

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 better 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 condemned.

CHAPTER V.—Jennie Woodruff is nominated for the position of county superintendent, and her nomination is bitterly opposed 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 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 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," by the introduction of 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 idea 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, implacable enemy of Jim Irwin.

CHAPTER XIV.—Feigning sickness, Newton Bronson, youngster whom 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.—Jim convinces the farmers of the district of the advantages to be derived from a co-operative creamery, and it is agreed to establish one. His rise to a position of leadership in the community, and high responsibility, has made a distinct difference in Jennie's feelings toward Jim, which she is forced to acknowledge to herself.

CHAPTER XVI

Jim Goes to Ames.

Jim had never felt more the upstart uneducated farm-hand than when he was introduced to that audience at Ames by Professor Withers, nor more completely disgraced than when he concluded his remarks. Even the applause was to him a kindly effort on the part of the audience to comfort him in his failure. His only solace was the look in Jennie's eyes.

"Young man," said an old farmer who wore thick glasses and looked

like a Dutch burgomaster, "I want to have a little talk with you."

"This is Mr. Hofmyer of Pottawatomie county," said the dean of the college.

"I'm glad to meet you," said Jim. "I can talk to you now."

"No," said Jennie. "I know Mr.

Hofmyer will excuse you until after dinner. We have a little party for Mr. Irwin, and we shall be late if we don't hurry."

"Where can I see you after supper?" asked Mr. Hofmyer.

Easy it was to satisfy Mr. Hofmyer; and Jim was carried off to a dinner given by County Superintendent Jennie to Jim, the dean, Professor Withers, and one or two others—and a wonderfully select and distinguished company it seemed to Jim. Jennie seized a moment's opportunity to say, "You did beautifully, Jim; everybody says so."

"I failed!" said Jim. "You know I failed. I couldn't remember my speech. I can't stay here feasting. I want to get out in the snow."

"You made the best address of the meeting; and you did it because you forgot your speech," insisted Jennie. "Does anybody else think so?"

"Why, Jim! You must learn to believe in what you have done. Even Con Bonner says it was the best. He says he didn't think you had it in ye!"

This advice from her to "believe in what you have done"—wasn't there something new in Jennie's attitude here? Wasn't his belief in what he was doing precisely the thing which had made him such a nuisance to the county superintendent? However, Jim couldn't stop to answer the question which popped up in his mind.

"What does Professor Withers say?" he asked.

"He's delighted—silly!"

"Silly!" How wonderful it was to be called "silly"—in that tone.

"I shouldn't have forgotten the speech if it hadn't been for this darned boiled shirt and collar, and for wearing a cravat," urged Jim in extenuation.

"You ought to've worn them around the house for a week before coming," said Jennie. "Why didn't you ask my advice?"

"I will, next time, Jennie," said Jim. "I didn't suppose I needed a bitting-rig—but I guess I did!"

Jennie ran away then to ask Nils Hansen and Bettina to join their dinner party. She had a sudden access of friendliness for the Hansens. Nils refused because he was going out to see the college herds fed; but at Jennie's urgent request, reinforced by pats and hugs, Bettina consented. Jennie was very happy, and proved herself a beaming hostess. The dean devoted himself to Bettina—and Jim found out afterward that this inquiring gentleman was getting at the mental processes of a specimen pupil in one of the new kind of rural schools, in which he was only half inclined to believe. He thanked Jim for his speech, and said it was "most suggestive and thought-provoking," and as the party broke up slipped into Jim's hand a check for the honorarium. It was not until then that Jim felt quite sure that he was actually to be paid.

Mr. Hofmyer was waiting to give Jim the final convincing proof that he had produced an effect with his speech.

"Do you teach the kind of school you lay out in your talk?" he asked.

"I try to," said Jim, "and I believe I do."

"Well," said Mr. Hofmyer, "that's the kind of education I believe in. I kept school back in Pennsylvania fifty years ago, and I made the scholars measure things, and weigh things, and apply their studies as far as I could."

"All good teachers have always done that," said Jim. "Froebel, Pestalozzi, Colonel Parker—they all had the idea which is at the bottom of my work; 'learn to do by doing,' and connecting up the school with life."

"M'h-m," granted Mr. Hofmyer, "I haven't been able to see how Latin connects up with a high-school kid's life—unless he can find a Latin settlement somewhere and get a job clerking in a store."

"But it used to relate to life," said Jim, "the life of the people who made Greek and Latin a part of everybody else's education as well as their own. Latin and Greek were the only languages in which anything worth much was written, you know. But now—"

Jim spread out his arms as if to take in the whole world—"science, the marvelous literature of our tongue in the last three centuries! And to make a child learn Latin with all that, a thousand times richer than all the literature of Latin, lying unused before him!"

"Know any Latin?" asked Mr. Hofmyer.

