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Spificated Farmers' Hens Woke Up Minus Feathers -- Chit Chat From England

By Margaret Butcher

Reading, England—This is 'most irregular'. I know it. It is pure talkativeness on my part. But here I am, with time on my hands, thinking of my friends over there; feeling grateful to them for kind thoughts and letters and things which reach me now and then and show me that we ARE friends.

I feel quite embarrassingly useless just now; so, with a typewriter balanced somewhat precariously on a bed-table, I mean to fill in some of the time, anyway, by being talkative.

Feeling useless, with All This going on, is not too good. I look askance at my rations (and other bits, if truth must be told) and wonder if I have any right to snap up all this food. Less and less do I understand those folk who, doing nothing at all, grab all they can. Yes, the truth is that this chill really got me down, though the bright shining of the sun today puts a very different complexion on things. Before long, with any luck, I shall be galloping about on the Allotment, as arranged.

But how truly maddening it all is! Why on earth should anybody go down under silly complaints when there is so much happening in the world? It isn't as if one wants to crack up — or even fears it. No sensible person is 'complaint minded' these days. Yet along comes that nerve-jab, that punch of horrid, personal realism, right in the middle of something else; and with a wince, a howl and some private cussing,

Notice to Creditors

In the matter of the Estate of FRED SMITH WILLIS, late of the Village of King in the County of York, Farm Manager, Deceased.

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that all creditors of, and claimants against, the Estate of the said Fred Smith Willis, who died on or about the 14th day of May 1942, are required on or before the 18th day of July 1942 to send particulars of their claims, and the nature of the security if any held by them, to the undersigned solicitors for the Executors. After the said 18th day of July 1942, the said Executors will proceed to distribute the said Estate, having regard only for those claims of which they shall then have received notice.

DATED at Toronto this 29th day of June 1942.

WILLIAM COOK & GIBSON,
 912 Federal Building,
 Toronto, Ontario,
 Solicitors for the Executors.

one crawls between the blankets. And how kind folk are to be sure! One expects to hear somebody say: "Now you get into a hole somewhere and don't bother me. We're all too busy for this civilian nonsense now." But nobody says it, bless them.

The Gardening Partner has come along with a most practical gift. "I'm putting on something new for Easter," says Gran's voice, through the door. "So am I," I answer. "A crutch."

And a crutch it is. What he has made it of goodness alone knows, but it works. And what a difference it has made! It is a hundred steps towards recovery already. Yet all the while I keep wondering what that other ultra-sensitive soul...the one who was so disturbed by my noises...would have said to the 'thud-thud' of a crutch! It is a profound thought, isn't it?

Yesterday, when everybody else was out, there was a tinkle at the bell. I thudded to the window, threw out the door-key, and in came Cookie. Yes, our own kind Cookie, busy—as usual — bothering herself about other people. You remember the story of Cookie and the Teapot? It was not a cup of tea, this time, but a most excellent bit of fish.

"I hope you won't be offended," says Cookie, coming in with her nice smile and her spotless overall with the cherry-red facings.

Offended? My dear Cookie! Then, from her overall pocket, peeps the smooth (and almost strange) contour of a new-laid egg. Offended! Just the same wonderful woman who, in that awful blitz, thought of nothing but caring for others. The same kindness, even without an emotional spur. I guess that she has always been like that: that her strange courage during that dreadful time was built on a solid foundation of habit. If any proof was needed I've had it.

Bunch of Daffodils

Then there is the barrister's wife with a bunch of daffodils, and the blue-eyed little Scotswoman with a packet of cigarettes and some amusing gossip. The lovely friends who have housed the East End refugees are in and out, too — doing such dull things as paying bills and lugging along the rations, so that I need have no worry. And of course there is 'Gran' herself, with a darling little meal on a tray, and a thousand other little attentions. It causes me the most awful confusion, believe me, for I've a perfect horror of being a public nuisance. But things are on the mend, and soon I pop the crutch in a corner, get up and toddle down into the town...job-hunting. The war — at last — has killed mine.

