

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 stances 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 nicknamed 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 condemned.

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 no 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 sends herself compelled formally to ask for his resignation. After she has left, Jim is visited by Colonel Woodruff, who strongly urges him 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. He conducts an examination of his pupils at the meeting, to prove that he is not neglecting their "book learning," and introduces other subjects which he considers of importance. The splendid showing made by the children converts many who had doubted, to 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 Irwin 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, irascible enemy of Jim Irwin.

CHAPTER XIV—Feigning sickness, Newton Bronson, younger brother of Irwin, has redeemed from idleness and folly and set on the right path, and who almost worships the teacher, keeps his father from voting at the school board election. Bronson is a friend of Bonner, and would have voted for him. As it is, Colonel Woodruff is chosen for the position, owing to Bronson's absence.

CHAPTER XV

The Glorious Fourth.

A good deal of water ran under the Woodruff district bridges in the weeks between the school election and the Fourth of July picnic at Eight-Mile grove. But few surface indications there were of any change in the little community in this annual gathering of friends and neighbors. Wilbur Smythe made the annual address, and was in rather finer fettle than usual as he paid his fervid tribute to the starry flag, and to this very place as the most favored spot in the best county of the greatest state in the most powerful, intellectual, freest and most progressive nation in the best possible of worlds.

Jim Irwin read the Declaration rather well, Jennie Woodruff thought, as she sat on the platform between Deacon Avery, the oldest settler in the district, and Mrs. Columbus Brown, the sole local representative of the Daughters of the American Revolution. Colonel Woodruff presided in his Grand Army of the Republic uniform. The fresh northwest breeze made free with the oaks, elms, hickories and box elders of Eight-Mile grove, and the waters of Pickeral creek glistened a hundred yards away, beyond the flitting figures of the boys who preferred to shoot off their own firecrackers and torpedoes and bigger chasers, rather than to listen to those of Wilbur Smythe. Still farther off could be heard the voice of a lone lemonade vender as he advertised ice-cold lemonade, made in the shade, with a brand-new spade, by an old maid, as a guaranty that it was the blindest, coldest lemonade ever sold.

Under the shadiest trees a few incorrigible Marthas were spreading the snowy tablecloths on which would soon be placed the bountiful repasts stored in ponderous wicker baskets and hampers. It was a lovely day, in a lovely spot—a good example of the miniature forests which grew naturally from time immemorial in favored

locations on the Iowa prairies—nair a square mile of woodland, all about which the green corn rows stood aslant in the cool breeze, waist-high and laid by.

They were passing down the rough board steps from the platform after the exercises had terminated in a rousing rendition of "America," when Jennie Woodruff, having slipped by everybody else to reach him, tapped Jim Irwin on the arm. He looked back at her over his shoulder with his slow gentle smile.

"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 schoolmaster 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 sisterly 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 Talcoits, the Hansens, the Hammes 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 its worth; an' they can't get within four 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.

"How do you kids know so darned much about it?" queried Pete.

"Huh!" sniffed Bettina. "We've been reading about it, and writing letters about it, and figuring percentages on it in school all winter. We've done arithmetic and geography and grammar and I don't know what else on it."

"Well, I'm agin' any schoolin'," said Pete, "that makes kids smarter in farmin' than their parents and their

parents' nired men. Or me another swig o' that lemonade, Jim!"

"You see," said Jim to his audience, meanwhile pouring the lemonade, "the centralizer creamery is uneconomical in several ways. It has to pay excessive transportation charges. It has to pay excessive commissions to its cream buyers. It has to accept cream without proper inspection, and mixes the good with the bad. It makes such long shipments that the cream spoils in transit and lowers the quality of the butter. It can't make the best use of the buttermilk. All these losses and leaks the farmers have to stand. I can prove—and so can the six or eight pupils in the Woodruff school who have been working on the cream question this winter—that we could make at least six cents a pound on our butter if we had a co-operative creamery and all sent our cream to it."

"Well," said Ezra Bronson, "let's start one."

"I'll go in," said Olaf Hansen.

"Me, too," said Con Bonner.

There was a general chorus of assent. Jim had convinced his audience.