Jim blushed, as one caught in condemning what he knows nothing about.

"I—I have studied the grammar, and read 'Caesar,'" he faltered, "but that isn't much. I had no teacher, and I had to work pretty hard, and it didn't go very well."

"I've had all the Latin they gave in the colleges of my time," said Mr. Hofmyer, "if I do talk dialect; and I'll agree with you so far as to say that it would have been a crime for me to neglect the chemistry, bacteriology, physics, engineering and other sciences that pertain to farmin'—if there'd been any such sciences when I was gettin' my schoolin'."

"And yet," said Jim, "some people want us to guide ourselves by the courses of study made before these sciences existed."

"I don't, by hokey!" said Hofmyer. "I'll be dag-goned if you ain't right. I wouldn't 'a' said so before I heard that speech—but I say so now."

Jim's face lighted up at this, the first convincing evidence that he had scored.

"I believe, too," went on Mr. Hofmyer, "that your idea would please our folks. I've been the standpatter in our parts—mostly on English and—say German. What d'ye say to comin' down and teachin' our school? We've got a two-room affair, and I was made

a committee of one to find a teacher."

"I—I don't see how—" Jim stammered, all taken aback by this new breeze of recognition.

"We can't pay much," said Hofmyer. "You have charge of the discipline in the whole school, and teach in Number Two room. Seventy-five dollars a month. Does it appeal to ye?"

Appeal to him! And yet, how about the Simmses, Colonel Woodruff, the Hansens and Newton Bronson, now just getting a firm start on the upward path to usefulness and real happiness? How could he leave the little, crude, puny structure on which he had been working—for a year, and remove to the new field?

"I'm afraid I can't," said Jim Irwin, "but—"

"If you're only 'fraid you can't," said Mr. Hofmyer, "think it over. I've got your post office address on this program, and we'll write you a formal offer. We may spring them figures a little. Think it over."

"You mustn't think," said Jim, "that we've done all the things I mentioned in my talk, or that I haven't made any mistakes or failures."

"Your county superintendent didn't mention any failures," said Mr. Hofmyer.

"Did you talk with her about my work?" inquired Jim, suddenly very curious.

"M'h-m."

"Then I don't see why you want me," Jim went on.

"Why?" asked Mr. Hofmyer.

"I had not supposed," said Jim, "that she had a very high opinion of my work."

"I didn't ask her about that," said Mr. Hofmyer, "though I guess she thinks well of it. I asked her what you are tryin' to do, and what sort of a fellow you are. I was favorably impressed; but she didn't mention any failures."

"We haven't succeeded in adopting a successful system of selling our cream," said Jim. "I believe we can do it, but we haven't."

"Well," said Mr. Hofmyer, "I d'know as I'd call that a failure. The fact that you're tryin' of it shows you've got the right ideas. We'll write ye, and maybe pay your way down to look us over. We're a pretty good crowd, the neighbors think."

"Every school," said he to Professor Withers, "ought to be doing a good deal of the work you have to do here."

"I'll admit," said the professor, "that much of our work in agriculture is pretty elementary."

"It's intermediate school work," said Jim. "It's wrong to force boys and girls to leave their homes and live in a college to get so much of what they should have before they're ten years old."

"There's something in what you say," said the professor, "but some experiment station men seem to think that agriculture in the common schools will take from the young men and

women the felt need, and therefore the desire to come to the college."

"If you can't give them anything better than high-school work," said Jim, "that will be so; but if the science and art of agriculture is what I think it is, it would make them hungry for the advanced work that really can't be done at home. To make the children wait until they're twenty is to deny them more than half what the college ought to give them—and make them pay for what they don't get."

"I think you're right," said the professor.

"Give us the kind of schools I ask for," cried Jim, "and I'll fill a college like this in every congressional district in Iowa, or I'll force you to tear this down and build larger."

More nearly happy, and rather short of money than he had recently been, Jim journeyed home among the companions from his own neighborhood, in a frenzy of plans for the future. Mr. Hofmyer had dropped from his mind, until Con Bonner, his old enemy, drew him aside in the vestibule of the train and spoke to him in the mysterious manner peculiar to politicians.

"What kind of a proposition did that man Hofmeister make you?" he inquired. "He asked me about you, and I told him you're a crackerjack."

"I'm much obliged," replied Jim.

"No use in back-cappin' a fellow that's tryin' to make somethin' of himself," said Bonner. "That ain't good politics, nor good sense. Anything to him?"

"He offered me a salary of seventy-five dollars a month to take charge of his school," said Jim.

"Well," said Con, "we'll be sorry to lose ye, but you can't turn down anything like that."

"I don't know," said Jim. "I haven't decided."

Bonner scrutinized his face sharply, as if to find out what sort of game he was playing.

