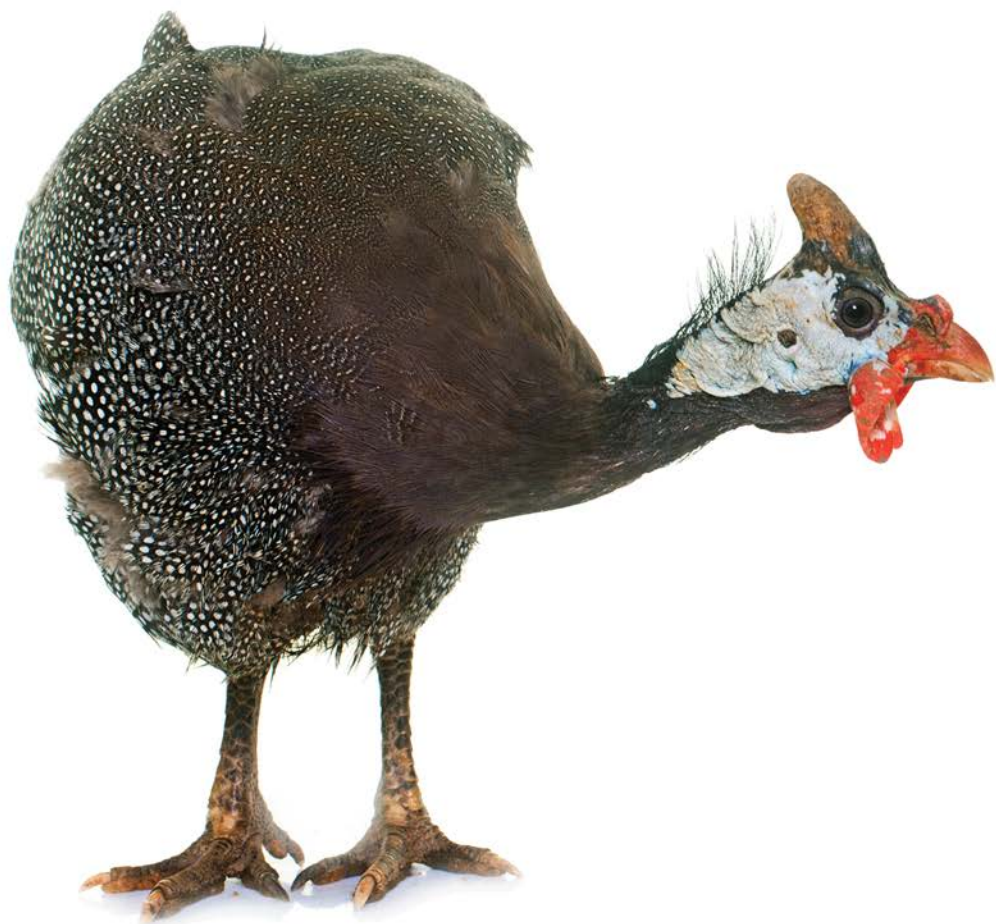


**TALES FROM A
POULTRY FARM**

CLARA DILLINGHAM PIERSON



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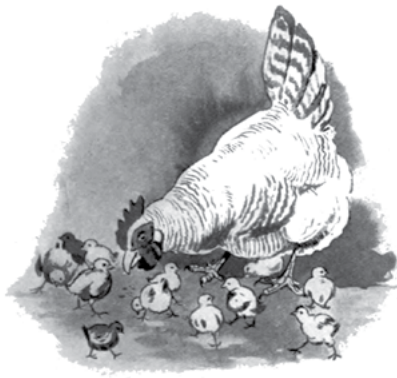


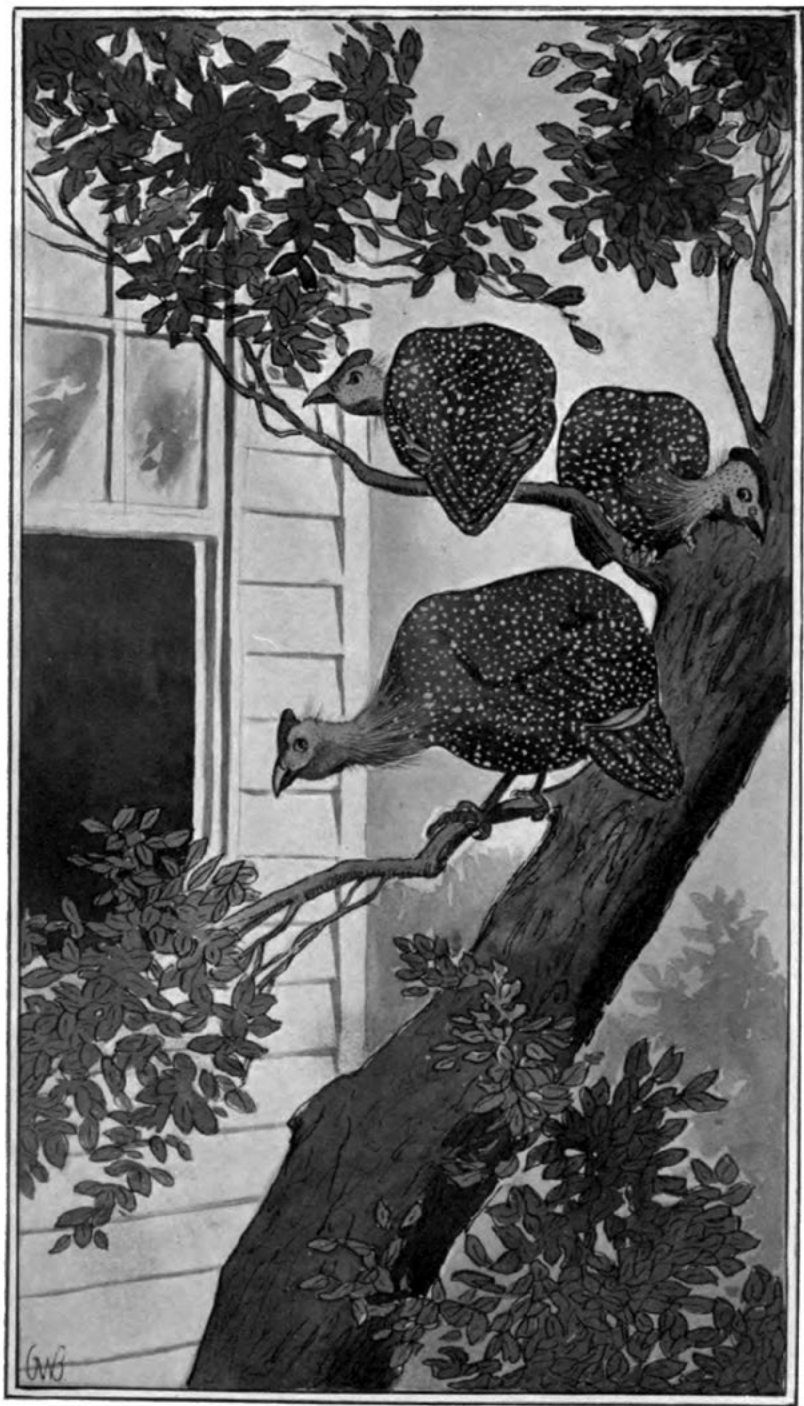
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TALES OF A POULTRY FARM

