

# The Chickens' Parade.



A STORY FOR CHILDREN.

BY CANNING WILLIAMS.

**N**O, old fellow," I said, addressing my dog; "not to-night." Philo dropped his tail, and in his expressive eyes appeared a look of disappointment, which made me regret my words. I opened the drawer in which I keep my heavy boots and my leggings, and stood looking at them half-inclined to don them, and face, for my dog's sake, the drenching rain. But the brightly-burning fire and the easy-chair were magnets too powerful for me to overcome; so the drawer was closed, and, instead of heavy boots and leather leggings, I donned my comfortable carpet slippers.

"No, old boy," I repeated, as Philo placed his head upon my knee, and looked appealingly into my face, "it is too wet for a run to-night. Cold, wind, hail, and snow I can stand well enough, but a drenching drizzle is too much for me."

Just here, my housekeeper entered the room.

"Was your eggs cooked as you like, Mr. Smith?" she asked, in her kind but ungrammatical way.

"They were cooked, as you always cook my eggs, Mrs. Jones—perfectly."

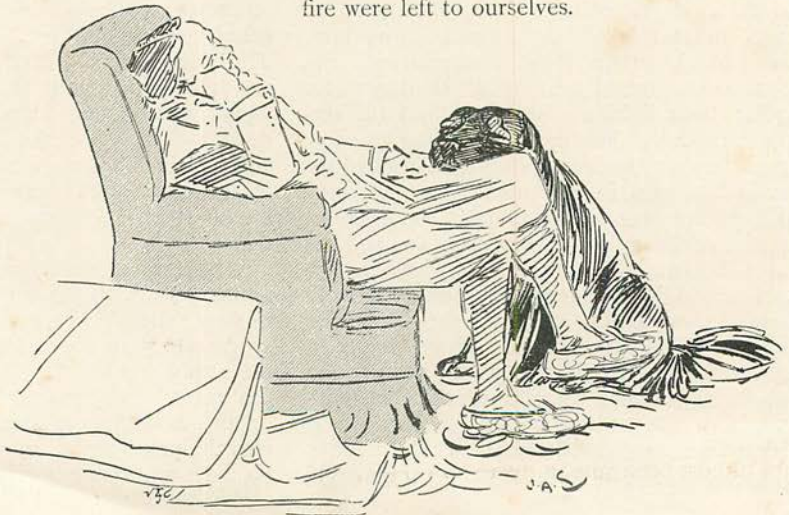
"You are not going out to-night, sir?"

"No, it is too wet, and your fire is in such admirable condition that—well, the fact is, I am lazy to-night."

"Yes, I think that must be it," Mrs. Jones replied, "for nothing has kept you in before."

"Do not light the lamp, Mrs. Jones; I would prefer to sit in the firelight. No, I am not ill," I said, answering her look of astonishment; "nor in love; just a little drowsy, that is all."

Mrs. Jones closed the door (I fancied I heard her say, "There must be something the matter with him"), and Philo and I and the fire were left to ourselves.



"PHILO AND I WERE LEFT TO OURSELVES."

"A most excellent cooker of eggs, is Mrs. J.," I said to my companion (silent companions are often the best of company); "most excellent. Few people can be relied upon to always cook one's eggs properly, but Mrs. J. is one of the few."

"Eggs! What a lot of eggs you have eaten," an inner voice said to me. "You eat one every morning, sometimes two. You must have eaten an egg and a half a day for the past thirteen years, without counting those you have eaten in puddings and pies."

Here my brain set to work at figures, an occupation it is accustomed to. Thirteen multiplied by three hundred and sixty-five: four thousand seven hundred and forty-five. Four thousand seven hundred and forty-five multiplied by one and a half: seven thousand one hundred and seventeen and a half.

"Seven thousand one hundred and seventeen and a half," the inner voice repeated, chidingly, putting particular stress on the "half"; "seven thousand one hundred and seventeen and a half, and a half."

"Did it never strike you," the voice said, after a short interval of silence, "did it never strike you that each time you cut off the top of an egg you killed a chicken?"

I said something to the effect that the egg was not a chicken when it came to my plate.

"Did you never think," the voice continued, solemnly, "did you never think of its poor mother?"

I confessed I had never given its mother a thought.

"Have you no ——" The question was interrupted by Philo's giving a low, long growl.

"What is it, Philo?" Another growl, longer and louder than the first. "He must be dreaming," I thought. Another growl, and this time Philo raised his head from my knee and looked towards the door.

