

The Brown Mouse

By HERBERT QUICK
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"A BROWN MOUSE"

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 flacks 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.

CHAPTER II—Continued.

The president followed usage when he said: "If there's no objection, it will be so ordered. Prepare the ballots for a vote on the election of teacher, Mr. Secretary."

There was no surprise in view of the nomination of Jim Irwin by the blarneying Bonner when the Secretary smoothed out the first ballot, and read: "James E. Irwin, one." But when the next slip came forth, "James E. Irwin, two," the board of directors of the Woodruff Independent district were stunned at the slowly dawning knowledge that they had made an election! Before they had rallied, the secretary drew from the box the third and last ballot, and read, "James E. Irwin, three."

President Bronson choked as he announced the result—choked and stammered, and made very hard weather of it, but he went through with the motion, as we all run in our grooves.

"The ballot having shown the unanimous election of James E. Irwin, I declare him elected."

He dropped into his chair, while the secretary, a very methodical man, drew from his portfolio a contract duly drawn up bearing the name and signature. This he calmly filled out, and passed over to the president, pointing to the dotted line. Mr. Bronson would have signed his own death-warrant at that moment, not to mention a perfectly legal document, and signed with Peterson and Bonner looking on stonily. The secretary signed and shoved the contract over to Jim Irwin.

"Sign there," he said. Jim looked it over, saw the other signatures, and felt an impulse to dodge the whole thing. Then he thought of Jennie Woodruff's "Humph!"—and he signed!

"Move us adjourn," said Peterson.

"No 'bjection 'tis so ordered!" said Mr. Bronson.

The secretary and Jim went out, while the directors waited.

"What the Billy—" began Bonner, and finished lamely! "What for did you vote for the dub, Ez?" "I voted for him," replied Bronson, "because he fought for my boy this afternoon. I didn't want it stuck into him too hard. I wanted him to have one vote."

"An' I wanted him to have wan vote, too," said Bonner. "I thought meself the only dang fool on the board—an' he made a spache that aimed wan vote—but fr the love of hivin, that dub fr a teacher! What come over you, Hankon—you voted fr him, too!" "Ay wanted him to have one wote, too," said Peterson.

And in this wise, Jim became the teacher in the Woodruff district—all on account of Jennie Woodruff's "Humph!"

CHAPTER III

What is a Brown Mouse?

Immediately upon the accidental election of Jim Irwin to the position of teacher of the Woodruff school, he developed habits somewhat like a ghost's or a bandit's. That is, he walked of nights and on rainy days.

On fine days, he worked in Colonel Woodruff's fields as of yore. Jim's salary was to be just \$360 for nine months' work in the Woodruff school, and he was to find himself—and his mother. Therefore, he had to indulge in his loose habits of night walking and roaming about after hours only, or on holidays and in foul weather.

The Simms family, being from the "mountings" of Tennessee, were rather startled one night, when Jim Irwin, homely, stooped and errandless, silently appeared in their family circle about the front door. They had lived where it was the custom to give a whoop from the big road before one passed through the palin's and up to the house. Otherwise, how was one to know whether the visitor was friend or foe?

From force of habit, Old Man Simms started for his gun-rack at Jim's appearance, but the Lincolnian smile and the low slow speech, so much like his own in some respects, ended that.

"Stranger," said Mr. Simms, after greetings had been exchanged, "you're right welcome, but in my kentry you'd find it dangerous to walk in this-way."

"How so?" queried Jim Irwin. "You'd more'n likely git shot up some," replied Mr. Simms, "unless you whooped from the big road." "I didn't know that," replied Jim. "I'm ignorant of the customs of other countries. Would you rather I'd whoop from the big road—nobody else w'll."

"I reckon," replied Mr. Simms, "that we-all w'll have to accommodate our-selves to the ways hyeh." Evidently Jim was the Simms' first

caller since they had settled on the little brushy tract whose hills and trees reminded them of their mountains. Low hills, to be sure, with only a footing of rocks where the creek had cut through, and not many trees, but down in the creek bed, with the oaks, elms and box-elders arching overhead, the Simmses could imagine themselves beside some run falling into the French Broad, or the Holston. The creek bed was a wild-ravine room in which to retire from the eternal black soil and level cornfield of Iowa.

