Title: The Brown Mouse

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Release date: October 21, 2008 [eBook #26987]
Most recently updated: March 26, 2013

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Roger Frank and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at http://www.pgdp.net

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THE BROWN MOUSE

By
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ALADDIN & COMPANY, THE BROKEN LANCE
ON BOARD THE GOOD SHIP EARTH, ETC.

INDIANAPOLIS
THE BOBBS-MERRILL COMPANY
PUBLISHERS

Printed in the United States of America

PRESS OF
BRAUNWORTH & CO.
BOOK MANUFACTURERS
BROOKLYN, N. Y.

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THE BROWN MOUSE

CHAPTER I

A MAIDEN'S "HUMPH"

A Farm-hand nodded in answer to a question asked him by Napoleon on the morning of Waterloo. The nod was false, or the emperor misunderstood—and Waterloo was lost. On the nod of a farm-hand rested the fate of Europe.

This story may not be so important as the battle of Waterloo—and it may be. I think that Napoleon was sure to lose to Wellington sooner or later, and therefore the words "fate of Europe" in the last paragraph should be understood as modified by "for a while." But this story may change the world permanently. We will not discuss that, if you please. What I am endeavoring to make plain is that this history would never have been written if a farmer's daughter had not said "Humph!" to her father's hired man.

Of course she never said it as it is printed. People never say "Humph!" in that way. She just closed her lips tight in the manner of people who have a great deal to say and prefer not to say it, and—I dislike to record this of a young lady who has been "off to school," but truthfulness compels—she grunted through her little nose the ordinary "Humph!" of conversational commerce, which was accepted at its face value by the farm-hand as an evidence of displeasure, disapproval, and even of contempt. Things then began to happen as they never would have done if the maiden hadn't "Humphed!" and this is a history of those happenings.

As I have said, it may be more important than Waterloo. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was, and I hope—I am just beginning, you know—to make this a much greater book than *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. And it all rests on a "Humph!" Holmes says,

> "Soft is the breath of a maiden's 'Yes,'
> Not the light gossamer stirs with less."

but what bard shall rightly sing the importance of a maiden's "Humph!" when I shall have finished telling what came of what Jennie Woodruff said to Jim Irwin, her father's hired man?

Jim brought from his day's work all the fragrances of next year's meadows. He had been feeding the crops. All things have opposite poles, and the scents of the farm are no exception to the rule. Just now, Jim Irwin possessed in his clothes and person the olfactory pole opposite to the new-mown hay, the fragrant butter and the scented breath of the lowing kine—perspiration and top-dressing.

He was not quite so keenly conscious of this as was Jennie Woodruff. Had he been so, the glimmer of her white piqué dress on the bench under the basswood would not have drawn him back from the gate. He had come to the house to ask Colonel Woodruff about the farm work, and having received instructions to take a team and join in the road work next day, he had gone down the walk between the beds of four o'clocks and petunias to the lane. Turning to latch the gate, he saw through the dusk the white dress under the tree and drawn by the greatest attraction known in nature, had re-entered the Woodruff grounds and strolled back.

A brief hello betrayed old acquaintance, and that social equality which still persists in theory between the work people on the American farm and the family of the employer. A desultory murmur of voices ensued. Jim Irwin sat down on the bench—not too close, be it observed, to the piqué skirt.... There came into the voices a note of deeper earnestness, betokening something quite aside from the rippling of the course of true love running smoothly. In the man's voice was a tone of protest and pleading....

“I know you are,” said she; “but after all these years don’t you think you should be at least preparing to be something more than that?”

“What can I do?” he pleaded. “I’m tied hand and foot.... I might have ...”

“You might have,” said she, “but, Jim, you haven’t ... and I don’t see any prospects....” “I have been writing for the farm papers,” said Jim; “but ...” 5

“But that doesn’t get you anywhere, you know.... You’re a great deal more able and intelligent than Ed —— and see what a fine position he has in Chicago....”

“There’s mother, you know,” said Jim gently.

“You can’t do anything here,” said Jennie. “You’ve been a farm-hand for fifteen years ... and you always will be unless you pull yourself loose. Even a girl can make a place for herself if she doesn’t marry and leaves the farm. You’re twenty-eight years old.”

“It’s all wrong!” said Jim gently. “The farm ought to be the place for the best sort of career—I love the soil!”

“I’ve been teaching for only two years, and they say I’ll be nominated for county superintendent if I’ll take it. Of course I won’t—it seems silly—but if it were you, now, it would be a first step to a life that leads to something.”

“Mother and I can live on my wages—and the garden and chickens and the cow,” said Jim. “After I received my teacher’s certificate, I tried to work out some way of doing the same thing on a country teacher’s wages. I couldn’t. It doesn’t seem right.” 6

Jim rose and after pacing back and forth sat down again, a little closer to Jennie. Jennie moved away to the extreme end of the bench, and the shrinking away of Jim as if he had been repelled by some sort of negative magnetism showed either sensitiveness or temper.

“It seems as if it ought to be possible,” said Jim, “for a man to do work on the farm, or in the rural schools, that would make him a livelihood. If he is only a field-hand, it ought to be possible for him to save money and buy a farm.”

“Pa’s land is worth two hundred dollars an acre,” said Jennie. “Six months of your wages for an acre—even if you lived on nothing.”

“No,” he assented, “it can’t be done. And the other thing can’t, either. There ought to be such conditions that a teacher could make a living.”

“They do,” said Jennie, “if they can live at home during vacations. *I* do.” 7

“But a man teaching in the country ought to be able to marry.”

“Marry!” said Jennie, rather unfeelingly, I think. “*You* marry!” Then after remaining silent for nearly a minute, she uttered the syllable—without the utterance of which this narrative would not have been written. “*You* marry! Humph!”

Jim Irwin rose from the bench tingling with the insult he found in her tone. They had been boy-and-girl sweethearts in the old days at the Woodruff schoolhouse down the road, and before the fateful time when Jennie went “off to school” and Jim began to support his mother. They had even kissed—and on Jim’s side, lonely as was his life, cut off as it necessarily was from all companionship save that of his tiny home and his fellow-workers of the field, the tender little love-story was the sole romance of his life. Jennie’s “Humph!” retired this romance from circulation, he felt. It showed contempt for the idea of his marrying. It relegated him to a sexless category with other defectives, and badged him with the celibacy of a sort of twentieth-century monk, without the honor of the priestly vocation. From another girl it would have been bad enough, but from Jennie Woodruff—and especially on that quiet summer night under the linden—it was insupportable. 8

“Good night,” said Jim—simply because he could not trust himself to say more.

“Good night,” replied Jennie, and sat for a long time wondering just how deeply she had unintentionally wounded the feelings of her father’s field-hand; deciding that if he was driven from her forever, it would solve the problem of terminating that old childish love affair which still persisted in occupying a suite of rooms all of its own in her memory; and finally repenting of the unpremeditated thrust which might easily have hurt too deeply so sensitive a man as Jim Irwin. But girls are not usually so made as to feel any very bitter remorse for their male victims, and so Jennie slept very well that night.

Great events, I find myself repeating, sometimes hinge on trivial things. Considered deeply, all those matters which we are wont to call great events are only the outward and visible results of occurrences in the minds and souls of people. Sir Walter Raleigh thought of laying his cloak under the feet of Queen Elizabeth as she passed over a mud-puddle, and all the rest of his career followed, as the effect of Sir Walter’s mental attitude. Elias Howe thought of a machine for sewing, Eli Whitney of a machine for ginning cotton, George Stephenson of a tubular boiler for his locomotive engine, and Cyrus McCormick of a sickle-bar, and the world was changed by those thoughts, rather than by the machines themselves. John D. Rockefeller thought strongly that he would be rich, and this thought, and not the Standard Oil Company, changed the commerce and finance of the world. As a man thinketh so is he; and as men think so is the world. Jim Irwin went home thinking of the “Humph!” of Jennie Woodruff—thinking with hot waves and cold waves running over his body, and swellings in his throat. Such thoughts centered upon his club foot made Lord Byron a great sardonic poet. That club foot set him apart from the world of boys and tortured him into a fury which lasted until he had lashed society with 9 10

the whips of his scorn.

Jim Irwin was not club-footed; far from it. He was bony and rugged and homely, with a big mouth, and wide ears, and a form stooped with labor. He had fine, lambent, gentle eyes which lighted up his face when he smiled, as Lincoln's illuminated his. He was not ugly. In fact, if that quality which fair ladies—if they are wise—prize far more than physical beauty, the quality called charm, can with propriety be ascribed to a field-hand who has just finished a day of the rather unfragrant labor to which I have referred, Jim Irwin possessed charm. That is why little Jennie Woodruff had asked him to help with her lessons, rather oftener than was necessary, in those old days in the Woodruff schoolhouse when Jennie wore her hair down her back.

But in spite of this homely charm of personality, Jim Irwin was set off from his fellows of the Woodruff neighborhood in a manner quite as segregative as was Byron by his deformity. He was different. In local parlance, he was an off ox. He was as odd as Dick's hatband. He ran in a gang 11
by himself, like Deacon Avery's celebrated bull. He failed to matriculate in the boy banditti which played cards in the haymows on rainy days, told stereotyped stories that smelled to heaven, raided melon patches and orchards, swore horribly like Sir Toby Belch, and played pool in the village saloon. He had always liked to read, and had piles of literature in his attic room which was good, because it was cheap. Very few people know that cheap literature is very likely to be good, because it is old and unprotected by copyright. He had Emerson, Thoreau, a John B. Alden edition of Chambers' *Encyclopedia of English Literature*, some Franklin Square editions of standard poets in paper covers, and a few Ruskins and Carlyles—all read to rags. He talked the book English of these authors, mispronouncing many of the hard words, because he had never heard them pronounced by any one except himself, and had no standards of comparison. You find this sort of thing in the utterances of self-educated recluses. And he had piles of 12
reports of the secretary of agriculture, college bulletins from Ames, and publications of the various bureaus of the Department of Agriculture at Washington. In fact, he had a good library of publications which can be obtained gratis, or very cheaply—and he knew their contents. He had a personal philosophy, which while it had cost him the world in which his fellows lived, had given him one of his own, in which he moved as lonely as a cloud, and as untouched of the life about him.

He seemed superior to the neighbor boys, and felt so; but this feeling was curiously mingled with a sense of degradation. By every test of common life, he was a failure. His family history was a badge of failure. People despised a man who was so incontestably smarter than they, and yet could do no better with himself than to work in the fields alongside the tramps and transients and hoboes who drifted back and forth as the casual market for labor and the lure of the cities swept them. Save for his mother and their cow and garden and flock of fowls and their 13
wretched little rented house, he was a tramp himself.

His father had been no better. He had come into the neighborhood from nobody knows where, selling fruit trees, with a wife and baby in his old buggy—and had died suddenly, leaving the baby and widow, and nothing else save the horse and buggy. That horse and buggy were still on the Irwin books represented by Spot the cow—so persistent are the assets of cautious poverty. Mrs. Irwin had labored in kitchen and sewing room until Jim had been able to assume the breadwinner's burden—which he did about the time he finished the curriculum of the Woodruff District school. He was an off ox and odd as Dick's hatband, largely because his duties to his mother and his love of reading kept him from joining the gangs whereof I have spoken. His duties, his mother, and his father's status as an outcast were to him the equivalent of the Byronic club foot, because they took away his citizenship in Boyville, and drove him in upon himself, and, at first, upon his school books which he mastered so easily and quickly as to become the star pupil of the Woodruff District school, and later upon Emerson, Thoreau, Ruskin and the poets, and the agricultural reports and bulletins. 14

All this degraded—or exalted—him to the position of an intellectual farm-hand, with a sense of superiority and a feeling of degradation. It made Jennie Woodruff's "Humph!" potent to keep him awake that night, and send him to the road work with Colonel Woodruff's team next morning with hot eyes and a hotter heart.

What was he anyhow? And what could he ever be? What was the use of his studies in farming practise, if he was always to be an underling whose sole duty was to carry out the crude ideas of his employers? And what chance was there for a farm-hand to become a farm owner, or even a farm renter, especially if he had a mother to support out of the twenty-five or thirty dollars of his monthly wages? None.

A man might rise in the spirit, but how about rising in the world?

Colonel Woodruff's gray percherons seemed to feel the unrest of their driver, for they fretted and actually executed a clumsy prance as Jim Irwin pulled them up at the end of the turnpike 15
across Bronson's Slew—the said slew being a peat-marsh which annually offered the men of the Woodruff District the opportunity to hold the male equivalent of a sewing circle while working out their road taxes, with much conversational gain, and no great damage to the road.

In fact, Columbus Brown, the pathmaster, prided himself on the Bronson Slew Turnpike as his greatest triumph in road engineering. The work consisted in hauling, dragging and carrying gravel out on the low fill which carried the road across the marsh, and then watching it slowly settle until the next summer.

"Haul gravel from the east gravel bed, Jim," called Columbus Brown from the lowest spot in the middle of the turnpike. "Take Newt here to help load."

Jim smiled his habitual slow, gentle smile at Newton Bronson, his helper. Newton was seventeen, undersized, tobacco-stained, profane and proud of the fact that he had once beaten his way from Des Moines to Faribault on freight trains. A source of anxiety to his father, and the subject of many predictions that he would come to no good end, Newton was out on the road work because he was likely to be of little use on the farm. Clearly, Newton was on the downward road in a double sense—and yet, Jim Irwin rather liked him.

“The fellers have put up a job on you, Jim,” volunteered Newton, as they began filling the wagon with gravel.

“What sort of job?” asked Jim.

“They’re nominating you for teacher,” replied Newton.

“Since when has the position of teacher been an elective office?” asked Jim.

“Sure, it ain’t elective,” answered Newton. “But they say that with as many brains as you’ve got sloshing around loose in the neighborhood, you’re a candidate that can break the deadlock in the school board.”

Jim shoveled on silently for a while, and by example urged Newton to earn the money credited to his father’s assessment for the day’s work.

“Aw, what’s the use of diggin’ into it like this?” protested Newton, who was developing an unwonted perspiration. “None of the others are heatin’ themselves up.”

“Don’t you get any fun out of doing a good day’s work?” asked Jim.

“Fun!” exclaimed Newton. “You’re crazy!”

A slide of earth from the top of the pit threatened to bury Newton in gravel, sand and good top soil. A sweet-clover plant growing rankly beside the pit, and thinking itself perfectly safe, came down with it, its dark green foliage anchored by the long roots which penetrated to a depth below the gravel pit’s bottom. Jim Irwin pulled it loose from its anchorage, and after looking attentively at the roots, laid the whole plant on the bank for safety.

“What do you want of that weed?” asked Newton.

Jim picked it up and showed him the nodules on its roots—little white knobs, smaller than pinheads.

“Know what they are, Newt?”

“Just white specks on the roots,” replied Newton.

“The most wonderful specks in the world,” said Jim. “Ever hear of the use of nitrates to enrich the soil?”

“Ain’t that the stuff the old man used on the lawn last spring?”

“Yes,” said Jim, “your father used some on his lawn. We don’t put it on our fields in Iowa—not yet; but if it weren’t for those white specks on the clover-roots, we should be obliged to do so—as they do back east.”

“How do them white specks keep us from needin’ nitrates?”

“It’s a long story,” said Jim. “You see, before there were any plants big enough to be visible—if there had been any one to see them—the world was full of little plants so small that there may be billions of them in one of these little white specks. They knew how to take the nitrates from the air——”

“Air!” ejaculated Newton. “Nitrates in the air! You’re crazy!”

“No,” said Jim. “There are tons of nitrogen in the air that press down on your head—but the big plants can’t get it through their leaves, or their roots. They never had to learn, because when the little plants—bacteria—found that the big plants had roots with sap in them, they located on those roots and tapped them for the sap they needed. They began to get their board and lodgings off the big plants. And in payment for their hotel bills, the little plants took nitrogen out of the air for both themselves and their hosts.”

“What d’ye mean by ‘hosts’?”

“Their hotel-keepers—the big plants. And now the plants that have the hotel roots for the bacteria furnish nitrogen not only for themselves but for the crops that follow. Corn can’t get nitrogen out of the air; but clover can—and that’s why we ought to plow down clover before a crop of corn.”

“Gee!” said Newt. “If you could get to teach our school, I’d go again.”

“It would interfere with your pool playing.”

“What business is that o’ yours?” interrogated Newt defiantly.

“Well, get busy with that shovel,” suggested Jim, who had been working steadily, driving out upon the fill occasionally to unload. On his return from dumping the next load, Newton seemed, in a superior way, quite amiably disposed toward his workfellow—rather the habitual thing in the neighborhood.

“I’ll work my old man to vote for you for the job,” said he.

“What job?” asked Jim.

“Teacher for our school,” answered Newt.

“Those school directors,” replied Jim, “have become so bullheaded that they’ll never vote for any one except the applicants they’ve been voting for.”

“The old man says he will have Prue Foster again, or he’ll give the school a darned long vacation, unless Peterson and Bonner join on some one else. That would beat Prue, of course.”

“And Con Bonner won’t vote for any one but Maggie Gilmartin,” added Jim.

“And,” supplied Newton, “Haakon Peterson says he’ll stick to Herman Paulson until the Hot Springs freeze over.”

“And there you are,” said Jim. “You tell your father for me that I think he’s a mere mule—and 21
that the whole district thinks the same.”

“All right,” said Newt. “I’ll tell him that while I’m working him to vote for you.”

Jim smiled grimly. Such a position might have been his years ago, if he could have left his mother or earned enough in it to keep both alive. He had remained a peasant because the American rural teacher is placed economically lower than the peasant. He gave Newton’s chatter no consideration. But when, in the afternoon, he hitched his team with others to the big road grader, and the gang became concentrated within talking distance, he found that the project of heckling and chaffing him about his eminent fitness for a scholastic position was to be the real entertainment of the occasion.

“Jim’s the candidate to bust the deadlock,” said Columbus Brown, with a wink. “Just like Garfield in that Republican convention he was nominated in—eh, Con?”

“Con” was Cornelius Bonner, an Irishman, one of the deadlocked school board, and the captain 22
of the road grader. He winked back at the pathmaster.

“Jim’s the gray-eyed man o’ destiny,” he replied, “if he can get two votes in that board.”

“You’d vote for me, wouldn’t you, Con?” asked Jim.

“I’ll try annything wance,” replied Bonner.

“Try voting with Ezra Bronson once, for Prue Foster,” suggested Jim. “She’s done good work here.”

“Opinions differ,” said Bonner, “an’ when you try annything just for wance, it shouldn’t be an irrevocable shtip, me bye.”

“You’re a reasonable board of public servants,” said Jim ironically. “I’d like to tell the whole board what I think of them.”

“Come down to-night,” said Bonner jeeringly. “We’re going to have a board meeting at the schoolhouse and ballot a few more times. Come down, and be the Garfield of the convintion. We’ve lacked brains on the board, that’s clear. They ain’t a man on the board that iver studied algebra, ’r that knows more about farmin’ than their impl’yers. Come down to the schoolhouse, and we’ll have a field-hand addriss the school board—and begosh, I’ll move yer illiction mesilf! 23
Come, now, Jimmy, me bye, be game. It’ll vary the program, anny-how.”

The entire gang grinned. Jim flushed, and then reconquered his calmness of spirit.

“All right, Con,” said he. “I’ll come and tell you a few things—and you can do as you like about making the motion.”

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CHAPTER II

REVERSED UNANIMITY

The great blade of the grading machine, running diagonally across the road and pulling the earth toward its median line, had made several trips, and much persiflage about Jim Irwin’s forthcoming appearance before the board had been addressed to Jim and exchanged by others for his benefit.

To Newton Bronson was given the task of leveling and distributing the earth rolled into the road by the grader—a labor which in the interests of fitting a muzzle on his big mongrel dog he deserted whenever the machine moved away from him. No dog would have seemed less deserving of a muzzle, for he was a friendly animal, always wagging his tail, pressing his nose into people’s palms, licking their clothing and otherwise making a nuisance of himself. That there was some mystery about the muzzle was evident from Newton’s pains to make a secret of 25
it. Its wires were curled into a ring directly over the dog’s nose, and into this ring Newton had fitted a cork, through which he had thrust a large needle which protruded, an inch-long bayonet, in front of Ponto’s nose. As the grader swept back, horses straining, harness creaking and a billow of dark earth rolling before the knife, Ponto, fully equipped with this stinger, raced madly alongside, a friend to every man, but not unlike some people, one whose friendship was of

all things to be most dreaded.

As the grader moved along one side of the highway, a high-powered automobile approached on the other. It was attempting to rush the swale for the hill opposite, and making rather bad weather of the newly repaired road. A pile of loose soil that Newton had allowed to lie just across the path made a certain maintenance of speed desirable. The knavish Newton planted himself in the path of the laboring car, and waved its driver a command to halt. The car came to a standstill with its front wheels in the edge of the loose earth, and the chauffeur fuming at the possibility of stalling—a contingency upon which Newton had confidently reckoned. 26

“What d’ye want?” he demanded. “What d’ye mean by stopping me in this kind of place?”

“I want to ask you,” said Newton with mock politeness, “if you have the correct time.”

The chauffeur sought words appropriate to his feelings. Ponto and his muzzle saved him the trouble. A pretty pointer leaped from the car, and attracted by the evident friendliness of Ponto’s greeting, pricked up its ears, and sought, in a spirit of canine brotherhood, to touch noses with him. The needle in Ponto’s muzzle did its work to the agony and horror of the pointer, which leaped back with a yelp, and turned tail. Ponto, in an effort to apologize, followed, and finding itself bayonetted at every contact with this demon dog, the pointer definitely took flight, howling, leaving Ponto in a state of wonder and humiliation at the sudden end of what had promised to be a very friendly acquaintance. I have known instances not entirely dissimilar among human beings. The pointer’s master watched its strange flight, and swore. His eye turned to the boy who had caused all this, and he alighted pale with anger. 27

“I’ve got time,” said he, remembering Newton’s impudent question, “to give you what you deserve.”

Newton grinned and dodged, but the bank of loose earth was his undoing, and while he stumbled, the chauffeur caught and held him by the collar. And as he held the boy, the operation of flogging him in the presence of the grading gang grew less to his taste. Again Ponto intervened, for as the chauffeur stood holding Newton, the dog, evidently regarding the stranger as his master’s friend, thrust his nose into the chauffeur’s palm—the needle necessarily preceding the nose. The chauffeur behaved much as his pointer had done, saving and excepting that the pointer did not swear.

It was funny—even the pain involved could not make it otherwise than funny. The grading gang laughed to a man. Newton grinned even while in the fell clutch of circumstance. Ponto tried to smell the chauffeur’s trousers, and what had been a laugh became a roar, quite general save for the fact that the chauffeur did not join in it. 28

Caution and mercy departed from the chauffeur’s mood; and he drew back his fist to strike the boy—and found it caught by the hard hand of Jim Irwin.

“You’re too angry to punish this boy,” said Jim gently,—“even if you had the right to punish him at all!”

“Oh, cut it out,” said a fat man in the rear of the car, who had hitherto manifested no interest in anything save Ponto. “Get in, and let’s be on our way!”

The chauffeur, however, recognized in a man of mature years and full size, and a creature with no mysterious needle in his nose, a relief from his embarrassment. Unhesitatingly, he released Newton, and blindly, furiously and futilely, he delivered a blow meant for Jim’s jaw, but which really miscarried by a foot. In reply, Jim countered with an awkward swinging uppercut, which was superior to the chauffeur’s blow in one respect only—it landed fairly on the point of the jaw. The chauffeur staggered and slowly toppled over into the soft earth which had caused so much of the rumpus. Newton Bronson slipped behind a hedge, and took his infernally equipped dog with him. The grader gang formed a ring about the combatants and waited. Colonel Woodruff, driving toward home in his runabout, held up by the traffic blockade, asked what was going on here, and the chauffeur, rising groggily, picked up his goggles, climbed into the car; and the meeting dissolved, leaving Jim Irwin greatly embarrassed by the fact that for the first time in his life, he had struck a man in combat. 29

“Good work, Jim,” said Cornelius Bonner. “I didn’t think ’twas in ye!”

“It’s beastly,” said Jim, reddening. “I didn’t know, either.”

Colonel Woodruff looked at his hired man sharply, gave him some instructions for the next day and drove on. The road gang dispersed for the afternoon. Newton Bronson carefully secreted the magic muzzle, and chuckled at what had been perhaps the most picturesquely successful bit of deviltry in his varied record. Jim Irwin put out his team, got his supper and went to the meeting of the school board. 30

The deadlocked members of the board had been so long at loggerheads that their relations had swayed back to something like amity. Jim had scarcely entered when Con Bonner addressed the chair.

“Mr. Prisidint,” said he, “we have wid us t’night, a young man who nades no introduction to an audience in this place, Mr. Jim Irwin. He thinks we’re bullheaded mules, and that all the schools are bad. At the proper time I shall move that we hire him f’r teacher; and pinding that motion, I move that he be given the floor. Ye’ve all heared of Mr. Irwin’s ability as a white hope, and I know he’ll be listened to wid respect!”

Much laughter from the board and the spectators, as Jim arose. He looked upon it as ridicule of

himself, while Con Bonner regarded it as a tribute to his successful speech.

“Mr. President and Gentlemen of the Board,” said Jim, “I’m not going to tell you anything that you don’t know about yourselves. You are simply making a farce of the matter of hiring a 31
teacher for this school. It is not as if any of you had a theory that the teaching methods of one of these teachers would be any better than or much different from those of the others. You know, and I know, that whichever is finally engaged, or even if your silly deadlock is broken by employing a new candidate, the school will be the same old story. It will still be the school it was when I came into it a little ragged boy”—here Jim’s voice grew a little husky—“and when I left it, a bigger boy, but still as ragged as ever.”

There was a slight sensation in the audience, as if, as Con Bonner said about the knockdown, they hadn’t thought Jim Irwin could do it.

“Well,” said Con, “you’ve done well to hold your own.”

“In all the years I attended this school,” Jim went on, “I never did a bit of work in school which was economically useful. It was all dry stuff copied from the city schools. No other pupil ever did any real work of the sort farmers’ boys and girls should do. We copied city schools—and the 32
schools we copied are poor schools. We made bad copies of them, too. If any of you three men were making a fight for what Roosevelt’s Country Life Commission called a ‘new kind of rural school,’ I’d say fight. But you aren’t. You’re just making individual fights for your favorite teachers.”