"What's the matter with you, old fellow? Been dreaming?" But Philo was not to be thus quieted; growling in his fiercest way, he walked to the door and began to sniff along the bottom of it. I rose from my chair and, holding Philo by the collar, opened the door, when, to my utter astonishment, I saw standing upon the cold oilcloth a tiny chicken. Philo looked at the downy mite and then at me, and said as plainly as his eyes could speak, "You need not hold me; I will not harm the little creature."

The chicken was not at all frightened of

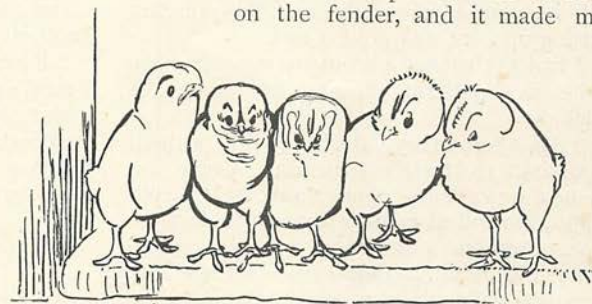
the great dog. Giving a chirp of delight, it hopped under Philo's legs, tripped rapidly up to the fireplace, and, much to my amusement, perched upon the brass rail of the fender. I shut the door, Philo and I taking up our positions in front of the fire, and quietly watching the tiny bird.

Presently, however, Philo gave another growl, and again sniffed at the bottom of the door.

"Can it be another chicken?" thought I. "There must be a brood of them somewhere, and yet 'tis a strange time of year to hatch chickens." I opened the door. Imagine my surprise when I saw five chickens, twin brothers and sisters of the first, standing in a row on the door-mat.

"Come in, chickens," I said; "make yourselves at home." They required no second invitation, but hopped quickly across the carpet and joined their friend upon the rail.

It was an amusing sight, these six chickens perched in a row on the fender, and it made me



"STANDING IN A ROW ON THE DOOR-MAT."

laugh more heartily than ever a pantomime did, or a joke in a funny paper. Philo was not less amused than I, but as he could not laugh, he satisfied himself with assuming the most comical expression of countenance I had ever seen him wear.

Five minutes later, Philo again indicated that there were some more chicken visitors outside.

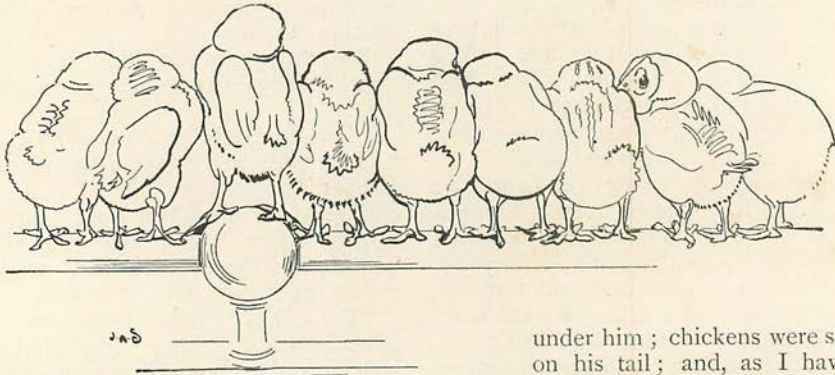
"This is much more than a joke. But let me see," I said, trying to recall my own chicken-rearing experiences, "a brood usually consists of thirteen; at least, that is the number when they all hatch out. Well, I think the rail will accommodate thirteen." So saying, I opened the door, expecting to see seven chicks waiting for admission. There were only three.

"So here you are, little ones," I said; "better late than not at all. Come in, plenty of room on the rail."

Nine chickens were now perched before the fire.

"I think, Philo, we had better leave the door open," I said; "those other four chicks

Philo had been reared in the country, and was used to the sight of chickens, but never had he seen so large a brood of them. Chickens were above him; chickens were