The soil was so poor, in comparison with those black uplands, that the owner of the old wood-lot could find no renter but it was better than the soil in the mountains, and suited the lonesome Simmses much more than a better farm would have done. They were not of the Iowa people anyhow, nor understood, not their equals—they were "pore," and expected to stay "pore"—while the Iowa people all seemed to be either well-to-do, or expecting to become so.

Jim Irwin asked Old Man Simms about the fishing in the creek, and whether there was any duck shooting spring and fall.

"We git right smart of these little panfish," said Mr. Simms, "an' Callista done shot two butterball ducks about 'tater-plantin' time."

Callista blushed—but this stranger, so much like themselves, could not see the rosy suffusion. The allusion gave him a chance to look about him at the family. There was a boy of sixteen, a girl—the duck-shooting Callista—younger than Raymond—a girl of eleven, named Virginia, but called Jinnie—and a smaller lad who rejoiced in the name of McGeehee, but was mercifully called Buddy.

Callista squirmed for something to say. "Raymond runs a line o' traps when the fur's prime," she volunteered.

Then came a long talk on traps and trapping, shooting, hunting and the joys of the mountings—during which Jim noted the ignorance and poverty of the Simmses. The clothing of the girls was not decent according to local standards; for while Callista wore a skirt hurriedly slipped on, Jim was quite sure—and not without evidence to support his views—that she had been wearing when he arrived the same regimentals now displayed by Jinnie—a pair of ragged blue overalls. Evidently the Simmses were wearing



Old Man Simms Started for His Gun.

what they had and not what they desired. The father was faded, patched, gray and earthy, and the boys looked better than the rest solely because we expect boys to be torn and patched. Mrs. Simms was invisible except as a gray blur beyond the rain-barrel, in the midst of which her pipe glowed with a regular ebb and flow of embers.

On the next rainy day Jim called again and secured the services of Raymond to help him select seed corn. He was going to teach the school next winter, and he wanted to have a seed-corn frolic the first day. Instead of waiting until the last—and you had to get seed corn while it was on the stalk, if you got the best.

No Simms could refuse a favor to the fellow who was so much like themselves, and who was so greatly interested in trapping, hunting and the Tennessee mountains—so Raymond went with Jim, and with Newt Bronson and five more they selected Colonel Woodruff's seed corn for the next year, under the colonel's personal superintendence.

In the evening they looked the grain over on the Woodruff lawn, and the colonel talked about corn and corn selection. They had supper at half past six, and Jennie waited on them—having assisted her mother in the cooking. It was quite a festival.

Jim Irwin was the least conspicuous person in the gathering, but the colonel, who was a seasoned politician, observed that the farm-hand had become a fisher of men, and was angling for the souls of these boys, and their interest in the school. Jim was careful not to flush the covey, but every boy received from the next winter's teacher some confidential hint as to plans, and some suggestion that Jim was relying on the aid and comfort of that particular boy.

Newt Bronson, especially, was leaned on as a strong staff and a very present help in time of trouble. As for Raymond Simms, it was clearly best to leave him alone. All this talk of corn selection and related things was new to him, and he drank it in

thirstily. He had an inestimable advantage over Newt in that he was starved, while Newt was surfeited with "advantages" for which he had no use.

"Jennie," said Colonel Woodruff, after the party had broken up, "I'm losing the best hand I ever had, and I've been sorry."

"I'm glad he's leaving you," said Jennie. "He ought to do something except work in the field for wages."

"I've had no idea he could make good as a teacher—and what is there in it if he does?"

"What has he lost if he doesn't?" "Joined Jennie. "And why can't he make good?"

"The school board's against him, for one thing," replied the colonel. "They'll fire him if they get a chance. They're laughing-stock of the country for hiring him by mistake, and they're irritated. But after seeing him perform tonight, I wonder if he can't make good."

"If he could feel like anything but an underling, he'd succeed," said Jennie.

"That's his heredity," stated the colonel, whose live stock operations were based on heredity. "Jim's a scrub, I suppose; but he acts as if he might turn out to be a Brown Mouse."

"What do you mean, pa," scoffed Jennie—"a Brown Mouse?"

