

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 co-operation 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?"
"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."

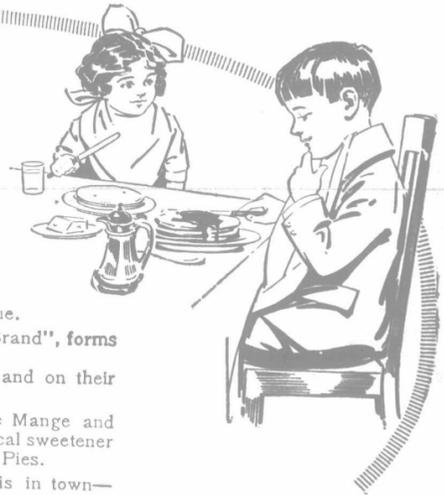
"What for?"
"Oh, nothing—just to please me. . . . And say, Jim, I glanced over a communication you have started to the more or less Honorable Board of Education."
"Yes?"
"Well, don't finish it. . . . And say, Jim, I think I'll give myself the luxury of being a wild-eyed reformer for once."
"Yes," said 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

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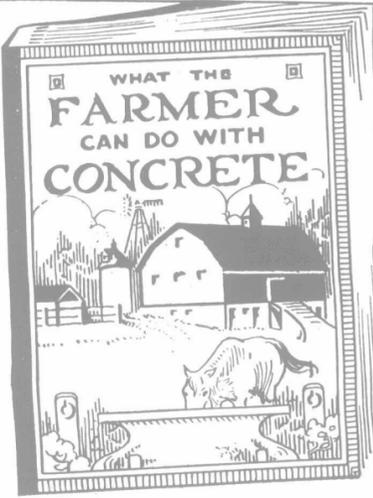
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teacher's certificate. The time appointed was ten o'clock. At nine forty-five Cornelius Bonner and his wife entered the office, and took twenty-five per cent. of the chairs therein. At nine fifty Jim Irwin came in, haggard, weather-beaten and seedy 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 grown-ups. 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 instantaneously 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