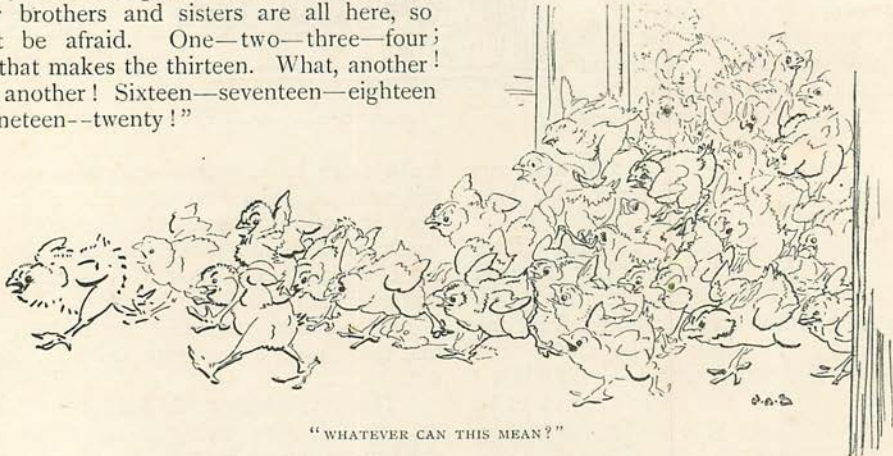


"NINE CHICKENS WERE NOW PERCHED BEFORE THE FIRE."

will be coming presently, and this constant getting up is tiring to old bones."

I had not been seated many minutes when I heard a pattering of tiny feet upon the oilcloth.

"Ah, here they are," I said, without troubling to turn my head. "Come in, friends, don't stand upon ceremony this cold night; we will dispense with an introduction. Your brothers and sisters are all here, so don't be afraid. One—two—three—four; yes, that makes the thirteen. What, another! And another! Sixteen—seventeen—eighteen—nineteen—twenty!"



"WHATSOEVER CAN THIS MEAN?"

The pattering increased, as though a whole army of chickens was on the march. "Whatever can this mean?" I asked myself, in blank dismay, as chickens by the hundred poured into the room. Some hopped upon the chairs and the table; others climbed upon the mantelpiece and the book-shelves; while one chicken—an impudent youngster—clambered to the top of Philo's head.

under him; chickens were standing on his tail; and, as I have said, a chicken was perched on his head. Still the tide of chickens flowed. Philo, who now resembled a black rock in a yellow sea of chickens, looked helplessly towards me for assistance.

"Poor old Philo," I said, comfortingly; "good dog. Chickens soon go away."

But they didn't go, nor did they show the least inclination to go. "Perhaps," I thought, "perhaps they will go when their feeding-time comes round."

But they were far too happy and contented to be hungry. Indeed, it was this making themselves so much at home in my room that made me speak seriously to them. I am usually patient and good-tempered, but the sight of those chickens, dressing their downy feathers and carrying on their private conversations, was more than my patience and good temper could bear. They had no



"MORE THAN A JOKE!"

the chickens on the table stretch itself to its full height and give a tiny crow of defiance.

A crisis was approaching. "Philo," I said, "growl." He did so, making a rumbling noise like distant thunder.

The chickens paused from their various occupations, but only for an instant.

"Philo," I said, "bark." He barked, and such a bark it was! It shook the ornaments on the mantelpiece, and made the fire-irons dance a jig upon the fender.

"Another." He gave another, and may I never hear such a bark again!

But the chickens treated Philo's exertions as an entertainment for their amusement, some of them even going the length of applauding the performance by stamping their feet.

"Philo," I said, "show your teeth." He showed them—all of them—making a snapping noise to add to the effect. But the

consideration for either Philo or me. They paid us no respect, nor were they afraid of us; and how is it possible for big things like Newfoundland dogs and full-grown men to be happy among little things like chickens, unless the little things act in a becoming way by being respectful and timid?

"Chickens," I said, in a tone of firmness, "this is more than a joke. I like a bit of fun as well as anybody, but this invasion of my room—my Englishman's castle—is not fun, but downright impudence. I should be very sorry to make an unfair use of my great strength or of my dog's sharp teeth, but I shall be compelled to do so unless you begin to make a move."

I expected this speech would have sent the chickens pell-mell, helter-skelter out of the room, but all it did was to make one of

only effect it had upon the chickens was to increase the stamping, and create a chorus of chirpy laughter. One of the chickens on the mantelpiece, excited by the exhibition, jumped clean on to the crown of my head, making its position secure by digging its claws into my hair.

The time had come for me to make another speech.