"He's got the jury," said Wilbur Smythe to Colonel Woodruff.

"Yes," said the colonel, "and right here is where he runs into danger. Can he handle the crowd when it's with him?"

"Well," said Jim, "I think we ought to organize one, but I've another proposition first. Let's get together and pool our cream. By that, I mean that we'll all sell to the same creamery, and get the best we can out of the centralizers by the co-operative method. We can save two cents a pound in that way, and we'll learn to co-operate. When we have found just how well we can hang together, we'll be able to take up the co-operative creamery, with less danger of falling apart and failing."

"Who'll handle the pool?" inquired Mr. Hansen.

"We'll handle it in the school," answered Jim.

"School's about done," objected Mr. Bronson.

"Won't the cream pool pretty near pay the expenses of running the school all summer?" asked Bonner.

"We ought to run the school plant all the time," said Jim. "It's the only way to get full value of the investment. And we've corn-club work, pig-club work, poultry work and canning-club work which make it very desirable to keep in session with only a week's vacation. If you'll add the cream pool, it will make the school the hardest working crowd in the district and doing actual farm work, too. I like Mr. Bonner's suggestion."

"Well," said Haakon Peterson, who had joined the group, "Ay tank we better have a meeting of the board and discuss it."

"Well, darn it," said Columbus Brown, "I want in on this cream pool—and I live outside the district!"

"We'll let you in, Clumb," said the colonel.

"Sure!" said Pete. "We hain't no more sense than to let any one in, Clumb. Come in, the water's fine. We ain't proud!"

"Well," said Clumb, "if this feller is goin' to do school work of this kind, I want in the district, too."

"We'll come to that one of these days," said Jim. "The district is too small."

Wilbur Smythe's car stopped at the distant gate and honked for him—a signal which broke up the party. Haakon Peterson passed the word to the colonel and Mr. Bronson for a board meeting the next evening. The picnic broke up in a dispersion of staid married couples to their homes, and young folks in top buggies to dances and displays of fireworks in the surrounding villages.

Jim walked across the fields to his home—neither old nor young, having neither sweetheart with whom to dance nor farm to demand labor in its inexorable chores. He turned after crawling through a wire fence and looked longingly at Jennie as she was suavely assisted into the car by the frock-coated lawyer.

"You saw what he did?" said the colonel interrogatively, as he and his daughter sat on the Woodruff veranda that evening. "Who taught him the supreme wisdom of holding back his troops when they grew too wild for attack?"

"He may lose them," said Jennie.

"Not so," said the colonel. "Individuals of the Brown Mouse type always succeed when they find their environment. And I believe Jim has found his."

"Well," said Jennie, "I wish his environment would find him some clothes. It's a shame the way he has to go looking. He'd be nice-appearing if he was dressed anyway."

"Oh, then you haven't heard the news," said the colonel. "Jim's going to have his first made-to-measure suit for Ames. It's all fixed."

"Who's making it?" asked Jennie.

"Gustaf Paulsen, the Dane that's just opened a shop in town."

"A Dane?" queried Jennie. "Isn't he Bettina's uncle?"

"Ratherly," said the colonel jocularly, "seeing as how Bettina's Mrs. Hansen's daughter."

Clothes are rather important, but the difference between a suit made by Atkins, the tailor, and one built by Gustaf Paulsen, the new Danish craftsman, could not be supposed to be crucially important, even when designed for a very dear friend. And Jim was scarcely that—of course not! Why, then, did the county superintendent hastily run to her room, and cry? Why did she say to herself that the Hansens were very good people, and well-to-do, and it would be a fine thing for Jim and his mother—and then cry some more?

(To be continued)

The Fortunate Boy

by Ida M. Tarbell in Collier's

HOW devoid of understanding is he that pities Abraham Lincoln's youth! It was so hard, we say, so meager and ugly—no comforts, no hair mattress, no electric light, no free library, no ready-made clothes. We rehearse what we know he did not have, but fail to see what he did have.

