

The BROWN MOUSE

By HERBERT QUICK

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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.—Jim's conduct of the school, where he endeavors to teach the children the wonders of nature and some of the scientific methods of farming, as well as "book learning," is commended.

CHAPTER V.—Jennie Woodruff is nominated for the position of county superintendent of schools. The school board grows bitter in its opposition to Jim and his innovations.

CHAPTER VI.—At a public meeting Jim roundly condemns the methods of teaching in the rural schools, and makes his friends thereby.

CHAPTER VII.—A delegation of prominent women condemn Jim's methods of teaching, but he is stoutly defended by his pupils, especially Newton Bronson.

CHAPTER VIII.—Jim has Christmas dinner at Colonel Woodruff's, and listening to him, Jennie begins to do some thinking concerning his ability and his prospects.

CHAPTER IX.—In the evening Jim, as well as he knows how, courts Jennie, without, however, making much progress, though she is quickly losing her poor opinion of him.

CHAPTER X.—Jennie, elected county superintendent of schools, receives so many complaints from people of the district concerning Jim's methods of teaching that she finds herself compelled formally to ask for his resignation. After she has left, Jim is visited by Colonel Woodruff, who strongly urges him to refuse to resign, and offers to back him. Jim agrees to stick, for a while at least.

CHAPTER XI.—A meeting of the school board, which had been gathered to "get" Jim, is confronted by Jennie, who upholds him. She conducts an examination of his pupils at the meeting, to prove that he is not neglecting their "book learning," by the introduction of other subjects which he considers of importance. The splendid showing made by the children converts many, who had doubted his views.

CHAPTER XII.—The novel ideas which Jim has introduced have been talked about outside the county, and he is visited by Professor Withers, extension lecturer at the state university, who invites him to deliver an address at the next annual meeting of the Farmers' institute.

CHAPTER XIII.—Professor Withers is impressed by many of the innovations made by Jim, and so informs Colonel Woodruff and Jennie, somewhat to the astonishment of both. The colonel suggests to Jim that he (the colonel) seek election to the school board, replacing Cornelius Bonner, implacable enemy of Jim Irwin.

CHAPTER XIV

A Minor Caste Half a Vote.

March came in like neither a lion nor a lamb, but was scarcely a week old before the wild ducks had begun to score the sky above Bronson's stow looking for open water and badly-harvested cornfields. Wild geese, too, honked from on high as if in wonder

that these great prairies on which their forefathers had been wont fearlessly to alight had been changed into a disgusting expanse of farms. Colonel Woodruff's hired man, Pete, stopped Newton Bronson and Raymond Simms as they tramped across the colonel's pasture, gun in hand, trying to make themselves believe that the shooting was good.

"This ain't no country to hunt in," said he. "Did either of you fellows ever have any real duck-shooting?"

"The mountings," said Raymond, "air poor places for ducks."

"Not big enough water," suggested Pete. "Some wood-ducks, I suppose?"

"Along the creeks and rivers, yes, seh," said Raymond, "but nothing to depend on."

"I've never been nowhere," said Newton, "except once to Minnesota—and that wasn't in the shooting season."

A year ago Newton would have boasted of having "bummed" his way to Faribault. His hesitant speech was a proof of the embarrassment his new respectability sometimes inflicted upon him.

"I used to shoot ducks for the market at Spirit Lake," said Pete. "I know Fred Gilbert just as well as I know you. But that's all over, now. You've got to go so fur now to get decent shooting where the farmers won't drive you off, that it costs nine dollars to send a postcard home."

"I think we'll have fine shooting on the slaw in a few days," said Newton.

"Humph!" scoffed Pete. "I give you my word, if I hadn't promised the colonel I'd stay with him another year, I'd take a side-door Pullman for the Sand Hills of Nebraska or the Devil's lake country tomorrow—if I had a gun."

"If it wasn't for a parcel of things that keep me hush," said Raymond, "I'd like to go, too."

"The colonel," said Pete, "needs me.

He needs me in the election campaign. What's the matter of your ol' man, Newt? What for does he vote for that Bonner, and throw down an old neighbor?"

"I can't do anything with him!" exclaimed Newton irritably. "He's all tangled up with Peterson and Bonner."

"Well," said Pete, "if he'd just stay at home it would help some. If he votes for Bonner, it'll be just about a stand-off."

"He never misses a vote!" said Newton despairingly.

"Can't you cripple him some way?" asked Pete jocularly. "Darned funny when a boy o' your age can't control his father's vote! So long!"

"I wish I could vote!" grumbled Newton. "I wish I could! We know a lot more about the school, and Jim Irwin bein' a good teacher than dad does—and we can't vote. Why can't folks vote when they are interested in an election, and know about the issues. It's tyranny that you and I can't vote."