It's a pity, because it was useful enough; but anything to do with paper is suffering now. The shortage grips us more and more tightly. For many weeks now I have worked on all kinds of odd scraps; even the backs of letters and telegrams! But the Powers That Be have decided now that this is the end; so there we are. I wonder what my next activity will be? Somebody, you may be sure, will engage a willing female who is not liable to be 'registered' just yet; so I am not fretting. Anyway, the folk I have been working with are dispersed, and that busy room, out there in the country, is empty again. No more cycling over those hills and valleys.

It was certainly an experience while it lasted, and I was terribly sorry to say "Goodbye" to them, the dears. Just before I went away I sped over for a farewell party and a 'doss' on the couch. How fond one had grown of those kind and pleasant people! We worked so hard and so happily together; and when the mornings were bitter, so that I arrived frozen, there was always a cup of hot tea saved for me. Yes, there is something very sad about this unavoidable breaking-up; I mustn't think too much about it. I am rather sneakily thankful that, if I had to crawl between the blankets for a bit, it has happened just now. At least I am not falling down on a new job. It all dovetails very nicely.

Fowl Play

I have been very amused by a letter from my friend up in the north. If I didn't know it to be a true story I should think she had furbished up a chestnut for me; but many a time have I seen some fantastic old idea repeat itself in real life, so I am not really surprised.

She tells me that the sisters of a farmer, living near her, had some hens which they treasured. The far-

mer also had some cherry brandy—equally treasured, no doubt — that went bad on him. The brandy, consequently, was thrown out into the hens' bowl — rashly enough! — and no more was thought about it. Later on, when the sisters came home from shopping, they found all the poultry stretched out, looking as dead as poultry can. The women were terribly upset; they just hated the idea of losing every penny on those fowls. With the best will in the world I still think they behaved badly, for how did they know it wasn't 'tainted meat'? Well, they weren't bothering about that, evidently, for they both got well down to it, plucked all the birds, stacked them up in the kitchen and went off to tell the local carrier to fetch them that afternoon and take them in to market. On their return from this call they found — to their horror and amazement — a bunch of naked fowls rushing round the kitchen.

"When I saw them yesterday afternoon," writes my friend, I simply couldn't believe my eyes. Those women had made little flannel jackets for them, some white, some red; and two of them were wearing garments made out of multi-colored scarves."

It has given me a deep distrust of poultry-buying—if ever I should prove as ambitious as that; but I should certainly have liked a peep at that extraordinary football team.

Unequal Struggle

The Gardening Partner, having no assistant at the moment, is waging his unequal struggle alone with the wireworms. In the evening he generally clumps in for a few minutes, all furrowed brow and clods of earth, manfully trying to hide his natural rage with my uselessness. From his enormous pockets he produces a tit-bit or a smoke, to be sure, but I am certain he is simply furious. And why not? I sit up here feverishly mending coats and other things he produces for my attentions, but what use is that, after all? Until I can walk (nay, hop and skip) I am a log, a mere figurehead of a female. Most irritating to a busy man, I am convinced. Also most irritating to the mere figurehead, I assure you.

And, every day, my radio, here on the table, brings me the news. These Bad Patches...Yet, the very fact that it has gone on for so long makes the whole thing quite imponderable. The Allies must be the most maddening foe in the world: so many times (by all accounts) 'dead' — but won't lie down! How can any propaganda explain away such folk and their doings? I should hate the job. I should be afraid of such people. Yes, afraid; and there, I suspect, you have the answer to much of the vicious cruelty which is taking place against us. It is the raw and natural reaction to anger and fear. There we are, just going on and on, privately convinced that 'the tide will turn'. It must be utterly infuriating.

And perhaps, through all this, we really are learning from past mistakes. How the Other Side loves to quote those Mistakes of ours! And how illogical he is about them! 'See' — he says — you complain of what I do, but remember the time when you did the same thing to So-and-So. I cannot decide whether he means it to be apology or justification; if it was so shocking, then is it his excuse for doing it now? Or, if it is quite right now, why pick on us for doing it then? No; I shall never fathom the depths of propaganda. Not even if I have to meditate here for another month! But I shan't. Very, very soon I shall be hopping around, as sprightly as ever.

Well, I've enjoyed that little talk — and I hope I haven't been a bore?

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