

## THE ROMANCE OF AN EGG

Did it ever occur to you, as you regaled yourself on your morning repast of ham and eggs, what a wealth of romance is wrapped up in the white shell of that commonplace article of your daily diet? Of course you have a faint idea that eggs are in some way connected with hens and country barnyards, and grocery stores, and you are certainly aware that you would not like to be deprived of them, but have you ever let your imagination picture the wonderful adventures that, perhaps your egg has experienced before it arrived on your table? Think, first of all, what a wonderful variety of eggs there are. We have fresh eggs and stale eggs, fried eggs, boiled eggs, poached eggs and scrambled eggs, and Easter eggs, and you are all acquainted, I am sure, with the hard egg. A very common variety is the well known election egg, a disagreeable old chap, whose chief duty in life is to move votes of thanks to unpopular political campaigners, and who is often called upon to officiate in the capacity of deputy-constable in ridding the town of undesirable citizens. Through faulty upbringing in his youth, he leads a long, but useless existence, though, like the hero of a well-known novel, he often redeems himself by sacrificing his dissipated life for the good of the community. Then there are the goose-eggs that we sometimes receive from our professors, as special marks of favor, in recognition of a successful year's loafing. You see, "loafer" is the Japanese way of expressing "baker" in English, and since bakers and eggs are associate ideas, you can easily see the connection.

Where do eggs come from? From the hen. And the hen? From another egg. But how does the hen come from the egg? Let me illustrate from my years of experience as a boy on the farm:

It is a fine evening in the latter part of May. We have just been let loose from the confinement of the schoolroom, and have run in haste to the barnyard, to see if there have been any new arrivals in the animal world. On passing through the poultry-house, we see Euphemia, an old multi-colored hen, of nondescript breed and lineage, with a topknot that looks for all the world like grandmother's Sunday bonnet, sitting dream-

ily on a cast-off doorknob, a far-away look in her eyes, and an expression of utter contentment on her wizened old face as she occasionally listens expectantly beneath her folded wings. Euphemia has long since passed the age of usefulness as an egg producer, but she is retained on a pension because the children like her, and in recognition of her past performances, and especially because she still remains the best brooder in the flock. In fact, Euphemia is the Mother or foster-mother (call it what you will, for the question is still disputed among the most learned biologists of the day) the mother then, or the great-great-grandmother of every one of her species in the barnyard.

Moved by one simultaneous impulse, we scramble precipitously through the poultry-house door, and rush pell-mell into the kitchen, where mother is preparing the evening meal. We crowd around her, the nine of us, and with much confusion, for we all talk at once, we announce the glad tidings that old Euphemia has made known her intention of assuming once more the responsibility of raising the annual family of chicks. Each of us, of course, pleads for the honour of making Euphemia happy in the realization of her dreams, by providing the necessary setting of eggs, with the concomitant claim of "owning" the chickens when they come. Now, mother is very busy; she has been housecleaning all day, and is consequently tired, so, without paying much attention to what we are saying, she nods her head in assent, and proceeds with the important rite of preparing the supper. Another rush, a jam in the doorway, and in the hundredth part of a midge's wink, silence in the kitchen, except for the gurgling of the kettle in response to mother's tired smile. Not so, however, in the hen-house. Bill, who is the fastest sprinter in the neighborhood, by dint of upsetting a pail of water over the back steps, and knocking over baby John, who, left far in the rear in that first riotous charge upon the kitchen, is just arriving at the back door, succeeds in negotiating the distance to the barn before the rest of us are well under way. When we arrive, breathless and panting, Bill is holding the squawking Euphemia by the legs, while he cries out to all and sundry to bring along the eggs, and get a box and be quick about it. The cloud of feathers floating about, that round, bare spot



on Euphemia's back, and the manner in which Bill sucks an injured forefinger between shouts of advice, are evidence enough that the outraged and outrageous hen has not resigned her post, or rather her door-knob without a struggle. Meantime Fred, less impetuous and more resourceful than the rest of us, has not joined in the mad scramble to the henhouse. He is going to insure his share in the future flock of chickens by remaining behind to procure the eggs. Margaret, too, unearths an old goods box from among a pile of debris in the woodshed, while Charlie confiscates an armful of hay from in front of the reproachful eyes of old Brindle, the bell cow. Being the eldest, I, of course, do not participate in these childish manifestations of excitement. I feel that my presence is needed on the main scene of action, where my superior knowledge and experience are necessary to superintend operations, and see that everything is carried out according to the best recognized authorities on chicken raising. Such is the responsible position of the eldest brother; and, although I would gladly resign my onerous duties, I feel that it would be an injustice to my younger brothers and sisters to shift the burden to their untried and inexperienced shoulders.