Jim Irwin made a somewhat lengthy speech after the awkwardness wore off, so long that his audience was nodding and yawning by the time he reached his peroration, in which he abjured Bronson, Bonner and Peterson to study his plan of a new kind of rural school,—in which the work of the school should be correlated with the life of the home and the farm—a school which would be in the highest degree cultural by being consciously useful and obviously practical. The sharp spats of applause from the useless hands of Newton Bronson gave the final touch of absurdity to a situation which Jim had felt to be ridiculous all through. Had it not been for Jennie Woodruff’s “Humph!” stinging him to do something outside the round of duties into which he had fallen, had it not been for the absurd notion that perhaps, after they had heard his 33
speech, they would place him in charge of the school, and that he might be able to do something really important in it, he would not have been there. As he sat down, he felt himself a silly clodhopper, filled with the east wind of his own conceit, out of touch with the real world of men. He knew himself a dreamer. The nodding board of directors, the secretary, actually snoring, and the bored audience restored the field-hand to a sense of his proper place.

“We have had the privilege of list’nin’,” said Con Bonner, rising, “to a great speech, Mr. Prisidint. We should be proud to have a borned orator like this in the agricultural pop’lation of the district. A reg’lar William Jennin’s Bryan. I don’t understand what he was trying to tell us, but sometimes I’ve had the same difficulty with the spaches of the Boy Orator of the Platte. Makin’ a good spache is one thing, and teaching a good school is another, but in order to bring this matter before the board, I nominate Mr. James E. Irwin, the Boy Orator of the Woodruff District, and the new white hope, f’r the job of teacher of this school, and I move that when he 34
shall have received a majority of the votes of this board, the secretary and prisidint be insthructed to enter into a contract with him f’r the comin’ year.”

The seconding of motions on a board of three has its objectionable features, since it seems to commit a majority of the body to the motion in advance. The president, therefore, followed usage, when he said—“If there’s no objection, it will be so ordered. The chair hears no objection—and it is so ordered. Prepare the ballots for a vote on the election of teacher, Mr. Secretary. Each votes his preference for teacher. A majority elects.”

For months, the ballots had come out of the box—an empty crayon-box—Herman Paulson, one; Prudence Foster, one; Margaret Gilmartin, one; and every one present expected the same result now. There was no surprise, however, 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.” Clearly this was the Bonner vote; 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 35
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 save for the signatures of the officers of the district, and the name and signature of the teacher-elect. 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. 36

“Sign there,” he said.

Jim looked it over, saw the other signatures, and felt an impulse to dodge the whole thing. He could not feel that the action of the board was serious. He thought of the platform he had laid down for himself, and was daunted. He thought of the days in the open field, and of the untroubled evenings with his books, and he shrank from the work. Then he thought of Jennie

Woodruff's "Humph!"—and he signed!

"Move we adjourn," said Peterson.

"No 'bjection 't's 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 mesilf the only dang fool on the board—an' he made a spache that airned wan vote—but f'r the love of hivin, that dub f'r a teacher! What come over you, Haakon—you voted f'r him, too!" 37

"Ay vanted 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!"

38

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. Had he been appointed to a position attached to a salary of fifty thousand dollars a year, he might have spent six months on a preliminary vacation in learning something about his new duties. But Jim's salary was to be three hundred and sixty dollars 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. 39

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 part of the matter. Besides, Old Man Simms remembered that none of the Hobdays, whose hostilities somewhat stood in the way of the return of the Simmses to their native hills, could possibly be expected to appear thus in Iowa.

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

"How so?" queried Jim Irwin.

"You'd more'n likely git shot up some," replied Mr. Simms, "onless you whooped from the big road." 40

"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 will."

"I reckon," replied Mr. Simms, "that we-all will have to accommodate ourse'ves 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 withdrawing room in which to retire from the eternal black soil and level corn-fields of Iowa. What if the soil was so poor, in comparison with those black uplands, that the owner of the old wood-lot could find no renter? 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, not 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. It was much more agreeable to the Simmses to retire to the back wood-lot farm with the creek bed running through it. 41

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’ Calista done shot two butterball ducks about ‘tater-plantin’ time.”

Calista 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 Calista—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. 42

Calista 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 Calista 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 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 43 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 44 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?” rejoined 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 the laughing-stock of the country for hiring him by mistake, and they’re 45 irritated. But after seeing him perform to-night, 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 pedling 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 46 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 italicized 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

I suppose every reader will say that genius consists very largely in seeing Opportunity in the set of circumstances or thoughts or impressions that constitute Opportunity, and making the best of them.

Jim Irwin would have said so, anyhow. He 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 twenty-five cents a volume; and he had pored long and with many thrills over the pages of Matthews' *Getting on in the World*—which is the best book of purely conventional helpfulness in the language. And 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. He was to be a general, hurling back the foes of his country; he was to be the nation's master in literature; a successful drawing on his slate had filled him with ambition, confidently entertained, of becoming a Rubens—and the story of Benjamin West in his school reader fanned this spark to a flame; science, too, had at times been his chosen field; and when he had built a mousetrap which actually caught mice, he saw himself a millionaire inventor. As for being president, that was a commonplace in his dreams. And all the time, he was barefooted, 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. Of any spark of genius he was to show in it, of anything he was to suffer in it, of those pains and penalties wherewith the world pays its geniuses, Jim Irwin anticipated nothing. 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 was not a college man or even a high-school man. All his other dreams had found rude awakening in the fact that he had not been able to secure the schooling which geniuses need in these days. He was unfitted for the work geniuses do. All he was to be was a rural teacher, accidentally elected by a stupid school board, and with a hard tussle before him to stay on the job for the term of his contract. He could have accepted positions quite as good years ago, save for the fact that they would have taken him away from his mother, their cheap little home, their garden and their fowls. 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 haymaker 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 twenty-five 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.

I suppose that no person who has undertaken the management of the young people of any school in all the history of education, ever did so much work of this sort before his school opened. 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 show 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 number 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 none-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 seaway.

"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 tickled 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 dam 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 git a *good* teacher that would git hold of Newt the way he seems to!"

CHAPTER V

THE PROMOTION OF JENNIE

If Jennie Woodruff was the cause of Jim Irwin's sudden irruption into the educational field by her scoffing "Humph!" at the idea of a farm-hand's ever being able to marry, she also gave him the opportunity to knock down the driver of the big motor-car, and perceptibly elevate himself in the opinion of the neighborhood, while filling his own heart with something like shame.

The fat man who had said "Cut it out" to his driver, was Mr. Charles Dilly, a business man in the village at the extreme opposite corner of the county. His choice of the Woodruff District as a place for motoring had a secret explanation. I am under no obligation to preserve the secret. He came to see Colonel Woodruff and Jennie. Mr. Dilly was a candidate for county treasurer, and wished to be nominated at the approaching county convention. In his part of the county lived the county superintendent—a candidate for renomination. He was just a plain garden or field county superintendent of schools, no better and no worse than the general political run of them, but he had local pride enlisted in his cause, and was a good politician.

Mr. Dilly was in the Woodruff District to build a backfire against this conflagration of the county superintendent. He expected to use Jennie Woodruff to light it withal. That is, while denying that he wished to make any deal or trade—every candidate in every convention always says that—he wished to say to Miss Woodruff and her father, that if Miss Woodruff would permit her name to be used for the office of county superintendent of schools, a goodly group of delegates could be selected in the other corner of the county who would be glad to reciprocate any favors Mr. Charles J. Dilly might receive in the way of votes for county treasurer with ballots for Miss Jennie Woodruff for superintendent of schools.

Mr. Dilly never inquired as to Miss Woodruff's abilities as an educator. That would have been eccentric. Miss Woodruff never asked herself if she knew anything about rural education which especially fitted her for the task; for was she not a popular and successful teacher—and was not that enough? Mr. Dilly merely asked himself if Miss Woodruff's name could command strength

enough to eliminate the embarrassing candidate in his part of the county and leave the field to himself. Miss Woodruff asked herself whether the work would not give her a pleasanter life than did teaching, a better salary, and more chances to settle herself in life. So are the officials chosen who supervise and control the education of the farm children of America.

This secret mission to effect a political trade accounted for Mr. Dilly's desire that his driver should "cut out" the controversy with Newton Bronson, and the personal encounter with Jim Irwin—and it may account for Jim's easy victory in his first and only physical encounter. An office seeker could scarcely afford to let his friend or employee lick a member of a farmers' road gang. It certainly explains the fact that when Jim Irwin started home from putting out his team the day after his first call on the Simms family, Jennie was waiting at the gate to be congratulated on her nomination.

"I congratulate you," said Jim.

"Thanks," said Jennie, extending her hand.

"I hope you're elected," Jim went on, holding the hand; "but there's no doubt of that."

"They say not," replied Jennie; "but father says I must go about and let the people see me. He believes in working just as if we didn't have a big majority for the ticket."

"A woman has an advantage of a man in such a contest," said Jim; "she can work just as hard as he can, and at the same time profit by the fact that it's supposed she can't."

"I need all the advantage I possess," said Jennie, "and all the votes. Say a word for me when on your pastoral rounds."

"All right," said Jim, "what shall I say you'll do for the schools?"

"Why," said Jennie, rather perplexed, "I'll be fair in my examinations of teachers, try to keep the unfit teachers out of the schools, visit schools as often as I can, and—why, what does any good superintendent do?"

"I never heard of a good county superintendent," said Jim.

"Never heard of one—why, Jim Irwin!"

"I don't believe there is any such thing," persisted Jim, "and if you do no more than you say, you'll be off the same piece as the rest. Your system won't give us any better schools than we have—of the old sort—and we need a new kind."

"Oh, Jim, Jim! Dreaming as of yore! Why can't you be practical! What do you mean by a new kind of rural school?"

"A truly-rural rural school," said Jim.

"I can't pronounce it," smiled Jennie, "to say nothing of understanding it. What would your tralalooral rural school do?"

"It would be correlated with rural life," said Jim.

"How?"

"It would get education out of the things the farmers and farmers' wives are interested in as a part of their lives."

"What, for instance?"

"Dairying, for instance, in this district; and soil management; and corn-growing; and farm manual training for boys; and sewing, cooking and housekeeping for the girls—and caring for babies!"

Jennie looked serious, after smothering a laugh.

"Jim," said she, "you're going to have a hard enough time to succeed in the Woodruff school, if you confine yourself to methods that have been tested, and found good."

"But the old methods," urged Jim, "have been tested and found bad. Shall I keep to them?"

"They have made the American people what they are," said Jennie. "Don't be unpatriotic, Jim."

"They have educated our farm children for the cities," said Jim. "This county is losing population—and it's the best county in the world."

"Pessimism never wins," said Jennie.

"Neither does blindness," answered Jim. "It is losing the farms their dwellers, and swelling the cities with a proletariat."

For some time, now, Jim had ceased to hold Jennie's hand; and their sweetheart days had never seemed farther away.

"Jim," said Jennie, "I may be elected to a position in which I shall be obliged to pass on your acts as teacher—in an official way, I mean. I hope they will be justifiable."

Jim smiled his slowest and saddest smile.

"If they're not, I'll not ask you to condone them," said he. "But first, they must be justifiable to me, Jennie."

"Good night," said Jennie curtly, and left him.

Jennie, I am obliged to admit, gave scant attention to the new career upon which her old

sweetheart seemed to be entering. She was in politics, and was playing the game as became the daughter of a local politician. The reader must not by this term get the impression that Colonel Woodruff was a man of the grafting tricky sort of which we are prone to think when the term is used. The West has been ruled by just such men as he, and the West has done rather well, all things considered. Colonel Albert Woodruff went south with the army as a corporal in 1861, and came back a lieutenant. His title of colonel was conferred by appointment as a member of the staff of the governor, long years ago, when he was county auditor. He was not a rich man, as I may have suggested, but a well-to-do farmer, whose wife did her own work much of the time, not because the colonel could not afford to hire "help," but for the reason that "hired girls" were hard to get.

The colonel, having seen the glory of the coming of the Lord in the triumph of his side in the great war, was inclined to think that all reform had ceased, and was a political stand-patter—a very honest and sincere one. Moreover, he was influential enough so that when Mr. Cummins or Mr. Dolliver came into the county on political errands, Colonel Woodruff had always been called into conference. He was of the old New England type, believed very much in heredity, very much in the theory that whatever is is right, in so far as it has secured money or power.

He had hated General Weaver and his forces; and had sometimes wondered how a man of Horace Boies' opinions had succeeded in being so good a governor. He broke with Governor Larrabee when that excellent man had turned against the great men who had developed Iowa by building the railroads. He was always in the county convention, and preferred to serve on the committee on credentials, and leave to others the more showy work of membership in the committee on resolutions. He believed in education, provided it did not unsettle things. He had a good deal of Latin and some Greek, and lived on a farm rather than in a fine house in the county seat because of his lack of financial ability. As a matter of fact, he had been too strictly scrupulous to do the things—such as dealing in lands belonging to eastern speculators who were not advised as to their values, speculating in county warrants, buying up tax titles with county money, and the like—by which his fellow-politicians who held office in the early years of the county had founded their fortunes. A very respectable, honest, American tory was the colonel, fond of his political sway, and rather soured by the fact that it was passing from him. He had now broken with Cummins and Dolliver as he had done years ago with Weaver and later with Larrabee—and this breach was very important to him, whether they were greatly concerned about it or not.

Such being her family history, Jennie was something of a politician herself. She was in no way surprised when approached by party managers on the subject of accepting the nomination for county superintendent of schools. Colonel Woodruff could deliver some delegates to his daughter, though he rather shied at the proposal at first, but on thinking it over, warmed somewhat to the notion of having a Woodruff on the county pay-roll once more.

CHAPTER VI

JIM TALKS THE WEATHER COLD

"Going to the rally, James?"

Jim had finished his supper, and yearned for a long evening in his attic den with his cheap literature. But as the district schoolmaster he was to some extent responsible for the protection of the school property, and felt some sense of duty as to exhibiting an interest in public affairs.

"I guess I'll have to go, mother," he replied regretfully. "I want to see Mr. Woodruff about borrowing his Babcock milk tester, and I'll go that way. I guess I'll go on to the meeting."

He kissed his mother when he went—a habit from which he never deviated, and another of those personal peculiarities which had marked him as different from the other boys of the neighborhood. His mother urged his overcoat upon him in vain—for Jim's overcoat was distinctly a bad one, while his best suit, now worn every day as a concession to his scholastic position, still looked passably well after several weeks of schoolroom duty. She pressed him to wear a muffler about his neck, but he declined that also. He didn't need it, he said; but he was thinking of the incongruity of a muffler with no overcoat. It seemed more logical to assume that the weather was milder than it really was, on that sharp October evening, and appear at his best, albeit rather aware of the cold. Jennie was at home, and he was likely to see and be seen of her.

"You can borrow that tester," said the colonel, "and the cows that go with it, if you can use 'em. They ain't earning their keep here. But how does the milk tester fit into the curriculum of the school? A decoration?"

"We want to make a few tests of the cows in the neighborhood," answered Jim. "Just another of my fool notions."

"All right," said the colonel. "Take it along. Going to the speakin'?"

“Certainly, he’s going,” said Jennie, entering. “This is my meeting, Jim.”

“Surely, I’m going,” assented Jim. “And I think I’ll run along.”

“I wish we had room for you in the car,” said the colonel. “But I’m going around by Bronson’s to pick up the speaker, and I’ll have a chuck-up load.”

“Not so much of a load as you think,” said Jennie. “I’m going with Jim. The walk will do me good.”

Any candidate warms to her voting population just before election; but Jennie had a special kindness for Jim. He was no longer a farm-hand. The fact that he was coming to be a center of disturbance in the district, and that she quite failed to understand how his eccentric behavior could be harmonized with those principles of teaching which she had imbibed at the state normal school in itself lifted him nearer to equality with her. A public nuisance is really more respectable than a nonentity.

She gave Jim a thrill as she passed through the gate that he opened for her. White moonlight on her white furs suggested purity, exaltation, the essence of womanhood—things far finer in the woman of twenty-seven than the glamour thrown over him by the schoolgirl of sixteen.

Jim gave her no thrill; for he looked gaunt and angular in his skimpy, ready-made suit, too short in legs and sleeves, and too thin for the season. Yet, as they walked along, Jim grew upon her. He strode on with immense strides, made slow to accommodate her shorter steps, and embarrassing her by his entire absence of effort to keep step. For all that, he lifted his face to the stars, and he kept silence, save for certain fragments of his thoughts, in dropping which he assumed that she, like himself, was filled with the grandeur of the sparkling sky, its vast moon, plowing like an astronomical liner through the cloudlets of a wool-pack. He pointed out the great open spaces in the Milky Way, wondering at their emptiness, and at the fact that no telescope can find stars in them.

They stopped and looked. Jim laid his hard hands on the shoulders of her white fur collarette.

“What’s the use of political meetings,” said Jim, “when you and I can stand here and think our way out, even beyond the limits of our Universe?”

“A wonderful journey,” said she, not quite understanding his mood, but very respectful to it.

“And together,” said Jim. “I’d like to go on a long, long journey with you to-night, Jennie, to make up for the years since we went anywhere together.”

“And we shouldn’t have come together to-night,” said Jennie, getting back to earth, “if I hadn’t exercised my leap-year privilege.”

She slipped her arm in his, and they went on in a rather intimate way.

“I’m not to blame, Jennie,” said he. “You know that at any time I’d have given anything—anything—”

“And even now,” said Jennie, taking advantage of his depleted stock of words, “while we roam beyond the Milky Way, we aren’t getting any votes for me for county superintendent.”

Jim said nothing. He was quite, quite reestablished on the earth.

“Don’t you want me to be elected, Jim?”

Jim seemed to ponder this for some time—a period of taking the matter under advisement which caused Jennie to drop his arm and busy herself with her skirts.

“Yes,” said Jim, at last; “of course I do.”

Nothing more was said until they reached the schoolhouse door.

“Well,” said Jennie rather indignantly, “I’m glad there are plenty of voters who are more enthusiastic about me than you seem to be!”

More interesting to a keen observer than the speeches, were the unusual things in the room itself. To be sure, there were on the blackboards exercises and outlines, of lessons in language, history, mathematics, geography and the like. But these were not the usual things taken from text-books. The problems in arithmetic were calculations as to the feeding value of various rations for live stock, records of laying hens and computation as to the excess of value in eggs produced over the cost of feed. Pinned to the wall were market reports on all sorts of farm products, and especially numerous were the statistics on the prices of cream and butter. There were files of farm papers piled about, and racks of agricultural bulletins. In one corner of the room was a typewriting machine, and in another a sewing machine. Parts of an old telephone were scattered about on the teacher’s desk. A model of a piggery stood on a shelf, done in cardboard. Instead of the usual collection of text-books in the desk, there were hectograph copies of exercises, reading lessons, arithmetical tables and essays on various matters relating to agriculture, all of which were accounted for by two or three hand-made hectographs—a very fair sort of printing plant—lying on a table. The members of the school board were there, looking on these evidences of innovation with wonder and more or less disfavor. Things were disorderly. The text-books recently adopted by the board against some popular protest had evidently been pitched, neck and crop, out of the school by the man whom Bonner had termed a dub. It was a sort of contempt for the powers that be.

Colonel Woodruff was in the chair. After the speechifying was over, and the stereotyped, though rather illogical, appeal had been made for voters of the one party to cast the straight ticket, and

for those of the other faction to scratch, the colonel rose to adjourn the meeting.

Newton Bronson, safely concealed behind taller people, called out, “Jim Irwin! speech!”

There was a giggle, a slight sensation, and many voices joined in the call for the new schoolmaster.

Colonel Woodruff felt the unwisdom of ignoring the demand. Probably he relied upon Jim’s discretion and expected a declination.

Jim arose, seedy and lank, and the voices ceased, save for another suppressed titter.

“I don’t know,” said Jim, “whether this call upon me is a joke or not. If it is, it isn’t a practical one, for I can’t talk. I don’t care much about parties or politics. I don’t know whether I’m a Democrat, a Republican or a Populist.”

This caused a real sensation. The nerve of the fellow! Really, it must in justice be said, Jim was losing himself in a desire to tell his true feelings. He forgot all about Jennie and her candidacy—about everything except his real, true feelings. This proves that he was no politician.

“I don’t see much in this county campaign that interests me,” he went on—and Jennie Woodruff reddened, while her seasoned father covered his mouth with his hand to conceal a smile. “The politicians come out into the farming districts every campaign and get us hayseeds for anything they want. They always have got us. They’ve got us again! They give us clodhoppers the glad hand, a cheap cigar, and a cheaper smile after election;—and that’s all. I know it, you all know it, they know it. I don’t blame them so very much. The trouble is we don’t ask them to do anything better. I want a new kind of rural school; but I don’t see any prospect, no matter how this election goes, for any change in them. We in the Woodruff District will have to work out our own salvation. Our political ring never’ll do anything but the old things. They don’t want to, and they haven’t sense enough to do it if they did. That’s all—and I don’t suppose I should have said as much as I have!”

There was stark silence for a moment when he sat down, and then as many cheers for Jim as for the principal speaker of the evening, cheers mingled with titters and catcalls. Jim felt a good deal as he had done when he knocked down Mr. Billy’s chauffeur—rather degraded and humiliated, as if he had made an ass of himself. And as he walked out of the door, the future county superintendent passed by him in high displeasure, and walked home with some one else.

Jim found the weather much colder than it had been while coming. He really needed an Eskimo’s fur suit.

CHAPTER VII

THE NEW WINE

In the little strip of forest which divided the sown from the Iowa sown wandered two boys in earnest converse. They seemed to be Boy Trappers, and from their backloads of steel-traps one of them might have been Frank Merriwell, and the other Dead-Shot Dick. However, though it was only mid-December, and the fur of all wild varmints was at its primest, they were bringing their traps into the settlements, instead of taking them afield. “The settlements” were represented by the ruinous dwelling of the Simmses, and the boy who resembled Frank Merriwell was Raymond Simms. The other, who was much more barbarously accoutered, whose overalls were fringed, who wore a cartridge belt about his person, and carried hatchet, revolver, and a long knife with a deerfoot handle, and who so studiously looked like Dead-Shot Dick, was our old friend of the road gang, Newton Bronson. On the right, on the left, a few rods would have brought the boys out upon the levels of rich corn-fields, and in sight of the long rows of cottonwoods, willows, box-elders and soft maples along the straight roads, and of the huge red barns, each of which possessed a numerous progeny of outbuildings, among which the dwelling held a dubious headship. But here, they could be the Boy Trappers—a thin fringe of bushes and trees made of the little valley a forest to the imagination of the boys. Newton put down his load, and sat upon a stump to rest.

Raymond Simms was dimly conscious of a change in Newton since the day when they met and helped select Colonel Woodruff’s next year’s seed corn. Newton’s mother had a mother’s confidence that Newton was now a good boy, who had been led astray by other boys, but had reformed. Jim Irwin had a distinct feeling of optimism. Newton had quit tobacco and beer, casually stating to Jim that he was “in training.” Since Jim had shown his ability to administer a knockout to that angry chauffeur, he seemed to this hobbledehoy peculiarly a proper person for athletic confidences. Newton’s mind seemed gradually filling up with interests that displaced the psychological complex out of which oozed the bad stories and filthy allusion. Jim attributed much of this to the clear mountain atmosphere which surrounded Raymond Simms, the ignorant barbarian driven out of his native hills by a feud. Raymond was of the open spaces, and refused to hear fetid things that seemed out of place in them. There was a dignity which impressed

Newton, in the blank gaze with which Raymond greeted Newton's sallies that were wont to set the village pool room in a roar; but how could you have a fuss with a feller who knew all about trapping, who had seen a man shot, who had shot a bear, who had killed wild turkeys, who had trapped a hundred dollars' worth of furs in one winter, who knew the proper "sets" for all fur-bearing animals, and whom you liked, and who liked you?

As the reason for Newton's improvement in manner of living, Raymond, out of his own experience, would have had no hesitation in naming the school and the schoolmaster. 78

"I wouldn't go back on a friend," said Newton, seated on the stump with his traps on the ground at his feet, "the way you're going back on me."

"You got no call to talk thataway," replied the mountain boy. "How'm I goin' back on you?"

"We was goin' to trap all winter," asseverated Newton, "and next winter we were goin' up in the north woods together."

"You know," said Raymond somberly, "that we cain't run any trap line and do whut we got to do to he'p Mr. Jim."

Newton sat mute as one having no rejoinder.

"Mr. Jim," went on Raymond, "needs all the he'p every kid in this settlement kin give him. He's the best friend I ever had. I'm a pore ignerant boy, an' he teaches me how to do things that will make me something."

"Darn it all!" said Newton.

"You know," said Raymond, "that you'd think mahgty small of me, if I'd desert Mr. Jim Irwin." 79

"Well, then," replied Newton, seizing his traps and throwing them across his shoulder, "come on with the traps, and shut up! What'll we do when the school board gets Jennie Woodruff to revoke his certificate and make him quit teachin', hey?"

"Nobody'll eveh do that," said Raymond. "I'd set in the schoolhouse do' with my rifle and shoot anybody that'd come to th'ow Mr. Jim outen the school."

"Not in this country," said Newton. "This ain't a gun country."

"But it orto be either a justice kentry, or a gun kentry," replied the mountain boy. "It stands to reason it must be one 'r the otheh, Newton."

"No, it don't, neither," said Newton dogmatically.

"Why should they th'ow Mr. Jim outen the school?" inquired Raymond. "Ain't he teachin' us right?"

Newton explained for the tenth time that his father, Mr. Con Bonner and Mr. Haakon Peterson had not meant to hire Jim Irwin at all, but each had voted for him so that he might have one vote. They were all against him from the first, but they had not known how to get rid of him. Now, however, Jim had done so many things that no teacher was supposed to do, and had left undone so many things that teachers were bound by custom to perform, that Newton's father and Mr. Bonner and Mr. Peterson had made up up their minds that they would call upon him to resign, and if he wouldn't, they would "turn him out" in some way. And the best way if they could do it, would be to induce County Superintendent Woodruff, who didn't like Jim since the speech he made at the political meeting, to revoke his certificate. 80

"What wrong's he done committed?" asked Raymond. "I don't know what teachers air supposed to do in this kentry, but Mr. Jim seems to be the only shore-enough teacher I ever see!"

"He don't teach out of the books the school board adopted," replied Newton. 81

"But he makes up better lessons," urged Raymond. "An' all the things we do in school, he'ps us make a livin'."