BY

CLARA DILLINGHAM PIERSON





THEY REACHED QUITE A HIGH BRANCH IN THE APPLE TREE.



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INTRODUCTION

MY DEAR LITTLE READERS:—I have often wondered why there were not more stories written about Chickens and their friends, and now I am glad that there have been so few, for I have greatly enjoyed writing some for you. Did I ever tell you that I cared for my father's Chickens when I was a little girl? That was one of my duties, and the most pleasant of all. It was not until I was older that I became acquainted with Ducks, Geese, and Turkeys, and I always wish that I might have lived on a poultry farm like the one of which I have written, for then I could have learned much more than I did.

You must not think that I understand no language but English. I learned Chicken-talk when I was very young; and in the fall, when the Quails wander through the stubble-fields near my home, I have many visits with them, calling back and forth "Bob White! Bob White!" and other agreeable things which they like to hear. My little boys can talk exactly like Chickens, and sometimes they pretend that they are Chickens, while I talk Turkey to them.

When you have a chance, you must learn these languages. They are often very useful to one. My friend, who drives in his Hens by imitating the warning cry of a Cock, had been

a teacher in a college for several years before he studied poultry-talk, and it helped him greatly.

You see, one must learn much outside of school, as well as inside, in order to be truly well educated. You should never look at poultry and say, "Why, they are only Hens!" or "Why, they are only Ducks!" Quite likely when they look at you they may be thinking, "Why, they are only boys!" or "Why, they are only girls!" Yet if you are gentle and care for them, you and they will learn to think a great deal of each other, and you will win new friends among the feathered people.

Your friend,

CLARA D. PIERSON.

STANTON, MICHIGAN, *March 21, 1904.*



THE FARM IS SOLD

“**Y**ou stupid creature!” cackled the Brown Hen, as she scrambled out of the driveway. “Don’t you know any better than to come blundering along when a body is in the middle of a fine dust bath? How would you like to have me come trotting down the road, just as you were nicely sprawled out in it with your feathers full of dust? I think you would squawk too!”

The Brown Hen drew her right foot up under her ruffled plumage and turned her head to one side, looking severely at Bobs and Snip as they backed the lumber wagon up to the side porch. “I say,” she repeated, “that you would squawk too!”

The Brown Hen’s friends had been forced to run away when she did, but they had already found another warm place in the dust and were rolling and fluttering happily there. “Come over here,” they called to her. “This is just as good a place as the other. Come over and wallow here.”

“No!” answered the Brown Hen, putting down her right foot and drawing up her left. “No! My bath is spoiled for to-day. There is no use in trying to take comfort when you are likely to be run over any minute.” She turned her head

to the other side and looked severely at Bobs and Snip with that eye. The Brown Hen prided herself on her way of looking sternly at people who displeased her. She always wished, however, that she could look at them with both eyes at once. She thought that if this were possible she could stop their nonsense more quickly.

Snip could not say anything just then. He was trying to be polite, and it took all his strength. He was young and wanted to have a good Horse laugh. He could not help thinking how a Horse would look covered with feathers and sprawling in the middle of the road. Of course the Brown Hen had not meant it in exactly that way, but was as unlucky as most people are when they lose their tempers, and amused the very people whom she most wanted to scold.

Bobs was a steady old gray Horse, and he was used to the Brown Hen. "I am sorry that we had to disturb you," he said pleasantly. "You looked very comfortable and I tried to turn out, but the Farmer held the lines so tightly that I could not. The bit cut into my mouth until I could not stand it. You see he wanted to back the wagon up right here, and so he couldn't let us turn out. We'll do better next time if we can."

The Brown Hen let both her feet down and took a few steps forward. "If you couldn't help it, of course I won't say anything more," she remarked, and walked off.

"P-p-p-p-p-p-p!" said Snip, blowing the air out between his lips. "Why did you bother to tell her that? She is so fussy and cross about everything that I wouldn't tell her I was sorry. Why doesn't she just find another place, as the other Hens do?"