"I reckon," said Raymond, the conservative, "that the old-time people that axed it thataway knowed best."

"Rats!" sneered Newton, the iconoclast. "Why, Callista knows more about the election of school director than dad knows."

"That don't seem reasonable," protested Raymond. "She's prejudiced, I reckon, in favor of Mr. Jim Irwin."

"Well, dad's prejudiced against him—or, no, he ain't either. He likes Jim. He's just prejudiced against giving up his old notions. No, he ain't neither—I guess he's only prejudiced against seeming to give up some old notions he seemed to have once! And the kids in school would be prejudiced right, anyhow!"

"Paw says he'll be on hand prompt," said Raymond. "But he had to be p'swaded right much. Paw's proud—and he can't read."

"Sometimes I think the more people read the less sense they've got," said Newton. "I wish I could tie dad up! I wish I could get snakebit, and make him go for the doctor!"

The boys crossed the ridge to the wooded valley in which nestled the Simms cabin. They found Mrs. Simms greatly exercised in her mind because young McGeehee had been found playing with some blue vitriol used by Raymond in his school work on the treatment of seed potatoes for scab.

"His hands was all blue with it," said she. "Do you reckon, Mr. Newton, that it'll pizen him?"

"Did he swallow any of it?" asked Newton.

"Nah!" said McGeehee scornfully. Newton reassured Mrs. Simms, and went away pensive. Jim Irwin's methods had already accomplished much in preparing Newton and Raymond for citizenship. He had shown them the fact that voting really has some relation to life. At present, however, the new wine in the old bottles was causing Newton to forget his filial duty, and his respect for his father.

He wished he could lock him up in the barn so he couldn't go to the school election. He wished he could become ill—or poisoned with blue vitriol or something—so his father would be obliged to go for a doctor.

He wished—well, why couldn't he get sick? Newton mended his pace, and looked happier.

"I'll fix him!" said he to himself. "What time's the election, Ezra?" asked Mrs. Bronson at breakfast.

"I'm goin' at four o'clock," said Ezra. "And I don't want to hear any more from any one—looking at Newton—'bout the election. It's none of the business of the women an' boys."

Newton took this reproof in an unexpectedly submissive spirit. In fact, he exhibited his very best side to the family that morning, like one going on a long journey, or about to be married off, or engaged in some deep dark plot.

"I s'pose you're off trampin' the slaws at the sight of a flock of ducks four miles off as usual?" stated Mr. Bronson challengingly.

"I thought," said Newton, "that I'd get a lot of raisin bait ready for the pocket-gophers in the lower meadow. They'll be throwing up their mounds by the first of April."

"Not then," said Mr. Bronson, somewhat mollified, "not before May. Where'd you get the raisin idee?"

"We learned it in school," answered Newton. "Jim had me study a bulletin on the control and eradication of pocket-gophers. You use raisins with strychnine in 'em—and it tells how."

"Some fool notion, I s'pose," said Mr. Bronson, rising. "But go ahead if you're careful about handlin' the strychnine."

Newton spent the time from twelve-thirty to half after two in watching the clock; and twenty minutes to three found him in the woodshed, pen-knife in hand, a small vial of strychnine crystal before him, a saucer of raisins at his right hand, and another exactly like it, partially filled with gopher bait—raisins into which a minute crystal of strychnine had been inserted on the point of the knife.

At three-thirty Newton went into the house and lay down on the porch-hair sofa, saying to his mother that he felt kind o' funny and thought he'd lie down a while. At three-forty he heard his father's voice in the kitchen and knew that his sire was preparing to start for the scene of battle.

A groan issued from Newton's lips—a gruesome groan. But his father's voice from the kitchen door betrayed no agitation. He was scolding the horses as they stood tied to the hitching-post, in tones that showed no knowledge of his son's distressed moans.

"What's the matter?" It was Newton's little sister who asked the question. Even though re-

garded as a pure matter of mere-believe, such sounds were terrible.

"Oh, sister, sister!" howled Newton, "run and tell 'em that brother's dyin'!"

Fanny disappeared in a manner which expressed her balanced feelings—she felt that her brother was making believe, but for all that, something awful was the matter. So she went rather slowly to the kitchen door, and casually remarked that Newton was dying on the sofa in the sitting-room.

"You little fraud!" said her father. "Why, Fanny!" said her mother—and ran into the sitting-room—whence in a moment, with a cry that was almost a scream, she summoned her husband, who responded at the top of his speed.

Newton was groaning and in convulsions. Horrible grimaces contorted his face, his jaws were set, his arms and legs drawn up, and his muscles tense.