The real boy Lincoln was not he who slept in the loft of a log cabin through whose chimneys the snow may sometimes have sifted; it was the boy who came home after a long day's work with glowing eyes, hugging to his heart a book—a borrowed book—who did his chores almost unconsciously, his mind on the joy that awaited him. What mattered it to him that he must gather chips and shavings to keep the logs flaming, if he would have a light to read by? He had a book to read, and he read it until sleep overtook the household, and then carried it up to bed that at the break of day it might be within his reach.

The real boy was not he who struggled with plow or ax or flatboat rudder; it was he who while working rehearsed over and over the passages that he had read the night before, making them his own. It was the boy who as he traveled the furrow visualized George Washington, Valley Forge, the crossing of the Delaware, who learned to declaim the "Great Declaration"—a thing born so close to his own time that no disappointing experience had ever chilled its noble phrases. To him there was a quality of truth, of possible realization in the famous document which thrilled and ennobled him. The real boy Lincoln was the one who, in those days we call so hard, carried with him a faith in the possibility of freedom and opportunity for all men, a faith which grew as he toiled.

He is not the one to be pitied. Pity the boy who, surrounded by all the thousands of volumes which rehearse the making and interpret the meaning of the Declaration of Independence, has never yet caught its vision or felt the fire of its inspiration.

His Craving for Books.

He must walk far for the book—beg it from neighbors who knew him, build acquaintance with strangers into confidence sufficient to borrow. Pity him for that? He had to learn a great thing—that the book is worth the price—any price. What did he grudge that brought him Bobby Burns or Aesop or Plutarch or the Constitution of the United States, or a collection of the strange and changing laws of men—that brought him anything that dealt with the workings of men's hearts and minds?

Pity the book hunter! What if the chase was long, the path hard, the footwear worn, the coat of homespun—what was all that to him? It was the quarry, not the way, of which he thought. A book in hand, he walked homeward with the man he had found—Jefferson, Shakespeare, Bunyan, Defoe—and for days, whatever came, cold, short rations, hard labor, Jefferson, Shakespeare, Bunyan, Defoe was by his side.

No, this boy is not to be pitied, but rather he who has never longed for a book, never walked a mile to borrow one—he who when a book is by his side can keep his hands from it, who can live among books daily, incurious, unacquainted.

The boy Lincoln did not read for forgetfulness. The book was not a sedative, a soporific for him. It did not take him out of Spencer county, Indiana, but rather helped him to understand Spencer county. It interpreted to him the thing of which he and Thomas Lincoln and Nancy Hanks Lincoln, and all of these neighbors and friends of theirs, were a part.

Read to Remember.

The pioneer life had its excitements and allurements—discovery, danger, hope lifted it out of the commonplace. Young Lincoln shared all this; and the book told him, as those about him could not, the meaning, the reasons, behind it all. It traced the path that a long line of forebears had traveled westward—their sacrifices, their hopes! Through the book he saw southwestern Indiana and its people as a scene in a great and noble drama—saw its relation to the opening of the new continent, the upbuilding of a new kind of government, the founding of something which would admit more and more men to the opportunities of the earth.

The book did something else for him—it helped him to understand human beings. His curiosity about them was insatiable—their ways, their

thoughts, their passions, their meannesses, their nobilities. The boy Lincoln saw wide ranges of human material—a few men of education; many men of patient, steady, daily labor; reverent, believing men; he saw those of riotous life, and not a few of men of petty living—dirty habits, physical and mental. He shirked no man. He was curiously impersonal in his contacts with men. He sought to know them—and the book helped him. Aesop, Bunyan, Burns, Shakespeare—all of them helped him understand the men of Spencer county, Indiana. He loved and sought the book because of the light and understanding it gave to life.

Do not pity him because he had no steadier glow to read by than that of blazing logs—rather rejoice that he read!

Abraham Lincoln

RICH in the reverence of a nation's heart, Thou martyred one! thou firm and rugged rock! Like valiant knight didst thou perform thy part, Despite all envy, malice, jeer and mock!

Dark were the shadows, deep the grief and care That fell to thee, heroic, homely soul! Belied, contemned, but now with splendor rare Thy fame glows radiantly from pole to pole!

Could we our fated tasks as fitly meet As thou didst thine, O peerless man of men! Fearless the great assassin, Death, Scorning his shaft, Life were a victory then!

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