"Snip," said Bobs, "I used to talk in that way when I was

a Colt, but I find that it makes things a good deal pleasanter around the place if I take a little trouble to say 'I am sorry' when I have to disturb people. You know how the Farmer does at noon? He comes into the stall when I have finished my dinner, and he gives me a pat and says, 'Come along, old fellow. We'd rather be lazy, but we have to work.' Do you think I'd hang back then? I tell you when I want to balk. It is when the Hired Man leads me out with a jerk. That makes me kick."

"I wonder if she will take her dust bath now?" said Snip.

"Oh no," answered Bobs. "Any other Hen on the farm would, but the Brown Hen will not. She will stalk around all day thinking what a hard time she has and talking about it, but she won't take her dust bath, not although every other fowl on the place should wallow beside her."

"Then I don't see what good it did for you to tell her you were sorry," said Snip, who never liked to confess that he was wrong.

"It did a lot of good," said Bobs, steadily. "Before that she was fussy and cross. Now she is only fussy. Besides, I really had to say something to her, and if it had not been pleasant it would have had to be unpleasant, and then there would have been two cross people instead of one. Quite likely there would have been even more before the day was over, for if each of us had gone on being cross we would have made more of our friends cross, and there is no telling where it would have ended. I'd feel mean, anyhow, if I lost my temper with a Hen. Imagine a great big fellow like me getting cross with a little creature like her, who has only two legs, and can't get any water into her stomach without tipping her head back for each billful."

Snip had wanted to ask many more questions, but so much began to happen that he quite forgot about the Brown Hen. The Farmer and the Hired Man had gone into the house, and now they came out, carrying a cook-stove between them. This they put into the wagon, covering it with rag carpet. The Farmer's Wife came to the door with rolled-up sleeves and a towel tied over her head. She looked tired but happy. In her hands she carried the legs of the stove, which she tucked into the oven.

This was a great event to happen on the quiet farm. Brown Bess and her new Calf came close to the fence which separated their pasture from the driveway, and stood looking on. The Pigs and their mother pressed hard against the walls of their pen on the two sides from which anything could be seen. Each of the nine Pigs thought that he had the poorest place for peeping, so he wriggled and pushed and pushed and wriggled to get a better one, and it ended in none of them seeing anything, because they were not still long enough. Their mother, being so much taller than they, had a crack all to herself and could see very well. "I don't understand why they want to do that," she sighed, as she lay down for another nap. "It was after the snow came that they brought the stove out here. But you can never tell what the people who live in houses and wear clothing will do next! They really seem to like to pick things up and carry them around. They are so silly."

The Gander came along with his wife and the other Geese. He ate grass while they visited with the Hens in the road. The Hens told him all they knew, even what the Barred Plymouth Rock Hen had seen when she walked

along the porch and peeped in at the open kitchen door. Then the Geese waddled back to where the Gander was and told him all the Hens had told them. He listened to it, asking a good many questions, and then said that it was just like Geese to be so interested in other people's business. That made them feel quite ashamed, so they ate a little grass to make themselves feel better, and then stood around to watch the loading of the wagon.

Besides the stove, the kitchen and dining-room furniture was put in, with a few of the largest plants from the sitting-room, and when the Farmer drove off he had the clock beside him on the seat, the churn between his knees, and a big bundle of some sort on his lap.

It suddenly seemed very dull on the farm. One of the Doves flew along above the team for a while and brought back the news that they had turned toward town. There was nothing now to be done but to wait until they returned and then ask as many questions as possible of the Horses.

"I believe that the family is going to move into town," said the White Cock, who always expected sad things to happen. Even when there was not a cloud in the sky, he was sure that it would rain the next day. That was probably because he was careless about what he ate. The Shanghai Cock said that he did not take half gravel enough, and any sensible fowl will tell you that he cannot be truly happy unless he eats enough gravel.

"What will ever become of us," asked the Hens, "if the family moves to town? It is their business to stay here and take care of us."

"Cock-a-doodle-doo!" crowed the Young Cock. "Let

them go. I can have a good enough time in the fields finding my own food.”

The Pullets looked at him admiringly. “But who will take care of us?” they asked.

“I will,” said he, holding his head very high. And that was exactly what they wanted him to say, although each of them would rather have had him say it to her alone.

“There will be nobody left to set traps for the Rats and the Weasels,” said an old Hen, who had seen much of the ways of poultry-yards. “And if our Chickens have the gapes, who will make horse-hair loops and pull the little Worms out of their throats? I have always said that it was well to have people living in the farmhouse.”

“Well,” said the Brown Hen, “I hope that if they go they will take the Horses with them. There is no pleasure in life when one is all the time afraid of being run over. You know what happened this morning, when I had started to take my dust bath. I spoke to the Horses about it afterward, and Bobs was very polite, but that didn’t give me the bath which he and that silly young Snip had spoiled. And I do not feel at all like myself without a bath.”

“Take it now then,” said the Shanghai Cock, who never bothered to be polite. “You ought to be able to get it in while the team is going to town and back.”

“No,” said the Brown Hen, firmly, “it is too far past the time when I should have taken it. I was never one of those Hens who can wallow from morning until night. I need my bath and I ought to have it, but when I have been kept from it so long I simply have to go without it.”

The other Hens said nothing. In nearly every poultry-

yard there is one fowl who is so fussy as to make everybody else uncomfortable. The rest become used to it after a while and do not answer back when she talks so.

In the house, the Farmer's Wife was hurrying to and fro, showing the Hired Man where to put this or calling him to lift that, and every little while something else would be brought out and placed on the side porch. Once a basket of wax fruit was set on a table there. The glass which usually covered it was put to one side, and the Young Cock who had promised to care for the Pullets flew up to peck at it. He knew it was not right, but he got one hurried billful from the side of the reddest peach just as the Hired Man threw an old shoe at him.