"He begins at eight in the mornin'," said Newton, "an' he has some of us there till half past five, and comes back in the evening. And every Saturday, some of the kids are doin' something at the schoolhouse."

"They don't pay him for overtime, do they?" queried Raymond. "Well, then, they orto, instid of turnin' him out!"

"Well, they'll turn him out!" prophesied Newton. "I'm havin' more fun in school than I ever—an' that's why I'm with you on this quittin' trapping—but they'll get Jim, all right!"

"I'm having something betteh'n fun," replied Raymond. "My pap has never understood this kentry, an' we-all has had bad times hyeh; but Mr. Jim an' I have studied out how I can make a betteh livin' next year—and pap says we kin go on the way Mr. Jim says. I'll work for Colonel Woodruff a part of the time, an' pap kin make corn in the biggest field. It seems we didn't do our work right last year—an' in a couple of years, with the increase of the hawgs, an' the land we kin get under plow...." 82

Raymond was off on his pet dream of becoming something better than the oldest of the Simms tribe of outcasts, and Newton was subconsciously impressed by the fact that never for a moment did Raymond's plans fail to include the elevation with him of Calista and Jinnie and Buddy and Pap and Mam. It was taken for granted that the Simmses sank or swam together, whether their antagonists were poverty and ignorance, or their ancient foes, the Hobdays. Newton drew closer to Raymond's side.

It was still an hour before nine—when the rural school traditionally “takes up”—when the boys had stored their traps in a shed at the Bronson home, and walked on to the schoolhouse. That rather scabby and weathered edifice was already humming with industry of a sort. In spite of the hostility of the school board, and the aloofness of the patrons of the school, the pupils were clearly interested in Jim Irwin’s system of rural education. Never had the attendance been so large or regular; and one of the reasons for sessions before nine and after four was the inability of the teacher to attend to the needs of his charges in the five and a half hours called “school hours.” 83

This, however, was not the sole reason. It was the new sort of work which commanded the attention of Raymond and Newton as they entered. This morning, Jim had arranged in various sorts of dishes specimens of grain and grass seeds. By each was a card bearing the name of the farm from which one of the older boys or girls had brought it. “Wheat, Scotch Fife, from the farm of Columbus Smith.” “Timothy, or Herd’s Grass, from the farm of A. B. Talcott.” “Alsike Clover, from the farm of B. B. Hamm.” Each lot was in a small cloth bag which had been made by one of the little girls as a sewing exercise; and each card had been written as a lesson in penmanship by one of the younger pupils, and contained, in addition to the data above mentioned, heads under which to enter the number of grains of the seed examined, the number which grew, the percentage of viability, the number of alien seeds of weeds and other sorts, the names of these adulterants, the weight of true and vitalized, and of foul and alien and dead seeds, the value per bushel in the local market of the seeds under test, and the real market values of the samples, after dead seeds and alien matter had been subtracted. 84

“Now get busy, here,” cried Jim Irwin. “We’re late! Raymond, you’ve a quick eye—you count seeds—and you, Calista, and Mary Smith—and mind, next year’s crop may depend on making no mistakes!”

“Mistakes!” scoffed Mary Smith, a dumpy girl of fourteen. “We don’t make mistakes any more, teacher.”

It was a frolic, rather than a task. All had come with a perfect understanding that this early attendance was quite illegal, and not to be required of them—but they came.

“Newt,” suggested Jim, “get busy on the percentage problems for that second class in arithmetic.”

“Sure,” said Newt. “Let’s see.... Good seed is the base, and bad seed and dead seed the percentage—find the rate....” 85

“Oh, you know!” said Jim. “Make them easy and plain and as many as you can get out—and be sure that you name the farm every pop!”

“Got you!” answered Newton, and in a fine frenzy went at the job of creating a text-book in arithmetic.

“Buddy,” said Jim, patting the youngest Simms on the head, “you and Virginia can print the reading lessons this morning, can’t you?”

“Yes, Mr. Jim,” answered both McGeehee Simms and his sister cheerily. “Where’s the copy?”

“Here,” answered the teacher, handing each a typewritten sheet for use as the original from which the young mountaineers were to make hectograph copies, “and mind you make good copies! Bettina Hansen pretty nearly cried last night because she had to write them over so many times on the typewriter before she got them all right.”

The reading lesson was an article on corn condensed from a farm paper, and a selection from *Hiawatha*—the Indian-corn myth. 86

“We’ll be careful, Mr. Jim,” said Buddy.

Half past eight, and only half an hour until school would officially be “called.”

Newton Bronson was writing in aniline ink for the hectographs, such problems as these:

“If Mr. Ezra Bronson’s seed wheat carries in each 250 grains, ten cockle grains, fifteen rye grains, twenty fox-tail seeds, three iron-weed seeds, two wild oats grains, twenty-seven wild buckwheat seeds, one wild morning-glory seed, and eighteen lamb’s quarter seeds, what percentage of the seeds sown is wheat, and what foul seed?”

“If in each 250 grains of wheat in Mr. Bronson’s bins, 30 are cracked, dead or otherwise not capable of sprouting, what per cent, of the seed sown will grow?”

“If the foul seed and dead wheat amount to one-eighth by weight of the mass, what did Mr. Bronson pay per bushel for the good wheat, if it cost him $1.10 in the bin, and what per cent, did he lose by the adulterations and the poor wheat?”

Jim ran over these rapidly. “Your mathematics is good, Newton,” said the schoolmaster, “but if you expect to pass in penmanship, you’ll have to take more pains.” 87

“How about the grammar?” asked Newton. “The writing is pretty bad, I’ll own up.”

“The grammar is good this morning. You’re gradually mastering the art of stating a problem in arithmetic in English—and that’s improvement.”

The hands of Jim Irwin’s dollar watch gradually approached the position indicating nine o’clock—at which time the schoolmaster rapped on his desk and the school came to order. Then, for a while, it became like other schools. A glance over the room enabled him to enter the names of

the absentees, and those tardy. There was a song by the school, the recitation in concert of *Little Brown Hands*, some general remarks and directions by the teacher, and the primary pupils came forward for their reading exercises. A few classes began poring over their text-books, but most of the pupils had their work passed out to them in the form of hectograph copies of exercises prepared in the school itself.

As the little ones finished their recitations, they passed to the dishes of wheat, and began aiding Raymond's squad in the counting and classifying of the various seeds. They counted to five, and they counted the fives. They laughed in a subdued way, and whispered constantly, but nobody seemed disturbed.

"Do they help much, Calista?" asked the teacher, as the oldest Simms girl came to his desk for more wheat.

"No, seh, not much," replied Calista, beaming, "but they don't hold us back any—and maybe they do he'p a little."

"That's good," said Jim, "and they enjoy it, don't they?"

"Oh, yes, Mr. Jim," assented Calista, "and the way Buddy is learnin' to count is fine! They-all will soon know all the addition they is, and a lot of multiplication. Angie Talcott knows the kinds of seeds better'n what I do!"

CHAPTER VIII

AND THE OLD BOTTLES

The day passed. Four o'clock came. In order that all might reach home for supper, there was no staying, except that Newt Bronson and Raymond Simms remained to sweep and dust the schoolroom, and prepare kindling for the next morning's fire—a work they had taken upon themselves, so as to enable the teacher to put on the blackboards such outlines for the morrow's class work as might be required. Jim was writing on the board a list of words constituting a spelling exercise. They were not from the text-book, but grew naturally out of the study of the seed wheat—"cockle," "morning-glory," "convolvulus," "viable," "viability," "sprouting," "iron-weed" and the like. A tap was heard at the door, and Raymond Simms opened it.

In filed three women—and Jim Irwin knew as he looked at them that he was greeting a deputation, and felt that it meant a struggle. For they were the wives of the members of the school board. He placed for them the three available chairs, and in the absence of any for himself remained standing before them, a gaunt shabby-looking revolutionist at the bar of settled usage and fixed public opinion.

Mrs. Haakon Peterson was a tall blonde woman who, when she spoke betrayed her Scandinavian origin by the northern burr to her "r's," and a slight difficulty with her "j's," her "y's" and long "a's." She was slow-spoken and dignified, and Jim felt an instinctive respect for her personality. Mrs. Bronson was a good motherly woman, noted for her housekeeping, and for her church activities. She looked oftener at her son, and his friend Raymond than at the schoolmaster. Mrs. Bonner was the most voluble of the three, and was the only one who shook hands with Jim; but in spite of her rather offhand manner, Jim sensed in the little, black-eyed Irishwoman the real commander of the expedition against him—for such he knew it to be.

"You may think it strange of us coming after hours," said she, "but we wanted to speak to you, teacher, without the children here."

"I wish more of the parents would call," said Jim. "At any hour of the day."

"Or night either, I dare say," suggested Mrs. Bonner. "I hear you've the scholars here at all hours, Jim."

Jim smiled his slow patient smile.

"We do break the union rules, I guess, Mrs. Bonner," said he; "there seems to be more to do than we can get done during school hours."

"What right have ye," struck in Mrs. Bonner, "to be burning the district's fuel, and wearing out the school's property out of hours like that—not that it's anny of my business," she interposed, hastily, as if she had been diverted from her chosen point of attack. "I just thought of it, that's all. What we came for, Mr. Irwin, is to object to the way the teachin's being done—corn and wheat, and hogs and the like, instead of the learnin' schools was made to teach."

"Schools were made to prepare children for life, weren't they, Mrs. Bonner?"

"To be sure," went on Mrs. Bonner, "I can see an' the whole district can see that it's easier for a man that's been a farm-hand to teach farm-hand knowledge, than the learnin' schools was set up to teach; but if so be he hasn't the book education to do the right thing, we think he should get out and give a real teacher a chance."

“What am I neglecting?” asked Jim mildly.

Mrs. Bonner seemed unprepared for the question, and sat for an instant mute. Mrs. Peterson interposed her attack while Mrs. Bonner might be recovering her wind.

“We people that have had a hard time,” she said in a precise way which seemed to show that she knew exactly what she wanted, “want to give our boys and girls a chance to live easier lives than we lived. We don’t want our children taught about nothing but work. We want higher things.”

“Mrs. Peterson,” said Jim earnestly, “we must have first things first. Making a living is the first thing—and the highest.” 93

“Haakon and I will look after making a living for our family,” said she. “We want our children to learn nice things, and go to high school, and after a while to the Juniwersity.”

“And I,” declared Jim, “will send out from this school, if you will let me, pupils better prepared for higher schools than have ever gone from it—because they will be trained to think in terms of action. They will go knowing that thoughts must always be linked with things. Aren’t your children happy in school, Mrs. Peterson?”

“I don’t send them to school to be happy, Yim,” replied Mrs. Peterson, calling him by the name most familiarly known to all of them; “I send them to learn to be higher people than their father and mother. That’s what America means!”

“They’ll be higher people—higher than their parents—higher than their teacher—they’ll be efficient farmers, and efficient farmers’ wives. They’ll be happy, because they will know how to use more brains in farming than any lawyer or doctor or merchant can possibly use in his business. I’m educating them to find an outlet for genius in farming!” 94

“It’s a fine thing,” said Mrs. Bonner, coming to the aid of her fellow soldiers, “to work hard for a lifetime, an’ raise nothing but a family of farmers! A fine thing!”

“They will be farmers anyhow,” cried Jim, “in spite of your efforts—ninety out of every hundred of them! And of the other ten, nine will be wage-earners in the cities, and wish to God they were back on the farm; and the hundredth one will succeed in the city. Shall we educate the ninety-and-nine to fail, that the hundredth, instead of enriching the rural life with his talents, may steal them away to make the city stronger? It is already too strong for us farmers. Shall we drive our best away to make it stronger?”

The guns of Mrs. Bonner and Mrs. Peterson were silenced for a moment, and Mrs. Bronson, after gazing about at the typewriter, the hectograph, the exhibits of weed seeds, the Babcock milk tester, and the other unscholastic equipment, pointed to the list of words, and the arithmetic problems on the board. 95

“Do you get them words from the speller?” she asked.

“No,” said he, “we got them from a lesson on seed wheat.”

“Did them examples come out of an arithmetic book?” cross-examined she.

“No,” said Jim, “we used problems we made ourselves. We were figuring profits and losses on your cows, Mrs. Bronson!”

“Ezra Bronson,” said Mrs. Bronson loftily, “don’t need any help in telling what’s a good cow. He was farming before you was born!”

“Like fun, he don’t need help! He’s going to dry old Cherry off and fatten her for beef; and he can make more money on the cream by beefing about three more of ’em. The Babcock test shows they’re just boarding on us without paying their board!”

The delegation of matrons ruffled like a group of startled hens at this interposition, which was Newton Bronson’s effective seizing of the opportunity to issue a progress bulletin in the research work on the Bronson dairy herd.

“Newton!” said his mother, “don’t interrupt me when I’m talking to the teacher!” 96

“Well, then,” said Newton, “don’t tell the teacher that pa knew which cows were good and which were poor. If any one in this district wants to know about their cows they’ll have to come to this shop. And I can tell you that it’ll pay ’em to come too, if they’re going to make anything selling cream. Wait until we get out our reports on the herds, ma!”

The women were rather stampeded by this onslaught of the irregular troops—especially Mrs. Bronson. She was placed in the position of a woman taking a man’s wisdom from her ne’er-do-well son for the first time in her life. Like any other mother in this position, she felt a flutter of pride—but it was strongly mingled with a motherly desire to spank him. The deputation rose, with a unanimous feeling that they had been scored upon.

“Cows!” scoffed Mrs. Peterson. “If we leave you in this yob, Mr. Irwin, our children will know nothing but cows and hens and soils and grains—and where will the culture come in? How will our boys and girls appear when we get fixed so we can move to town? We won’t have no culture at all, Yim!” 97

“Culture!” exclaimed Jim. “Why—why, after ten years of the sort of school I would give you if I were a better teacher, and could have my way, the people of the cities would be begging to have their children admitted so that they might obtain real culture—culture fitting them for life in the twentieth century—”

“Don’t bother to get ready for the city children, Jim,” said Mrs. Bonner sneeringly, “you won’t be teaching the Woodruff school that long.”

All this time, the dark-faced Cracker had been glooming from a corner, earnestly seeking to fathom the wrongness he sensed in the gathering. Now he came forward.

“I reckon I may be making a mistake to say anything,” said he, “f’r we-all is strangers hyeh, an’ we’re pore; but I must speak out for Mr. Jim—I must! Don’t turn him out, folks, f’r he’s done mo’ f’r us than eveh any one done in the world!”

“What do you mean?” asked Mrs. Peterson.

“I mean,” said Raymond, “that when Mr. Jim began talking school to us, we was a pore no-’count lot without any learnin’, with nothin’ to talk about except our wrongs, an’ our enemies, and the meanness of the Iowa folks. You see we didn’t understand you-all. An’ now, we have hope. We done got hope from this school. We’re goin’ to make good in the world. We’re getting education. We’re all learnin’ to use books. My little sister will be as good as anybody, if you’ll just let Mr. Jim alone in this school—as good as any one. An’ I’ll he’p pap get a farm, and we’ll work and think at the same time, an’ be happy!”

CHAPTER IX

JENNIE ARRANGES A CHRISTMAS PARTY

The great party magnates who made up the tickets from governor down to the lowest county office, doubtless regarded the little political plum shaken off into the apron of Miss Jennie Woodruff of the Woodruff District, as the very smallest and least bloomy of all the plums on the tree; but there is something which tends to puff one up in the mere fact of having received the votes of the people for any office, especially in a region of high average civilization, covering six hundred or seven hundred square miles of good American domain. Jennie was a sensible country girl. Being sensible, she tried to avoid uppishness. But she did feel some little sense of increased importance as she drove her father’s little one-cylinder runabout over the smooth earth roads, in the crisp December weather, just before Christmas.

The weather itself was stimulating, and she was making rapid progress in the management of the little car which her father had offered to lend her for use in visiting the one hundred or more rural schools soon to come under her supervision. She rather fancied the picture of herself, clothed in more or less authority and queening it over her little army of teachers.

Mr. Haakon Peterson was phlegmatically conscious that she made rather an agreeable picture, as she stopped her car alongside his top buggy to talk with him. She had bright blue eyes, fluffy brown hair, a complexion whipped pink by the breeze, and she smiled at him ingratiatingly.

“Don’t you think father is lovely?” said she. “He is going to let me use the runabout when I visit the schools.”

“That will be good,” said Haakon. “It will save you lots of time. I hope you make the county pay for the gasoline.”

“I haven’t thought about that,” said Jennie. “Everybody’s been so nice to me—I want to give as well as receive.”

“Why,” said Haakon, “you will yust begin to receive when your salary begins in Yanuary.”

“Oh, no!” said Jennie. “I’ve received much more than that now! You don’t know how proud I feel. So many nice men I never knew before, and all my old friends like you working for me in the convention and at the polls, just as if I amounted to something.”

“And you don’t know how proud I feel,” said Haakon, “to have in county office a little girl I used to hold on my lap.”

In early times, when Haakon was a flat-capped immigrant boy, he had earned the initial payment on his first eighty acres of prairie land as a hired man on Colonel Woodruff’s farm. Now he was a rather richer man than the colonel, and not a little proud of his ascent to affluence. He was a mild-spoken, soft-voiced Scandinavian, quite completely Americanized, and possessed of that aptitude for local politics which makes so good a citizen of the Norwegian and Swede. His influence was always worth fifty to sixty Scandinavian votes in any county election. He was a good party man and conscious of being entitled to his voice in party matters. This seemed to him an opportunity for exerting a bit of political influence.

“Yennie,” said he, “this man Yim Irwin needs to be lined up.”

“Lined up! What do you mean?”

“The way he is doing in the school,” said Haakon, “is all wrong. If you can’t line him up, he will make you trouble. We must look ahead. Everybody has his friends, and Yim Irwin has his friends. If you have trouble with him, his friends will be against you when we want to nominate

you for a second term. The county is getting close. If we go to conwention without your home delegation it would weaken you, and if we nominate you, every piece of trouble like this cuts down your wote. You ought to line him up and have him do right."

"But he is so funny," said Jennie.

"He likes you," said Haakon. "You can line him up."

Jennie blushed, and to conceal her slight embarrassment, got out for the purpose of cranking her machine.

"But if I can not line him up?" said she.

"I tank," said Haakon, "if you can't line him up, you will have a chance to rewoke his certificate when you take office."

So Jim Irwin was to be crushed like an insect. The little local gearing of the big party machine was to crush him. Jennie dimly sensed the tragedy of it, but very dimly. Mainly she thought of Mr. Peterson's suggestion as to "lining up" Jim Irwin as so thoroughly sensible that she gave it a good deal of thought that day. She could not help feeling a little resentment at Jim for following his own fads and fancies so far. We always resent the necessity of crushing any weak creature which must needs be wiped out. The idea that there could be anything fundamentally sane in his overturning of the old and tried school methods under which both he and she had been educated, was absurd to Jennie. To be sure, everybody had always favored "more practical education," and Jim's farm arithmetic, farm physiology, farm reading and writing, cow-testing exercises, seed analysis, corn clubs and the tomato, poultry and pig clubs he proposed to have in operation the next summer, seemed highly practical; but to Jennie's mind, the fact that they introduced dissension in the neighborhood and promised to make her official life vexatious, seemed ample proof that Jim's work was visionary and impractical. Poor Jennie was not aware of the fact that new truth always comes bringing, not peace to mankind, but a sword.

"Father," said she that night, "let's have a little Christmas party."

"All right," said the colonel. "Whom shall we invite?"

"Don't laugh," said she. "I want to invite Jim Irwin and his mother, and nobody else."

"All right," reiterated the colonel. "But why?"

"Oh," said Jennie, "I want to see whether I can talk Jim out of some of his foolishness."

"You want to line him up, do you?" said the colonel. "Well, that's good politics, and incidentally, you may get some good ideas out of Jim."

"Rather unlikely," said Jennie.

"I don't know about that," said the colonel, smiling. "I begin to think that Jim's a Brown Mouse. I've told you about the Brown Mouse, haven't I?"

"Yes," said Jennie. "You've told me. But Professor Darbishire's brown mice were simply wild and incorrigible creatures. Just because it happens to emerge suddenly from the forests of heredity, it doesn't prove that the Brown Mouse is any good."

"Justin Morgan was a Brown Mouse," said the colonel. "And he founded the greatest breed of horses in the world."

"You say that," said Jennie, "because you're a lover of the Morgan horse."

"Napoleon Bonaparte was a Brown Mouse," said the colonel. "So was George Washington, and so was Peter the Great. Whenever a Brown Mouse appears he changes things in a little way or a big way."

"For the better, always?" asked Jennie.

"No," said the colonel. "The Brown Mouse may throw back to slant-headed savagery. But Jim ... sometimes I think Jim is the kind of Mendelian segregation out of which we get Franklins and Edisons and their sort. You may get some good ideas out of Jim. Let us have them here for Christmas, by all means."

In due time Jennie's invitation reached Jim and his mother, like an explosive shell fired from a distance into their humble dwelling—quite upsetting things. Twenty-five years constitute rather a long wait for social recognition, and Mrs. Irwin had long since regarded herself as quite outside society. To be sure, for something like half of this period, she had been of society if not in it. She had done the family washings, scrubbings and cleanings, had made the family clothes and been a woman of all work, passing from household to household, in an orbit determined by the exigencies of threshing, harvesting, illness and child-bearing. At such times she sat at the family table and participated in the neighborhood gossip, in quite the manner of a visiting aunt or other female relative; but in spite of the democracy of rural life, there is and always has been a social difference between a hired woman and an invited guest. And when Jim, having absorbed everything which the Woodruff school could give him in the way of education, found his first job at "making a hand," Mrs. Irwin, at her son's urgent request, ceased going out to work for a while, until she could get back her strength. This she had never succeeded in doing, and for a dozen years or more had never entered a single one of the houses in which she had formerly served.

"I can't go, James," said she; "I can't possibly go."

"Oh, yes, you can! Why not?" said Jim. "Why not?"

“You know I don’t go anywhere,” urged Mrs. Irwin.

“That’s no reason,” said her son.

“I haven’t a thing to wear,” said Mrs. Irwin.

“Nothing to wear!”

I wonder if any ordinary person can understand the shock with which Jim Irwin heard those words from his mother’s lips. He was approaching thirty, and the association of the ideas of Mother and Costume was foreign to his mind. Other women had surfaces different from hers, to be sure—but his mother was not as other women. She was just Mother, always at work in the house or in the garden, always doing for him those inevitable things which made up her part in life, always clothed in the browns, grays, gray-blues, neutral stripes and checks which were cheap and common and easily made. Clothes! They were in the Irwin family no more than things by which the rules of decency were complied with, and the cold of winter turned back—but as for their appearance! Jim had never given the thing a thought further than to wear out his Sunday best in the schoolroom, to wonder where the next suit of Sunday best was to come from, and to buy for his mother the cheap and common fabrics which she fashioned into the garments in which alone, it seemed to him, she would seem like Mother. A boy who lives until he is nearly thirty in intimate companionship with Carlyle, Thoreau, Wordsworth, Shakespeare, Emerson, Professor Henry, Liberty H. Bailey, Cyril Hopkins, Dean Davenport and the great obscurities of the experiment stations, may be excused if his views regarding clothes are derived in a transcendental manner from *Sartor Resartus* and the agricultural college tests as to the relation between Shelter and Feeding.

“Why, mother,” said he, “I think it would be pretty hard to explain to the Woodruffs that you stayed away because of clothes. They have seen you in the clothes you wear pretty often for the last thirty years!”

Was a woman ever quite without a costume?

Mrs. Irwin gazed at vacancy for a while, and went to the old bureau. From the bottom drawer she took an old, old black alpaca dress—a dress which Jim had never seen. She spread it out on her bed in the alcove off the combined kitchen, parlor and dining-room in which they lived, and smoothed out the wrinkles. It was almost whole, save for the places where her body, once so much fuller than now, had drawn the threads apart—under the arms, and at some of the seams—and she handled it as one deals with something very precious.

“I never thought I’d wear it again,” said she, “but once. I’ve been saving it for my last dress. But I guess it won’t hurt to wear it once for the benefit of the living.”

Jim kissed his mother—a rare thing, save as the caress was called for by the established custom between them.

“Don’t think of that, mother,” said he, “for years and years yet!”

CHAPTER X

HOW JIM WAS LINED UP

There is no doubt that Jennie Woodruff was justified in thinking that they were a queer couple. They weren’t like the Woodruffs, at all. They were of a different pattern. To be sure, Jim’s clothes were not especially noteworthy, being just shiny, and frayed at cuff and instep, and short of sleeve and leg, and ill-fitting and cheap. They betrayed poverty, and the inability of a New York sweatshop to anticipate the prodigality of Nature in the matter of length of leg and arm, and wealth of bones and joints which she had lavished upon Jim Irwin. But the Woodruff table had often enjoyed Jim’s presence, and the standards prevailing there as to clothes were only those of plain people who eat with their hired men, buy their clothes at a county seat town, and live simply and sensibly on the fat of the land. Jim’s queerness lay not so much in his clothes as in his personality.

On the other hand, Jennie could not help thinking that Mrs. Irwin’s queerness was to be found almost solely in her clothes. The black alpaca looked undeniably respectable, especially when it was helped out by a curious old brooch of goldstone, bordered with flowers in blue and white and red and green—tiny blossoms of little stones which looked like the flowers which grow at the snow line on Pike’s Peak. Jennie felt that it must be a cheap affair, but it was decorative, and she wondered where Mrs. Irwin got it. She guessed it must have a story—a story in which the stooped, rusty, somber old lady looked like a character drawn to harmonize with the period just after the war. For the black alpaca dress looked more like a costume for a masquerade than a present-day garment, and Mrs. Irwin was so oppressed with doubt as to whether she was presentable, with knowledge that her dress didn’t fit, and with the difficulty of behaving naturally—like a convict just discharged from prison after a ten years’ term—that she took on a

stiffness of deportment quite in keeping with the idea that she was a female Rip Van Winkle not yet quite awake. But Jennie had the keenness to see that if Mrs. Irwin could have had an up-to-date costume she would have become a rather ordinary and not bad-looking old lady. What Jennie failed to divine was that if Jim could have invested a hundred dollars in the services of tailors, haberdashers, barbers and other specialists in personal appearance, and could for this hour or so have blotted out his record as her father's field-hand, he would have seemed to her a distinguished-looking young man. Not handsome, of course, but the sort people look after—and follow.

