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The correct date of sale is Dec. 13; the announcement on page 1979 is incorrect.

Serial Story

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The Brown Mouse.

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 prime, 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 deer-foot 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 hobbled boy 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.

"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 soberly, "that we can't run any trap line and do what 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."

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

"He begins at eight in the morn'," 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' trap-ping—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 hawks, an' the land we kin get under plow."

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 Mann. 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



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