"How does it taste?" cried the Geese, who were still hanging around to find out what they could. The Young Cock did not reply, but wiped his bill on the grass for a long time. He feared he would never be able to open it again. The peaches which he had eaten the fall before had not stuck his bill together in this way, and he was now more sure than ever that the people who lived in houses did not know very much. "Such fruit should be thrown away," he said. "It must be eating such peaches as this which keeps the Boy chewing so much of the time. I have watched him, and he carries something in his mouth which he chews and chews and chews, but never swallows. Once his mother made him throw it away, and I should think she would. He waggled his jaws very much like a Cow." Then he strolled off toward the woods to get away from the other fowls.

In the middle of the afternoon the team came back drawing the empty wagon. All the poultry came sauntering

toward the barn, making excuses as they came. "Too hot out in the sunshine," said the Brown Hen. "I really cannot stand it any longer."

"The Geese would come up to the barn," said the Gander, "so I thought I might as well come along."

"Shouldn't wonder if they would throw out some corn when they get through unharnessing," said the Gobbler.

The Ducks never kept up with the others, and they were close to the house when Bobs and Snip stopped there. "How very lucky!" they quacked, for they were a truthful family and not given to making excuses. "We hope you will tell us what all this means. Are the Farmer's people moving away?"

"They are," replied Bobs, who was always good about giving a direct answer to a direct question. "You know the children have been staying in town to go to school ever since last fall, and now their father has sold the farm and is moving into town to be with them."

"Will they take us into town?" asked the Drake.

"Guess not," said Snip. "They are to live over a store."

By this time the disappointed ones who had been waiting in the barn came hurrying along toward the house, where the wagon was being filled once more. It did not take long for the Ducks to tell the news, and then there was great excitement, very great indeed. Brown Bess heard it and licked her Calf more tenderly than ever. She knew that they could not live over a store, and she wondered what would become of them both.

In the Pig-pen the little Pigs were teasing their mother to tell who would bring them their food. It was enough to make her lose her patience to have nine children all asking

questions at the same time, and each saying "Why?" every time that he was given an answer. So it is not to be wondered at that she finally became cross and lay down in the corner with her back to them, pretending to be asleep. To tell the truth, she herself was somewhat worried. She had often called the Farmer's family silly, but she had not minded their habit of carrying things around, when the things that they carried were pails full of delicious food and they were carrying them to the Pig-pen.

It was the poultry who talked the longest about the change, and perhaps this was partly because there were so many of them to talk. Poultry have a very happy time on small farms like this one. It is true that they did not have a good house of their own, and they had but little attention paid to them, yet when the cold winter was once past, there was all the lovely spring, summer, and fall weather in which to be happy. They were not kept in a yard, going wherever they chose, finding plenty to eat, and having no cares, excepting that when a Hen felt like it she laid an egg. She laid it wherever she chose, too, and this was usually somewhere in the barn or woodshed. Sometimes Hens wanted to sit, and then they came off after a while with broods of Chickens. When a Hen had done that, she was usually caught and put under a coop for a few days. She never liked that part of it, and the others always told her that if she would hatch out Chickens she might know what to expect.

The winters were bad, but then the poultry spent their whole time in trying to be comfortable and hardly ever bothered to lay eggs, so it was an easy life after all. No wonder that they talked about the change until after they went to

roost. Although the Farmer was not a thrifty man, he had been kind enough to the creatures on the farm, and they did not want to go away or belong to any one else.

The last word spoken was by a black Hen. She was not Black Spanish or black anything-in-particular. In fact, there was only one of the Hens who knew to what breed she belonged. That was the Barred Plymouth Rock Hen, and it made her very proud. The Black Hen had a temper, and had even been known to peck at the Farmer's Wife. "Do you know what I will do if a new Farmer tries to make me lay my eggs where he wishes?" she said. "I may have to lay the eggs there, but I will smash every one of them if I do."





THE NEW OWNER COMES

ON the morning after the family left, a pale and quiet Man, wearing glasses, came out in a platform wagon to look over the farm. He had been there but a short time when two great loads of furniture appeared down the road. Then the Man took off his coat and helped the drivers carry it all into the little farmhouse. The fowls, who happened to be near enough, noticed that the Man never lifted anything which seemed to be heavy. They noticed, too, that his hands were rather small and very white. Still he acted as though he expected to live on the place. With the others helping him, he put down two carpets and set up two stoves.

The other Men drove away, leaving the single Horse and the platform wagon. The Man washed his hands, put on his coat, and brought a pasteboard box out onto the side porch. He opened it carefully, took out a glass, and drew up a bucketful of water at the well. He filled his glass and carried it back to the porch. Then he began to eat his dinner.

All the farm people had been properly cared for that morning by the Farmer from across the road, and felt sure that he would not see them wanting food, so it was not just a wish for something to eat which made every creature

there come quietly to a place near the side porch. They were certain that they belonged to this Man, and they wanted to find out what he was like.

“I hope he isn’t expecting to milk me,” said Brown Bess. “I don’t believe he could draw a drop from my udders, and he would probably set the stool down on the wrong side anyhow.”

Bobs and Snip were no longer on the farm, having gone to town, to work there with their old master, so the Hog was the next to speak. “I hope he won’t eat that kind of dinner every day,” said she. “It looks to me as though there would be no scraps left to go into my pail.”

“Ugh! Ugh! Stingy!” grunted the little Pigs. “He wants it all for himself!” They did not stop to think that every time food was emptied into their trough, each of them acted as though he wanted every drop and crumb of it for himself.

The Gobbler strutted up and down near the porch, with his feathers on end and his wings dragging. “There is just one thing I like about the Man,” said he. “He does *not* wear a red tie.”

“I can’t tell exactly what is the matter,” said the Gander, “but he is certainly very different from any Man I ever saw before. I think he must belong to a different breed. The things he has on his feet are much blacker and shinier than the Men around here wear, and that stiff and shiny white thing around his neck is much higher. I hope he is not stupid. I cannot bear stupid people.”

