The Babcock test shows they're just boarding on us without paying their board."

The delegation of matrons ruffled like a group of startled hens at this interposition, which was Newton Bronson's effective seizing of the opportunity to issue a progress bulletin in the research work on the Bronson dairy herd.

"Newton!" said his mother, "don't interrupt me when I'm talking to the teacher!"

"Well, then," said Newton, "don't tell the teacher that pa knows which cows were good and which were poor. If any one in this district wants to know about their cows they'll have to come to this shop. And I can tell you that it'll pay 'em to come, too, if they're going to make anything selling cream. Wait until we get out our reports on the herds, ma!"

The women were rather stampeded by this onslaught of the irregular troops—especially Mrs. Bronson. She felt a flutter of pride in her son, but it was strongly mingled with a motherly desire to spank him. The deputation rose with a unanimous feeling that they had been scored upon.

"Cows!" scoffed Mrs. Peterson. "If we leave you in this job, Mr. Irwin, our children will know nothing but cows and hens and soils and grass—and where will the culture come?"

"Culture!" exclaimed Jim. "Why—why, after ten years of the sort of school I would give you if I were a better teacher and could have my way—"

"Don't bother, Jim," said Mrs. Bonner sneeringly, "you won't be teaching the Woodruff school that long."

All this time, the dark-faced Cracker had been glooming from a corner, earnestly seeking to fathom the wrongness he sensed in the gathering. Now he came forward.

"I reckon I may be making a mistake to say anything," said he, "f'r we-all is strangers hyeh, an' we're pore; but I must speak out for Mr. Jim—I must! Don't turn him out, folks, f'r he's done mo' f'r us than eveh any one done in the world!"

"What do you mean?" asked Mrs. Peterson.

"I mean," said Raymond, "that when Mr. Jim began talking school to us, we was a pore no-count lot. Without any learnin', with nothin' to talk about except our wrongs, an' our enemies, and the weaknesses of the Iowa folks. You see we didn't understand you-all. An' now, we have hope. We done got hope from this school. We're goin' to make good in the world. We're getting education. We all learnin' to use books. My little sister will be as good as anybody, if you'll just let Mr. Jim alone in this school—as good as any one. An' I'll be a pap get a farm, and we'll work and think at the same time, an' be happy!"

CHAPTER VIII

Jennie Arranges a Christmas Party.

Miss Jennie Woodruff of the Woodruff district was a sensible country girl. Being sensible, she tried to avoid uppishness. But she did feel some little sense of increased importance as she drove her father's little runabout over the smooth earth roads, in the crisp December weather, just before Christmas. The weather itself was stimulating, and in the little year, visiting the one hundred or more rural schools soon to come under her supervision, she rather fancied the picture of herself, clothed in more or less authority and queening it over her little army of teachers.

Mr. Haakon Peterson was philosophically conscious that she made a rather agreeable picture, as she skipped her car alongside his top buggy to talk with him. She had bright blue eyes, fluffy brown hair, a complexion whipped pink by the breeze, and she smiled at him ingratiatingly.

"Don't you think father is lovely?" said she. "He is going to let me use the runabout when I visit the schools."

"That will be good," said Haakon. "It will save you lots of time. I hope you make the county pay for the gasoline."

"I haven't thought about that," said Jennie. "Everybody's been so nice to me—I want to give as well as receive."

"Why," said Haakon, "you will just begin to receive when your salary begins in January."

"Oh, no!" said Jennie. "I've received much more than that now. You don't know how proud I feel. So many nice men I never knew before, and all my old friends like you work so for me in the convention and at the polls, just as if I amounted to something."

"And you don't know how proud I feel," said Haakon, "to see a county office a little girl I used to hold on my lap."

Haakon was a rather richer man than the colonel, and not a little proud of his ascent to affluence. A fluid-spoken, soft-voiced Scandinavian, he was quite completely Americanized, and his influence was always worth fifty to sixty Scandinavian votes in any county election. He was a good party man and conscious of being entitled to his voice in party matters. This seemed to him an opportunity for exerting a bit of political influence.

"Yennie," said he, "this man Yim Irwin needs to be lined up."

"Lined up! What do you mean?"

"The way he is doing in the school," said Haakon, "is all wrong. If you can't line him up, he will make you trouble. We must look ahead. Everybody has his friends, and Yim Irwin has his friends. If you have trouble with him, his friends will be against you when we want to nominate you for a second term. The county is getting close. If we go to convention with out your home delegation it would weaken you, and if we nominate you, every piece of trouble like this cuts down your vote. You ought to line him up and have him do right the rest of the time."

"But he is so funny," said Jennie.

"He likes you," said Haakon. "You can line him up."

"I guess that's so—to a wide-eyed reformer."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Peculiar Combinations.

An English woman recently wrote to a newspaper saying that she was born A. Mann (Alice Mann). She married a Mr. Husband, and so became A. Husband. He died and she married again, this time a Mr. Malden. Becoming a widow for a second time, she concludes that, though born A. Mann, she will die A. Malden.

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