"Come to dinner," said Mrs. Woodruff, who at this juncture had a hired girl, but was yoked to the oar nevertheless when it came to turkey and the other fixings of a Christmas dinner. "It's good enough, what there is of it, and there's enough of it such as it is—but the dressing in the turkey would be better for a little more sage!"

The bountiful meal piled mountain high for guest and hired help and family melted away in a 114
manner to delight the hearts of Mrs. Woodruff and Jennie. The colonel, in stiff starched shirt, black tie and frock coat, carved with much empressement, and Jim felt almost for the first time a sense of the value of manner.

"I had bigger turkeys," said Mrs. Woodruff to Mrs. Irwin, "but I thought it would be better to cook two turkey-hens instead of one great big gobbler with meat as tough as tripe and stuffed full of fat."

"One of the hens would 'a' been plenty," replied Mrs. Irwin. "How much did they weigh?"

"About fifteen pounds apiece," was the answer. "The gobbler would 'a' weighed thirty, I guess. He's pure Mammoth Bronze."

"I wish," said Jim, "that we could get a few breeding birds of the wild bronze turkeys from Mexico."

"Why?" asked the colonel.

"They're the original blood of the domestic bronze turkeys," said Jim, "and they're bigger and handsomer than the pure-bred bronzes, even. They're a better stock than the northern wild 115
turkeys from which our common birds originated."

"Where do you learn all these things, Jim?" asked Mrs. Woodruff. "I declare, I often tell Woodruff that it's as good as a lecture to have Jim Irwin at table. My intelligence has fallen since you quit working here, Jim."

There came into Jim's eyes the gleam of the man devoted to a Cause—and the dinner tended to develop into a lecture. Jennie saw a little more plainly wherein his queerness lay.

"There's an education in any meal, if we would just use the things on the table as materials for study, and follow their trails back to their starting-points. This turkey takes us back to the chaparral of Mexico——"

"What's chaparral?" asked Jennie, as a diversion. "It's one of the words I have seen so often and know perfectly to speak it and read it—but after all it's just a word, and nothing more."

"Ain't that the trouble with our education, Jim?" queried the colonel, cleverly steering Jim back into the track of his discourse.

"They are not even living words," answered Jim, "unless we have clothed them in flesh and 116
blood through some sort of concrete notion. 'Chaparral' to Jennie is just the ghost of a word. Our civilization is full of inefficiency because we are satisfied to give our children these ghosts and shucks and husks of words, instead of the things themselves, that can be seen and hefted and handled and tested and heard."

Jennie looked Jim over carefully. His queerness was taking on a new phase—and she felt a sense of surprise such as one experiences when the conjurer causes a rose to grow into a tree before your very eyes. Jim's development was not so rapid, but Jennie's perception of it was. She began to feel proud of the fact that a man who could make his impractical notions seem so plausible—and who was clearly fired with some sort of evangelistic fervor—had kissed her, once or twice, on bringing her home from the spelling school.

"I think we lose so much time in school," Jim went on, "while the children are eating their dinners."

"Well, Jim," said Mrs. Woodruff, "every one but you is down on the human level. The poor kids 117
have to eat!"

"But think how much good education there is wrapped up in the school dinner—if we could only get it out."

Jennie grew grave. Here was this Brown Mouse actually introducing the subject of the school—and he ought to suspect that she was planning to line him up on this very thing—if he wasn't a perfect donkey as well as a dreamer. And he was calmly wading into the subject as if she were the ex-farm-hand country teacher, and he was the county superintendent-elect!

"Eating a dinner like this, mother," said the colonel gallantly, "is an education in itself—and eating some others requires one; but just how 'larnin' is wrapped up in the school lunch is a new one on me, Jim."

"Well," said Jim, "in the first place the children ought to cook their meals as a part of the school work. Prior to that they ought to buy the materials. And prior to that they ought to keep the

accounts of the school kitchen. They'd like to do these things, and it would help prepare them for life on an intelligent plane, while they prepared the meals."

"Isn't that looking rather far ahead?" asked the county superintendent-elect.

"It's like a lot of other things we think far ahead," urged Jim. "The only reason why they're far off is because we think them so. It's a thought—and a thought is as near the moment we think it as it will ever be."

"I guess that's so—to a wild-eyed reformer," said the colonel. "But go on. Develop your thought a little. Have some more dressing."

"Thanks, I believe I will," said Jim. "And a little more of the cranberry sauce. No more turkey, please."

"I'd like to see the school class that could prepare this dinner," said Mrs. Woodruff.

"Why," said Jim, "you'd be there showing them how! They'd get credits in their domestic-economy course for getting the school dinner—and they'd bring their mothers into it to help them stand at the head of their classes. And one detail of girls would cook one week, and another serve. The setting of the table would come in as a study—flowers, linen and all that. And when we get a civilized teacher, table manners!"

"I'd take on that class," said the hired man, winking at Selma Carlson, the maid, from somewhere below the salt. "The way I make my knife feed my face would be a great help to the children."

"And when the food came on the table," Jim went on, with a smile at his former fellow-laborer, who had heard most of this before as a part of the field conversation, "just think of the things we could study while eating it. The literary term for eating a meal is discussing it—well, the discussion of a meal under proper guidance is much more educative than a lecture. This breast-bone, now," said he, referring to the remains on his plate. "That's physiology. The cranberry-sauce—that's botany, and commerce, and soil management—do you know, Colonel, that the cranberry must have an acid soil—which would kill alfalfa or clover?"

"Read something of it," said the colonel, "but it didn't interest me much."

"And the difference between the types of fowl on the table—that's breeding. And the nutmeg, pepper and cocoanut—that's geography. And everything on the table runs back to geography, and comes to us linked to our lives by dollars and cents—and they're mathematics."

"We must have something more than dollars and cents in life," said Jennie. "We must have culture."

"Culture," cried Jim, "is the ability to think in terms of life—isn't it?"

"Like Jesse James," suggested the hired man, who was a careful student of the life of that eminent bandit.

There was a storm of laughter at this sally amidst which Jennie wished she had thought of something like that. Jim joined in the laughter at his own expense, but was clearly suffering from argumentative shock.

"That's the best answer I've had on that point, Pete," he said, after the disturbance had subsided. "But if the James boys and the Youngers had had the sort of culture I'm for, they would have been successful stock men and farmers, instead of train-robbers. Take Raymond Simms, for instance. He had all the qualifications of a member of the James gang when he came here. All he needed was a few exasperated associates of his own sort, and a convenient railway with undefended trains running over it. But after a few weeks of real 'culture' under a mighty poor teacher, he's developing into the most enthusiastic farmer I know. That's real culture."

"It's snowing like everything," said Jennie, who faced the window.

"Don't cut your dinner short," said the colonel to Pete, "but I think you'll find the cattle ready to come in out of the storm when you get good and through."

"I think I'll let 'em in now," said Pete, by way of excusing himself. "I expect to put in most of the day from now on getting ready to quit eating. Save some of everything for me, Selma,—I'll be right back!"

"All right, Pete," said Selma.

CHAPTER XI

THE MOUSE ESCAPES

Jennie played the piano and sang. They all joined in some simple Christmas songs. Mrs. Woodruff and Jim's mother went into other parts of the house on research work connected with their converse on domestic economy. The colonel withdrew for an inspection of the live stock on

the eve of the threatened blizzard. And Jim was left alone with Jennie in the front parlor. After the buzz of conversation, they seemed to have nothing to say. Jennie played softly, and looked at nothing, but scrutinized Jim by means of the eyes which women have concealed in their back hair. There was something new in the man—she sensed that. He was more confident, more persuasive, more dynamic. She was used to him only as a static force.

And Jim felt something new, too. He had felt it growing in him ever since he began his school work, and knew not the cause of it. The cause, however, would not have been a mystery to a wise old yogi who might discover the same sort of change in one of his young novices. Jim Irwin had been a sort of ascetic since his boyhood. He had mortified the flesh by hard labor in the fields, and by flagellations of the brain to drive off sleep while he pored over his books in the attic—which was often so hot after a day of summer's sun on its low thin roof, that he was forced to do his reading in the midmost night. He had looked long on such women as Helen of Troy, Cleopatra, Isabel, Cressida, Volumnia, Virginia, Evangeline, Agnes Wickfleld and Fair Rosamond; but on women in the flesh he had gazed as upon trees walking. The aforesaid spiritual director, had this young ascetic been under one, would have foreseen the effects on the psychology of a stout fellow of twenty-eight of freedom from the toil of the fields, and association with a group of young human beings of both sexes. To the novice struggling for emancipation from earthly thoughts, he would have recommended fasting and prayer, and perhaps, a hair shirt. Just what his prescription would have been for a man in Jim's position is, of course, a question. He would, no doubt, have considered carefully his patient's symptoms. These were very largely the mental experiences which most boys pass through in their early twenties, save, perhaps that, as in a belated season, the transition from winter to spring was more sudden, and the contrast more violent. Jim was now thrown every day into contact with his fellows. He was no longer a lay monk, but an active member of a very human group. He was becoming more of a boy, with the boys, and still more was he developing into a man with the women. The budding womanhood of Calista Simms and the other girls of his school thrilled him as Helen of Troy or Juliet had never done. This will not seem very strange to the experienced reader, but it astonished the unsophisticated young schoolmaster. The floating hair, the heaving bosom, the rosebud mouth, the starry eye, the fragrant breath, the magnetic hand—all these disturbed the hitherto sedate mind, and filled the brief hours he was accustomed to spend in sleep with strange dreams. And now, as he gazed at Jennie, he was suddenly aware of the fact that, after all, whenever these thoughts and dreams took on individuality, they were only persistent and intensified continuations of his old dreams of her. They had always been dormant in him, since the days they both studied from the same book. He was quite sure, now, that he had never forgotten for a moment, that Jennie was the only girl in the world for him. And possibly he was right about this. It is perfectly certain, however, that for years he had not consciously been in love with her.

Now, however, he arose as from some inner compulsion, and went to her side. He wished that he knew enough of music to turn her sheets for her, but, alas! the notes were meaningless to him. Still scanning him by means of her back hair, Jennie knew that in another moment Jim would lay his hand on her shoulder, or otherwise advance to personal nearness, as he had done the night of his ill-starred speech at the schoolhouse—and she rose in self-defense. Self-defense, however, did not seem to require that he be kept at too great a distance; so she maneuvered him to the sofa, and seated him beside her. Now was the time to line him up.

"It seems good to have you with us to-day," said she. "We're such old, old friends."

"Yes," repeated Jim, "old friends …. We are, aren't we, Jennie?"

"And I feel sure," Jennie went on, "that this marks a new era in our friendship."

"Why?" asked Jim, after considering the matter.

"Oh! everything is different, now—and getting more different all the time. My new work, and your new work, you know."

"I should like to think," said Jim, "that we are beginning over again."

"Oh, we are, we are, indeed! I am quite sure of it."

"And yet," said Jim, "there is no such thing as a new beginning. Everything joins itself to something which went before. There isn't any seam."

"No?" said Jennie interrogatively.

"Our regard for each other," Jennie noted most pointedly his word "regard"—"must be the continuation of the old regard."

"I hardly know what you mean," said Jennie.

Jim reached over and possessed himself of her hand. She pulled it from him gently, but he paid no attention to the little muscular protest, and examined the hand critically. On the back of the middle finger he pointed out a scar—a very tiny scar.

"Do you remember how you got that?" he asked.

Because Jim clung to the hand, their heads were very close together as she joined in the examination.

"Why, I don't believe I do," said she.

"I do," he replied. "We—you and I and Mary Forsythe were playing mumble-peg, and you put your hand on the grass just as I threw the knife—it cut you, and left that scar."

“I remember, now!” said she. “How such things come back over the memory. And did it leave a scar when I pushed you toward the red-hot stove in the schoolhouse one blizzardy day, like this, and you peeled the skin off your wrist where it struck the stove?” 128

“Look at it,” said he, baring his long and bony wrist. “Right there!”

And they were off on the trail that leads back to childhood. They had talked long, and intimately, when the shadows of the early evening crept into the corners of the room. He had carried her across the flooded slew again after the big rain. They had relived a dozen moving incidents by flood and field. Jennie recalled the time when the tornado narrowly missed the schoolhouse, and frightened everybody in school nearly to death.

“Everybody but you, Jim,” Jennie remembered. “You looked out of the window and told the teacher that the twister was going north of us, and would kill somebody else.”

“Did I?” asked Jim.

“Yes,” said Jennie, “and when the teacher asked us to kneel and thank God, you said, ‘Why should we thank God that somebody else is blowed away?’ She was greatly shocked.”

“I don’t see to this day,” Jim asserted, “what answer there was to my question.”

In the gathering darkness Jim again took Jennie’s hand, but this time she deprived him of it. 129

He was trembling like a leaf. Let it be remembered in his favor that this was the only girl’s hand he had ever held.

“You can’t find any more scars on it,” she said soberly.

“Let me see how much it has changed since I stuck the knife in it,” begged Jim.

Jennie held it up for inspection.

“It’s longer, and slenderer, and whiter, and even more beautiful,” said he, “than the little hand I cut; but it was then the most beautiful hand in the world to me—and still is.”

“I must light the lamps,” said the county superintendent-elect, rather flustered, it must be confessed. “Mama! Where are all the matches?”

Mrs. Woodruff and Mrs. Irwin came in, and the lamplight reminded Jim’s mother that the cow was still to milk, and that the chickens might need attention. The Woodruff sleigh came to the door to carry them home; but Jim desired to breast the storm. He felt that he needed the conflict. 130 Mrs. Irwin scolded him for his foolishness, but he strode off into the whirling drift, throwing back a good-by for general consumption, and a pathetic smile to Jennie.

“He’s as odd as Dick’s hatband,” said Mrs. Woodruff, “tramping off in a storm like this.”

“Did you line him up?” asked the colonel of Jennie.

The young lady started and blushed. She had forgotten all about the politics of the situation.

“I—I’m afraid I didn’t, papa,” she confessed.

“Those brown mice of Professor Darbishire’s,” said the colonel, “were the devil and all to control.”

Jennie was thinking of this as she dropped asleep.

“Hard to control!” she thought. “I wonder. I wonder, after all, if Jim is not capable of being easily lined up—when he sees how foolish I think he is!”

And Jim? He found himself hard to control that night. So much so that it was after midnight 131 before he had finished work on a plan for a cooperative creamery.

“The boys can be given work in helping to operate it,” he wrote on a tablet, “which, in connection with the labor performed by the teacher, will greatly reduce the expense of operation. A skilled butter-maker, with slender white hands”—but he erased this last clause and retired.

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CHAPTER XII

FACING TRIAL

A distinct sensation ran through the Woodruff school, but the schoolmaster and a group of five big boys and three girls engaged in a very unclasslike conference in the back of the room were all unconscious of it. The geography classes had recited, and the language work was on. Those too small for these studies were playing a game under the leadership of Jinnie Simms, who had been promoted to the position of weed-seed monitor.

The game was forfeits. Each child had been encouraged to bring some sort of weed from the winter fields—preferably one the seed of which still clung to the dried receptacles—but anyhow,

a weed. Some pupils had brought merely empty tassels, some bare stalks, and some seeds which they had winnowed from the grain in their father's bins; and with them they played forfeits. They counted out by the "arey, Ira, ickery an'" method, and somebody was "It." Then, in order, they presented to him a seed, stalk or head of a weed, and if the one who was It could tell the name of the weed, the child who brought the specimen became It, and the name was written on slates or tablets, and the new It told where the weed or seed was collected. If any pupil brought in a specimen the name of which he himself could not correctly give, he paid a forfeit. If a specimen was brought in not found in the school cabinet—which was coming to contain a considerable collection—it was placed there, and the task allotted to the best penman in the school to write its proper label. All this caused excitement, and not a little buzz—but it ceased when the county superintendent entered the room.

For it was after the first of January, and Jennie was visiting the Woodruff school.

The group in the back of the room went on with its conference, oblivious of the entrance of Superintendent Jennie. Their work was rather absorbing, being no more nor less than the compilation of the figures of a cow census of the district.

"Altogether," said Mary Talcott, "we have in the district one hundred and fifty-three cows."

"I don't make it that," said Raymond Simms. "I don't get but a hundred and thirty-eight."

"The trouble is," said Newton Bronson, "that Mary's counting in the Bailey herd of Shorthorns."

"Well, they're cows, ain't they?" interrogated Mary.

"Not for this census," said Raymond.

"Why not?" asked Mary. "They're the prettiest cows in the neighborhood."

"Scotch Shorthorns," said Newton, "and run with their calves."

"Leave them out," said Jim, "and to-morrow, I want each one to tell in the language class, in three hundred words or less, whether there are enough cows in the district to justify a cooperative creamery, and give the reason. You'll find articles in the farm papers if you look through the card index. Now, how about the census in the adjoining districts?"

"There are more than two hundred within four miles on the roads leading west," said a boy.

"My father and I counted up about a hundred beyond us," said Mary. "But I couldn't get the exact number."

"Why," said Raymond, "we could find six hundred dairy cows in this neighborhood, within an hour's drive."

"Six hundred!" scoffed Newton. "You're crazy! In an hour's drive?"

"I mean an hour's drive each way," said Raymond.

"I believe we could," said Jim. "And after we find how far we will have to go to get enough cows, if half of them patronized the creamery, we'll work over the savings the business would make, if we could get the prices for butter paid the Wisconsin cooperative creameries, as compared with what the centralizers pay us, on a basis of the last six months. Who's in possession of that correspondence with the Wisconsin creameries?"

"I have it," said Raymond. "I'm hectographing a lot of arithmetic problems from it."

"How do you do, Mr. Irwin!" It was the superintendent who spoke.

Jim's brain whirled little prismatic clouds before his vision, as he rose and shook Jennie's extended hand.

"Let me give you a chair," said he.

"Oh, no, thank you!" she returned. "I'll just make myself at home. I know my way about in this schoolhouse, you know!"

She smiled at the children, and went about looking at their work—which was not noticeably disturbed, by reason of the fact that visitors were much more frequent now than ever before, and were no rarity. Certainly, Jennie Woodruff was no novelty, since they had known her all their lives. Most of the embarrassment was Jim's. He rose to the occasion, however, went through the routine of the closing day, and dismissed the flock, not omitting making an engagement with a group of boys for that evening to come back and work on the formalin treatment for smut in seed grains, and the blue-vitriol treatment for seed potatoes.

"We hadn't time for these things," said he to the county superintendent, "in the regular class work—and it's getting time to take them up if we are to clean out the smut in next year's crop."

They repeated Whittier's *Corn Song* in concert, and school was out.

Alone with her in the old schoolhouse, Jim confronted Jennie in the flesh. She felt a sense of his agitation, but if she had known the power of it, she would have been astonished. Since that Christmas afternoon when she had undertaken to follow Mr. Peterson's advice and line Yim Irwin up, Jim had gone through an inward transformation. He had passed from a late, cold, backward sexual spring, into a warm June of the spirit, in which he had walked amid roses and lilies with Jennie. He was in love with her. He knew how insane it was, how much less than nothing had taken place in his circumstances to justify the hope that he could ever emerge from the state in which she would not say "Humph!" at the thought that he could marry her or any one else. Yet, he had made up his mind that he would marry Jennie Woodruff .... She ought

never have tried to line him up. She knew not what she did.

He saw her through clouds of rose and pink; but she looked at him as at a foolish man who was making trouble for her, chasing rainbows at her expense, and deeply vexing her. She was in a cold official frame of mind.

“Jim,” said she, “do you know that you are facing trouble?”

“Trouble,” said Jim, “is the natural condition of a man in my state of mind. But it is going to be a delicious sort of tribulation.”

“I don’t know what you mean,” she replied in perfect honesty.

“Then I don’t know what you mean,” replied Jim.

“Jim,” she said pleadingly, “I want you to give up this sort of teaching. Can’t you see it’s all wrong?”

“No,” answered Jim, in much the manner of a man who has been stabbed by his sweetheart. “I can’t see that it’s wrong. It’s the only sort I can do. What do you see wrong in it?” 139

“Oh, I can see some very wonderful things in it,” said Jennie, “but it can’t be done in the Woodruff District. It may be correct in theory, but it won’t work in practise.”

“Jennie,” said he, “when a thing won’t work, it isn’t correct in theory.”

“Well, then, Jim,” said she, “why do you keep on with it?”

“It works,” said Jim. “Anything that’s correct in theory will work. If the theory seems correct, and yet won’t work, it’s because something is wrong in an unsuspected way with the theory. But my theory is correct, and it works.”

“But the district is against it.”

“Who are the district?”

“The school board are against it.”

“The school board elected me after listening to an explanation of my theories as to the new sort of rural school in which I believe. I assume that they commissioned me to carry out my ideas.”

“Oh, Jim!” cried Jennie. “That’s sophistry! They all voted for you so you wouldn’t be without support. Each wanted you to have just one vote. Nobody wanted you elected. They were all surprised. You know that!” 140

“They stood by and saw the contract signed,” said Jim, “and—yes, Jennie, I *am* dealing in sophistry! I got the school by a sort of shell-game, which the board worked on themselves. But that doesn’t prove that the district is against me. I believe the people are for me, now, Jennie. I really do!”

Jennie rose and walked to the rear of the room and back, twice. When she spoke, there was decision in her tone—and Jim felt that it was hostile decision.

“As an officer,” she said rather grandly, “my relations with the district are with the school board on the one hand, and with your competency as a teacher on the other.”

“Has it come to that?” asked Jim. “Well, I have rather expected it.”

His tone was weary. The Lincolnian droop in his great, sad, mournful mouth accentuated the resemblance to the martyr president. Possibly his feelings were not entirely different from those experienced by Lincoln at some crises of doubt, misunderstanding and depression. 141

“If you can’t change your methods,” said Jennie, “I suggest that you resign.”

“Do you think,” said Jim, “that changing my methods would appease the men who feel that they are made laughing-stocks by having elected me?”

Jennie was silent; for she knew that the school board meant to pursue their policy of getting rid of the accidental incumbent regardless of his methods.

“They would never call off their dogs,” said Jim.

“But your methods would make a great difference with my decision,” said Jennie.

“Are you to be called upon to decide?” asked Jim.

“A formal complaint against you for incompetency,” she replied, “has been lodged in my office, signed by the three directors. I shall be obliged to take notice of it.”

“And do you think,” queried Jim, “that my abandonment of the things in which I believe in the face of this attack would prove to your mind that I am competent? Or would it show me incompetent?” 142

Again Jennie was silent.

“I guess,” said Jim, “that we’ll have to stand or fall on things as they are.”

“Do you refuse to resign?” asked Jennie.

“Sometimes I think it’s not worth while to try any longer,” said Jim. “And yet, I believe that in my way I’m working on the question which must be solved if this nation is to stand—the question of making the farm and farm life what they should be and may well be. At this moment, I feel like surrendering—for your sake more than mine; but I’ll have to think about it. Suppose I refuse to resign?”

Jennie had drawn on her gloves, and stood ready for departure.

"Unless you resign before the twenty-fifth," said she, "I shall hear the petition for your removal on that date. You will be allowed to be present and answer the charges against you. The charges are incompetency. I bid you good evening!"

"Incompetency!" The disgraceful word, representing everything he had always despised, rang 143
through Jim's mind as he walked home. He could think of nothing else as he sat at the simple supper which he could scarcely taste. Incompetent! Well, had he not always been incompetent, except in the use of his muscles? Had he not always been a dreamer? Were not all his dreams as foreign to life and common sense as the Milky Way from the earth? What reason was there for thinking that this crusade of his for better schools had any sounder foundation than his dream of being president, or a great painter, or a poet or novelist or philosopher? He was just a hayseed, a rube, a misfit, as odd as Dick's hatband, an off ox. He *was* incompetent. He picked up a pen, and began writing. He wrote, "To the Honorable the Board of Education of the Independent District of ——" And he heard a tap at the door. His mother admitted Colonel Woodruff.

"Hello, Jim," said he.

"Good evening, Colonel," said Jim. "Take a chair, won't you?"

"No," replied the colonel. "I thought I'd see if you and the boys at the schoolhouse can't tell me 144
something about the smut in my wheat. I heard you were going to work on that to-night."

"I had forgotten!" said Jim.

"I wondered if you hadn't," said the colonel, "and so I came by for you. I was waiting up the road. Come on, and ride up with me."

The colonel had always been friendly, but there was a new note in his manner to-night. He was almost deferential. If he had been talking to Senator Cummins or the president of the state university, his tone could not have been more courteous, more careful to preserve the amenities due from man to man. He worked with the class on the problem of smut. He offered to aid the boys in every possible way in their campaign against scab in potatoes. He suggested some tests which would show the real value of the treatment. The boys were in a glow of pride at this cooperation with Colonel Woodruff. This was real work! Jim and the colonel went away together. It had been a great evening.

"Jim," said the colonel, "can these kids spell?" 145

"You mean these boys?"

"I mean the school."

"I think," said Jim, "that they can outspell any school about here."

"Good," said the colonel. "How are they about reading aloud?"

"Better than they were when I took hold."

"How about arithmetic and the other branches? Have you sort of kept them up to the course of study?"

"I have carried them in a course parallel to the text-books," said Jim, "and covering the same ground. But it has been vocational work, you know—related to life."

"Well," said the colonel, "if I were you, I'd put them over a rapid review of the text-books for a few days—say between now and the twenty-fifth."

"What for?"

"Oh, nothing—just to please me .... And say, Jim, I glanced over a communication you have started to the more or less Honorable Board of Education."

"Yes?"

"Well, don't finish it .... And say, Jim, I think I'll give myself the luxury of being a wild-eyed 146
reformer for once."

"Yes," said Jim, dazed.

"And if you think, Jim, that you've got no friends, just remember that I'm for you."

"Thank you, Colonel."

"And we'll show them they're in a horse race."

"I don't see ..." said Jim.

"You're not supposed to see," said the colonel, "but you can bet that we'll be with them at the finish; and, by thunder! while they're getting a full meal, we'll get at least a lunch. See?"

"But Jennie says," began Jim.

"Don't tell me what she says," said the colonel. "She's acting according to her judgment, and her lights and other organs of perception, and I don't think it fittin' that her father should try to influence her official conduct. But you go on and review them common branches, and keep your nerve. I haven't felt so much like a scrap since the day we stormed Lookout Mountain. I kinder like being a wild-eyed reformer, Jim."