“Neither can we,” murmured the Geese. “We really cannot bear them.”

“I fear he does not know very much,” said the Drake,

sadly, "although I must say that I like his face. He looks good and kind, not at all as though he would ever throw stones at people for the fun of seeing them waddle faster. What I do not like is the way in which he acted about getting his water. Any Duck knows that you can tell most about people by the way they take water. The old gourd which the Farmer and his family used so long, hung right on the chain-pump, and yet this Man got a glass and filled it. He did not even drink from it as soon as it was full, but filled and emptied it three times before drinking. That is not what I call good sense."

"Did you notice how he put on his coat before he began to eat?" asked the White Cock. "I never saw our Farmer do that except in very cold weather, and I have been close to the kitchen door a great many times when they sat down to the table."

"It must be that he was not very hungry," said one of the Hens, "or he would never have taken so much time to begin eating. Besides, you can see that he was not, by the size of his mouthfuls. He did not take a single bite as big as he could, and you will never make me believe that a person is hungry when he eats in that way." This was the Hen who usually got the largest piece from the food-pan and swallowed it whole to make sure of it, before any of the other fowls could overtake her and get it away.

Then the Barred Plymouth Rock Hen spoke. "I like him," she said. "I am sure that he belongs to a different breed, but I think it is a good one. I remember hearing somebody say, when I was a Chicken, that it was well for fowls to have a change of ground once in a while, and that it would make

them stronger. I believe that is why he is here. You can tell by watching him work that he is not strong, and he may be here for a change of ground. I shall certainly befriend him, whatever the rest of you do. We people of fine families should stand by each other." Then she strolled over toward the Man, lifting her feet in her most aristocratic way and perking her head prettily.

The Man smiled. He broke a piece from the slice of bread which he was eating, and sprinkled it lightly with salt from a tiny bottle. This piece he divided into two portions and held one out at arm's length toward the Barred Plymouth Rock Hen. She had never before been invited to eat from anybody's hand, and she was really afraid to do it. Her skin felt creepy, as though her feathers were about to stand on end. Still, she had just said that she meant to befriend the new Man, and that he and she were of finer breeds than most people. Here was her chance to prove her words, and she was not the sort of Hen to show the white feather.

She stood erect in all her Plymouth Rock dignity, and ate the bread in five pecks. Then she stooped and wiped her bill daintily on the grass at the Man's feet before strolling away again.

You can imagine what excitement this made among the poultry. The Gobbler, the Gander, and the Drake did not wish to appear too much interested, and some of the Cocks acted in the same way, but the mothers and sisters of the families talked of nothing else for a long time. It is true that the Barred Plymouth Rock Hen had not been very popular on the farm, most of the Hens insisting that she put on airs, but now they could not help admiring her courage and grace.

Two or three of them even thought she might be right in saying that it was a good thing to come from a fine family. The Cocks had never thought her airy. They always told the other Hens that it was just their notion, and that she was really a very clever and friendly Hen.

As for the Man, he seemed much pleased by what had happened. He put his hat on the back of his head and smiled. "That is a good beginning," he said to himself. "To eat bread and salt together means that we will always be friends, and I would rather break bread with respectable poultry than with some Men that I know."

Late in the afternoon, the Man harnessed his Horse, whom he called Brownie, to the same platform wagon in which he had come, gave one parting look all around the house and yard, turned the key in the side door, and drove off toward town. "What next?" asked all the poultry.

If you had ever been a Hen or a Duck or a Turkey or a Goose (for although you may have acted like a perfect Goose, you probably never have been one), you would know just how worried the poultry on this particular farm were, after the new Man had driven away in the platform wagon. It seemed quite certain that he had gone to town to bring out his family, and it mattered a great deal to them what his family were like. A single Boy of the wrong kind could make all the fowls on the place unhappy, and the others agreed with the Gobbler when he said, "There is one thing worse than a Girl in a red dress, and that is a Boy who throws stones."

It was a very sad company which wandered around the farmyard, picking here and there, and really eating but little.

The White Cock would keep talking about the dreadful things which might happen, and reminded his friends that there might be two Boys, or three, or four, perhaps even five in the family! The other fowls soon tried to get away from him, and then they were often so unfortunate as to meet the Brown Hen, who was fussing and worrying for fear the Man would shut her up in a small yard.

At last the Shanghai Cock lost his temper, as he was very apt to do, and said that there were some fowls he would like to have shut up. This displeased both the White Cock and the Brown Hen, because the Shanghai Cock had looked at both of them when he spoke, using one eye for each, and they did not know what to say. They thought from the mean little cackling laugh which the others gave, that he might have wished them to shut up their bills. Then they did the very best thing that they could have done, going off together to the pasture, where each could talk gloomily to the other without annoying anybody else.

When Brownie came jogging back to the farm, the platform wagon looked very gay. On the back seat sat a pleasant looking Woman with a fat Baby on her lap. Beside her sat a Little Girl with brown hair. On the seat beside the Man sat another Little Girl, dressed exactly like the first one and just as large as she, but with golden hair. They were all laughing and talking and pointing at different things as they drove into the yard.

“It is not much like our other home,” said the Man, as he set the Baby on his feet beside the steps, and turned to help the Woman out.

“That does not matter if we can be comfortable and well

here," she answered with a smile. "It will be a lovely place for the children, and I believe it will make you strong again."

