

The BROWN MOUSE

by Herbert Quick



SYNOPSIS

CHAPTER I—Jennie Woodruff contemptuously 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 expert school teaching, for which he is ridiculed by many.

CHAPTER II—More as a joke than otherwise Jim is selected as teacher of the Woodruff district school.

CHAPTER III—Jim, in his new position, sets out to make staunch friends of his pupils, especially two boys, Newton Bronson and "Buddy" Simms, the latter the son of a shiftless farmer, Colonel Woodruff, Jennie's father, has little faith in Jim's ideas of improving rural educational methods. He nicknames him the "Brown Mouse," in illustration of an anecdote.

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 whooshing 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.

But, true to his belief in honest, thorough work, like a general preparing for battle, he examined his field of operations. His manner of doing this seemed to prove to Colonel Woodruff, who watched it with keen interest as something new in the world, that Jim Irwin was possibly a Brown Mouse. But the colonel knew only a part of Jim's performances. He saw Jim clothed in slickers, walking through rainstorms to the houses in the Woodruff district, as greedy for every moment of rain as a baymaker for shine; and he knew that Jim made a great many evening calls.

But he did not know that Jim was making what our sociologists call a survey. For that matter, neither did Jim; for books on sociology cost more than 25 cents a volume, and Jim had never seen one. However, it was a survey. To be sure, he had long known everybody in the district, save the Simmses—and he was now a friend of all that exotic race; but there is knowing and knowing.

He now had note-books full of facts about people and their farms. He knew how many acres each family possessed, and what sort of farming each husband was doing—live stock, grain or mixed. He knew about the mortgages, and the debts. He knew whether the family atmosphere was happy and contented, or the reverse. He knew which boys and girls were wayward and insubordinate. He made a record of the advancement in their studies of all the children, and what they liked to read. He knew their favorite amusements. He talked with their mothers and sisters—not about the school, to any extent, but on the weather, the horses, the automobiles, the silo-filling machinery and the profits of farming.

Really, though Jennie Woodruff did not see how such doings related to school work, Jim Irwin's school was running full blast in the homes of the district and the minds of many pupils, weeks and weeks before that day when he called them to order on the Monday specified in his contract as the first day of school.

Con Bonner, who came to see the opening, voiced the sentiments of the older people when he condemned the school as disorderly. To be sure, there were more pupils enrolled than had ever entered on a first day in the whole history of the school, and it was hard to accommodate them all. But the director's criticism was leveled against the free-and-easy air of the children. Most of them had brought seed corn and a good-sized corn shov was on view. There was much argument as to the merits of the various entries. Instead of a language lesson from the text-book, Jim had given them an exercise based on an examination of the ears of corn.

The lumber exercises of the little chaps had been worked out with ears and kernels of corn. One class in arithmetic calculated the percentage

of inferior kernels at tip and butt to the full-sized grains in the middle of the ear.

All the time, Jim Irwin, awkward and uncouth, clad in his home-too-good Sunday suit and trying to hide behind his Lincolnian smile the fact that he was pretty badly frightened and much embarrassed, passed among them, getting them enrolled, setting them to work, wasting much time and laboring like a heavy-laden barge in a sea-way.



"That feller'll never do," said Bonner to Bronson next day. "Looks like a tramp in the schoolroom."

"Wearin' his best, I guess," said Bronson.

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

"That's all right with me," replied Bronson.

"The room was as noisy as a caucus," was Bonner's next indictment, "and the flure was all over corn like a hog-pin."

"Oh! I don't suppose he can get away with it," assented Bronson disgustedly, "but that boy of mine is as slicked as a colt with the whole thing. Says he's goin' reg'lar this winter."

"That's because Jim don't keep no order," said Bonner. "He lets Newt do as he pleases."

"First time he's ever pleased to do anything but deviltry," protested Bronson. "Oh, I suppose Jim'll fall down, and we'll have to fire him—but I wish we could get a good teacher that would git hold of Newt the way he seems to!"

(To be continued)

AS TO WOMEN'S HIGH HEELS

Biologist Predicts Ultimate Loss of All Toes but One if Their Use Continues.

A London biologist is quoted as making the prediction that if women keep on wearing high heels they will find themselves eventually with only one toe, says the New York Herald. With the high heels now worn, he says, three toes are sufficient for walking; and as nature always gets rid of superfluous organs it seems likely that in the course of time women's toes will be reduced to three, and perhaps later to two, or even one.

The biologist is not mentioned by name but apparently he accepts a theory that most evolutionists have abandoned. The present view of orthodox biologists is that acquired characteristics are not inherited.

Even Bernard Shaw, who, venturing into this controversy in "Back to Methuselah," argues with his usual energy against the orthodox view, admits that many generations of Chinese women have bound their feet "without producing the slightest tendency on their part to be born with abnormally small feet."

He also, descending the scale, concedes that the clipped ears and docked tails which fanciers have inflicted on generations of dogs have not affected the ears and tails of the dogs' puppies. And descending still further, he recalls the experiments of the biologist Weismann, who cut off the tails of a colony of mice, and the tails of the children of the mice, and the tails of the children of the children of the mice, without finding that the tails of the descendants were any shorter than those of their ancestors.

So the toes of coming generations are probably safe regardless of the fashion in women's footwear.

Figures Were Not There.

The class had been told to draw a picture of a river with two figures sitting on the bank. Going round the class the teacher came to a boy who had finished his drawing. She looked at his paper and was surprised to find only a river.

"Why, Jack," she said, "where are the two people I told you to draw?"

"Well, you see, miss," he answered, "I'm not very good at drawing people so I put up a notice: 'Trespassers will be prosecuted.'"

CALL FOR COUNTY WARRANTS

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Dated at Heppner, Oregon, December 12th, 1923.

LEON W. BRIGGS,
County Treasurer.

2 issues

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