

"Catherine," he said presently, "this morning I must tell you that love-story of mine, of which you have never yet let me speak. I want you to know it, and it cannot hurt you now."

"No, it cannot hurt me. Tell me," said Catherine, with her hand on his arm.

"Do you remember that morning, a year ago, when you took a letter of mine to post at Grantham? That letter was to have altered my life. It was to ask the only woman I ever loved—but you—to run away from her father and mother and become my wife. There was urgent need of haste, for they were taking her abroad, and with them was going the man they wanted her to marry. She had written, beseeching me to help her; and I planned it all, and wrote and told her. I planned the hour and place of meeting; I asked for a word in reply, and it never came; I went to the meeting-place, and she was not there—she was gone, and from that day to this I have never heard from her. In September she married the man her parents wished. My poor little Mary! I often wonder what her life is now.

Catherine, what is the matter?" For he felt her grasp tighten painfully on his arm; and turning, he saw a white face and trembling lips.

"Mary, did you say? Not Lady Mary Eldon!"

"Yes, dear. What of it?"

"George, will you ever forgive me? I did not guess—I never knew; it was only when I came back here in November that I found I had left a letter in my pocket that day. I found it there. I had never seen your writing then—I did not know it was yours. I thought it was too late to do any good by speaking of it, and I burnt it just as it was. It was directed to Lady Mary Eldon."

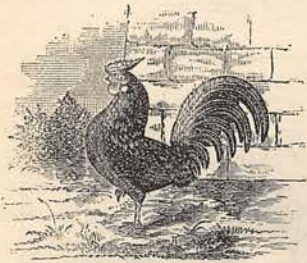
Catherine's agonised eyes watched every look which passed over his face—anger, sorrow, pity, but there was not even a glance at her.

"George!" she cried at last, unable any longer to bear his silence.

Then he turned and gravely kissed her.

"The past is dead and buried, Catherine, and my sorrow lies with it. Dear, do you not remember that to-morrow is to be our wedding-day?"

THE FAMILY POULTRY-YARD.



IN the early days of our residence in the neighbourhood of Bristol, tradesmen had hardly developed the system of calling regularly for orders, and shops had not crept up very near to Redland, so that

housekeepers had either to go or send into the city for what they required. It was customary also in those unsophisticated times for ladies to go down on Saturdays accompanied by a servant to the market, where they laid in supplies of eggs, butter, poultry, and even meat, for several days; and if all these comestibles were too heavy for the maid, there were plenty of girls and women, upright as darts, with hands on their hips and great baskets on their heads, ready to walk up the hill with a load that would now-a-days be thought enough for a donkey. We children were highly delighted when we were allowed to be of the party, and it really was pretty, and almost picturesque, on turning out of the bustle of Wine Street to see the stalls heaped with fresh fruit and vegetables, decorated with posies of common flowers backed by boughs of myrtle, and presided over by Welshwomen from Cardiff or Swansea, in the traditional low-crowned hats over the whitest of cap-borders, and the brightest of scarlet cloaks. Farm and dairy produce was much cheaper bought in this manner than it can be after passing through the hands of several dealers, the last of whom brings it to your very door and must, of course, be paid directly or indirectly for his time and trouble. But even under

these circumstances the price of eggs and poultry vexed our mother's prudent soul, for she had been accustomed to see the former brought in by the score, and to have the latter always ready for use without the apparent outlay of a penny. She often told father that her hobby was to have a poultry-yard once more, though she could not see her way to it at Redland. It was in vain that he offered her a site down in the quarry for a fowl-house, for she invariably shook her head and said it was too cold, and she could not bear to keep creatures without making them comfortable and happy. It came to pass, however, one day that in walking round the house to see where some climbing roses should be planted she put her hand on the wall, and finding it remarkably warm, remembered that it was just where the kitchen chimney came, and told father that if he would let her have a house and run for her fowls just along there, she thought they would do almost as well as in the Irish and Scotch cottages where they roost on the rafters, and lay daily eggs in cosy warm corners near the fire.

There was not much difficulty about the construction of the kind of shelter required for her feathered friends, for there was an unusually broad well-made gravel path along by the wall, and leading nowhere but to the one forming the outer boundary of our garden, which she said was the very best sort of run for them. At each end of this a small wooden shed was erected, with a sloping roof covered with felt, which received a coating of tar on the outside, so as to make it impervious to wet. A few broad perches were put up in the interior, not too far from the ground, and the space between the two sheds was enclosed by fine wire netting nailed to posts, a rather coarser netting being put

over the top lest the fowls should fly over and prove themselves bad gardeners. A heap of sand was thrown down in the middle for them to burrow in. The preparations were then complete. Father thought he should like to get some gold and silver spangled Hamburgs, but mother said they laid such small eggs, and were delicate into the bargain. Spanish and Polish fowls were then proposed, and an offer made of a couple of Cochins—then in the very height of their renown; but mother was determined to go to work in an economical manner, and would not hear of any but the old-fashioned homely Dorkings, and even these she wished to get in her own way. So the next Saturday she went down to the old woman in the market with whom she usually dealt, and consulted with her on the possibility of bringing her some young Dorkings from near Swansea—one cock, three hens, and three pullets—which duly arrived in a hamper the following week, and received a warm welcome from every member of the family. Chanticleer himself cost half-a-crown, the hens two shillings each, and the pullets eighteenpence, so they were a fair average price, neither very dear nor extraordinarily cheap.