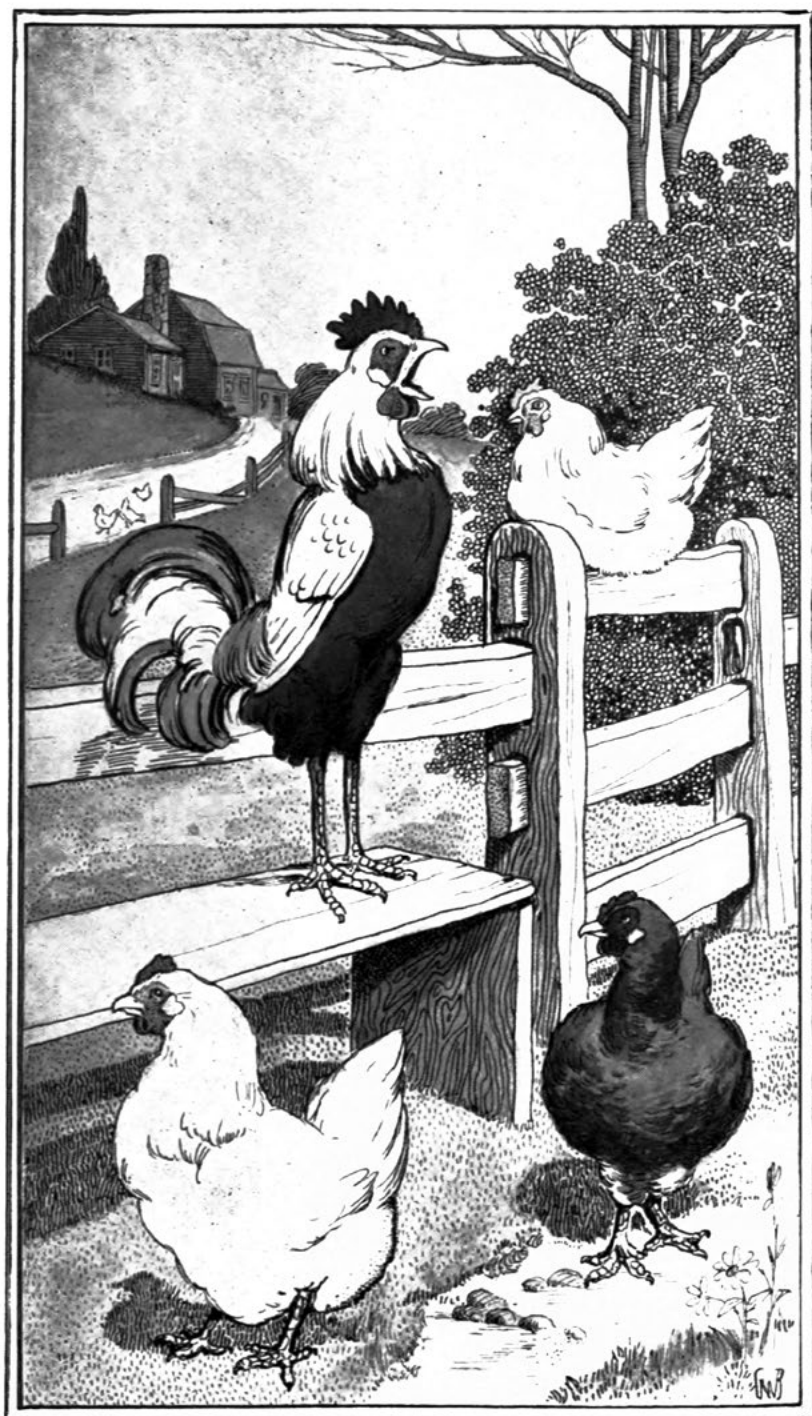
"Cock-a-doodle-doo!" said the young Cock from the top rail of the fence. He did it only to show off, but the children, who had never lived on a farm, and so could not understand poultry-talk very well, felt sure that he said, "How-do-you-all-do?" and thought him exceedingly polite. The Baby started after him at once, and fell flat before he had taken six steps.

The Man, the Woman, and the two Little Girls all started to pick up the Baby, who was so wound up in his long cloak that he could not rise. Brownie looked around in a friendly way and stood perfectly still, instead of edging off toward the barn as some Horses would have done, while the Baby just rolled over on his back and laughed.

"Gobble-gobble-gobble!" said the Gobbler. "I think this family will suit us very well."

The Barred Plymouth Rock Hen was too polite a fowl ever to say "I told you so," but she stood very straight and chuckled softly to herself, so the rest could know that she was pleased with what she saw, and felt more certain than ever that the Man and his family were no common people.

All the family went to the barn with the Man while he unharnessed Brownie and gave him his supper. The children had a happy time on the hay, and, before they went into the house together, the Man put some corn in a pan and let them scatter it by the door for the poultry. "They have been running loose in the fields," he said, "and they may not need it all, but we will give it to them anyway, and to-morrow I will study my book of directions and see how they should be fed at this season."



“COCK-A-DOODLE-DOO!” SAID THE YOUNG COCK.

The children scattered the corn, the Woman kneeling down with her arm around the Baby, to keep him from falling over each time that he threw a few kernels. The Barred Plymouth Rock Hen was the first to come forward to pick it up, and the Man told his wife how he and she had eaten bread and salt at noon.

Then the Woman said: "Come, we must go into the house! I should have been there working long ago, but I wanted to see the children make friends with the poultry."

As the door of the house closed behind its new inmates, the Barred Plymouth Rock Hen could not help looking at the Shanghai Cock. "Yes," he said, for he knew what she meant, "I like your friends very much. They seem to have some sense." Then the Barred Plymouth Rock Hen was satisfied, for she was fond of the Shanghai Cock, and praise from him was praise indeed.





THE FIRST SPRING CHICKENS ARE HATCHED

IT was only a few days after the new family settled in the house that the Man drove out from town with a queer-looking box-like thing in his light wagon. This he took out and left on the ground beside the cellarway. When he had unharnessed Brownie and let him loose in the pasture, he came back and took the crate off from the box. Then the poultry who were standing around saw that it was not at all an ordinary box. Indeed, as soon as the Man had fastened a leg to each corner, they thought it rather more like a fat table than a box.