"Well," said he, at last, "I hope you can stay with us, of course. I'm ticked, and I never squeal. If the rest of the district can stand your kind of thricks, I can. And say, Jim"—here he grew still more mysterious—"if you do stay, some of us would like to have you be

enough of a Democrat to go into the next convention for county superintendent."

"Why," replied Jim, "I never thought of such a thing!"

"Well, think of it," said Con. "The county's close, and wid a pop'lar young educator—an' a farmer, too, it might be done. Think of it."

Jim was almost dazed at the number of "propositions" of which he was now required to "think"—and Bonner's did not at first impress him as having anything back of it but blarney. He was to find out later, however, that the wily Con had made up his mind that the ambition of Jim to serve the rural schools in a larger sphere might be used for the purpose of bringing to earth what he regarded as the soaring political ambitions of the Woodruff family. To split the forces which had defeated Mr. Bonner in his own school district, with the very instrument used by the colonel at the last school election—that, to Mr. Bonner, would be a fine thing.

Jim had scarcely taken his seat in the car, facing Jennie Woodruff and Bettina Hansen in the Pullman, when Columbus Brown, pathmaster of the road district and only across the way from residence in the school district, came down the aisle and called Jim to the smoking-room.

"Did an old fellow named Hoffman from Pottawatomie county ask you to leave us and take his school?" he asked.

"Mr. Hofmyer," said Jim, "—yes, he did."

"Well," said Columbus, "I don't want to ask you to stand in your own light, but I hope you won't let him toll you



"We're Proud of You, Jim."

off there among strangers. We're proud of you, Jim, and we don't want to lose you."

Proud of him! Sweet music to the underling's ears! Jim blushed and stammered.

"The fact is," said Columbus, "I know that Woodruff district job ain't big enough for you any more; but we can make it bigger. If you'll stay, I believe we can pull off a deal to consolidate some of them districts, and make you boss of the whole shooting match."

"I appreciate this, Cumb," said Jim, "but I don't believe you can do it."

"Well, think of it," said Columbus. "And don't do anything till you talk with me and a few of the other boys."

"Think of it!" again!

A fine home-coming it was for Jim, with the colonel waiting at the station with a double sleigh, and the chance to ride into the snowy country in the same seat with Jennie—a chance which was blighted by the colonel's placing Bettina and Nils Hansen in the broad rear seat, and Jim in front with himself. The colonel would not allow him to get out and walk when he could really have reached home more quickly by doing so; no, he set the Hansens down at their door, took Jennie home, and then drove the lightened sleigh merrily to the humble cabin of the rather excited young schoolmaster.

"Did you make any deal with those people down in the western part of the state?" asked the colonel. "Jennie wrote me that you've got an offer."

"No," said Jim, and he told the colonel about the proposal of Mr. Hofmyer.

"Well," said the colonel, "in my capacity of wild-eyed reformer, I've made up my mind that the first four miles in the trip is to make the rural teacher's job a bigger job. It's got to be a man's size, woman's size job, or we can't get real men and real women to stay in the work."

"I think that's a statesmanlike formulation of it," said Jim.

"Well," said the colonel, "don't turn down the Pottawatomie county job until we have a chance to see what we can do. I'll get some kind of a meeting together, and what I want you to do is to use this offer as a club over this helpless school district. What we need is to be held up. Do the Jesse James act, Jim!"

"I can't, Colonel!"

"Yes, you can, too. Will you try it?"

"I want to treat everybody fairly," said Jim, "including Mr. Hofmyer. I don't know what to do, hardly."

"Well, I'll get the meeting together," said the colonel, "and in the meantime, think of what I've said."

Another thing to think of! Jim

passed into the house and surprised his mother, who had expected him to arrive after a slow walk from town through the snow. Jim caught her in his arms, from which she was released a moment later, quite flustered and blushing.

"Why, James," said she, "you seem excited. What's happened?"

"Nothing, mother," he replied, "except that I believe there's just a possibility of my being a success in the world!"

"My boy, my boy!" said she, laying her hand on his arm, "if you were to die tonight, you'd die the greatest success any boy ever was—if your mother is any judge."

Jim kissed her, and went up to his attic to change his clothes. Inside the waistcoat was a worn envelope, which he carefully opened, and took from it a letter much creased from many foldings. It was the old letter from Jennie, written when the comical mistake had been made of making him the teacher of the Woodruff school. He read only the sentence in which Jennie had told of her father's interest in Jim's success, ending with the underscored words, "I'm for you, too."

"I wonder," said Jim, as he went out to do the evening's tasks, "I wonder if she is for me!"

(To be continued)

LINCOLN SAYING

"IF YOU once forfeit the confidence of your fellow citizens," Lincoln said to a caller at the White House, "you can never regain their respect and esteem. It is true that you may fool all the people some of the time; you can even fool some of the people all the time; but you can't fool all of the people all the time."

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