CHAPTER XIII

FAME OR NOTORIETY

The office of county superintendent was, as a matter of course, the least desirable room of the court-house. I say “room” advisedly, because it consisted of a single chamber of moderate size, provided with office furniture of the minimum quantity and maximum age. It opened off the central hall at the upper end of the stairway which led to the court room, and when court was in session, served the extraordinary needs of justice as a jury room. At such times the county superintendent’s desk was removed to the hall, where it stood in a noisy and confusing but very democratic publicity. Superintendent Jennie might have anticipated the time when, during the March term, offenders passing from the county jail in the basement to arraignment at the bar of justice might be able to peek over her shoulders and criticize her method of treating examination papers. On the twenty-fifth of February, however, this experience lurked unsuspected in her official future.

Poor Jennie! She anticipated nothing more than the appearance of Messrs. Bronson, Peterson and Bonner in her office to confront Jim Irwin on certain questions of fact relating to Jim’s competency to hold a teacher’s certificate. The time appointed was ten o’clock. At nine forty-five Cornelius Bonner and his wife entered the office, and took twenty-five per cent. of the chairs therein. At nine fifty Jim Irwin came in, haggard, weather-beaten and seedy as ever, and looked as if he had neither eaten nor slept since his sweetheart stabbed him. At nine fifty-five Haakon Peterson and Ezra Bronson came in, accompanied by Wilbur Smythe, attorney-at-law, who carried under his arm a code of Iowa, a compilation of the school laws of the state, and *Throop on Public Officers*. At nine fifty-six, therefore, the crowd in Jennie’s office exceeded its seating capacity, and Jennie was in a flutter as the realization dawned upon her that this promised to be a bigger and more public affair than she had anticipated. At nine fifty-nine Raymond Simms opened the office door and there filed in enough children, large and small, some of them accompanied by their parents, and all belonging to the Woodruff school, to fill completely the interstices of the corners and angles of the room and between the legs of the grownups. In addition there remained an overflow meeting in the hall, under the command of that distinguished military gentleman, Colonel Albert Woodruff.

“Say, Bill, come here!” said the colonel, crooking his finger at the deputy sheriff.

“What you got here, Al!” said Bill, coming up the stairs, puffing. “Ain’t it a little early for Sunday-school picnics?”

“This is a school fight in our district,” said the colonel. “It’s Jennie’s baptism of fire, I reckon ... and say, you’re not using the court room, are you?”

“Nope,” said Bill.

“Well, why not just slip around, then,” said the colonel, “and tell Jennie she’d better adjourn to the big room.”

Which suggestion was acted upon instanter by Deputy Bill.

“But I can’t, I can’t,” said Jennie to the courteous deputy sheriff. “I don’t want all this publicity, and I don’t want to go into the court room.”

“I hardly see,” said Deputy Bill, “how you can avoid it. These people seem to have business with you, and they can’t get into your office.”

“But they have no business with me,” said Jennie. “It’s mere curiosity.”

Whereupon Wilbur Smythe, who could see no particular point in restricted publicity, said, “Madame County Superintendent, this hearing certainly is public or quasi-public. Your office is a public one, and while the right to attend this hearing may not possibly be a universal one, it surely is one belonging to every citizen and taxpayer of the county, and if the taxpayer, *qua* taxpayer, then certainly *a fortiori* to the members of the Woodruff school and residents of that district.”

Jennie quailed. “All right, all right!” said she. “But, shall I have to sit on the bench!”

“You will find it by far the most convenient place,” said Deputy Bill.

Was this the life to which public office had brought her? Was it for this that she had bartered her independence—for this and the musty office, the stupid examination papers, and the interminable visiting of schools, knowing that such supervision as she could give was practically worthless? Jim had said to her that he had never heard of such a thing as a good county superintendent of schools, and she had thought him queer. And now, here was she, called upon to pass on the competency of the man who had always been her superior in everything that constitutes mental ability; and to make the thing more a matter for the laughter of the gods, she was perched on the judicial bench, which Deputy Bill had dusted off for her, tipping a wink to the assemblage while doing it. He expected to be a candidate for sheriff, one of these days, and was pleasing the crowd. And that crowd! To Jennie it was appalling. The school board under the lead of Wilbur Smythe took seats inside the railing which on court days divided the audience

from the lawyers and litigants. Jim Irwin, who had never been in a court room before, herded with the crowd, obeying the attraction of sympathy, but to Jennie, seated on the bench, he, like other persons in the auditorium, was a mere blurry outline with a knob of a head on its top.

She couldn't call the gathering to order. She had no idea as to the proper procedure. She sat there while the people gathered, stood about whispering and talking under their breaths, and finally became silent, all their eyes fixed on her, as she wished that the office of county superintendent had been abolished in the days of her parents' infancy.

"May it please the court," said Wilbur Smythe, standing before the bar. "Or, Madame County Superintendent, I should say ..."

A titter ran through the room, and a flush of temper tinted Jennie's face. They were laughing at her! She wouldn't be a spectacle any longer! So she rose, and handed down her first and last decision from the bench—a rather good one, I think.

"Mr. Smythe," said she, "I feel very ill at ease up here, and I'm going to get down among the 153
people. It's the only way I have of getting the truth."

She descended from the bench, shook hands with everybody near her, and sat down by the attorney's table.

"Now," said she, "this is no formal proceeding and we will dispense with red tape. If we don't, I shall get all tangled up in it. Where's Mr. Irwin? Please come in here, Jim. Now, I know there's some feeling in these things—there always seems to be; but I have none. So I'll just hear why Mr. Bronson, Mr. Peterson and Mr. Bonner think that Mr. James E. Irwin isn't competent to hold a certificate."

Jennie was able to smile at them now, and everybody felt more at ease, save Jim Irwin, the members of the board and Wilbur Smythe. That individual arose, and talked down at Jennie.

"I appear for the proponents here," said he, "and I desire to suggest certain principles of
procedure which I take it belong indisputably to the conduct of this hearing." 154

"Have you a lawyer?" asked the county superintendent of the respondent.

"A what?" exclaimed Jim. "Nobody here has a lawyer!"

"Well, what do you call Wilbur Smythe?" queried Newton Bronson from the midst of the crowd.

"He ain't lawyer enough to hurt!" said the thing which the dramatists call A Voice.

There was a little tempest of laughter at Wilbur Smythe's expense, which was quelled by Jennie's rapping on the table. She was beginning to feel the mouth of the situation.

"I have no way of retaining a lawyer," said Jim, on whom the truth had gradually dawned. "If a lawyer is necessary, I am without protection—but it never occurred to me ..."

"There is nothing in the school laws, as I remember them," said Jennie, "giving the parties any right to be represented by counsel. If there is, Mr. Smythe will please set me right."

She paused for Mr. Smythe's reply.

"There is nothing which expressly gives that privilege," said Mr. Smythe, "but the right to the
benefit of skilled advisers is a universal one. It can not be questioned. And in opening this case 155
for my clients, I desire to call your honor's attention—"

"You may advise your clients all you please," said Jennie, "but I'm not going to waste time in listening to speeches, or having a lot of lawyers examine witnesses."

"I protest," said Mr. Smythe.

"Well, you may file your protest in writing," said Jennie. "I'm going to talk this matter over with these old friends and neighbors of mine. I don't want you dipping into it, I say!"

Jennie's voice was rising toward the scream-line, and Mr. Smythe recognized the hand of fate. One may argue with a cantankerous judge, but the woman, who like necessity, knows no law, and who is smothering in a flood of perplexities, is beyond reason. Moreover, Jennie dimly saw that what she was doing had the approval of the crowd, and it solved the problem of procedure.

There was a little wrangling, and a little protest from Con Bonner, but Jennie ruled with a rod of
iron, and adhered to her ruling. When the hearing was resumed after the noon recess, the 156
crowd was larger than ever, but the proceedings consisted mainly in a conference of the principals grouped about Jennie at the big lawyers' table. They were talking about the methods adopted by Jim in his conduct of the Woodruff school—just talking. The only new thing was the presence of a couple of newspaper men, who had queried Chicago papers on the story, and been given orders for a certain number of words on the case of the farm-hand schoolmaster on trial before his old sweetheart for certain weird things he had done in the home school in which they had once been classmates. The fact that the old school-sweetheart had kicked a lawyer out of the case was not overlooked by the gentlemen of the fourth estate. It helped to make it a "good story."

By the time at which gathering darkness made it necessary for the bailiff to light the lamps, the parties had agreed on the facts. Jim admitted most of the allegations. He had practically ignored the text-books. He had burned the district fuel and worn out the district furniture early and late,
and on Saturdays. He had introduced domestic economy and manual training, to some extent, 157
by sending the boys to the workshops and the girls to the kitchens and sewing-rooms of the farmers who allowed those privileges. He had used up a great deal of time in studying farm

conditions. He had induced the boys to test the cows of the district for butter-fat yield. He was studying the matter of a cooperative creamery. He hoped to have a blacksmith shop on the schoolhouse grounds sometime, where the boys could learn metal working by repairing the farm machinery, and shoeing the farm horses. He hoped to install a cooperative laundry in connection with the creamery. He hoped to see a building sometime, with an auditorium where the people would meet often for moving picture shows, lectures and the like, and he expected that most of the descriptions of foreign lands, industrial operations, wild animals—in short, everything that people should learn about by seeing, rather than reading—would be taught the children by moving pictures accompanied by lectures. He hoped to open to the boys and girls the wonders of the universe which are touched by the work on the farm. He hoped to make good 158
and contented farmers of them, able to get the most out of the soil, to sell what they produced to the best advantage, and at the same time to keep up the fertility of the soil itself. And he hoped to teach the girls in such a way that they would be good and contented farmers' wives. He even had in mind as a part of the schoolhouse the Woodruff District would one day build, an apartment in which the mothers of the neighborhood would leave their babies when they went to town, so that the girls could learn the care of infants.

"An' I say," interposed Con Bonner, "that we can rest our case right here. If that ain't the limit, I don't know what is!"

"Well," said Jennie, "do you desire to rest your case right here?"

Mr. Bonner made no reply to this, and Jennie turned to Jim.

"Now, Mr. Irwin," said she, "while you have been following out these very interesting and original methods, what have you done in the way of teaching the things called for by the course of study?" 159

"What is the course of study?" queried Jim. "Is it anything more than an outline of the mental march the pupils are ordered to make? Take reading: why does it give the children any greater mastery of the printed page to read about Casabianca on the burning deck, than about the cause of the firing of corn by hot weather? And how can they be given better command of language than by writing about things they have found out in relation to some of the sciences which are laid under contribution by farming? Everything they do runs into numbers, and we do more arithmetic than the course requires. There isn't any branch of study—not even poetry and art and music—that isn't touched by life. If there is we haven't time for it in the common schools. We work out from life to everything in the course of study."

"Do you mean to assert," queried Jennie, "that while you have been doing all this work which was never contemplated by those who have made up the course of study, that you haven't neglected anything?"

"I mean," said Jim, "that I'm willing to stand or fall on an examination of these children in the 160
very text-books we are accused of neglecting."

Jennie looked steadily at Jim for a full minute, and at the clock. It was nearly time for adjournment.

"How many pupils of the Woodruff school are here?" she asked. "All rise, please!"

A mass of the audience, in the midst of which sat Jennie's father, rose at the request.

"Why," said Jennie, "I should say we had a quorum, anyhow! How many will come back to-morrow morning at nine o'clock, and bring your school-books? Please lift hands."

Nearly every hand went up.

"And, Mr. Irwin," she went on, "will you have the school records, so we may be able to ascertain the proper standing of these pupils?"

"I will," said Jim.

"Then," said Jennie, "we'll adjourn until nine o'clock. I hope to see every one here. We'll have school here to-morrow. And, Mr. Irwin, please remember that you state that you'll stand or fall on the mastery by these pupils of the text-books they are supposed to have neglected." 161

"Not the mastery of the text," said Jim. "But their ability to do the work the text is supposed to fit them for."

"Well," said Jennie, "I don't know but that's fair."

"But," said Mrs. Haakon Peterson, "we don't want our children brought up to be yust farmers. Suppose we move to town—where does the culture come in?"

The Chicago papers had a news item which covered the result of the examinations; but the great sensation of the Woodruff District lay in the Sunday feature carried by one of them.

It had a picture of Jim Irwin, and one of Jennie Woodruff—the latter authentic, and the former gleaned from the morgue, and apparently the portrait of a lumber-jack. There was also a very free treatment by the cartoonist of Mr. Simms carrying a rifle with the intention of shooting up the school board in case the decision went against the schoolmaster. 162

"When it became known," said the news story, "that the schoolmaster had bet his job on the proficiency of his school in studies supposed and alleged to have been studiously neglected, the excitement rose to fever heat. Local sports bet freely on the result, the odds being eight to five on General Proficiency against the field. The field was Jim Irwin and his school. And the way

those rural kids rose in their might and ate up the text-books was simply scandalous. There was a good deal of nervousness on the part of some of the small starters, and some bursts of tears at excusable failures. But when the fight was over, and the dead and wounded cared for, the school board and the county superintendent were forced to admit that they wished the average school could do as well under a similar test.

"The local Mr. Dooley is Cornelius Bonner, a member of the 'board.' When asked for a statement of his views after the county superintendent had decided that her old sweetheart was to be allowed the priceless boon of earning forty dollars a month during the remainder of his contract, Mr. Bonner said, 'Aside from being licked, we're all right. But we'll get this guy yet, don't fall down and fergit that!'

"'The examinations tind to show,' said Mr. Bonner, when asked for his opinion on the result, 'that in or-r-rder to larn anything you shud shtudy somethin' ilse. But we'll git this guy yit!'"

"Jim," said Colonel Woodruff, as they rode home together, "the next heat is the school election. We've got to control that board next year—and we've got to do it by electing one out of three."

"Is that a possibility?" asked Jim. "Aren't we sure to be defeated at last? Shouldn't I quit at the end of my contract? All I ever hoped for was to be allowed to fulfill that. And is it worth the fight?"

"It's not only possible," replied the colonel, "but probable. As for being worth while—why, this thing is too big to drop. I'm just beginning to understand what you're driving at. And I like being a wild-eyed reformer more and more."

CHAPTER XIV

THE COLONEL TAKES THE FIELD

Every Iowa county has its Farmers' Institute. Usually it is held in the county seat, and is a gathering of farmers for the ostensible purpose of listening to improving discussions and addresses both instructive and entertaining. Really, in most cases, the farmers' institutes have been occasions for the cultivation of relations between a few of the exceptional farmers and their city friends and with one another. Seldom is anything done which leads to any better selling methods for the farmers, any organization looking to cooperative effort, or anything else that an agricultural economist from Ireland, Germany or Denmark would suggest as the sort of action which the American farmer must take if he is to make the most of his life and labor.

The Woodruff District was interested in the institute however, because of the fact that a rural-school exhibit was one of its features that year, and that Colonel Woodruff had secured an urgent invitation to the school to take part in it.

"We've got something new out in our district school," said he to the president of the institute.

"So I hear," said the president—"mostly a fight, isn't it?"

"Something more," said the colonel. "If you'll persuade our school to make an exhibit of real rural work in a real rural school, I'll promise you something worth seeing and discussing."

Such exhibits are now so common that it is not worth while for us to describe it; but then, the sight of a class of children testing and weighing milk, examining grains for viability and foul seeds, planning crop rotations, judging grains and live stock was so new in that county as to be the real sensation of the institute.

Two persons were a good deal embarrassed by the success of the exhibit. One was the county superintendent, who was constantly in receipt of undeserved compliments upon her wisdom in fostering really "practical work in the schools." The other was Jim Irwin, who was becoming famous, and who felt he had done nothing to deserve fame. Professor Withers, an extension lecturer from Ames, took Jim to dinner at the best hotel in the town, for the purpose of talking over with him the needs of the rural schools. Jim was in agony. The colored waiter fussed about trying to keep Jim in the beaten track of hotel manners, restored to him the napkin which Jim failed to use, and juggled back into place the silverware which Jim misappropriated to alien and unusual uses. But, when the meal had progressed to the stage of conversation, the waiter noticed that gradually the uncouth farmer became master of the situation, and the well-groomed college professor the interested listener.

"You've got to come down to our farmers' week next year, and tell us about these things," said he to Jim. "Can't you?"

Jim's brain reeled. He go to a gathering of real educators and tell his crude notions! How could he get the money for his expenses? But he had that gameness which goes with supreme confidence in the thing dealt with.

"I'll come," said he.

“Thank you,” said the Ames man, “There’s a small honorarium attached, you know.”

Jim was staggered. What was an honorarium? He tried to remember what an honorarium is, and could get no further than the thought that it is in some way connected with the Latin root of “honor.” Was he obliged to pay an honorarium for the chance to speak before the college gathering? Well, he’d save money and pay it. The professor must be able to understand that it couldn’t be expected that a country school-teacher would be able to pay much.

“I—I’ll try to take care of the honorarium,” said he. “I’ll come.”

The professor laughed. It was the first joke the gangling innovator had perpetrated.

“It won’t bother you to take care of it,” said he, “but if you’re not too extravagant it will pay you your expenses and give you a few dollars over.”

Jim breathed more freely. An honorarium was paid to the person receiving the honor, then. What a relief! 168

“All right,” he exclaimed. “I’ll be glad to come!”

“Let’s consider that settled,” said the professor. “And now I must be going back to the opera-house. My talk on soil sickness comes next. I tell you, the winter wheat crop has been—”

But Jim was not able to think much of the winter wheat problem as they went back to the auditorium. He was worth putting on the program at a state meeting! He was worth the appreciation of a college professor, trained to think on the very matters Jim had been so long mulling over in isolation and blindness! He was actually worth paying for his thoughts.

Calista Simms thought she saw something shining and saint-like about the homely face of her teacher as he came to her at her post in the room in which the school exhibit was held. Calista was in charge of the little children whose work was to be demonstrated that day, and was in a state of exaltation to which her starved being had hitherto been a stranger. Perhaps there was 169 something similar in her condition of fervent happiness to that of Jim. She, too, was doing something outside the sordid life of the Simms cabin. She yearned over the children in her care, and would have been glad to die for them—and besides was not Newton Bronson in charge of the corn exhibit, and a member of the corn-judging team? To the eyes of the town girls who passed about among the exhibits, she was poorly dressed; but if they could have seen the clothes she had worn on that evening when Jim Irwin first called at their cabin and failed to give a whoop from the big road, they could perhaps have understood the sense of wellbeing and happiness in Calista’s soul at the feeling of her whole clean underclothes, her neat, if cheap, dress, and the “boughten” cloak she wore—and any of them, even without knowledge of this, might have understood Calista’s joy at the knowledge that Newton Bronson’s eyes were on her from his station by the big pillar, no matter how many town girls filed by. For therein they would have been in a realm of the passions quite universal in its appeal to the feminine soul. 170

“Hello, Calista!” said Jim. “How are you enjoying it?”

“Oh!” said Calista, and drew a long, long breath. “Ah’m enjoying myse’f right much, Mr. Jim.”

“Any of the home folks coming in to see?”

“Yes, seh,” answered Calista. “All the school board have stopped by this morning.”

Jim looked about him. He wished he could see and shake hands with his enemies, Bronson, Peterson and Bonner: and if he could tell them of his success with Professor Withers of the State Agricultural College, perhaps they would feel differently toward him. There they were now, over in a corner, with their heads together. Perhaps they were agreeing among themselves that he was right in his school methods, and they wrong. He went toward them, his face still beaming with that radiance which had shone so plainly to the eyes of Calista Simms, but they saw in it only a grin of exultation over his defeat of them at the hearing before Jennie Woodruff. When 171 Jim had drawn so close as almost to call for the extended hand, he felt the repulsion of their attitudes and sheered off on some pretended errand to a dark corner across the room.

They resumed their talk.

“I’m a Dimocrat,” said Con Bonner, “and you fellers is Republicans, and we’ve fought each other about who we was to hire for teacher; but when it comes to electing my successor, I think we shouldn’t divide on party lines.”

“The fight about the teacher,” said Haakon Peterson, “is a t’ing of the past. All our candidates got odder yobs now.”

“Yes,” said Ezra Bronson. “Prue Foster wouldn’t take our school now if she could get it”

“And as I was sayin’,” went on Bonner, “I want to get this guy, Jim Irwin. An’ bein’ the cause of his gittin’ the school, I’d like to be on the board to kick him off; but if you fellers would like to have some one else, I won’t run, and if the right feller is named, I’ll line up what friends I got for him.” “You got no friend can git as many wotes as you can,” said Peterson. “I tank you better 172 run.”

“What say, Ez?” asked Bonner.

“Suits me all right,” said Bronson. “I guess we three have had our fight out and understand each other.”

“All right,” returned Bonner, “I’ll take the office again. Let’s not start too soon, but say we begin about a week from Sunday to line up our friends, to go to the school election and vote kind of

unanimous-like?”

“Suits me,” said Bronson.

“Wery well,” said Peterson.

“I don’t like the way Colonel Woodruff acts,” said Bonner. “He rounded up that gang of kids that shot us all to pieces at that hearing, didn’t he?”

“I tank not,” replied Peterson. “I tank he was yust interested in how Yennie managed it.”

“Looked mighty like he was managin’ the demonstration,” said Bonner. “What d’ye think, Ez?”

“Too small a matter for the colonel to monkey with,” said Bronson. “I reckon he was just 173
interested in Jennie’s dilemmer. It ain’t reasonable that Colonel Woodruff after the p’litical career he’s had would mix up in school district politics.”

“Well,” said Bonner, “he seems to take a lot of interest in this exhibition here. I think we’d better watch the colonel. That decision of Jennie’s might have been because she’s stuck on Jim Irwin, or because she takes a lot of notice of what her father says.”

“Or she might have thought the decision was right,” said Bronson. “Some people do, you know.”

“Right!” scoffed Bonner. “In a pig’s wrist! I tell you that decision was crooked.”

“Vell,” said Haakon Peterson, “talk of crookedness wit’ Yennie Woodruff don’t get wery fur wit’ me.”

“Oh, I don’t mean anything bad, Haakon,” replied Bonner, “but it wasn’t an all-right decision. I think she’s stuck on the guy.”

The caucus broke up after making sure that the three members of the school board would be as one man in maintaining a hostile front to Jim Irwin and his tenure of office. It looked rather like 174
a foregone conclusion, in a little district wherein there were scarcely twenty-five votes. The three members of the board with their immediate friends and dependents could muster two or three ballots each—and who was there to oppose them? Who wanted to be school director? It was a post of no profit, little honor and much vexation. And yet, there are always men to be found who covet such places. Curiously there are always those who covet them for no ascertainable reason, for often they are men who have no theory of education to further, and no fondness for affairs of the intellect. In the Woodruff District, however, the incumbents saw no candidate in view who could be expected to stand up against the rather redoubtable Con Bonner. Jim’s hold upon his work seemed fairly secure for the term of his contract, since Jennie had decided that he was competent; and after that he himself had no plans. He could not expect to be retained by the men who had so bitterly attacked him. Perhaps the publicity of his Ames address would get him another place with a sufficient stipend so that he could support his 175
mother without the aid of the little garden, the cows and the fowls—and perhaps he would ask Colonel Woodruff to take him back as a farm-hand. These thoughts thronged his mind as he stood apart and alone after his rebuff by the caucusing members of the school board.

“I don’t see,” said a voice over against the cooking exhibit, “what there is in this to set people talking? Buttonholes! Cookies! Humph!”

It was Mrs. Bonner who had clearly come to scoff. With her was Mrs. Bronson, whose attitude was that of a person torn between conflicting influences. Her husband had indicated to the crafty Bonner and the subtle Peterson that while he was still loyal to the school board, and hence perforce opposed to Jim Irwin, and resentful to the decision of the county superintendent, his adhesion to the institutions of the Woodruff District as handed down by the fathers was not quite of the thick-and-thin type. For he had suggested that Jennie might have been sincere in rendering her decision, and that some people agreed with her: so Mrs. Bronson, while consorting with the censorious Mrs. Bonner evinced restiveness when the school and its work 176
was condemned. Was not her Newton in charge of a part of this show! Had he not taken great interest in the project? Was he not an open and defiant champion of Jim Irwin, and a constant and enthusiastic attendant upon, not only his classes, but a variety of evening and Saturday affairs at which the children studied arithmetic, grammar, geography, writing and spelling, by working on cows, pigs, chickens, grains, grasses, soils and weeds? And had not Newton become a better boy—a wonderfully better boy? Mrs. Bronson’s heart was filled with resentment that she also could not be enrolled among Jim Irwin’s supporters. And when Mrs. Bonner sneered at the buttonholes and cookies, Mrs. Bronson, knowing how the little fingers had puzzled themselves over the one, and young faces had become floury and red over the other, flared up a little.

“And I don’t see,” said she, “anything to laugh at when the young girls do the best they can to make themselves capable housekeepers. I’d like to help them.” She turned to Mrs. Bonner as if 177
to add “If this be treason, make the most of it!” but that lady was far too good a diplomat to be cornered in the same enclosure with a rupture of relations.

“And quite right, too,” said she, “in the proper place, and at the proper time. The little things ought to be helped by every real woman—of course!”

“Of course,” repeated Mrs. Bronson.

“At home, now, and by their mothers,” added Mrs. Bonner.

“Well,” said Mrs. Bronson, “take them Simms girls, now. They have to have help outside their home if they are ever going to be like other folks.”

“Yes,” agreed Mrs. Bonner, “and a lot more help than a farm-hand can give ’em in school. Pretty poor trash, they, and I shouldn’t wonder if there was a lot we don’t know about why they come north.”

“As for that,” replied Mrs. Bronson, “I don’t know as it’s any of my business so long as they behave themselves.”

Again Mrs. Bonner felt the situation getting out of hand, and again she returned to the task of keeping Mrs. Bronson in alignment with the forces of accepted Woodruff District conditions. 178

“Ain’t it some of our business?” she queried. “I wonder now! By the way Newtie keeps his eye on that Simms girl, I shouldn’t wonder if it might turn out your business.”

“Pshaw!” scoffed Mrs. Bronson. “Puppy love!”

“You can’t tell how far it’ll go,” persisted Mrs. Bonner. “I tell you these schools are getting to be nothing more than sparkin’ bees, from the county superintendent down.”

“Well, maybe,” said Mrs. Bronson, “but I don’t see sparkin’ in everything boys and girls do as quick as some.”

“I wonder,” said Mrs. Bonner, “if Colonel Woodruff would be as friendly to Jim Irwin if he knew that everybody says Jennie decided he was to keep his certif’kit because she wants him to get along in the world, so he can marry her?”