"Chickens," I said, solemnly, "prepare to die. It is a pity to spoil my carpet with your blood, because it is a new and a costly one, and blood-stains, I am told, are hard to remove; but it shall never be said that Theophilus Smith shrank from doing his duty, from carpet considerations. No, rather than that should be said, he would sacrifice everything he possessed! In order to give you the chance of retiring before my

dog and I begin the onslaught, I will take a little time in describing our method of attack. (Attend, Philo.) We shall commence the attack from the rear, first shutting the door to cut off all chance of escape in that direction. The only exit left you will be the chimney, and the way to the chimney is through the burning fire. My dog will attack the right flank, while I engage the left. He will use his teeth, of which, as you have seen, he has a particularly good set; my weapon will be that heavy club that stands in the corner yonder, a score of you dying each time I make a blow. You who are not on the floor," I continued, "shall be disposed of differently. It would be dangerous to the furniture to use the club in your case; I shall therefore adopt another plan—a plan that will be both startling and novel. I will not explain it in detail, but will merely state that it is a quick and a deadly one. When the battle is over, and our honour upheld, your bodies will be buried in a deep grave, which Philo will have great pleasure in making for you. One shall be spared: one to tell the tale of his comrades' fate, and to warn all chickens against trifling with men and dogs. No one can say that——"

But just here my attention was drawn to a small black object that was making its way into the room. I looked hard at it, and at last discovered that it was half a chicken. I noticed that the chickens on the floor made way for the black visitor, bowing their heads to the ground, and looking very humble.

"I beg your pardon, Sir Fraction," I said. "I imagine, Sir Fraction, that you are the—person—no—the—the——"

"The Commander-in-Chief," said the Fraction, coming to my assistance.

"Thank you," I said: "will you be so good as to command these chickens to right-about-turn-quick-march out of this room? I have had as much of their company as I desire."

"Sir," replied the Fraction, haughtily, "I do not take my instructions from *you!*"

The contempt with which he said "you" was most amusing. "From whom, then, do you take your instructions?" I asked.

"Do not question me, sir; it is not for you to address your betters." So saying, he jumped on to my knee, and stared me defiantly in the face.

With one movement of my hand I could have swept the Commander-in-Chief into the fire, but I merely smiled. The Commander was not so polite, but puckered his eyebrow with a frown, and glared at me with his one eye in a most angry way.

Turning round, and facing the main body of his troops, he cried, "Fall in!"

"He is going to drill them," I said to myself; "this will be interesting."

At the word of command, "Fall in!" the chickens on the floor ranged themselves in lines of two deep.

"Attention! Form fours!" The movement was not done to the satisfaction of the Fraction.



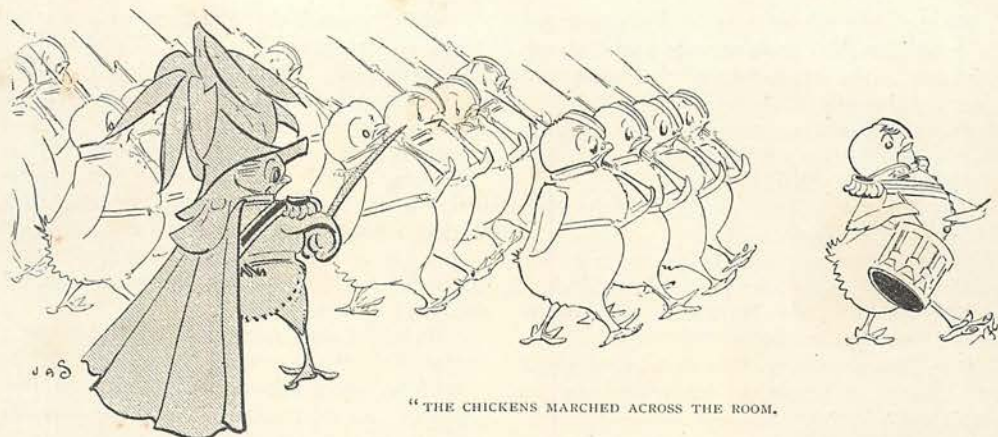
"A BIG GUN."

"This is some big gun amongst them," I thought; "I will address his lordship. Good evening," I said, in my politest way; "I imagine you are the chicken——"

"Excuse me, sir," the little creature said, with a lordly air, "I am not a chicken—I am a fraction."

"As you were!" he shouted, at the top of his voice. "Form fours! Right turn! By the right, quick march!"

The chickens marched across the room, keeping step in the grandest style, which was the more surprising because there was no band to keep them right.



"THE CHICKENS MARCHED ACROSS THE ROOM."

"Right about turn!" roared the Commander. The chickens turned round without breaking the line a hair's breadth.

"Halt!" cried the Commander. Instantly the moving ranks came to a dead halt. Not a single chick in the whole battalion moved a muscle an instant after that halt. The Fraction was pleased. "Front!" he said. "Stand at ease!"

"Now," said the Commander-in-Chief, proudly facing me, "what do you think of that?"

"I think," said I, "that it was a sight that would do the heart of any soldier good. I am sorry our Commander-in-Chief has not had the opportunity of seeing to what a state of perfection you have brought your troops. I shall not fail to tell him the next time I smoke a cigar with him."