"What's the matter?" His father's voice was stern as well as full of anxiety. "What's the matter, boy?"

"Oh!" cried Newton. "Oh! Oh! Oh!"

"Newtie, Newtie!" cried his mother, "where are you in pain? Tell mother, Newtie!"

"Oh," groaned Newtie, relaxing, "I feel awful!"

"What you been eatin'?" interrogated his father.

"Nothing," replied Newton. "I saw you eatin' dinner," said his father.

Again Newton was convulsed by strong spasms, and again his groans filled the hearts of his parents with terror.

"That's all I've eaten," said he when his spasms had passed, "except a few raisins. I was putting strychnine in 'em—"

"Oh, heavens!" cried his mother.



"Heavens! He's Poisoned!"

"He's poisoned! Drive for the doctor, Ezra! Drive!"

Mr. Bronson forgot all about the election—forgot everything save antidotes and speed. He leaped toward the door. As he passed out, he shouted, "Give him an emetic!" He tore the itching straps from the posts, jumped into the buggy, gave the spirited horses their heads, and fled toward town. Just at the town limits, he met the doctor in Sheriff Dilly's automobile, the sheriff himself at the steering wheel. Mr. Bronson signaled them to stop, ignoring the fact that they were making similar signs to him.

"We're just starting for your place," said the doctor. "Your wife got me on the phone."

"Thank God!" replied Bronson. "Don't fool any time away on me, Drive!"

"Get in here, Ez," said the sheriff. "Doc knows how to drive, and I'll come with your team. They need a slow drive to cool 'em off."

"Why didn't you phone me?" asked the doctor.

"Never thought of it," replied Bronson. "I hadn't had the phone only a few years. Drive faster!"

"Isn't your mother here, Jim?" she asked. "I've been looking all over the crowd and can't see her."

"She isn't here," answered Jim. "I was in hopes that when she broke loose and went to your Christmas dinner she would stay loose—but she went home and settled back into her rut."

"Too bad," said Jennie. "She'd have had a nice time if she had come."

"Yes," said Jim, "I believe she would."

"I want help," said Jennie. "Our hamper is terribly heavy. Please!"

It was rather obvious to Mrs. Bonner that Jennie was throwing herself at Jim's head, but that was an article of the Bonner family creed since the decision which closed the hearing at the court house. It must be admitted that the young county superintendent found tasks which kept the school-master very close to her side.

"Sit down, Jim," said Mrs. Woodruff. "you've earned a bite of what we've got. It's good enough, what there is of it, and there's enough of it, such as it is!"

"I'm sorry," said Jim, "but I've a prior engagement."

"Why, Jim!" protested Jennie. "I've been counting on you. Don't desert me!"

"I'm awfully sorry," said Jim, "but I promised. I'll see you later."

One might have thought, judging by the colonel's quizzical smile, that he was pleased at Jennie's loss of her former swain.

"We'll have to invite him longer ahead of time," said he. "He's getting to be in demand."

Jim seemed to be in demand—a fact that Jennie confirmed by observation. He received a dozen invitations as he passed the groups seated on the grass—one of them from Mrs. Cornelius Bonner, who saw no particular point in advertising disgruntlement. The

children ran to him and clung to his hands; young girls gave him stately smiles and such trifles as chicken drumsticks, pieces of cake and like tidbits. His passage to the numerous group at a square table under a big burr oak was quite an ovation—an ovation of the significance of which he was himself quite unaware.

But Jennie—the daughter of a politician and a promising one herself—Jennie sensed the fact that Jim Irwin had won something from the people of the Woodruff district in the way of deference. Still he was the gangling, Lincolnian, ill-dressed, over-stricken Jim Irwin of old, but Jennie had no longer the feeling that one's standing was somewhat compromised by association with him.

He had begun to put on something more significant than clothes, something which he had possessed all the time, but which became valid only as it was publicly apprehended. He was clearly the central figure of his group, in which she recognized the Bronsons, those queer children from Tennessee, the Simmses, the Talcotts, the Hansens, the Hamms and Colonel Woodruff's hired man, Pete, whose other name is not recorded.

Jim sat down between Bettina Hansen, a flaxen-haired young Brunhilde of seventeen, and Callista Simms—Jennie saw him do it, while listening to Wilbur Smythe's account of the exacting nature of the big law practice he was building up—and would have been glad to exchange places with Bettina.

The repast drew to a close; and over by the burr oak the crowd had grown to a circle surrounding Jim Irwin.

"He seems to be making an address," said Wilbur Smythe.

"Well, Wilbur," replied the colonel, "you had the first shot at us. Suppose we move over and see what's under discussion."

As they approached the group, they heard Jim Irwin answering something which Ezra Bronson had said.