“I don’t know as she is so very friendly to him,” replied Mrs. Bronson; “and Jim and Jennie are both of age, you know.” 179

“Yes, but how about our schools bein’ ruined by a love affair?” interrogated Mrs. Bonner, as they moved away. “Ain’t that your business and mine?”

Instead of desiring further knowledge of what they were discussing, Jim felt a dreadful disgust at the whole thing. Disgust at being the subject of gossip, at the horrible falsity of the picture he had been able to paint to the people of his objects and his ambitions, and especially at the desecration of Jennie by such misconstruction of her attitude toward him officially and personally. Jennie was vexed at him, and wanted him to resign from his position. He firmly believed that she was surprised at finding herself convinced that he was entitled to a decision in the matter of his competency as a teacher. She was against him, he believed, and as for her being in love with him—to hear these women discuss it was intolerable.

He felt his face redden as at the hearing of some horrible indecency. He felt himself stripped naked, and he was hotly ashamed that Jennie should be associated with him in the exposure. And while he was raging inwardly, paying the penalty of his new-found place in the public eye—a publicity to which he was not yet hardened—he heard other voices. Professor Withers, County Superintendent Jennie and Colonel Woodruff were making an inspection of the rural-school exhibit. 180

“I hear he has been having some trouble with his school board,” the professor was saying.

“Yes,” said Jennie, “he has.”

“Wasn’t there an effort made to remove him from his position?” asked the professor.

“Proceedings before me to revoke his certificate,” replied Jennie.

“On what grounds?”

“Incompetency,” answered Jennie. “I found that his pupils were really doing very well in the regular course of study—which he seems to be neglecting.”

“I’m glad you supported him,” said the professor. “I’m glad to find you helping him.” “Really,” protested Jennie, “I don’t think myself—” 181

“What do you think of his notions?” asked the colonel.

“Very advanced,” replied Professor Withers. “Where did he imbibe them all?”

“He’s a Brown Mouse,” said the colonel.

“I beg your pardon,” said the puzzled professor. “I didn’t quite understand. A—a—what?”

“One of papa’s breeding jokes,” said Jennie. “He means a phenomenon in heredity—perhaps a genius, you know.”

“Ah, I see,” replied the professor, “a Mendelian segregation, you mean?”

“Certainly,” said the colonel. “The sort of mind that imbibes things from itself.”

“Well, he’s rather wonderful,” declared the professor. “I had him to lunch to-day. He surprised me. I have invited him to make an address at Ames next winter during farmers’ week.”

“He?”

Jennie’s tone showed her astonishment. Jim the underling. Jim the off ox. Jim the thorn in the county superintendent’s side. Jim the country teacher! It was stupefying. 182

“Oh, you musn’t judge him by his looks,” said the professor. “I really do hope he’ll take some advice on the matter of clothes—put on a cravat and a different shirt and collar when he comes to Ames—but I have no doubt he will.”

“He hasn’t any other,” said the colonel.

“Well, it won’t signify, if he has the truth to tell us,” said the professor.

"*Has* he?" asked Jennie.

"Miss Woodruff," replied the professor earnestly, "he has something that looks toward truth, and something that we need. Just how far he will go, just what he will amount to, it is impossible to say. But something must be done for the rural schools—something along the lines he is trying to follow. He is a struggling soul, and he is worth helping. You won't make any mistake if you make the most of Mr. Irwin."

Jim slipped out of a side door and fled. As in the case of the conversation between Mrs. Bronson and Mrs. Bonner, he was unable to discern the favorable auspices in the showing of adverse things. He had not sensed Mrs. Bronson's half-concealed friendliness for him, though it was disagreeably plain to Mrs. Bonner. And now he neglected the colonel's evident support of him, and Professor Withers' praise, in Jennie's manifest surprise that old Jim had been accorded the recognition of a place on a college program, and the professor's criticism of his dress and general appearance. 183

It was unjust! What chance had he been given to discover what it was fashionable to wear, even if he had had the money to buy such clothes as other young men possessed? He would never go near Ames! He would stay in the Woodruff District where the people knew him, and some of them liked him. He would finish his school year, and go back to work on the farm. He would abandon the struggle.

He started home, on foot as he had come, A mile or so out he was overtaken by the colonel, driving briskly along with room in his buggy for Jim. 184

"Climb in, Jim!" said he. "Dan and Dolly didn't like to see you walk."

"They're looking fine," said Jim.

There is a good deal to say whenever two horse lovers get together. Hoofs and coats and frogs and eyes and teeth and the queer sympathies between horse and man may sometimes quite take the place of the weather for an hour or so. But when Jim had alighted at his own door, the colonel spoke of what had been in his mind all the time.

"I saw Bonner and Haakon and Ez doing some caucusing to-day," said he. "They expect to elect Bonner to the board again."

"Oh, I suppose so," replied Jim.

"Well, what shall we do about it?" asked the colonel.

"If the people want him—" began Jim.

"The people," said the colonel, "must have a choice offered to 'em, or how can you or any man tell what they want? How can they tell themselves?"

Jim was silent. Here was a matter on which he really had no ideas except the broad and general one that truth is mighty and shall prevail—but that the speed of its forward march is problematical. 185

"I think," said the colonel, "that it's up to us to see that the people have a chance to decide. It's really Bonner against Jim Irwin."

"That's rather startling," said Jim, "but I suppose it's true. And much chance Jim Irwin has!"

"I calculate," rejoined the colonel, "that what you need is a champion."

"To do what?"

"To take that office away from Bonner."

"Who can do that?"

"Well, I'm free to say I don't know that any one can, but I'm willing to try. I think that in about a week I shall pass the word around that I'd like to serve my country on the school board."

Jim's face lighted up—and then darkened.

"Even then they'd be two to one, Colonel."

"Maybe," replied the colonel, "and maybe not. That would have to be figured on. A cracked log splits easy." 186

"Anyhow," Jim went on, "what's the use? I shan't be disturbed this year—and after that—what's the use?"

"Why, Jim," said the colonel, "you aren't getting short of breath are you? Do I see frost on your boots? I thought you good for the mile, and you aren't turning out a quarter horse, are you? I don't know what all it is you want to do, but I don't, believe you can do it in nine months, can you?"

"Not in nine years!" replied Jim.

"Well, then, let's plan for ten years," said the colonel. "I ain't going to become a reformer at my time of life as a temporary job. Will you stick if we can swing the thing for you?"

"I will," said Jim, in the manner of a person taking the vows in some solemn initiation.

"All right," said the colonel. "We'll keep quiet and see how many votes we can muster up at the election. How many can you speak for?"

Jim gave himself for a few minutes to thought. It was a new thing to him, this matter of

mustering votes—and a thing which he had always looked upon as rather reprehensible. The citizen should go forth with no coercion, no persuasion, no suggestion, and vote his sentiments.

“How many can you round up?” persisted the colonel.

“I think,” said Jim, “that I can speak for myself and Old Man Simms!”

The colonel laughed.

“Fine politician!” he repeated. “Fine politician! Well, Jim, we may get beaten in this, but if we are, let’s not have them going away picking their noses and saying they’ve had no fight. You round up yourself and Old Man Simms and I’ll see what I can do—I’ll see what I can do!”

CHAPTER XV

A MINOR CASTS 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 Slew looking for open water and badly-harvested corn-fields. 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. If geese are favored with the long lives in which fable bids us believe, some of these venerable honkers must have seen every vernal and autumnal phase of the transformation from boundless prairie to boundless corn-land. I sometimes seem to hear in the bewildering trumpetings of wild geese a cry of surprise and protest at the ruin of their former paradise. Colonel Woodruff’s hired man, Pete, had no such foolish notions, however. He 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, “and sometimes a flock of wild geese would get lost, and some bewildered, and a man would shoot one or two—from the tops of the ridges—but nothing to depend on.”

“I’ve never been nowhere,” said Newton, “except once to Minnesota—and—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. If I’d ‘a’ kep’ on shooting I could have made my millions as champion wing shot as easy as he has. He didn’t have nothing on me when we was both shooting for a livin’. 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 slew 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 to-morrow—if I had a gun.”

“If it wasn’t for a passel of things that keep me hyeh,” said Raymond, “I’d like to go too.”

“The colonel,” said Pete, “needs me. He needs me in the election to-morrow. 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 someway?” 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 fixed it thataway knowed best.”

“Rats!” sneered Newton, the iconoclast. “Why, Calista knows more about the election of school director than dad knows.”

“That don’t seem reasonable,” protested Raymond. “She’s prejudyced, I reckon, in favor of Mr. Jim Irwin.”

“Well, dad’s prejudiced against him,—er, no, he hain’t either. He likes Jim. He’s just prejudiced against giving up his old notions. No, he hain’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 cain’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. He was in rebellion against the strange ways grown men have of discharging their duties as citizens—a rather remarkable thing, and perhaps a proof that 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. Mrs. Simms had been about to send for the doctor for Buddy when he had explained away the apparent necessity. People got dreadfully scared about poison—— Newton mended his pace, and looked happier. He looked very much as he had done on the day he adjusted the needle-pointed muzzle to his dog’s nose. He looked, in fact, more like a person filled with deviltry, than one yearning for the right to vote.

“I’ll fix him!” said he to himself.

“What time’s the election, Ez?” 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—“about 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 slews 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 them,” 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 seated in the woodshed with a pen-knife in his hand, a small vial of strychnine crystals on a stand before him, a saucer of raisins at his right hand, and one exactly like it, partially filled with gopher bait—by which is meant raisins under the skin of each of which a minute crystal of strychnine had been inserted on the point of the knife. Newton was apparently happy and was whistling *The Glow-Worm*. It was a lovely scene if one can forget the gopher’s point of view.

At three-thirty, Newton went into the house and lay down on the horsehair 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 between Colonel Woodruff and Con Bonner, on the result of which hinged the future of Jim Irwin and the Woodruff school.

A groan issued from Newton’s lips—a gruesome groan as of the painful death of a person very sensitive to physical suffering. 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, her facial expression evincing appreciation 197
of Newton's efforts in the line of groans, somewhat touched with awe. Even though regarded as a pure matter of make-believe, such sounds were terrible.

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

Fanny disappeared in a manner which expressed her balanced feelings—she felt that her brother was making believe, but she believed for all that, 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, 198
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 eating?" 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. "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 hitching straps from the posts, jumped into the buggy and headed for the road. Skilfully avoiding an overturn as he rounded into the highway, he gave the spirited horses their heads, 199
and fled toward town, carefully computing the speed the horses could make and still be able to return. Mile after mile he covered, passing teams, keeping ahead of automobiles and advertising panic. 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 on 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 hain't had the phone only a few years. Drive faster!"

"I want to get there, or I would," answered the doctor. "Don't worry. From what your wife told 200
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."

"I'd hate to lose that boy, Doc!"

"I don't believe there's any danger. It doesn't sound like a genuine poisoning case to me."

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. Haakon Peterson occupied an armchair.

"What's all this?" asked the doctor. "How 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 201
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 hamestrap to you! If I’d been there the vote would have been eleven to thirteen!”

“There was plenty wotes there for the colonel, if he needed ’em,” said Haakon, whose politician’s mind was already fully adjusted to the changed conditions. “Ay tank the Woodruff District will have a junanimous school board from dis time on once more. Colonel Woodruff is yust 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 in 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?”

CHAPTER XVI

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. They were very important weeks to Jim Irwin, though outwardly uneventful. Great events are often mere imperceptible developments of the spirit.

Spring, for instance, brought a sort of spiritual crisis to Jim; for he had to face the accusing glance of the fields as they were plowed and sown while he lived indoors. As he labored at the tasks of the Woodruff school he was conscious of a feeling not very easily distinguished from a sense of guilt. It seemed that there must be something almost wicked in his failure to be afield with his team in the early spring mornings when the woolly anemones appeared in their fur coats, the heralds of the later comers—violets, sweet-williams, puccoons, and the scarlet prairie lilies.

A moral crisis accompanies the passing of a man from the struggle with the soil to any occupation, the productiveness of which is not quite so clear. It requires a keenly sensitive nature to feel conscious of it, but Jim Irwin possessed such a temperament; and from the beginning of the daily race with the seasons, which makes the life of a northern farmer an eight months’ Marathon in which to fall behind for a week is to lose much of the year’s reward, the gawky schoolmaster slept uneasily, and heard the earliest cock-crow as a soldier hears a call to arms to which he has made up his mind he will not respond.

I think there is a real moral principle involved. I believe that this deep instinct for labor in and about the soil is a valid one, and that the gathering together of people in cities has been at the cost of an obscure but actual moral shock.

I doubt if the people of the cities can ever be at rest in a future full of moral searchings of conscience until every man has traced definitely the connection of the work he is doing with the maintenance of his country’s population. Sometimes those vocations whose connection can not be so traced will be recognized as wicked ones, and people engaged in them will feel as did Jim—until he worked out the facts in the relation of school-teaching to the feeding, clothing and sheltering of the world. Most school-teaching he believed—correctly or incorrectly—has very little to do with the primary task of the human race; but as far as his teaching was concerned, even he believed in it. If by teaching school he could not make a greater contribution to the productiveness of the Woodruff District than by working in the fields, he would go back to the fields. Whether he could make his teaching thus productive or not was the very fact in issue between him and the local body politic.

These are some of the waters that ran under the bridges before the Fourth of July picnic at Eight-Mile Grove. 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 country of the greatest state in the most powerful, intellectual, freest and most progressive nation in the best possible of worlds. Wilbur was going strong. 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 Pickerel Creek glimmered a hundred yards away, beyond the flitting figures of the boys who preferred to shoot off their own fire-crackers and torpedoes and nigger-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 blamedest, coldest lemonade ever sold. And 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—half 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. He carried the hamper, helped Jennie to spread the cloth on the grass, went with her to the well for water and cracked ice wherewith to cool it. In fact, he quite cut Wilbur Smythe out when that gentleman made ponderous efforts to obtain a share of the favor implied in these permissions.

“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 Jim longer ahead of time,” said he. “He’s getting to be in demand.”

He seemed to be in demand—a fact that Jennie confirmed by observation as she chatted with Deacon Avery, Mrs. Columbus Brown and her husband, and the Orator of the Day, at the table set apart for the guests and notables. Jim 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 groups 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. The people were just friendly, that was all—to his mind.

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, poverty-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. There was a slight air of command in his down-sitting and up-rising at the picnic. 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 Calista Simms—Jennie saw him do it, while listening to Wilbur Smythe’s account of the exacting

nature of the big law practise he was building up,—and would have been glad to exchange places with Calista or 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.” 212

“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 fo’ all it’s wuth; an’ they cain’t get within from foah to seven cents a pound as much fo’ it as the farmers’ creameries in Wisconsin and Minnesota get fo’ 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.” 213

“Well, I’m agin’ any schoolin’,” said Pete, “that makes kids smarter in farmin’ than their parents and their parents’ hired men. Gi’ me another swig o’ that lemonade, Jim!”

“You see,” said Jim to his audience, meanwhile pouring the lemonade, “the centralizer creamery is uneconomic 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 cooperative creamery and all sent our cream to it.”

“Well,” said Ezra Bronson, “let’s start one.”

“I’ll go in,” said Olaf Hansen. 214

“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 cooperative method. We can save two cents a pound in that way, and we’ll learn to cooperate. When we have found just how well we can hang together, we’ll be able to take up the cooperative 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. 215

“We ought to run the school plant all the time,” said Jim. “It’s the only way to get full value out 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.”

“Would he?” queried the colonel. “I wonder, now! Well, Jennie, as his oldest friend having any knowledge of clothes, I think it’s up to you to act as a committee of one on Jim’s apparel.”

CHAPTER XVII

A TROUBLE SHOOTER

A sudden July storm had drenched the fields and filled the swales with water. The cultivators left the corn-fields until the next day’s sun and a night of seepage might once more fit the black soil for tillage. The little boys rolled up their trousers and tramped home from school with the rich mud squeezing up between their toes, thrilling with the electricity of clean-washed nature, and the little girls rather wished they could go barefooted, too, as, indeed, some of the more sensible did.

A lithe young man with climbers on his legs walked up a telephone pole by the roadside to make some repairs to the wires, which had been whipped into a “cross” by the wind of the storm and the lashing of the limbs of the roadside trees. He had tied his horse to a post up the road, and was running out the trouble on the line, which was plentifully in evidence just then. Wind and lightning had played hob with the system, and the line repairer was cheerfully profane, in the manner of his sort, glad by reason of the fire of summer in his veins, and incensed at the forces of nature which had brought him out through the mud to the Woodruff District to do these piffling jobs that any of the subscribers ought to have known how to do themselves, and none of which took more than a few minutes of his time when he reached the seat of the difficulty.

Jim Irwin, his school out for the day, came along the muddy road with two of his pupils, a bare-legged little boy and a tall girl with flaxen hair—Bettina Hansen and her small brother Hans, who refused to answer to any name other than Hans Nilsen. His father’s name was Nils Hansen, and Hans, a born conservative, being the son of Nils, regarded himself as rightfully a Nilsen, and disliked the “Hans Hansen” on the school register. Thus do European customs sometimes survive among us.

Hans strode through the pool of water which the shower had spread completely over the low turnpike a few rods from the pole on which the trouble shooter was at work, and the electrician ceased his labors and rested himself on a cross-arm while he waited to see what the flaxen-haired girl would do when she came to it.

Jim and Bettina stopped at the water’s edge. “Oh!” cried she, “I can’t get through!” The trouble shooter felt the impulse to offer his aid, but thought it best on the whole, to leave the matter in the hands of the lank schoolmaster.

“I’ll carry you across,” said Jim.

“I’m too heavy,” answered Bettina.

“Nonsense!” said Jim.

“She’s awful heavy,” piped Hans. “Better take off your shoes, anyhow!”

Jim thought of the welfare of his only good trousers, and saw that Hans’ suggestion was good; but a mental picture of himself with shoes in hand and bare legs restrained him. He took Bettina in his arms and went slowly across, walking rather farther with his blushing burden than was strictly necessary. Bettina was undoubtedly heavy; but she was also wonderfully pleasant to feel 221
in arms which had never borne such a burden before; and her arms about his neck as he slopped through the pond were curiously thrilling. Her cheek brushed his as he set her upon her feet and felt, rather than thought, that if there had only been a good reason for it, Bettina would have willingly been carried much farther.

“How strong you are!” she panted. “I’m awful heavy, ain’t I?”

“Not very,” said Jim, with scholastic accuracy. “You’re just right. I—I mean, you’re simply well-nourished and wholesomely plump!”

Bettina blushed still more rosily.

“You’ve ruined your clothes,” said she. “Now you’ll have to come home with me and let me—see who’s there!”

Jim looked up at the trouble shooter, and went over to the foot of the pole. The man walked down, striking his spurs deep into the wood for safety.

“Hello!” said he. “School out?”

“For the day,” said Jim. “Any important work on the telephone line now?” 222

“Just trouble-shooting,” was the answer. “I have to spend three hours hunting these troubles, to one in fixing ’em up.”

“Do they take much technical skill?” asked Jim.

“Mostly shakin’ out crosses, and puttin’ in new carbons in the arresters,” replied the trouble man. “Any one ought to do any of ’em with five minutes’ instruction. But these farmers—they’d rather have me drive ten miles to take a hair-pin from across the binding-posts than to do it themselves. That’s the way they are!”

“Will you be out here to-morrow?” queried the teacher.

“Sure!”

“I’d like to have you show my class in manual training something about the telephone,” said Jim. “The reason we can’t fix our own troubles, if they are as simple as you say, is because we don’t know how simple they are.”

“I’ll tell you what I’ll do, Professor,” said the trouble man. “I’ll bring a phone with me and give ’em a lecture. I don’t see how I can employ the company’s time any better than in beating a 223
little telephone sense into the heads of the community. Set the time, and I’ll be there with bells.”

Bettina and her teacher walked on up the shady lane, feeling that they had a secret. They were very nearly on a parity as to the innocence of soul with which they held this secret, except that Bettina was much more single-minded toward it than Jim. To her he had been gradually attaining the status of a hero whose clasp of her in that iron-armed way was mysteriously blissful—and beyond that her mind had not gone. To Jim, Bettina represented in a very sweet way the disturbing influences which had recently risen to the threshold of consciousness in his being, and which were concretely but not very hopefully embodied in Jennie Woodruff.

Thus interested in each other, they turned the corner which took them out of sight of the lineman, and stopped at the shady avenue leading up to Nils Hansen’s farmstead. Little Hans Nilsen had disappeared by the simple method of cutting across lots. Bettina’s girlish instinct called for something more than the casual good-by which would have sufficed yesterday. She 224
lingered, standing close by Jim Irwin.

“Won’t you come in and let me clean the mud off you,” she asked, “and give you some dry socks?”

“Oh, no!” replied Jim. “It’s almost as far to your house as it is home. Thank you, no.”

“There’s a splash of mud on your face,” said Bettina. “Let me—” And with her little handkerchief she began wiping off the mud. Jim stooped to permit the attention, but not much, for Bettina was of the mold of women of whom warriors are born—their faces approached, and Jim recognized a crisis in the fact that Bettina’s mouth was presented for a kiss. Jim met the occasion like the gentleman he was. He did not leave her stung by rejection; neither did he obey the impulse to respond to the invitation according to his man’s instinct; he took the rosy face between his palms and kissed her forehead—and left her in possession of her self-respect. After that Bettina Hansen felt, somehow, that the world could not possibly contain another man like 225
Jim Irwin—a conviction which she still cherishes when that respectful caress has been swept into the cloudy distance of a woman’s memories.

Pete, Colonel Woodruff’s hired man, was watering the horses at the trough when the trouble shooter reached the Woodruff telephone. County Superintendent Jennie had run for her father’s home in her little motor-car in the face of the shower, and was now on the bench where once she had said “Humph!” to Jim Irwin—and thereby started in motion the factors in this story.

“Anything wrong with your phone?” asked the trouble man of Pete.

“Nah,” replied Pete. “It was on the blink till you done something down the road.”

“Crossed up,” said the lineman. “These trees along here are something fierce.”

“I’d cut ’em all if they was mine,” said Pete, “but the colonel set ’em out, along about sixty-six, and I reckon they’ll have to go on a-growin’.”

“Who’s your school-teacher?” asked the telephone man.

The county superintendent pricked up her ears—being quite properly interested in matters educational.

“Feller name of Irwin,” said Pete.

“Not much of a looker,” said the trouble shooter.

“Nater of the sile,” said Pete. “He an’ I both worked in it together till it roughened up our complexions.”

“Farmer, eh?” said the lineman interrogatively. “Well, he’s the first farmer I ever saw in my life that recognized there’s education in the telephone business. I’m goin’ to teach a class in telephony at the schoolhouse to-morrow.”

“Don’t get swelled up,” said Pete. “He has everybody tell them young ones about everything—blacksmith, cabinet-maker, pie-founder, cookie-cooper, dressmaker—even down to telephones. He’ll have them scholars figurin’ on telephones, and writin’ compositions on ’em, and learnin’ ’lectricity from ’em an’ things like that”

“He must be some feller,” said the lineman. “And who’s his star pupil?”

“Didn’t know he had one,” said Pete. “Why?”

“Girl,” said the trouble-shooter. “Goes to school from the farm where the Western Union brace is used at the road.”

“Nils Hansen’s girl?” asked Pete.

“Toppy little filly,” said the lineman, “with silver mane—looks like she’d pull a good load and step some.”

“M’h’m,” grunted Pete. “Bettina Hansen. Looks well enough. What about her?”

Again the county superintendent, seated on the bench, pricked up her ears that she might learn, mayhap, something of educational interest.

“I never wanted to be a school-teacher as bad,” continued the shooter of trouble, “as I did when this farmer got to the low place in the road with the fair Bettina this afternoon when they was comin’ home from school. The water was all over the road——”

“Then I win a smoke from the roadmaster,” said Pete. “I bet him it would overflow.”

“Well, if I was in the professor’s place, I’d be glad to pay the bet,” said the worldly lineman. “And I’ll say this for him, he rose equal to the emergency and caved the emergency’s head in. He carried her across the pond, and her a-clingin’ to his neck in a way to make your mouth water. She wasn’t a bit mad about it, either.”

“I’d rather have a good cigar any ol’ time,” said Pete. “Nothin’ but a yaller-haired kid—an’ a Dane at that. I had a dame once up at Spirit Lake——”

“Well, I must be drivin’ on,” said the lineman. “Got to get up a lecture for Professor Irwin to-morrow—and maybe I’ll be able to meet that yaller-haired kid. So long!”

The county superintendent recognized at once the educational importance of the matter, when one of her country teachers adopted the policy of calling in everybody available who could teach the pupils anything special, and converting the school into a local Chautauqua served by local lecturers. She made a run of ten miles to hear the trouble shooter’s lecture. She saw the boys and some of the girls give an explanation of the telephone and the use of it. She heard the teacher give as a language exercise the next day an essay on the ethics and proprieties of eavesdropping on party lines; and she saw the beginning of an arrangement under which the boys of the Woodruff school took the contract to look after easily-remedied line troubles in the neighborhood on the basis which paid for a telephone for the school, and swelled slightly the fund which Jim was accumulating for general purposes. Incidentally, she saw how really educational was the work of the day, and that to which it led.

She had no curiosity to which she would have confessed, about the relations between Jim Irwin and his “star pupil,” that young Brunhilde—Bettina Hansen; but her official duty required her to observe the attitude of pupils to teachers—Bettina among them. Clearly, Jim was looked upon by the girls, large and small, as a possession of theirs. They competed for the task of keeping his desk in order, and of dusting and tidying up the schoolroom. There was something of exaltation of sentiment in this. Bettina’s eyes followed him about the room in a devotional sort of way; but so, too, did those of the ten-year-olds. He was loved, that was clear, by Bettina, Calista Simms and all the rest—an excellent thing in a school.

All the same, Jennie met Jim rather oftener after the curious conversation between those rather low fellows, Pete and the trouble shooter. As autumn approached, and the time came for Jim to begin to think of his trip to Ames, Colonel Woodruff’s hint that she should assume charge of the problem of Jim’s clothes for the occasion, came more and more often to her mind. Would Jim be able to buy suitable clothes? Would he understand that he ought not to appear in the costume

which was tolerable in the Woodruff District only because the people there were accustomed to seeing him dressed like a tramp? Could she approach the subject with any degree of safety? Really these were delicate questions; and considering the fact that Jennie had quite dismissed her old sweetheart from the list of eligibles—had never actually admitted him to it, in fact—they assumed great importance to her mind. Once, only a little more than a year ago, she had scoffed at Jim's mention of the fact that he might think of marrying; and now she could not think of saying to him kindly, "Jim, you really must have some better clothes to wear when you go to Ames!" It would have been far easier last summer.