"A fellow in Edinburgh," said the colonel, "crossed the Japanese waltzing mouse with the common white mouse. Jim's peddling father was a waltzing mouse, no good except to jump from one spot to another for no good reason. Jim's mother is an albino of a woman, with all the color washed out in one way or another. Jim ought to be a mongrel, and I've always considered him one. But the Edinburgh fellow every once in a while got out of his variously-colored, waltzing and albino hybrids, a brown mouse. It wasn't a common house mouse, either, but a wild mouse unlike any he had ever seen. It ran away, and bit and gnawed and raised hob. It was what we breeders call a Mendelian segregation of genetic factors that had been in the waltzers and albinos all the time—their original wild ancestor of the woods and fields. If Jim turns out to be a brown mouse, he may be a bigger man than any of us. Anyhow, I'm for him."

"He'll have to be a big man to make anything out of the job of a country school teacher," said Jennie.

"Any job's as big as the man who holds it down," said her father.

Next day Jim received a letter from Jennie.

"Dear Jim," it ran. "Father says you are sure to have a hard time—the school board's against you, and all that. But he added 'I'm for Jim, anyhow!' I thought you'd like to know this. Also he said, 'Any job's as big as the man who holds it down.' And I believe this also, and I'm for you, too! You are doing wonders even before the school starts in getting the pupils interested in a lot of things, which, while they don't belong to school work, will make them friends of yours. I don't see how this will help you much, but it's a fine thing, and shows your interest in them. Don't be too original. The wheel runs easiest in the beaten track. Yours, Jennie."

Jennie's caution made no impression on Jim—but he put the letter away, and every evening took it out and read the words, "I'm for you, too!" The colonel's dictum, "Any job's as big as the man who holds it down," was an Emersonian truism to Jim. It reduced all jobs to an equality, and it meant equality in intellectual and spiritual development. It didn't mean, for instance, that any job was as good as another in making it possible for a man to marry—and Jennie Woodruff's "Humph!" returned to kill and drag off her "I'm for you, too!"

CHAPTER IV

The First Day of School.

Jim Irwin was full of his Emerson's "Representative Men," and his Carlyle's "French Revolution," and the other old-fashioned, excellent, good literature which did not cost over 25 cents a volume; and he had pored long and with many thrills over the pages of Matthews' "Getting On in the World." His view of efficiency was that it is the capacity to see opportunity where others overlook it, and make the most of it.

All through his life he had had his own plans for becoming great. And all the time he was bare-footed, ill-clad and dreamed his dreams to the accompaniment of the growl of the plow cutting the roots under the brown furrow-slice, or the wooshing of the milk in the pail. At twenty-eight, he considered these dreams over.

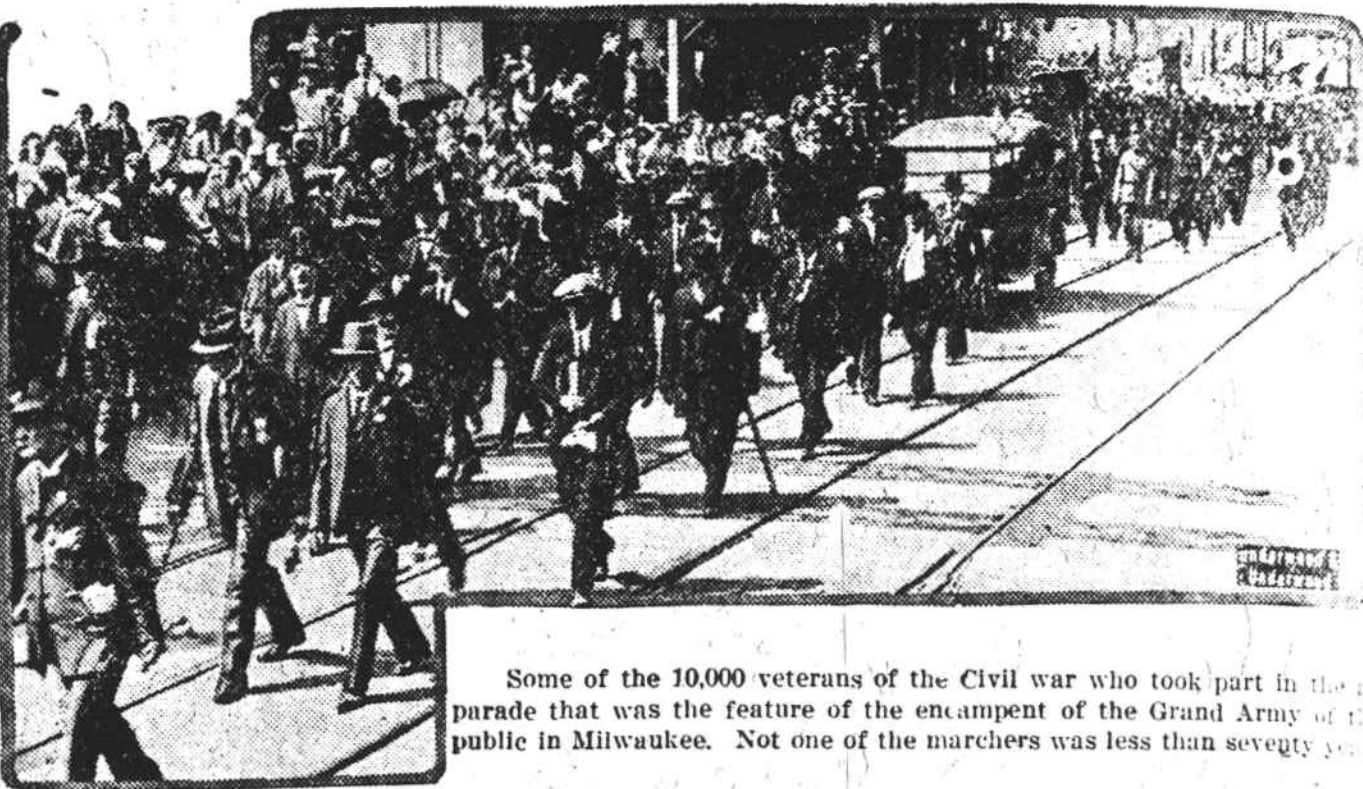
As for this new employment, he saw no great opportunity in it. He went into the small, mean, ill-paid task as a part of the day's work, with no knowledge of the stirring of the nation for a different sort of rural school, and no suspicion that there lay in it any highway to success in life. He rather wondered why he had allowed Jennie's sneer to sting him into the course of action which put him in this new relation to his neighbors.