Cook received orders to boil our potatoes in their jackets from that time forth, that the fowls might have the skins to eat, a stock of damaged rice was laid in, and some barley bought, on which father observed slyly that he feared the eggs would be worth at least sixpence apiece. Mother laughingly reminded him that she never made slighting remarks about any of his favourites, and time would prove what good economy her process of feeding would be.

The very day after the Dorkings had been installed in their new quarters five eggs were laid, and as one of the hens and one pullet soon showed decided signs of wishing to sit, corners were arranged for them in one of the sheds with two or three bricks, inside which were put some finely-sifted coal-ashes and a little straw. The pullet was allowed nine eggs to sit on, and the hen as many as fifteen. I thought the ashes were very queer material for a bed, and said so, but mother showed me how soft they were, and pointed out that if the hen disturbed the eggs at all in getting on or off her nest, they would be far less likely to break in such a fine, powdery receptacle than if they were liable to be knocked against each other in straw alone. How anxiously we all awaited the hatching of the two broods, may be better imagined than described; and how busy we were about the time they were expected, will be understood by all who have had similar interests and occupations. We found four baskets, put hay and wool into them to receive the first arrivals, and were extremely interested one day when mother found that an egg had been chipped just a little by the chick inside, though when she went to look at it a few hours later it seemed to have ceased its efforts to escape, so she concluded that some of its feathers had stuck to the shell, and it would be necessary to give it some assistance. This was a delicate operation, for she took the egg in her hand, broke away a piece or two of shell with the help of a small pair of scissors, and then dipping her finger into some

warm water, applied it to the part where the feathers seemed to stick, so as to dissolve the gluey substance which caused them to adhere to the membranous lining of the shell. At this point she thought it best to leave well alone, and returned the chick with the remnant of its prison to the nest, where it finished extricating itself before evening, and became the first denizen of one of our baskets by the side of the kitchen fire. The broods were completely hatched out in the course of twenty-four hours, and the first food they had was hard-boiled egg chopped small and mixed with bread soaked in milk. This diet, however, was only continued for three days or so, and then followed by a course of grits, oatmeal, and boiled barley, with a little grass chopped up and added to it, which was all eaten with the greatest gusto.

Tom had been employed for several days with four old wine-cases under mother's own direction, and the method adopted was this. One of them minus part of its lid was set up on end, and the other one, divested of its bottom and one end as well as the lid, was secured to it. Some wire netting was fixed over these three sides, and over the upper part of the case that retained a portion of its lid; and when the whole structure was put on the grass, one could see that there was a snug house with dry boarded floor for the hen and her chicks to retire to, and a small turfy yard in which they could disport themselves during the day, while in case of rain, from which they were sure to take refuge in the interior, the whole affair was easily carried into an outhouse or the potting-shed. These were very rough-looking coops, but mother maintained that they answered every purpose in the best manner and at the least cost, and since she reared every bird of both broods, every one had to acknowledge that her success was perfect. Jennie and I used to collect worms and insects of various sorts wherewith to feed both the juvenile and adult poultry, and were rewarded for these small services with eggs for breakfast.

Mother did not care to keep the chicks intended for table for any length of time, so when they were about three months old she selected those which had the shortest legs and kept them in the coop, giving them plenty of clean water, soaked or boiled Indian corn, and a kind of cake which they relished and thrived upon. It was made of coarse oatmeal, moist sugar, milk, and any suet or other kitchen fat that cook had to spare. It would have been very poor economy to use this dainty food till it was quite stale, but after keeping it for some days it was crumbled and put into the coop, in quantities of about a quarter of a pint for each bird. Some rough, sandy gravel was also given them to peck at, and in a few weeks they were delicately instead of grossly fat, and father declared he had never eaten nicer chicken in his life. Mother was peculiarly proud of her good luck, because she had always been told that Dorkings, useful as they might be when grown up, were rather delicate as young chicks; but a time came when she was less fortunate, and glad to admit fowls of other breeds into her little poultry-yard.

Among these were some black Polands without combs, the place of which ornaments was taken by a tuft of pretty white feathers. They proved to be everlasting layers, and we reckoned that each hen produced on an average about 120 eggs a year, though mother fancied they did not contain as much nourishment as those of many other kinds.