All is now in readiness, so, followed in order, by Bill with the hen, Charlie with the hay, and Margaret with the goods box, the rest forming a sort of rearguard to the main body, I lead the procession to a shady and quiet corner of an unused manger, where, with more rites, with more scrupulous care, and with a greater enthusiasm, than most grownups display at a religious ceremony, we lovingly prepare the nest, arranging the eggs in the most enticing way imaginable, so that Euphemia will be comfortable for the three weeks during which she must sit and await the most wonderful event in the life of any good mother-hen. But alas for our plans. Our troubles are just about to begin. Baby John, wondering what it is all about, has trailed along behind, holding fast to sister Mary's skirts, much to the hindrance of her enjoyment of the occasion, has finally edged his way to the front, and is standing openmouthed, with his wide, blue eyes questioning the portent of this strange ceremony. Euphemia has quieted down by this time, partly through exhaustion, but chiefly because Bill has unconsciously jammed her head under his arm, where she is half-smoth-

ered in the folds of his blouse. But this seeming resignation to an unknown fate is only a ruse. Euphemia is too old, too wise and too courageous a hen to submit to such treatment without making a last grand bid for liberty, and her helpless, unprotected doorknob. Just as we are about to ensconce her on the nest, old Tom, the rooster who has angrily followed us about, protesting helplessly against the violation of his favorite spouse, crows out defiance and encouragement from the step of the stable door. Euphemia suddenly comes to life with a loud squawk and a flap of her strong wings, escapes from the hands of the unwary Bill, and, knocking little John backwards into the manger, where he immediately sets up a howl, she disappears through the doorway with a flip of her funny tail. The escape of Euphemia is forgotten for the moment as we gingerly rescue John from the sticky yellow mass, that a few minutes before had been fifteen beautiful eggs. Gone are our visions of a flock of chickens, while a more imminent, and, if you understand me, a more intimate picture presents itself. What will mother say? and what will father do? The resourceful Fred, who, by the way, is destined by father for a commercial career, comes to the rescue with the following sage advice :

"We'll just send John in ahead. He can't tell what happened to him, and mother'll think he was prying around in the nests and broke the eggs over himself."

This happy suggestion is immediately acted upon, and the rest of us straggle in at intervals trying to look as unconcerned as possible, but trembling a little at the knees and smarting a little in anticipation. Fred, however, improves on his plan for saving the rest of us by coming in half an hour later carrying an armful of wood for the kitchen stove. Now, I would not have you think that we anticipate unjust treatment, but your experience tells you that the best of fathers, as ours certainly is, sometimes mistakes the best of intentions on the part of his children for meddling or mischief. Nothing is said, however, although we do not feel safe until snugly tucked between the sheets at eight o'clock.

Next day, as we arrive home from school again we are met by mother, who is on her way to the barnyard with a dish of bread crumbs. We all fall in line to "help" and are led straight to the manger, where behold, Euphemia sits, as calmly as you please. Her scornful and



dignified looks as she sees her persecutors, make us feel a bit ashamed, but mother, gently lifting her from the nest, a proceeding which, strangely enough, she does not in the least appear to resent, reveals a nest of warm, white eggs. How did mother do it? She did not reveal the secret. Certainly we had not failed for want of enthusiasm or because of an insufficiency of numbers. Perhaps it was the maternal bond that gave mother and Euphemia a perfect understanding of one another,—perhaps our inexperience mitigated against us in the eyes of the wise old hen. Be that as it may, in three short weeks she proudly led forth ten healthy chicks, one for each of us, including one for mother. The egg you relished for breakfast this morning is probably the descendant of one of them. Euphemia died the following winter, and I am not ashamed to say that we all shed tears at her departure. Mine were poured forth in secret, for it does not behoove a young man of twelve summers to betray the tender emotions in public. That is the inalienable prerogative of children and women.

R.G.E.'27.

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I would rather make my name than inherit it.—*Thackeray*.

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To be conscious that you are ignorant is a great step to knowledge.—*Benj. Disraeli*.

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I believe the first test of a truly great man is his humility.—*Ruskin*.

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Where there is room in the heart there is always room in the house.—*Moore*.

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Faith is to believe what we do not see; and the reward of this faith is to see what we believe.—*St. Augustine*.

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What sculpture is to a block of marble, education is to a human soul.—*Addison*.