The Fraction bowed, and, turning to his army, cried, "Attention! Number!"

Clearly and rapidly did the chickens respond to the order. "One—two—three—four—five—six—seven—eight—nine—ten—twenty—thirty—forty—fifty—sixty—seventy—eighty—ninety—one hundred—two hundred—three hundred—four hundred—five hundred—six hundred—seven hundred—eight hundred—nine hundred—one thousand—two thousand—three thousand—four thousand—five thousand—six thousand."

At six thousand the numbering ceased, much to my relief.

"Our main body," said the Fraction, addressing me in a quiet, gentlemanly tone, "consists of six thousand chickens. Our reserve force numbers a little over a thousand."

Here he turned towards the chickens on the table, the mantelpiece, and the bookshelves, and called, in a powerful voice, "Reserve! Number!"

Equally smartly the reserve numbered themselves, the last number being one thousand one hundred and fifteen.

"One thousand one hundred and fifteen," the Commander said to himself, like one engaged in a mental calculation; "that cannot be right. Chickens of the reserve," he spoke aloud, "a mistake has been made in the numbering. Unless the two chickens who have not numbered do so at once, you shall all have half an hour's punishment drill."

"One thousand one hundred and sixteen," squeaked the chick on Philo's head.

"One thousand one hundred and seventeen," piped the youngster who had concealed himself at the back of my neck.

"Six thousand of the main body," said the Fraction, bowing politely to me, "and one thousand one hundred and seventeen of the reserve; a total of seven thousand one hundred and seventeen. Adding to this your humble servant, who is reckoned as a half, you have the grand total of seven thousand one hundred and seventeen and a half."

It was the number of eggs I had eaten!

"Are you familiar with the number? Ever met with it before?" said the Commander-in-Chief, looking knowingly at me out of his one eye. "Eh?"

"Exceedingly probable," I replied, carelessly.

"Well?" said the Fraction.

"Well," I replied, "proceed."

"Impudent monster!" said he. "Apologize."

"What! To a Fraction? Never! I defy thee, and thy troops as well!"

The Commander-in-Chief was nettled. Turning quickly round, he cried, in a loud voice, "Present arms!"

To my utter astonishment (for I had not the least idea the chickens were armed), each chick presented a tiny rifle of the latest and most deadly pattern.

The Fraction faced me again and repeated his former question: "Well?"

"Bucket," I replied.

The Fraction's eye glittered with rage. "Ready!" he cried.

In less time than it takes to tell, six thousand cartridges were placed in position.

"Present!" Six thousand rifle-barrels were directed at my head.

The Commander, as though to give me a last chance to apologize, addressed me as before: "Well?"

"Yes," I said, "I have seen the well at

"Man," hissed the Fraction, in a frenzy, "do you wish to die?"

"Well, really," I replied, "that is rather an important question to settle off-hand. I will consider the matter, and let you have an answer in due course, as we say in business."

"Man," said the Commander, quite furiously for half a chicken, "six thousand loaded rifles are at this instant directed at you. I have but to give the word, and you are riddled through and through with six thousand bullets."

"Well?" I said, using the Fraction's word.

"Shall I give that word?"

"Please yourself, my dear sir—do not consider me in the least; besides, you do not take your instructions from me."



JAS

"MAN, DO YOU WISH TO DIE?"



Carisbrooke Castle, and the donkey in the wheel. It is a big donkey to work that wheel all the day long, but it is not such a big donkey as you are, Sir Fraction, if you think I am afraid of you or your fledglings."

"Well?" repeated the Fraction, angrily.

"Exactly," I replied; "the wheel is attached to a rope, and the rope to a bucket, and as the wheel goes round the bucket comes up."

"Well?"

"I think a photograph will show you more clearly what I mean." I was in the act of reaching for my photograph album, when I felt a sharp prick in the cheek. It was from the point of the Fraction's sword, which needle-like weapon he was now flourishing in a threatening way around his head.

The Fraction, muttering "Vengeance!" turned sharply round on his one leg, and I saw plainly enough that he was about to give the word that would end my fate.

"Britons never shall be slaves!" I shouted. "England expects that every man and dog this day shall do his duty! Three cheers for the roast beef of Old England! On, Stanley, on! Charge, Chester, charge! Philo for ever! God save the Queen! Hurrah!"

The Fraction waited until I had finished.

"Fire!"

A noise like the pealing of thunder followed close upon the word. I started—gasped—awoke!

The fire was out, but Philo's noble head still lay upon my knee.