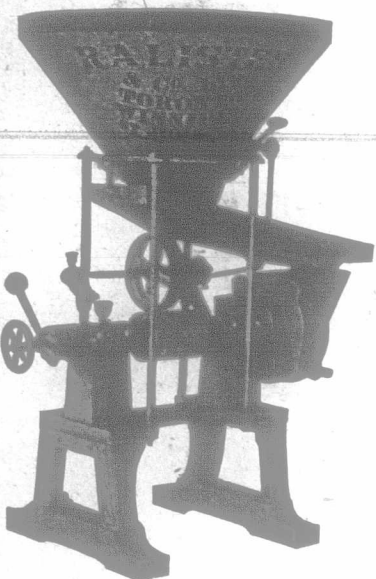




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WHAT'S YOURS?

(Tell us in a few words)

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 dangerous to walk in this way."

"How so?" queried Jim Irwin. "You'd more'n likely git shot up some," replied Mr. Simms, "unless you whooped from the big road."

"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 ourselves 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 cornfields 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.

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 Jennie—and a smaller lad who rejoiced in the name of McGeehee, but was mercifully called Buddy.

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 Jennie—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 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 get 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 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 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 peddling 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 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.

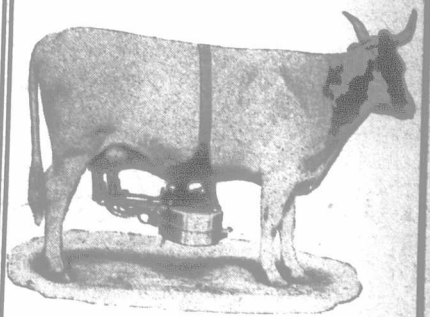
"Any job's as big as the man who holds it down," said her father.

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 italicised 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

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