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# Mother's Hens

By Mrs. F. E. Sheperd, Stalwart, Sask.

**EDITOR'S NOTE.**—The following article is the first of a series of practical talks on farm poultry raising, written by a farmer's wife who has successfully kept poultry. The advice contained is essentially actual experience, written in a pleasing, understandable manner, and it is hoped that our readers will obtain a very large amount of valuable information thru reading this series.

Young Mrs. Hazelton hummed a love-song softly as she laid the supper table. She had only been married six weeks and had come straight from England to her prairie home. Everything was delightfully new and strange to her. It was early springtime and the ravines were full of rushing water caused by the melting snow and only a few blue crocuses had ventured to peep thru the almost bare ground. Will, her husband, had been on the harrows for the first time that day and seeing him pulling in, she slipped on her bonnet and ran down to the barn to "help." Strictly speaking she was more of a hindrance than a help, for the bronchos were trouble enough to unhitch at any time, without having a coquettish apron fluttering around them in the wind. But Will would not have hinted at it for worlds. She wielded the pumphantle vigorously and laughed as the spirited animals pranced around. "That will do," said her husband, keeping a firm grip on the lines. "You run along indoors; I'll be up in a minute or two."

True to his word, in a very short time they were seated at the supper table.

"I wish I could get my letters every day, Will," Margaret remarked as she poured out his third cup of tea. "That's really the only thing I don't like about living in the country, getting your letters only once or twice a week."

"Call it mail," laughed her husband. "I shall never make you into a Canadian I can see. Here comes old Billy. I expect he's got it. I asked him as he went down towards town if he would. Fed the hens since breakfast?"

Margaret nearly dropped the teapot. "Good gracious! I quite forgot them again. Some of them were squawking around the door just now, but I 'shoo-ed' them off. I suppose they were hungry, poor things. I did remember to look for eggs after dinner, but there wasn't many, and one old hen pecked me like anything, and that turkey gobbler looked so fierce I ran away."

She showed the pecked hand, which was promptly seized and kissed, just as old Billy drove up to the door. He was much too shy to come indoors and after commenting on the price of wheat and the weather, drove off again to his lonely shack, vaguely wondering how many years had passed since he was a smart, well-set up chap like Will Hazelton.

"There you are, pet," he said, tossing them into her lap, "three letters for you and three for me—fair division, eh?" "I don't care how many or how few there are," replied his wife, "so long as there's one from your mother; it does seem too bad to think that in that dreadful railway accident you and I should have escaped scot free, and she should have suffered so terribly and been in hospital ever since."

"Just like mother," laughed Will, "always taking the brunt of things herself, but you bet she's just as happy in that hospital, being made such a lot of by those nurses, as she would be here, if it wasn't for worrying about her old hens. But open the letter, it seems a good fat one; she always was fond of letter writing."

Margaret perched herself on the arm of her husband's rocking chair and read as follows:

"My Dearest Children—For I look on you as one of my own, Margaret, altho I saw so little of you before this dreadful accident—Well, you will be glad to hear I am getting better, tho slowly, and have coaxed my favorite nurse to let me sit up for just ten minutes every day to write to you about my Biddies. I am getting so anxious about them, as I know you don't know the first thing about chicken raising, so I will write a short note every day and nurse will post it for me once a week. I expect it will be two months or more before I come home again, but if you will follow my directions carefully, I can assure you you will earn as much actual profit as Will does on his wheat."

"That's so," admitted Will, albeit

rather grudgingly. "She made close on \$500 with those darned old hens last year and they never seemed to be any trouble either. We had no idea how much she was getting, altho we knew that for the first time there was always comfortably enough money and no store bill running, but when she showed us her account book towards the beginning of September we were astonished—but go ahead."

"Now when you get up tomorrow morning," Margaret continued reading, "get Will to throw about two gallons of those screenings all around outside the hen houses and open the doors wide. They need to be shut up at nights because of the coyotes and stray animals, but get the doors open as soon as ever you can in the morning. And if he does that for you as he goes past them on his way to the barn, you will know they are alright until after your own breakfast. Directly after breakfast—(no, don't stop to wash the dishes or clear up the room, or you may forget them altogether)—put on your bonnet and a pair of old gloves, get a pail of clean, cold water and an old hoe without a handle (you will find one on a nail outside the kitchen window), and go over to the poultry houses and scrape their troughs and drinking vessels nice and clean and fill them with water. Do this again about four o'clock in the afternoon, for you know, dear, an egg is composed of 80 per cent. water, so water is quite as necessary for them as food, if not more so. Then take a dry pail and your fire-shovel and go to the granary. Here you will find sacks of shorts, bran, oat chop and corn meal. Put in your pail a shovel of bran, another of shorts, oat chop and corn meal, mix these lightly together as you put them in and fill every hopper, except the small one in each house, that is for their oyster shell."

"Is that those boxes on the side of the walls of the chicken-houses, that run out at the bottom?" inquired Margaret.

Her husband laughed and nodded and she continued: "You see, sometimes the weaker ones, or the layers, are not on hand when you are feeding them, but if they can go to the hoppers and get something to eat without being pushed around, they manage alright until feeding time comes again without getting over hungry."

"Now about the nest boxes. I daresay they are pretty mussy. Get Will to bring you over a big armful of hay, finhook the nests—they are only boxes hung on nails—empty them and knock the dust out. I did give them a good lime washing the last thing before I came away. Put in a good handful of fresh hay and a clean nest-egg and hang them up again. Always move gently when among the hens; don't fluster them, talk to them sometimes to get them used to your voice. They will soon get tame and then you can handle them or do anything you like with them. Collect the eggs twice a day now and three times a day presently when the weather gets warmer. Now you know, my dear, the eggs are my special hobby. You will find most of the neighbors take theirs to town and trade them for groceries, etc., but you will find it a much better way to send them to—as I did last year. The railways charge very reasonable rates for farm and dairy produce. You get a higher price per dozen and it is cash instead of trade, and cash is generally a pretty scarce article on most farms during the summer months. But if you send them away, you must be sure and pick out all the best looking and the largest eggs that are laid. Give the men-folk all the small ones. Never mind if they grumble, let them have an extra one, and after that wash the dirty ones to use for cooking; but you won't have any dirty ones if you keep plenty of clean hay in the nests, and you will have very few small ones if you keep the hens well supplied with oyster shell. Above all things be sure and don't put any eggs in with those you send away which came from a stray nest—they may be

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I remain,

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*M. McInnes*

Manager, Dominion Lumber & Fuel Co.

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