Somehow, Jim had been acquiring dignity and unapproachability. She must sidle up to the subject. She did. She took him into her runabout one day as he was striding toward town in that plowed-ground manner of his, and gave him a spin over to the fair grounds and two or three times around the half-mile track.

"I'm going to Ames to hear your speech," said she.

"I'm glad of that," said Jim. "More of the farmers are going from this neighborhood than ever before. I'll feel at home, if they all sit together where I can talk at them."

"Who's going?" asked Jennie.

"The Bronsons, Con Bonner and Nils Hansen and Bettina," replied Jim. "That's all from our district—and Columbus Brown and probably others from near-by localities."

"I shall have to have some clothes," said Jennie.

Jim failed to respond to this, as clearly out of his field. They were passing the county fair buildings, and he began expatiating on the kind of county fair he would have—a great county exposition with the schools as its central thought—a clearing house for the rural activities of all the country schools.

"And pa's going to have a suit before we go, too," said Jennie. "Here are some samples I got of Atkins, the tailor. Which would be the most becoming do you think?"

Jim looked the samples over carefully, but had little to say as to their adaptation to Colonel Woodruff's sartorial needs. Jennie laid great stress on the excellent quality of one or two samples, and carefully specified the prices of them. Jim exhibited no more than a languid and polite interest, and gave not the slightest symptom of ever having considered even remotely the contingency of having a tailor-made suit. Jennie sidled closer to the subject.

"I should think it would be awfully hard for you to get fitted in the stores," said she, "you are so very tall."

"It would be," said Jim, "if I had ever considered the matter of looks very much. I guess I'm not constructed on any plan the clothing manufacturers have regarded as even remotely possible. How about this county fair idea? Couldn't we do this next fall? You organize the teachers——"

Jennie advanced the spark, cut out the muffler and drowned the rest of Jim's remarks in wind and dust.

"I give it up, dad," said she to her father that evening.

"What?" queried the colonel.

"Jim Irwin's clothes," she replied. "I think he'll go to Ames in a disgraceful plight, but I can't get any closer to the subject than I have done."

"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 related to some of the neighbors?"

"A brother to Mrs. Hansen," answered the colonel.

"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? Colonel failed to notice Jennie's unceremonious retirement from circulation that evening, and had he known all about what took place, he would have been as mystified as you or I.

CHAPTER XVIII

The boat tipped over, and Jim Irwin was left struggling in the water. It was in the rapids just above the cataract—and poor Jim could not swim a stroke. Helpless, terrified, gasping, he floated to destruction, and Jennie Woodruff was not able to lift a hand to help him. To see any human being swept to such an end is dreadful, but for a county superintendent to witness the drowning of one of her best—though sometimes it must be confessed most insubordinate—teachers, under such circumstances, is unspeakable; and when that teacher is a young man who was once that county superintendent's sweetheart, and falls in, clothed in a new made-to-order suit in which he looks almost handsome despite his manifest discomfort in his new cravat and starched collar, the experience is something almost impossible to endure. That is why Jennie 236
gripped her seat until she must have scratched the varnish. That is why she felt she must go to him—and do something. She could not endure it a moment longer, she felt; and there he floated away, his poor pale face dipping below the waves, his sad, long, homely countenance sadder than ever, his lovely—yes, she must confess it now, his eyes were lovely!—his lovely blue eyes, so honest and true, wide with terror; and she unable to give him so much as a cry of encouragement!

And then Jim began to swim. He cast aside the roll of manuscript which he had held in his hand when the waters began to rise about him, and struck out for the shore with strong strokes—wild and agitated at first, but gradually becoming controlled and coordinated, and Jennie drew a long breath as he finally came to shore, breasting the waves like Triton, and master of the element in which he moved. There was a burst of applause, and people went forward to congratulate the greenhorn who had really made good.

Jennie felt like throwing her arms about his neck and weeping out her joy at his escape, and his 237
restoration to her. Her eyes told him something of this; for there was a look in them which reminded him of fifteen years ago. Bettina Hansen was proud of him, and Con Bonner shook his hand and said that he agreed with him. Neither Bettina nor Con had noticed the capsizing of the boat or saw the form of Jim as it went drifting toward the cataract. But Jim knew how near he had been to disaster, and knew that Jennie knew. For she had seen him turn pale when he came on the platform to make his address at the farmers' meeting at Ames, had seen him begin the speech he had committed to memory, had observed how unable he was to remember it, had noted his confusion as he tried to find his manuscript, and then his place of beginning in it—and when his confusion had seemingly quite overcome him, had seen him begin talking to his audience just as he had talked to the political meeting that time when he had so deeply offended her, and had observed how he won first their respect, then their attention, then apparently their convictions. 238

To Jennie's agitated mind Jim had barely escaped being drowned in the ocean of his own unreadiness and confusion under trying conditions. And she was right. Jim had never felt more the upstart uneducated farm-hand than when he was introduced to that audience 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. 239

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 240
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 241
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 for his speech; and he felt a good deal like returning the check to the conscience fund of the State of Iowa, if it by any chance possessed such a fund. But the breach made in his financial entrenchments by the expenses of the trip and the respectable and well-fitting suit of clothes overcame his feeling of getting something for nothing. If he hadn’t given the state anything, he had at least expended something—a good deal in fact—on the state’s account.

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CHAPTER XIX

JIM’S WORLD WIDENS

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 b’lieve in. I kep’ school back in Pennsylvany fifty years ago, and I made the scholars measure things, and weigh things, and apply their studies as fur 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,” grunted Mr. Hofmyer, “I hain’t been able to see how Latin connects up with a high- 243
school kid’s life—unless he can find a Latin settlement som’eres and git a job clerkin’ 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 *Cæsar*,” 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 244
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 Mr. 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 b’lieve, too,” went on Mr. Hofmyer, “that your idee would please our folks. I’ve been the stand-patter 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 Mr. Hofmyer. "You have charge of the dis-*cip*-line in the whole school, and teach in Number Two room. Seventy-five dollars a month. Does it appeal to ye?" 245

Appeal to him! Why, eighteen months ago it would have been worth crawling across the state after, and now to have it offered to him—it was stupendous. 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—on which he had been merely practising—for a year, and remove to the new field? Jim was in exactly the same situation in which every able young minister of the gospel finds himself sooner or later. The Lord was calling to a broader field—but how could he be sure it was the Lord?

"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." 246

"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."

"Wal," 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 idees. We'll write ye, and mebbe pay your way down to look us over. We're a pretty good crowd, the neighbors think." 247

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CHAPTER XX

THINK OF IT

Ames was an inspiration. Jim Irwin received from the great agricultural college more real education in this one trip than many students get from a four years' course in its halls; for he had spent ten years in getting ready for the experience. The great farm of hundreds of acres, all under the management of experts, the beautiful campus, the commodious classrooms and laboratories, and especially the barns, the greenhouses, gardens, herds and flocks filled him with a sort of apostolic joy.

"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." 249

"It's intermediate school work," said Jim. "It's a 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." 250

The professor laughed at his enthusiasm.

More nearly happy, and rather shorter 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 yeh, but you can’t turn down anything like that.” 251

“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, o’ course. I’m licked, and I never squeal. If the rist 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 Dimmycrat to go into the next con’vintion f’r 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.”

It must be confessed that Jim was almost dazed at the number of “propositions” of which he was now required to “think”—and that 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 252 of bringing to earth what he regarded as the soaring political ambitions of the Woodruff family.

To defeat the colonel in the defeat of his daughter when running for her traditionally-granted second term; to get Jim Irwin out of the Woodruff District by kicking him up-stairs into a county office; to split the forces which had defeated Mr. Bonner in his own school district; and to do these things with the very instrument used by the colonel on that sad but glorious day of the last school election—these, to Mr. Bonner, would be diabolically fine things to do—things worthy of those Tammany politicians who from afar off had won his admiration.

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 253 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 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 hain’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, Clumb,” 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 rest of the 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 254 blighted by the colonel’s placing of Jennie, Bettina and Nils Hansen in the broad rear seat, and Jim in front with himself. A fine ride, just the same, over fine roads, and past fine farmsteads snuggled into their rectangular wrappages of trees set out in the old pioneer days. 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.” 255

“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 rushed 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 to-night, 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. It still contained her rather fussy cautions about being “too original,” and the sage statement that “the wheel runs easiest in the beaten track.” It was written before the vexation and trouble he had caused her; but he did not read the advice, nor think of the coolness which had come between them—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!”

CHAPTER XXI

A SCHOOL DISTRICT HELD UP

Young McGeehee Simms was loitering along the snowy way to the schoolhouse bearing a brightly scoured tin pail two-thirds full of water. He had been allowed to act as Water Superintendent of the Woodruff School as a reward of merit—said merit being an essay on which he received credit in both language and geography on “Harvesting Wheat in the Tennessee Mountains.” This had been of vast interest to the school in view of the fact that the Simmses were the only pupils in the school who had ever seen in use that supposedly-obsolete harvesting implement, the cradle. Buddy’s essay had been passed over to the class in United States history as the evidence of an eye-witness concerning farming conditions in our grandfathers’ times.

The surnameless Pete, Colonel Woodruff’s hired man, halted Buddy at the door.

“Mr. Simms, I believe?” he said.

“I reckon you must be lookin’ for my brother, Raymond, suh,” said Buddy.

“I am a-lookin’,” said Pete impressively, “for Mr. McGeehee Simms.”

“That’s me,” said Buddy; “but I hain’t been doin’ nothin’ wrong, suh!”

“I have a message here,” said Pete, “for Professor James E. Irwin. He’s what-ho within, there, ain’t he?”

“He’s inside, I reckon,” said Buddy.

“Then will you be so kind and condescendin’ as to stoop so low as to jump so high as to give him this letter?” asked Pete.

Buddy took the letter and was considering of his reply to this remarkable speech, when Pete, gravely saluting, passed on, rather congratulating himself on having staged a very good burlesque of the dignified manners of those queer mountaineers, the Simmses.

> “Please come to the meeting to-night,” ran the colonel’s note to Jim; “and when you come, come prepared to hold the district up. If we can’t meet the Pottawatomie County standard of wages, we ought to lose you. Everybody in the district will be

there. Come late, so you won't hear yourself talked about—I should recommend nine-thirty and war-paint."

It was a crisis, no doubt of that; and the responsibility of the situation rather sickened Jim of the task of teaching. How could he impose conditions on the whole school district? How could the colonel expect such a thing of him? And how could any one look for anything but scorn for the upstart field-hand from these men who had for so many years made him the butt of their good-natured but none the less contemptuous ridicule? Who was he, anyway, to lay down rules for these substantial and successful men—he who had been for all the years of his life at their command, subservient to their demands for labor—their underling? Only one thing kept him from dodging the whole issue and remaining at home—the colonel's matter-of-fact assumption that Jim had become master of the situation. How could he flee, when this old soldier was fighting so valiantly for him in the trenches? So Jim went to the meeting. 261

The season was nearing spring, and it was a mild thawy night. The windows of the schoolhouse were filled with heads, evidencing the presence of a crowd of almost unprecedented size, and the sashes had been thrown up for ventilation and coolness. As Jim climbed the back fence of the school-yard, he heard a burst of applause, from which he judged that some speaker had just finished his remarks. There was silence when he came alongside the window at the right of the chairman's desk, a silence broken by the voice of Old Man Simms, saying "Mistah Chairman!"

"The chair," said the voice of Ezra Bronson, "recognizes Mr. Simms."

Jim halted in indecision. He was not expected while the debate was in progress, and therefore regarded himself at this time as somewhat *de trop*. There is no rule of manners or morals, however, forbidding eavesdropping during the proceedings of a public meeting—and anyhow, he felt rather shiveringly curious about these deliberations. Therefore he listened to the first and last public speech of Old Man Simms. 262

"Ah ain't no speaker," said Old Man Simms, "but Ah cain't set here and be quiet an' go home an' face my ole woman an' my boys an' gyuhls withouten sayin' a word fo' the best friend any family evah had, Mr. Jim Irwin." (Applause.) "Ah owe it to him that Ah've got the right to speak in this meetin' at all. Gentlemen, we-all owe everything to Mr. Jim Irwin! Maybe Ah'll be thought forrard to speak hyah, bein' as Ah ain't no learnin' an' some may think Ah don't pay no taxes; but it will be overlooked, I reckon, seein' as how we've took the Blanchard farm, a hundred an' sixty acres, for five yeahs, an' move in a week from Sat'day. We pay taxes in our rent, Ah reckon, an' howsomever that may be, Ah've come to feel that you-all won't think hard of me if Ah speak what we-uns feel so strong about Mr. Jim Irwin?"

Old Man Simms finished this exordium with the rising inflection, which denoted a direct question as to his status in the meeting. "Go on!" "You've got as good a right as any one!" 263 "You're all right, old man!" Such exclamations as these came to Jim's ears with scarcely less gratefulness than to those of Old Man Simms—who stammered and went on.

"Ah thank you-all kindly. Gentlemen an' ladies, when Mr. Jim Irwin found us, we was scandalous pore, an' we was wuss'n pore—we was low-down." (Cries of "No—No!") "Yes, we was, becuz what's respectable in the mountings is one thing, whar all the folks is pore, but when a man gets in a new place, he's got to lift himse'f up to what folks does where he's come to, or he'll fall to the bottom of what there is in that there community—an' maybe he'll make a place fer himse'f lower'n anybody else. In the mountings we was good people, becuz we done the best we could an' the best any one done; but hyah, we was low-down people becuz we hated the people that had mo' learnin', mo' land, mo' money, an' mo' friends than what we had. My little gyuhls wasn't respectable in their clothes. My childern was igernant, an' triflin', but I was the most triflin' of all. Ah'll leave it to Colonel Woodruff if I was good fer a plug of terbacker, or a bakin' 264 of flour at any sto' in the county. Was I, Colonel? Wasn't I perfectly wuthless an' triflin'?"

There was a ripple of laughter, in the midst of which the colonel's voice was heard saying, "I guess you were, Mr. Simms, I guess you were, but——"

"Thankee," said Old Man Simms, as if the colonel had given a really valuable testimonial to his character. "I sho' was! Thankee kindly! An'now, what am I good fer? Cain't I get anything I want at the stores? Cain't I git a little money at the bank, if I got to have it?"

"You're just as good as any man in the district," said the colonel. "You don't ask for more than you can pay, and you can get all you ask."

"Thankee," said Mr. Simms gravely. "What Ah tell you-all is right, ladies and gentlemen. An' what has made the change in we-uns, ladies and gentlemen? It's the wuk of Mr. Jim Irwin with my boy Raymond, the best boy any man evah hed, and my gyuhl, Calista, an' Buddy, an' Jinnie, an' with me an' my ole woman. He showed us how to get a toe-holt into this new kentry. He 265 teached the children what orto be did by a rentin' farmer in Ioway. He done lifted us up, an' made people of us. He done showed us that you-all is good people, an' not what we thought you was. Outen what he learned in school, my boy Raymond an' me made as good crops as we could last summer, an' done right much wuk outside. We got the name of bein' good farmers an' good wukkers, an' when Mr. Blanchard moved to town, he said he was glad to give us his fine farm for five years. Now, see what Mr. Jim Irwin has done for a pack o' outlaws and outcasts. Instid o' hidin' out from the Hobdays that was lay-wayin' us in the mountings, we'll be livin' in a house with two chimleys an' a swimmin' tub made outen crock'ryware. We'll be in debt a whole lot—an' we owe it to Mr. Jim Irwin that we got the credit to git in debt with, an' the courage to go on and git out agin!" (Applause.) "Ah could affo'd to pay Mr. Jim Irwin's salary mysr'f, if Ah could. An' there's enough men hyah to-night that say they've been money-he'ped by his teachin' the

school to make up mo' than his wages. Let's not let Mr. Jim Irwin go, neighbors! Let's not let him go!"

Jim's heart sank. Surely the case was desperate which could call forth such a forlorn-hope charge as that of Old Man Simms—a performance on Mr. Simms' part which warmed Jim's soul. "There isn't a man in that meeting," said he to himself, as he walked to the schoolhouse door, "possessed of the greatness of spirit of Old Man Simms. If he's a fair sample of the people of the mountains, they are of the stuff of which great nations are made—if they only are given a chance!"

Colonel Woodruff was on his feet as Jim made his way through the crowd about the door.

"Mr. Irwin is here, ladies and gentlemen," said he, "and I move that we hear from him as to what we can do to meet the offer of our friends in Pottawatomie County, who have heard of his good work, and want him to work for them; but before I yield the floor, I want to say that this meeting has been worth while just to have been the occasion of our all becoming better acquainted with our friend and neighbor, Mr. Simms. Whatever may have been the lack of understanding, on our part, of his qualities, they were all cleared up by that speech of his—the best I have ever heard in this neighborhood."

More applause, in the midst of which Old Man Simms slunk away down in his seat to escape observation. Then the chairman said that if there was no objection they would hear from their well-known citizen, whose growing fame was more remarkable for the fact that it had been gained as a country schoolmaster—he need not add that he referred to Mr. James E. Irwin. More and louder applause.

"Friends and neighbors," said Jim, "you ask me to say to you what I want you to do. I want you to do what you want to do—nothing more nor less. Last year I was glad to be tolerated here; and the only change in the situation lies in the fact that I have another place offered me—unless there has been a change in your feelings toward me and my work. I hope there has been; for I know my work is good now, whereas I only believed it then."

"Sure it is!" shouted Con Bonner from a front seat, thus signalizing that astute wire-puller's definite choice of a place in the bandwagon. "Tell us what you want, Jim!"

"What do I want?" asked Jim. "More than anything else, I want such meetings as this—often—and a place to hold them. If I stay in the Woodruff District, I want this meeting to effect a permanent organization to work with me. I can't teach this district anything. Nobody can teach any one anything. All any teacher can do is to direct people's activities in teaching themselves. You are gathered here to decide what you'll do about the small matter of keeping me at work as your hired man. You can't make any legal decision here, but whatever this meeting decides will be law, just the same, because a majority of the people of the district are here. Such a meeting as this can decide almost anything. If I'm to be your hired man, I want a boss in the shape of a civic organization which will take in every man and woman in the district. Here's the place and now's the time to make that organization—an organization the object of which shall be to put the whole district at school, and to boss me in my work for the whole district."

"Dat sounds good," cried Haakon Peterson. "Ve'll do dat!"

"Then I want you to work out a building scheme for the school," Jim went on. "We want a place where the girls can learn to cook, keep house, take care of babies, sew and learn to be wives and mothers. We want a place in which Mrs. Hansen can come to show them how to cure meat—she's the best hand at that in the county—where Mrs. Bonner can teach them to make bread and pastry—she ought to be given a doctor's degree for that—where Mrs. Woodruff can teach them the cooking of turkeys, Mrs. Peterson the way to give the family a balanced ration, and Mrs. Simms induct them into the mysteries of weaving rag rugs and making jellies and preserves—you can all learn these things from her. There's somebody right in this neighborhood able to teach anything the young people want to learn.

"And I want a physician here once in a while to examine the children as to their health, and a dentist to look after their teeth and teach them how to care for them. Also an oculist to examine their eyes. And when Bettina Hansen comes home from the hospital a trained nurse, I want her to have a job as visiting nurse right here in the Woodruff District.

"I want a counting-room for the keeping of the farm accounts and the record of our observation in farming. I want cooperation in letting us have these accounts.

"I want some manual training equipment for wood-working and metal working, and a blacksmith and wagon shop, in which the boys may learn to shoe horses, repair tools, design buildings, and practise the best agricultural engineering. So I want a blacksmith and handyman with tools regularly on the job—and he'll more than pay his way. I want some land for actual farming. I want to do work in poultry according to the most modern breeding discoveries, and I want your cooperation in that, and a poultry plant somewhere in the district.

"I want a laboratory in which we can work on seeds, pests, soils, feeds and the like. For the education of your children must come out of these things.

"I want these things because they are necessary if we are to get the culture out of life we should get—and nobody gets culture out of any sort of school—they get it out of life, or they don't get it at all.

"So I want you to build as freely for your school as for your cattle and horses and hogs.

"The school I ask for will make each of you more money than the taxes it will require would

make if invested in your farm equipment. If you are not convinced of this, don't bother with me any longer. But the money the school will make for you—this new kind of rural school—will be as nothing to the social life which will grow up—a social life which will make necessary an assembly-room, which will be the social center, because it will be the educational center, and the business center of the countryside.

"I want all these things, and more. But I don't expect them all at once. I know that this district is too small to do all of them, and therefore, I am going to tell you of another want which will tempt you to think that I am crazy. I want a bigger district—one that will give us the financial 272
strength to carry out the program I have sketched. This may be a presumptuous thing for me to propose; but the whole situation here to-night is presumptuous on my part, I fear. If you think so, let me go; but if you don't, please keep this meeting together in a permanent organization of grown-up members of the Woodruff school, and by pulling together, you can do these things—all of them—and many more—and you'll make the Woodruff District a good place to live in and die in—and I shall be proud to live and die in it at your service, as the neighborhood's hired man!"

As Jim sat down there was a hush in the crowded room, as if the people were dazed at his assurance. There was no applause, until Jennie Woodruff, now seen by Jim for the first time over next the blackboard, clapped her gloved hands together and started it; then it swept out through the windows in a storm. The dust rose from stamping feet until the kerosene lamps were dimmed by it. And as the noise subsided, Jim saw standing out in front the stooped form of 273
B. B. Hamm, one of the most prosperous men in the district.

"Mr. Chairman—Ezra Bronson," he roared, "this feller's crazy, an' from the sound of things, you're all as crazy as he is. If this fool scheme of his goes through, my farm's for sale! I'll quit before I'm sold out for taxes!"

"Just a minute, B. B.!" interposed Colonel Woodruff. "This ain't as dangerous as you think. You don't want us to do all this in fifteen minutes, do you, Jim?"

"Oh, as to that," replied Jim, "I just wanted you to have in your minds what I have in my mind—and unless we can agree to work toward these things there's no use in my staying. But time—that's another matter. Believe with me, and I'll work with you."

"Get out of here!" said the colonel to Jim in an undertone, "and leave the rest to your friends."

Jim walked out of the room and took the way toward his home. A horse tied to the hitching-pole had his blanket under foot, and Jim replaced it on his back, patting him kindly and talking horse 274
language to him. Then he went up and down the line of teams, readjusting blankets, tying loosened knots, and assuring himself that his neighbors' horses were securely tied and comfortable. He knew horses better than he knew people, he thought. If he could manage people as he could manage horses—but that would be wrong. The horse did his work as a servant, submissive to the wills of others; the community could never develop anything worth while in its common life, until it worked the system out for itself. Horse management was despotism; man-government must be like the government of a society of wild horses, the result of the common work of the members of the herd.

Two figures emerged from the schoolhouse door, and as he turned toward his home after his pastoral calls on the horses, they overtook him. They were the figures of Newton Bronson and the county superintendent of schools.

"We were coming after you," said Jennie.

"Dad wants you back there again," said Newton.

"What for?" inquired Jim. 275

"You silly boy," said Jennie, "you talked about the good of the schools all of the time, and never said a word about your own salary! What do you want? They want to know?"

"Oh!" exclaimed Jim in the manner of one who suddenly remembers that he has forgotten his umbrella or his pocket-knife. "I forgot all about it. I haven't thought about that at all, Jennie!"

"Jim," said she, "you need a guardian!"

"I know it, Jennie," said he, "and I know who I want. I want——"

"Please come back," said Jennie, "and tell papa how much you're going to hold the district up for."

"You run back," said Jim to Newton, "and tell your father that whatever is right in the way of salary will be satisfactory to me. I leave that to the people."

Newton darted off, leaving the schoolmaster standing in the road with the county superintendent.

"I can't go back there!" said Jim.

"I'm proud of you, Jim," said Jennie. "This community has found its master. They can't do all you 276
ask now, nor very soon; but finally they'll do just as you want them to do. And, Jim, I want to say that I've been the biggest little fool in the county!"

CHAPTER XXII

AN EMBASSY FROM DIXIE

Superintendent Jennie sat at her desk in no very satisfactory frame of mind. In the first place court was to convene on the following Monday, and both grand jury and petit juries would be in session, so that her one-room office was not to be hers for a few days. Her desk was even now ready to be moved into the hall by the janitor. To Wilbur Smythe, who did her the honor of calling occasionally as the exigencies of his law practise took him past the office of the pretty country girl on whose shapely shoulders rested the burden of the welfare of the schools, she remarked that if they didn't soon build the new court-house so as to give her such accommodations as her office really needed, "they might take their old office—so there!"

"Fair woman," said Wilbur, as he creased his Prince Albert in a parting bow, "should adorn the home!"

"Bosh!" sneered Jennie, rather pleased, all the same, "suppose she isn't fair, and hasn't any home!"

This question of adorning a home was no nearer settlement with Jennie than it had ever been, though increasingly a matter of speculation.

There were two or three men—rather good catches, too—who, if they were encouraged—but what was there to any of them? Take Wilbur Smythe, now; he would by sheer force of persistent assurance and fair abilities eventually get a good practise for a country lawyer—three or four thousand a year—serve in the legislature or the state senate, and finally become a bank director with a goodly standing as a safe business man; but what was there to him? This is what Jennie asked her paper-weight as she placed it on a pile of unfinished examination papers. And the paper-weight echoed, "Not a thing out of the ordinary!" And then, said Jennie, "Well, you little simpleton, who and what are *you* so out of the ordinary that you should sneer at Wilbur Smythe and Beckman Fifield and such men?" And echo answered, "What?"—and then the mail-carrier came in.

Down near the bottom of the pile she found this letter, signed by a southern state superintendent of schools, but dated at Kirksville, Missouri:

> "I am a member of a party of southern educators—state superintendents in the main," the letter ran, "*en tour* of the country to see what we can find of an instructive nature in rural school work. I assure you that we are being richly repaid for the time and expense. There are things going on in the schools here in northeastern Missouri, for instance, which merit much study. We have met Professor Withers, of Ames, who suggests that we visit your schools, and especially the rural school taught by a young man named Irwin, and I wonder if you will be free on next Monday morning, if we come to your office, to direct us to the place? If you could accompany us on the trip, and perhaps show us some of your other excellent schools, we should be honored and pleased. The South is recreating her rural schools, and we are coming to believe that we shall be better workmen if we create a new kind rather than an improvement of the old kind."

