

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 mountains high for guest and hired help and family melted away in a 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 turkeys 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 turkey 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 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 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 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 coconut—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 the 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, Volunmia, Virginia, Evangeline, Agnes Wickfield 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 the thoughts and dreams



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