

The Brown Mouse

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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 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 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 ease right here. If that aint the limit, I don't know what is!"

Jim Wins Out

But Jim Irwin stuck to his guns thru it all. He was unable to see that a "course of study" was more than an outline of the mental march the pupils were ordered to make. Why did it give the children any greater mastery of the printed page to read about Casablanca on the burning deck than about the cause of "firing" of corn by hot weather? And how could they be given better command of language than by writing about things they had found out in relation to some of the sciences which are laid under contribution by farming? Everything they did ran into numbers and the teacher contended they did more arithmetic than the prescribed course required. There wasn't a branch of study—not even poetry, art and music—that wasn't touched by life; if there was, then there was no time for it in the common schools. Jim Irwin was ready to stand or fall on an examination of his pupils in the very text-books he was accused of neglecting—in his pupils' ability to do the work the text was supposed to fit them for!

So they put his school to the test and his boys and girls came thru with flying colors. "The examinations tend to show," said Mr. Bonner when asked for his opinion on the result, "that in order to turn anything you should study something else!"

The thing got into the papers and the methods of Jim Irwin began to attract attention all over the State of Iowa. He was invited to speak during Farmers' Week at Ames by Professor Withers of that institution, and after that great event in his life he began to receive tangible offers from other school districts in the State.

But the Woodruff district was beginning to wake up to the fact that they couldn't afford to lose this genius in their midst. Politics had been mixed up in the opposition to him all along. "I don't care much about parties or politics," the teacher had declared. "I don't know whether I'm a Democrat, a Republican or a Populist. The politicians come out into the farming districts every campaign and get us hayseeds for anything they want. They always have got us. 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." With such radical views he was a dangerous influence—to certain local politicians—and the wives of these gentlemen had been largely responsible for the spreading of antagonism to the new teaching methods.

They Wanted Culture

The whole district could understand, they declared, that it was easier for an ex-farm hand to teach farm-hand knowledge than the learning the schools were set up to teach! They'd had a hard enough time and wanted to give their boys and girls a chance to live easier lives, not to be taught nothing but work. They wanted higher things. They wanted their children to go to high school and the university.

"We must have first things first," Jim had replied to these attacks. "Making a living is the first thing—and the highest. And I will send out from this school pupils better prepared for higher

schools than have ever gone from it, because they will be trained to think in terms of action. They'll be higher people—higher than their parents—higher than their teacher—they'll be efficient farmers and 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."

"It's a fine thing," said Mrs. Bonner, "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?"

Coming His Way

So the Woodruff school district began slowly to change its views in regard to Jim Irwin and when offers began to reach the young man a meeting was called to consider what could be done to hold him. It was a complete triumph for Jim Irwin. Old Man Simms, an outlaw from the Kentucky Mountains, made his first public speech that night—told how miserably his family had been living on their scrub farm before Jim Irwin took hold and showed them all how to adjust themselves to their new surroundings. Others added to the testimony and Jim was finally asked what he wanted the district to do. Even Con Bonner was friendly now. And Old Man Hamm, who had been threatening to move out of the district.

What did he want? First of all he wanted the whole district to meet regularly like this, to boss him in his work for the whole district.

"Then I want you to work out a building scheme for the school," he 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, where Mrs. Bonner can teach them to make bread and pastry, Mrs. Woodruff 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. 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 co-operation 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 practice the best agricultural engineering. So I want a blacksmith and handy man 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 co-operation in that, and a poultry plant somewhere in the district."

Practical Education

"I want a laboratory in which we can work on seeds, pests, soils, feeds and the like. 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. But the money the school will make for you—this new kind of rural school—will be as nothing

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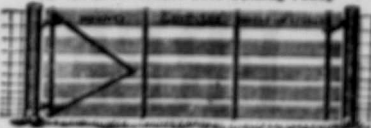
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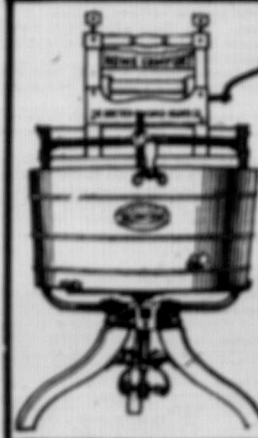
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