"Half the kids call him Jim," said Bonner.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

No woman is satisfied unless she has something to worry about.

Grand Army Veterans Marching Through Milwaukee



Some of the 10,000 veterans of the Civil war who took part in the annual parade that was the feature of the encampment of the Grand Army of the Republic in Milwaukee. Not one of the marchers was less than seventy years old.

LUCKY YOUNG SINGER



Lina Paglinghi, the protege of Tetravzini, who was picked out of a legion of girls whom she heard all over the world. Miss Paglinghi is only sixteen years old and is a resident of San Francisco. Mme. Tetravzini will personally educate her in her studio in Rome. Miss Paglinghi's soprano voice is rich and warm and has thrilled large audiences in San Francisco as well as elsewhere. The famous diva has given the youthful singer her name to become hyphenated with that of her own and the girl will in the future be called Lina Paglinghi-Tetravzini.

HEADS RELIEF IN JAPAN



Brig. Gen. Frank R. McCoy, member of General Wood's staff, who has been appointed director general of American relief in Japan.

WON'T WAIT FOR MARY



Allister McCormick, prominent young Chicagoan, will not be found waiting at the altar again for Mary Landon Baker, society belle of Chicago, for his engagement to an English girl, Miss Joan Stevens of London, has been announced. Miss Baker repeatedly postponed her marriage to McCormick.

Fortissimo.

"Phwat's that noise, Mrs. Mulcahy?" "It's me daughter Maggie runnin' up and down th' scales." "Begorra, she must weigh a ton."

Spelled Differently.

Wife—This pudding is a sample of the new cook's work. What do you think of it? Husband—I call it mediocre. Wife—No, dear; it's tapioca.—London Tit-Bits.

City Crowns 87-Year-Old Queen



Here is Mrs. G. A. Oelwein, eighty-seven years old, after whom the town of Oelwein, Iowa, was named, and who lives on the property on which stands Oelwein's first log house. Oelwein held an elaborate historic pageant Sept. 12, when the people of that community celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the city. During the celebration Mrs. Oelwein was crowned queen.

Columbus Beauty Again Winner



"Miss America of 1922" (Katherine Campbell of Columbus, O.) was again selected as "Miss America" in the Atlantic City contest. She is here seen on her throne beside Father Neptune.

One Issue Dodged by Mr. Bryan



This photograph shows William Jennings Bryan at the annual baby show in Los Angeles. Mr. Bryan refused to pick the winner and admitted his inability to kiss all of the 150 contestants who so sweetly smiled at him as they passed in review. However, he did consent to pose for a picture with twins at the head of the parade.