Father once brought home a couple of Malays, large handsome creatures standing nearly three feet high, and weighing as much as ten pounds apiece. Unhappily they were very pugnacious, and being allowed one winter day to have a run in the garden, the cock caught sight of his own reflection in the scullery-window, and pecked at it so vigorously as to break the glass. There were plenty of charges against him before, but this achievement so completely filled up the measure of his iniquities that he was sold the next week, though his spouse was retained and added to the harem of a Spanish signor. Her eggs were after that time reserved for hatching, and the chicks they produced fattened for eating, as they were large, tender, and juicy.

Mother became an ultimate convert to the superior qualities of the Cochin Chinas, because they are such good layers, provide their owners with eggs at all times of the year, and are the parents of the hardiest and healthiest young chicks that ever gladdened the heart of an amateur hen-wife. She had one particular partridge-coloured hen which was a perfect wonder. She was remarkably tame, and would at any time allow herself to be taken up without fluttering. As she was so great a favourite she was usually allowed to have her nest in a shed at the back of our little greenhouse, where she had the benefit of the heating apparatus, and her exploits one year were so marvellous that we kept a chronicle of her doings. On the 19th of January she began sitting, and brought out eleven chicks on the 9th of February, only seven of which were reared, because, warm as their quarters were, Jack Frost reigned supreme out of doors, and made his unwelcome presence felt within, in spite of all our efforts to exclude him. Just one month after they were hatched she began laying again, giving us thirty eggs in thirty-three days. Then she evidently wished to sit, and on the 12th of April was put on seventeen eggs, from which she brought up a family of fourteen. Nearly a month later she began to lay once more, and produced an egg daily for nearly three weeks, and after another day or two sat on fifteen. Only twelve of these were hatched, and unfortunately they had the gapes and only nine lived. The summer went on, and Mrs. Cochin enjoyed herself and her liberty for a few weeks, but began to lay again on the 16th of August. By the 17th of September there were twenty-seven of her eggs, and four days after laying the last of them, mother sat her on fifteen, which she covered for twenty-two days, bringing out only ten chicks. They grew up healthy and well, and on the 18th of November this indefatigable hen began laying for the fifth time, and produced twenty-five eggs in a day or two less than a month. I will not follow our poultry records into her next year's achievements, but just

say that the sum-total was that in less than twelve months she laid 128 eggs and reared forty chickens. I have seen equally remarkable results recorded in the *Live Stock Journal*: I mention this in case any reader is inclined to doubt my figures.

We once gave mother on her wedding-day a couple of Brahma-Pootras, which were then the latest novelties in the poultry line, and she was soon persuaded that they united the virtues of every other kind of fowl she had ever met with.

I mentioned just now that we lost some little Cochins with the gapes, and they were far from being the only victims to this complaint among our feathered tribes, though mother saved a good many by opening their beaks and just as they drew in their breath inserting a feather dipped in sweet oil into the windpipe, turning it cleverly round once or twice, and then withdrawing it. Several of the small worms which are the cause of the disease would adhere to the feather and thus be removed, others were presumably killed by the oil, but at all events the little creature was relieved. Some people puff tobacco-smoke down their throats when they have this ailment, and others cram snuff or salt into their mouths, but these seem very cruel measures to adopt with a bird already half suffocated with the worms which block up its air-tubes. A more modern and much milder remedy, said to be very efficacious, is to put a little camphor in the drinking-water.

We never lost any fowls while moulting, and mother thought it was because their home was so nice and warm and kept so very clean. She used at such times to make them some bread pills with a grain or two of cayenne pepper in each every morning, and throw them down one at a time till she thought every fowl had had its proper share, and she gave them the old-fashioned tonic of a rusty nail in their drinking-water. They always had plenty of green meat from the garden, and an occasional handful of sunflower-seed.

Whenever we had any oysters Tom used to hold a few of the shells in a clear fire with the tongs, and when thus calcined they were thrown in among the fowls, who pecked at them with avidity, being taught by Nature the value of this sort of pabulum; though whether they understood that the lime entered into the composition of their egg-shells must be left to wiser heads than mine to determine.

Mother made a point of keeping an account of what the fowls cost her in the first instance, as well as for their food, and set over against it the value of the eggs and poultry used in the household at current market prices. She considered that her gains were very satisfactory, for not only had she a nice balance to show on the right side, of which she was very proud, but we certainly used more eggs and had more fowls at table than we should have done if they had had to be bought for hard cash. Of course they took the places of other things, so mother used to close her poultry-book with a smile and say that, however much the rest of us might appreciate the varieties introduced into our bill of fare, no one but herself realised the actual addition made by her feathered favourites to the family income.

E. C.