While the Man was examining it, he kept turning over the pages of a small book which he took from some place inside the table. The Geese thought it quite a senseless habit of the Man's, this looking at books when he was at work. They had never seen the Farmer do so, and they did not understand it. When Geese do not understand anything, you know, they always decide that it is very silly and senseless. There are a great many things which they do not understand, so, of course, there are a great many which they think extremely silly.

The Little Girls and their mother stood beside the Man as he looked at the book and the fat new table. He said something to one of them and she went into the house. When she came out she had a small basketful of eggs. The Man took some and put them into one part of the table. Then he took them out again and put them into the basket. That disgusted the Brown Hen, who was watching it all.

“I am always fair,” she said, “and I am willing to say that I have been treated very well by this Man, very well indeed, but it is most distressing and unpleasant to a sensible fowl like myself to have to see so much utter foolishness on a farm where I have spent my life.”

“Then why don’t you shut your eyes?” asked the Shanghai Cock, with his usual rudeness, and after that the Brown Hen could say nothing more. This was a great relief to the Barred Plymouth Rock Hen, who did not at all understand what was going on, but would have tried to defend the Man if the Brown Hen had asked her about it.

After a while the Woman helped the Man carry the queer-looking object into the cellar, and then the poultry strolled off to talk it all over. They heard nothing more about the fat table until the next morning. Then the Gander, who had been standing for a long time close to the cellarway, waddled off toward the barn with the news. “They use that table to keep eggs in,” said he. “Now isn’t that just like the Man? I saw him put in a great many eggs, and he took them all out of little cases which he brought from town this morning. I don’t see why a Man should bring eggs out from town, when he can get plenty in the barn by hunting for them. Do you?”

“He won’t find any of mine in the barn,” said a Hen Turkey. “I lay one every day, but I never put them there.” When she had finished speaking, she looked around to see if the Gobbler had heard her. Luckily he had not. If he had, he would have tried to find and break her eggs.

“That was not the only silly thing the Man did,” said the Gander, who intended to tell every bit of news he had, in spite of interruptions.

“Probably not,” said the White Cock, who was feeling badly that morning, and so thought the world was all wrong.

“No indeed,” said the Gander, raising his voice somewhat, so that the poultry around might know he had news of importance to tell. “No indeed! The Man marked every egg with a sort of stick, which he took from his pocket. It was sharp at both ends, and sometimes he marked with one end and sometimes with the other. He put a black mark on one side of each egg and a red mark on the other.”

“Red!” exclaimed the Gobbler. “Ugh!”

“Yes, red,” said the Gander. “But the worst and most stupid part of it all was when he lighted a little fire in something that he had and fastened it onto the table.”

“What a shame!” cried all the Geese together. “It will burn up those eggs, and every fowl knows that it takes time to get a good lot of them together. He may not have thought of that. He cannot know very much, for he probably never lived on a farm before. He may think that eggs are to be found in barns exactly as stones are found in fields.”

All this made the Barred Plymouth Rock Hen very sad. She could not help believing what she had heard, and still she hoped they might yet find out that the Man

had a good reason for marking and then burning up those eggs. She was glad to think that none of hers were in the lot. She was not saving them for Chickens just then, but she preferred to think of them as being eaten by the Little Girls or the fat Baby who lived in the house. She decided to begin saving for a brood of Chickens at once. She wanted to say something kind about the Man, or explain what he was doing when he lighted that fire. However, she could not, so she just kept her bill tightly shut and said nothing at all. This also showed that she was a fine Hen, for the best people would rather say nothing at all about others than to say unkind things.

It was a long time before the friendly Barred Plymouth Rock Hen knew what was going on in the cellar. She was greatly discouraged about the Man. She had tried as hard as she could to make the other poultry believe in him, and had thought she was succeeding, but now this foolishness about the fat table and the eggs seemed likely to spoil it all. She found a good place for laying, in a corner of the carriage house on some old bags, and there she put all her eggs. She had decided to raise a brood of Chickens and take comfort with them, leaving the Man to look out for himself as well as he could. She still believed in him, but she was discouraged.

Several of the other Hens also stole nests and began filling them, so on the day when the Man hunted very thoroughly for eggs and found these stolen nests, taking all but one egg from each, there were five exceedingly sad Hens. You would think they might have been discouraged, yet they were not. A Hen may become discouraged about

anything else in the world, but if she wants to sit, she sticks to it.

That very day was an exciting one in the cellar. When the Man came down after breakfast to look at the eggs in the fat table he found them all as he had left them, with the black-marked side uppermost. He took them out to air for a few minutes, and then began putting them back with the red-marked side uppermost. As he lifted them, he often put one to his ear, or held it up to the light. He had handled the eggs over in this way twice a day for about three weeks. A few of them had small breaks in the shell, and through one of these breaks there stuck out the tiny beak of an unhatched Chicken. When he found an egg that was cracked, or one in which there seemed to be a faint tap-tap-tapping, he put it apart from the others.

When this was done, the Man ran up the inside stairs. In a few minutes he returned with the Baby in his arms and the rest of the family following. The Woman had her sleeves rolled up and flour on her apron. The Little Girls were dressed in the plain blue denim frocks which they wore all the time, except when they went to town. Then all five of them watched the cracked eggs, and saw the tiny Chickens who were inside chip away the shell and get ready to come out into the great world. The Woman had to leave first, for there came a hissing, bubbling sound from the kitchen above, which made her turn and run up-stairs as fast as she could.