"You think so, Ezra," said he, "and it seems reasonable that big creameries like those at Omaha, Sioux City, Des Moines and the other centralizer points can make butter cheaper than we would do here—but we've the figures that show that they aren't economical."

"They can't make good butter, for one thing," said Newton Bronson cockily.

"Why can't they?" asked Olaf Hansen, the father of Bettina.

"Well," said Newton, "they have to have so much cream that they've got to ship it so far that it gets rotten on the way, and they have to renovate it with lime and other ingredients before they can churn it."

"Well," said Raymond Simms, "I reckon they sell their butter for all it's worth; an' they can't get within four fath to seven cents a pound as much for it as the farmers' creameries in Wisconsin and Minnesota get for theirs."

"That's a fact, Olaf," said Jim.

"I'm Sorry," said Jim, "but I've a Prior Engagement."

"I want to get there, or I would," answered the doctor. "Don't worry. From what your wife told me over the phone I don't believe the boy's eaten any more strychnine than I have—and probably not so much."

"He was alive, then?"

"Alive and making an argument against taking the emetic," replied the doctor. "But I guess she got it down him."

Thus reassured, Mr. Bronson was calm, even if somewhat tragic in calmness, when he entered the death chamber with the doctor. Newton was sitting up, his eyes wet, and his face pale. His mother had won the argument, and Newton had lost his dinner. Hankon Peterson occupied an arm-chair.

"What's all this?" asked the doctor. "How are you feeling, Newt? Any pain?"

"I'm all right," said Newton. "Don't give me any more o' that nasty stuff!"

"No," said the doctor, "but if you don't tell me just what you've been eating, and doing, and pulling off on us, I'll use this"—and the doctor exhibited a huge stomach pump.

"What'll you do with that?" asked Newton faintly.

"I'll put this down into your hold, and unload you, that's what I'll do."

"Is the election over, Mr. Peterson?" asked Newton.

"Yes," answered Mr. Peterson, "and the votes counted."

"Who's elected?" asked Newton.

"Colonel Woodruff," answered Mr. Peterson. "The vote was twelve to eleven."

"Well, dad," said Newton, "I s'pose you'll be sore, but the only way I could see to get in half a vote for Colonel Woodruff was to get poisoned and send you after the doctor. If you'd gone, it would 'a' been a tie, anyhow, and probably you'd 'a' persuaded somebody to change to Bonner. That's what's the matter with me. I killed your vote. Now, you can do whatever you like to me—but I'm sorry I scared mother."

Ezra Bronson seized Newton by the throat, but his fingers failed to close. "Don't pinch, dad," said Newton. "I've been using that neck an' it's tired."

Mr. Bronson dropped his hands to his sides, glared at his son for a moment and breathed a sigh of relief.

"Why, you darned infernal little fool," said he. "I've a notion to take a hamstrap to you! If I'd been there the vote would have been eleven to thirteen!"

"There was plenty votes there for the colonel, if he needed 'em," said Hankon, whose politician's mind was already fully adjusted to the changed conditions. "Ay tank the Woodruff district will have a unanimous school board from dis time on once more. Colonel Woodruff is just the man we have needed."

"I'm with you there," said Bronson. "And as for you, young man, if one or both of them horses is hurt by the run I give them, I'll lick you within an inch of your life— Here comes Dilly driving 'em now— I guess they're all right. I wouldn't want to drive a good team to death for any young hoodlum like him— All right, how much do I owe you, Doc?"

(To be continued)

QUAKERS TO HANDLE GERMAN RELIEF WORK

Funds Collected Will Be Spent in America, Says Major-General Allen.

Official word from Major-General Henry T. Allen, national chairman of the American committee for relief of German children, received by Robert H. Strong, Oregon state chairman, last week at headquarters, 715 Corbett building, Portland, is that all money collected in this country will be used to buy foodstuffs in America for shipment to Germany. There the materials will be distributed by the American Quakers, who have organized to do this great work.

General Allen also wired the Oregon headquarters that relief funds are being collected in Berlin and Bremen and other places for adding women and children. This is vouched for by American investigators there.

In Portland, the German-speaking members of 26 churches of all denominations and of 28 societies, following action taken at a mass meeting at the outset of this campaign, have contributed several thousand dollars toward this relief fund. It is also announced that they have been collecting relief funds regularly for at least three years to alleviate suffering in their native land.

In a state-wide collection, authorized by officials of the Catholic churches in Oregon, a substantial sum was realized on Sunday. Every Catholic church in the state participated.

Portland labor unions have been subscribing various sums, also, and the Central council there has a special committee of union members working on solicitation, following formal indorsement of the campaign.

IT PAYS TO READ THE HERALD ADS

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