There was more of this courteous and deferential letter, all giving Jennie a sense of being saluted by a fine gentleman in satin and ruffles, and with a plume on his hat. And then came the shock—a party of state officials were coming into the county to study Jim Irwin's school! They would never come to study Wilbur Smythe's law practise—never in the world—or her work as county superintendent—never!—and Jim was getting seventy-five dollars a month, and had a mother to support. Moreover, he was getting more than he had asked when the colonel had told him to "hold the district up!" But there could be no doubt that there was something *to* Jim—the man was out of the ordinary. And wasn't that just what she had been looking for in her mind?

Jennie wired to her southerner for the number of his party, and secured automobiles for the trip. She sent a note to Jim Irwin telling of the prospective visitation. She would show all concerned that she could do some things, anyhow, and she would send these people on with a good impression of her county.

She was glad of the automobiles the next Monday morning, when at nine-thirty the train discharged upon her a dozen very alert, very up-to-date, very inquisitive southerners, male and female, most of whom seemed to have left their "r's" in the gulf region. It was eleven when the party parked their machines before the schoolhouse door.

"There are visitors here before us," said Jennie.

"Seems rather like an educational shrine," said Doctor Brathwayt, of Mississippi. "How does he accommodate so many visitors in that small edifice?"

"I am not aware," said Jennie, "that he has been in the habit of receiving so very many from outside the district. Well, shall we go in?"

Once inside, Jennie felt a queer return of her old aversion to Jim's methods—the aversion which had caused her to criticize him so sharply on the occasion of her first visit. The reason for the return of the feeling lay in the fact that the work going on was of the same sort, but of a more intense character. It was so utterly unlike a school as Jennie understood the word, that she

glanced back at the group of educators with a little blush. The school was in a sort of uproar. Not that uproar of boredom and mischief of which most of us have familiar memories, but a sort of eager uproar, in which every child was intensely interested in the same thing; and did little rustling things because of this interest; something like the hum at a football game or a dog-fight.

On one side of the desk stood Jim Irwin, and facing him was a smooth stranger of the old-fashioned lightning-rod-agent type—the shallower and laxer sort of salesman of the kind whose sole business is to get signatures on the dotted line, and let some one else do the rest. In short, he was a “closer.”

Standing back of him in evident distress was Mr. Cornelius Bonner, and grouped about were Columbus Brown, B. B. Hamm, Ezra Bronson, A. B. Talcott and two or three others from outside the Woodruff District. With envelopes in their hands and the light of battle in their eyes stood Newton Bronson, Raymond Simms, Bettina Hansen, Mary Smith and Angie Talcott, the boys filled with delight, the girls rather frightened at being engaged in something like a debate with the salesman. 283

As the latest-coming visitors moved forward, they heard the schoolmaster finishing his passage at arms with the salesman.

“You should not feel exasperated at us, Mr. Carmichael,” said he in tones of the most complete respect, “for what our figures show. You are unfortunate in the business proposition you offer this community. That is all. Even these children have the facts to prove that the creamery outfit you offer is not worth within two thousand dollars of what you ask for it, and that it is very doubtful if it is the sort of outfit we should need.”

“I’ll bet you a thousand dollars—” began Carmichael hotly, when Jim waved him down.

“Not with me,” said Jim. “Your friend, Mr. Bonner, there, knows what chance there is for you to bet even a thousand cents with me. Besides, we know our facts, in this school. We’ve been working on them for a long time.”

“Bet your life we have!” interpolated Newton Bronson.

“Before we finish,” said Jim, “I want to thank you gentlemen for bringing in Mr. Carmichael. We have been reading up on the literature of the creamery promoter, and it is a very fine thing to have one in the flesh with whom to—to—demonstrate, if Mr. Carmichael will allow me to say so.” 284

Carmichael looked at Bonner, made an expressive motion with his head toward the door, and turned as if to leave.

“Well,” said he, “I can do plenty of business with *men*. If you *men* want to make the deal I offer you, and I can show you from the statistics I’ve got at the hotel that it’s a special deal just to get started in this part of the state, and carries a thousand dollars of cut in price to you. Let’s leave these children and this he school-ma’am and get something done.”

“I can’t allow you to depart,” said Jim more gently than before, “without thanking you for the very excellent talk you gave us on the advantage of the cooperative creamery over the centralizer. We in this school believe in the cooperative creamery, and if we can get rid of you, Mr. Carmichael, without buying your equipment, I think your work here may be productive of good.” 285

“He’s off three or four points on the average overrun in the Wisconsin co-ops,” said Newton.

“And we thought,” said Mary Smith, “that we’d need more cows than he said to keep up a creamery of our own.”

“Oh,” replied Jim, “but we mustn’t expect Mr. Carmichael to know the subject as well as we do, children. He makes a practise of talking mostly to people who know nothing about it—and he talks very well. All in favor of thanking Mr. Carmichael please say ‘Aye.’”

There was a rousing chorus of “Aye!” in which Mr. Carmichael, followed closely by Mr. Bonner, made his exit. B. B. Hamm went forward and shook Jim’s hand slowly and contemplatively, as if trying to remember just what he should say.

“James E. Irwin,” said he, “you’ve saved us from being skinned by the smoothest grafter that I ever seen.”

“Not I,” said Jim; “the kind of school I stand for, Mr. Hamm, will save you more than that—and give you the broadest culture any school ever gave. A culture based on life. We’ve been studying life, in this school—the life we all live here in this district.” 286

“He had a smooth partner, too,” said Columbus Brown. Jim looked at Bonner’s little boy in one of the front seats and shook his head at Columbus warningly.

“If I hadn’t herded ’em in here to ask you a few questions about cooperative creameries,” said Mr. Talcott, “we’d have been stuck—they pretty near had our names. And then the whole neighborhood would have been sucked in for about fifty dollars a name.”

“I’d have gone in for two hundred,” said B. B. Hamm.

“May I call a little meeting here for a minute, Jim?” asked Ezra Bronson. “Why, where’s he gone?”

“They’s some other visitors come in,” said a little girl, pulling her apron in embarrassment at

the teacher's absence.

Jim had, after what seemed to Jennie an interminable while, seen the county superintendent and her distinguished party, and was now engaged in welcoming them and endeavoring to find them seats,—quite an impossible thing at that particular moment, by the way.

“Don't mind us, Mr. Irwin,” said Doctor Brathwayt. “This is the best thing we've seen on our journeyings. Please go on with the proceedin's. That gentleman seems to have in mind the perfectin' of some so't of organization. I'm intensely interested.”

“I'd like to call a little meetin' here,” said Ezra to the teacher. “Seein' we've busted up your program so far, may we take a little while longer?”

“Certainly,” said Jim. “The school will please come to order.”

The pupils took their seats, straightened their books and papers, and were at attention. Doctor Brathwayt nodded approvingly as if at the answer to some question in his mind.

“Children,” said Mr. Irwin, “you may or may not be interested in what these gentlemen are about to do—but I hope you are. Those who wish may be members of Mr. Bronson's meeting. Those who do not prefer to do so may take up their regular work.”

“Gentlemen,” said Mr. Bronson to the remains of Mr. Carmichael's creamery party, “we've been cutting bait in this neighborhood about long enough. I'm in favor of fishing, now. It would have been the biggest disgrace ever put on this district to have been swindled by that sharper, when the man that could have set us right on the subject was right here working for us, and we never let him have a chance. And yet that's what we pretty near did. How many here favor building a cooperative creamery if we can get the farmers in with cows enough to make it profitable, and the equipment at the right price?”

Each man held up a hand.

“Here's one of our best farmers not voting,” said Mr. Bronson, indicating Raymond Simms. “How about you, Raymond?”

“Ah reckon paw'll come in,” said Raymond blushingly.

“He will if you say so,” said Mr. Bronson.

Raymond's hand went up amid a ripple of applause from the pupils, who seemed glad to have a voter in their ranks.

“Unanimous!” said Mr. Bronson. “It is a vote! Now I'd like to hear a motion to perfect a permanent organization to build a creamery.”

“I think we ought to have a secretary first,” said Mr. Talcott, “and I nominate Mr. James E. Irwin for the post.”

“Quite correct,” said Mr. Bronson, “thankee, A. B. I was about to forgit the secretary. Any other nominations? No 'bjections, Mr. Irwin will be declared unanimously elected. Mr. Irwin's elected. Mr. Irwin, will you please assume the duties?”

Jim sat down at the desk and began making notes.

“I think we ought to call this the Anti-Carmichael Protective Association,” said Columbus Brown, but Mr. Bronson interrupted him, rather frowningly.

“All in good time, Clumb,” said he, “but this is serious work.” So admonished, the meeting appointed committees, fixed upon a time for a future meeting, threw a collection of half-dollars on the desk to start a petty cash fund, made the usual joke about putting the secretary under bond, adjourned and dispersed.

“It's a go this time!” said Newton to Jim.

“I think so,” said Jim, “with those men interested. Well, our study of creameries has given a great deal of language work, a good deal of arithmetic, some geography, and finally saved the people from a swindle. Rather good work, Raymond!”

“My mother has a delayed luncheon ready for the party,” said Jennie to Jim. “Please come with us—please!”

But Jim demurred. Getting off at this time of day was really out of the question if he was to be ready to show the real work of the school in the afternoon session.

“This has been rather extraordinary,” said Jim, “but I am very glad you were here. It shows the utility of the right sort of work in letter-writing, language, geography and arithmetic—in learning things about farming.”

“It certainly does,” said Doctor Brathwayt. “I wouldn't have missed it under any consideration; but I'm certainly sorry for that creamery shark and his accomplice—to be routed by the Fifth Reader grade in farming!”

The luncheon was rather a wonderful affair—and its success was unqualified after everybody discovered that the majority of those in attendance felt much more at home when calling it dinner. Colonel Woodruff had fought against the regiment of the father of Professor Gray, of Georgia, in at least one engagement, and tentative plans were laid for the meeting of the two old veterans “some winter in the future.”

“What d'ye think of our school?” asked the colonel.

“Well,” said Professor Gray, “it’s not fair to judge, Colonel, on what must have been rather an extraordinary moment in the school’s history. I take it that you don’t put on a representation of ‘The Knave Unmasked’ every morning.”

“It was more like a caucus than I’ve ever seen it, daddy,” said Jennie, “and less like a school.”

“Don’t you think,” said Doctor Brathwayt, “that it was less like a school because it was more like life? It *was* life. If I am not mistaken, history for this community was making in that schoolroom as we entered.”

“You’re perfectly right, Doctor,” said the colonel. “Columbus Brown and about a dozen others living outside the district are calling Wilbur Smythe in counsel to perfect plans for an election to consolidate a few of these little independent districts, for the express purpose of giving Jim Irwin a plant that he can do something with. Jim’s got too big for the district, and so we’re going to enlarge the district, and the schoolhouse, and the teaching force, and the means of educational grace generally. That’s as sure as can be—after what took place this morning.”

“He’s rather a wonderful person, to be found in such a position,” said Professor Gray, “or would be in any region I have visited.”

“He’s a native product,” said the colonel, “but a wonder all the same. He’s a Brown Mouse, you know.”

“A—a—?” Doctor Brathwayt was plainly astonished. And so the colonel was allowed to tell again the story of the Darbishire brown mice, and why he called Jim Irwin one. Doctor Brathwayt said it was an interesting Mendelian explanation of the appearance of such a character as Jim. “And if you are right, Colonel, you’ll lose him one of these days. You can’t expect to retain a Cæsar, a Napoleon, or a Lincoln in a rural school, can you?”

“I don’t know about that,” said the colonel. “The great opportunity for such a Brown Mouse may be in this very school, right now. He’d have as big an army right here as Socrates ever had. The Brown Mouse is the only judge of his own proper place.”

“I think,” said Mrs. Brathwayt, as they motored back to the school, “that your country schoolmaster is rather terrible. The way he crushed that Mr. Carmichael was positively merciless. Did he know how cruel he was?”

“I think not,” said Jennie. “It was the truth that crushed Mr. Carmichael.”

“But that vote of thanks,” said Mrs. Brathwayt. “Surely that was the bitterest irony.”

“I wonder if it was,” said Jennie. “No, I am sure it wasn’t. He wanted to leave the children thinking as well as possible of their victim, and especially of Mr. Bonner; and there was really something in Mr. Carmichael’s talk which could be praised. I have known Jim Irwin since we were both children, and I feel sure that if he had had any idea that his treatment of this man had been unnecessarily cruel, it would have given him a lot of pain.”

“My dear,” said Mrs. Brathwayt, “I think you are to be congratulated for having known for a long time a genius.”

“Thank you,” said Jennie. And Mrs. Brathwayt gave her a glance which brought to her cheek another blush; but of a different sort from the one provoked by the uproar in the Woodruff school.

There could be no doubt now that Jim was thoroughly wonderful—nor that she, the county superintendent, was quite as thoroughly a little fool. She to be put in authority over him! It was too absurd for laughter. Fortunately, she hadn’t hindered him much—but who was to be thanked for that? Was it owing to any wisdom of hers? Well, she had decided in his favor, in those first proceedings to revoke his certificate. Perhaps that was as good a thing to remember as was to be found in the record.

CHAPTER XXIII

AND SO THEY LIVED——

And so it turned out quite as if it were in the old ballad, that “all in the merry month of May,” and also “all in the merry green wood,” there were great doings about the bold little promontory where once stood the cabin on the old wood-lot where the Simms family had dwelt. The brook ran about the promontory, and laid at its feet on three sides a carpet of blue-grass, amid clumps of trees and wild bushes. Not far afield on either hand came the black corn-land, but up and down the bluffy sides of the brook for some distance on both sides of the King-dragged highway, ran the old wood-lot, now regaining much of the unkempt appearance which characterized it when Jim Irwin had drawn upon himself the gentle rebuke of Old Man Simms for not giving a whoop from the big road before coming into the yard.

But Old Man Simms was gone, with all the Simmses, now thoroughly established on the

Blanchard farm, and quite happy in their new success. The cabin was gone, and in its place stood a pretty little bungalow, about which blossomed the lilacs and peonies and roses and other old-fashioned flowers, planted there long ago by some pioneer woman, nourished back to thriftiness by old Mrs. Simms, and carefully preserved during the struggles with the builders of the bungalow by Mrs. Irwin. For this was Mrs. Irwin's new home. It was, in point of fact, the teacher's house or schoolmanse for the new consolidated Woodruff District, and the old Simms wood-lot was the glebe-land of the schoolmanse.

Jim turned over and over in his mind these new applications of old, historic, significant words, dear to every reader of history—"glebe-land," "schoolmanse"—and it seemed to him that they signified the return of many old things lost in Merrie England, lost in New England, lost all over the English-speaking world, when the old publicly-paid clergyman ceased to be so far the 297
servant of all the people that they refused to be taxed for his support. Was not the new kind of rural teacher to be a publicly-paid leader of thought, of culture, of progress, and was he not to have his manse, his glebe-land, and his "living"? And all because, like the old clergymen, he was doing a work in which everybody was interested and for which they were willing to be taxed. Perhaps it was not so high a status as the old; but who was to say that? Certainly not Jim Irwin, the possessor of the new kind of "living," with its "glebe-land" and its "schoolmanse." He would have rated the new quite as high as the old.

From the brow of the promontory, a light concrete bridge took the pretty little gorge in the leap of a single arch, and landed the eye at the bottom of the front yard of the schoolhouse. Thus the new institution of life was in full view of the schoolmanse veranda, and yet shut off from it by the dry moat of the brook and its tiny meadow of blue-grass.

Across the road was the creamery, with its businesslike unloading platform, and its addition in 298
process of construction for the reception of the machinery for the cooperative laundry. Not far from the creamery, and also across the road, stood the blacksmith and wheelwright shop. Still farther down the stream were the barn, poultry house, pens, hutches and yards of the little farm —small, economically made, and unpretentious, as were all the buildings save the schoolhouse itself, which was builded for the future.

And even the schoolhouse, when one thinks of the uses to which it was to be put—kitchen, nursery, kindergarten, banquet-hall, theater, moving-picture hall, classrooms, manual training rooms, laboratory and counting-room and what-not, was wonderfully small—Colonel Woodruff said far too small—though it was necessarily so large as to be rather astonishing to the unexpectant passer-by.

The unexpectant passer-by this May day, however, would have been especially struck by the number of motor-cars, buggies and surreys parked in the yard back of the creamery, along the roadside, and by the driveway running to the schoolhouse. People in numbers had arrived by 299
five o'clock in the afternoon, and were still coming. They strolled about the place, examining the buildings and grounds, and talking with the blacksmith and the butter-maker, gradually drawing into the schoolhouse like a swarm of bees into a hive selected by the queen. None of them, however, went across the concrete bridge to the schoolmanse, save Mrs. Simms, who crossed, consulted with Mrs. Irwin about the shrubbery and flowers, and went back to Buddie and Jinnie, who were good children but natchally couldn't be trusted with so many other young ones withouten some watchin'.

"They're coming! They're coming!"

This was the cry borne to the people in and about the schoolhouse by that Hans Hansen who would be called Hans Nilsen. Hans had been to the top of the little hill and had a look toward town. Like a crew manning the rigging, or a crowd having its picture taken, the assemblage crystallized into forms determined by the chances of getting a glimpse of the bungalow across the ravine—on posts, fences, trees and hillocks. Still nobody went across the bridge, and when 300
McGeehee Simms and Johnny Bonner strayed to the bridge-head, Mrs. Simms called them back by a minatory, "Buddy, what did I *tell* you? You come hyah!"

A motor-car came over the hillock, ran down the road to the driveway to the schoolmanse and drew up at the door. Out of it stepped Mrs. Woodruff and the colonel, their daughter, the county superintendent of schools, and Mr. Jim Irwin. Jennie was dressed in a very well-tailored traveling costume, and Jim in a moderately well-tailored business suit. Mrs. Irwin kissed her son and Jennie, and led the way into the house. Jennie and Jim followed—and when they went in, the crowd over across the ravine burst forth into a tremendous cheer, followed by a three-times-three and a tiger. The unexpectant passer-by would have been rather surprised at this, but we who are acquainted with the parties must all begin to have our suspicions. The fact that when they reached the threshold Jim picked Jennie up in his arms and carried her in, will enable any good detective to put one and one together and make a pair—which comes pretty near telling 301
the whole story.

By this time it was nearly seven, and Calista Simms came across the charmed bridge as a despatch-bearer, saying that if Mr. Jim and Miss Jennie didn't mind, dinner would be suhved right soon. It was cooked about right, and the folks was gettin' right hungry—an' such a crowd! There were fifteen in the babies' room, and for a while they thought the youngest Hamm young one had swallowed a marble. She would tell 'em they would be right over; good-by.

There was another cheer as the three elderly and the two young people emerged from the schoolmanse and took their way over the bridge to the school side of the velvet-bottomed moat; but it did not terminate in three-times-three and a tiger. It was, in fact shut off like the vibration

of a bell dipped in water by the sudden rush of the shouters into the big assembly-room, now filled with tables for the banquet—and here the domestic economy classes, with their mothers, sisters, female cousins and aunts, met them, as waiters, hat-snatchers, hostesses, floor-managers and cooks, scoring the greatest triumph of history in the Woodruff District. For everything went off like clockwork, especially the victuals—and such victuals!

There was quantity in meats, breads, vegetables—and there was also savor. There was plenty, and there was style. Ask Mrs. Haakon Peterson, who yearned for culture, and had been afraid her children wouldn't get it if Yim Irwin taught them nothing but farming. She will tell you that the dinner—which so many thought of all the time as supper—was yust as well served as it if had been in the Chamberlain Hotel in Des Moines, where she had stayed when she went with Haakon to the state convention.

Why shouldn't it have been even better served? It was planned, cooked, served and eaten by people of intelligence and brains, in their own house, as a community affair, and in a community where, if any one should ask you, you are authorized to state that there's as much wealth to the acre as in any strictly farming spot between the two oceans, and where you are perfectly safe—financially—in dropping from a balloon in the dark of the moon, and paying a hundred and fifty dollars an acre for any farm you happen to land on. Why shouldn't things have been well done, when every one worked, not for money, but for the love of the doing, and the love of learning to do in the best way?

Some of these things came out in the speeches following the repast—and some other things, too. It was probably not quite fair for B. B. Hamm to incorporate in his wishes for the welfare and prosperity and so forth of Jim and Jennie that stale one about the troubles of life, but he wanted to see Jennie blush—which as a matter of fact he did; but she failed to grow quite so fiery red as did Jim. But B. B. was a good fellow, and a Trojan in his work for the cause, and the schoolmaster and superintendent of schools forgave him. A remark may be a little broad, and still clean, and B. B. made a clean speech mainly devoted to the increased value of that farm he at one memorable time was going to sell before Jim's fool notions could be carried out.

Colonel Woodruff made most of the above points which I have niched from him. He had begun as a reformer late in life, he said, but he would leave it to them if he hadn't worked at the trade steadily after enlistment. He had become a follower of Jim Irwin, because Jim's reform was like dragging the road in front of your own farm—it was reform right at home, and not at the county seat, or Des Moines, or Washington. He had followed Jim Irwin as he had followed Lincoln, and Grant, and Blaine, and McKinley—because Jim Irwin stood for more upward growth for the average American citizen than the colonel could see any prospect of getting from any other choice. And he was proud to live in a country like this, saved and promoted by the great men he had followed, and in a neighborhood served and promoted, if not quite saved, by Jim Irwin. And he was not so sure about its not being saved. Every man and nation had to be saved anew every so often, and the colonel believed that Jim Irwin's new kind of rural school is just as necessary to the salvation of this country as Lincoln's new kind of recognition of human rights was half a century ago. "I am about to close my speech," said the colonel, "and the small service I have been able to give to this nation. I went through the war, neighbors—and am proud of it; but I've done more good in the peaceful service of the last three years than I did in four of fighting and campaigning. That's the way I feel about what we've done in Consolidated District Number One." (Vociferous and long-continued applause.)

"Oh, Colonel!" The voice of Angie Talcott rose from away back near the kitchen. "Can Jennie keep on bein' county superintendent, now she's married?"

A great guffaw of laughter reduced poor Angie to tears; and Jennie had to go over and comfort her. It was all right for her to ask that, and they ought not to laugh at Angie, so there! Now, you're all right, and let's talk about the new schoolhouse, and so forth. Jennie brought the smiles back to Angle's face, just in time to hear Jim tell the people amid louder cheers that he had been asked to go into the rural-school extension work in two states, and had been offered a fine salary in either place, but that he wasn't even considering these offers. And about that time, the children began to get sleepy and cross and naughty, and the women set in motion the agencies which moved the crowd homeward.

Before a bright wood fire—which they really didn't need, but how else was Jim's mother to show off the little fireplace?—sat Jim and Jennie. They had been together for a week now—this being their home-coming—and had only begun to get really happy.

"Isn't it fine to have the fireplace?" said Jennie.

"Yes, but we can't really afford to burn a fire in it—in Iowa," said Jim. "Fuel's too everlastingly scarce. If we use it much, the fagots and deadwood on our 'glebe-land' won't last long."

"If you should take that Oklahoma position," said Jennie, "we could afford to have open wood fires all the time."

"It's warmer in Oklahoma," said Jim, "and wood's more plentiful. Yes"—contemplatively—"we could, dear."

"It would be nice, wouldn't it?" said Jennie.

"All right," said Jim briskly, "get me my writing materials, and we'll accept. It's still open."

Jennie sat looking into the fire oblivious of the suggestion. She was smiling. Jim moved uneasily, and rose.

“Well,” he said, “I believe I can better guess where mother would put those writing materials than you could, after all. I’ll hunt them up.”

As he passed, Jennie took him by the hand and pulled him down on the arm of her chair.

“Jim,” she said, “don’t be mean to me! You know you wouldn’t do such a wicked, wicked thing at this time as to leave the people here.”

“All right,” said Jim, “whatever you say is the law.”

When Jennie spoke again things had taken place which caused her voice to emanate from Jim’s shirt-front.

“Did you hear,” said she, “what Angie Talcott asked?” 308

“M’h’m,” said Jim.

“Well,” said Jennie, “now that I’m married can I go on being county superintendent?”

There was a long silence.

“Would you like to?” asked Jim.

“Kind of,” said Jennie; “if I knew enough about things to do anything worth while; but I’m afraid that by rising to my full height I shall always just fail to be able to see over anything.”

“You’ve done more for the schools of the county,” said Jim, “in the last year than any other county superintendent has ever done.”

“And we shall need the money so like—so like the dickens,” said Jennie.

“Oh, not so badly,” laughed Jim, “except for the first year. I’ll have this little farm paying as much as some quarter-sections when we get squared about. Why, we can make a living on this school farm, Jennie,—or I’m not fit to be the head of the school.”

There was another silence, during which Jennie took down her hair, and wound it around Jim’s neck. 309

“It will settle itself soon one of these days anyhow,” said he at last. “There’s enough to do for both of us right here.”

“But they won’t pay me,” she protested.

“They don’t pay the ministers’ wives,” said Jim, “and yet, the ministers with the right sort of wives are always the best paid. I guess you’ll be in the bill, Jennie.”

Jim walked to the open window and looked out over the still landscape. The untidy grounds appealed to him—there would be lessons in their improvement for both the children and the older people. It was all good. Down in the little meadow grew the dreaming trees, their round crowns rising as from a sea not quite to the level of the bungalow, their thrifty leaves glistening in the moonlight. Across the pretty bridge lay the silent little campus with its twentieth-century temple facing its chief priest. It was all good, without and within. He went across the hall to bid his mother good night. She clung to him convulsively, and they had their own five minutes which arranged matters for these two silent natures on the new basis forever. Jennie was in 310 white before the mantel when he returned, smiling at the inscription thereon.

“Why didn’t you put it in Latin?” she inquired. “It would have had so much more distinction.”

“I wanted it to have meaning instead,” said Jim. “And besides, nobody who was at hand was quite sure how to turn the Latin phrase. Are you?”

Jennie leaned forward with her elbows on her knees, and studied it.

“I believe I could,” said she, “without any pony. But after all, I like it better as it is. I like everything, Jim—everything!”

“LET US CEASE THINKING SO MUCH OF AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION, AND DEVOTE OURSELVES TO EDUCATIONAL AGRICULTURE. SO WILL THE NATION BE MADE STRONG.”

THE END

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