Then what a time the Man had! The Baby in his arms kept jumping and reaching for the struggling Chickens, and the two Little Girls could hardly keep their hands away from them. "Let me help just one get out of his shell," said



RETURNED WITH THE BABY IN HIS ARMS.

the brown-haired Little Girl. "It is *so* hard for such small Chickens."

"No," said the Man, and he said it very patiently, although they had already been begging like this for some time. "No, you must not touch one of them. If you were Hens, you would know better than to want to do such a thing. If you should take the shell off for a Chicken, he would either die or be a very weak little fellow. Before long each will have a fine round doorway at the large end of his shell, through which he can slip out easily."

Some of the Chickens worked faster than others, and some had thin shells to break, while others had quite thick ones, so when the first Chicken was safely out many had not even poked their bills through. As soon as the first was safely hatched, the Man took away the broken shell and closed the fat table again. Then he waved his hat at the Little Girls and said "Shoo! Shoo!" until they laughed and ran out-of-doors.

All that day there were tiny Chickens busy in the incubator (that was what the Man called the fat table), working and working and working to get out of their shells. Each was curled up in a tight bunch inside, and one would almost think that he could not work in such a position. However, each had his head curled around under his left wing, and pecked with it there. Then, too, as he worked, each pushed with his feet against the shell, and so turned very slowly around and around inside it. That gave him a chance, you see, to peck in a circle and so break open a round doorway. As they came out, the Chickens nestled close to each other or ran around a bit and got acquainted, talking in soft little "Cheep-cheep-cheeps."

They were very happy Chickens, for they were warm and had just about light enough for eyes that had seen no light at all until that day. It is true that they had no food, but one does not need food when first hatched, so it is not strange that they were happy. It is also true that they had no mother, yet even that did not trouble them, for they knew nothing at all about mothers. Probably they thought that Chickens were always hatched in incubators and kept warm by lamps.

The next morning, when the Barred Plymouth Rock Hen was sitting on her one egg in the carriage house, thinking sadly of her friend, the Man, that same Man came slowly up to her. The Little Girls were following him, and when they reached the doorway they stood still with their toes on a mark which the Man had made. They wanted very much to see what he was about to do, yet they minded, and stood where they had been told, although they did bend forward as far as they could without tumbling over.

The Man knelt in front of the sitting Hen, and gently uncovered the basket he held. The Hen could hardly believe her ears, for she heard the soft "cheep-cheep-cheep" of newly hatched Chickens. She tried to see into the basket. "There! There!" said the Man, "I have brought you some children." Then he lifted one at a time and slipped it into her nest, until she had twelve beautiful downy white Chickens there.

"Well! Well! Well!" clucked the Hen. And she could not think of another thing to say until the Man had gone off to the barn. He had taken her egg, but she did not care about that. All she wanted was those beautiful Chickens. She fluffed up her feathers and spread out her wings until she covered the whole twelve, and then she was the happi-

est fowl on the place. The Man came back to put food and water where she could reach both without leaving her nest, and even then she could think of nothing to say.

After he went away, a friend came strolling through the open doorway. This Hen was also sitting, but had come off the nest to stretch her legs and find food. It was a warm April day, and she felt so certain that the eggs would not chill, that she paused to chat.

“Such dreadful luck!” she cackled. “You must never try to make me think that this Man is friendly. He has left me only one of the eggs I had laid, and now I have to start all over for a brood of Chickens, or else give up. The worst of it is that I feel as though I could not lay any more for a while.”

“Don’t be discouraged,” said the Barred Plymouth Rock Hen. “I had only one egg to sit on last night, and this morning I have a whole brood of Chickens.”

“Where did they come from?” asked the visiting Hen, in great excitement.

“That is what I don’t know,” replied the happy mother. “The Man brought them to me just now, and put food and water beside my nest. I have asked and asked them who their mother was, and they say I am the first Hen they ever saw. Of course that cannot be so, for Chickens are not blind at first, like Kittens, but it is very strange that they cannot remember about the Hen who hatched them. They say that there were many more Chickens where they came from, but no Hen whatever.”

The White Cock stood in the doorway. “Do you know where my Chickens were hatched?” asked the Barred Plymouth Rock Hen.

“Do I know?” said he, pausing to loosen some mud from one of his feet (he did not understand the feelings of a mother, or he would have answered at once). “I saw the Man bring a basketful of Chickens over this way a while ago. He got them from the cellar. The door was open and I stood on it. Of course I was not hanging around to find out what he was doing. I simply happened to be there, you understand.”

“Yes, we understand all about it,” said the Hens, who knew the White Cock as well as anybody.

“I happened to be there,” he repeated, “and I saw the Man take the Chickens out of the fat table. There was no Hen in sight. It must be a machine for hatching Chickens. I think it is dreadful if the Chickens on this farm have to be hatched in a cellar, without Hens. Everything is going wrong since the Farmer left.”

The Barred Plymouth Rock Hen and her caller looked at each other without speaking. They remembered hearing the White Cock talk in that way before the Farmer left. He was one of those fowls who are always discontented.

“I am going back to my nest,” said the visiting Hen. “Perhaps the Man will bring me some Chickens too.”

The Barred Plymouth Rock Hen sat on her nest in the carriage house, eating and drinking when she wished, and cuddling her children under her feathers. She was very happy, and thought it a beautiful world. “I would rather have had them gray,” she said to herself, “but if they couldn’t be gray, I prefer white. They are certainly Plymouth Rock Chickens anyway, and the color does not matter, if they are good.”

She stood up carefully and took a long look at her family. “I couldn’t have hatched out a better brood myself,” she said.

“It is a queer thing for tables to take to hatching Chickens, but if that is the way it is to be done on this farm, it will save me a great deal of time and be a good thing for my legs. It is lucky that this Man came here. The Farmer who left would never have thought of making a table sit on eggs and hatch them.”

