

A CHICKEN, UNHATCHED

BY HOPKINS J. MOORHOUSE

THE whole village giggled as it had never giggled before in all its giggly existence—but, of course, that was afterwards when it heard about it.

People said things about the Misses Henny—made-up things, mind you, for as fast as unsatisfied curiosity grows, and that is pretty fast, imagination grow every bit as fast, and sometimes faster. They told stories to the new minister when he came in July, but he only smiled as ministers do sometimes when they take pinches of salt with things. It was true, though, that the Misses Henny lived by themselves, and kept a two-barrelled shot-gun, and a big, white bull-dog, whose inherent ugliness was only surpassed by his reputation for viciousness. There were spikes and broken glass on the top of the stone wall that surrounded the place, and half the windows in the big house were boarded up; the rest had bars across—that was true also. On the adjoining pasture, there was an old empty house where a man had once been murdered, and nights when the wind was high, there were strange cries and things. The Misses Henny themselves wore checkered aprons and funny blue sun-bonnets all the year round, never went near a church, and only to the grocery when they had to. They were said to be wealthy. Ann C. F. was reputed older than Elizabeth E., and was decidedly thin, so that her sister was comparatively stout.

The advent of the new minister furnished the village with a universal topic of conversation, and even Elizabeth E., who had gone to the grocery, came back with a smattering of the general talk.

“And they say he ain’t married,” she remarked to her sister, who was hanging out some washing.

Ann C. F. had a clothes-pin in her mouth, and she grunted like this: “Kugh! He’ll be some young know-all jest out o’ school for the giddy things to go sparkin’ after, you mark me. It’s mighty cool we’ll be with the likes o’ that, Lib Henny.”

“He’s English Church, though, and mebbe he’ll be comin’ in here sometime—”

“An’ he won’t stop long,” snapped Ann. “Prinney never did like preacher folk, did you, old doggie?”

Elizabeth gasped. “Why, you don’t mean to say as you’d sic the dog on the minister, Ann Henny?”

“An’ you don’t mean to say as you want any young noodle-headed, stuck-up, psalm-singin’, long-tail hangin’ ’bout this place?” retorted Ann. “I should think—”

“I said nothing of the kind. Little fear of any civilized body wantin’ to hang about *this* place,” and there was a trace of bitterness in Elizabeth’s voice. “But I do say as we could stand bein’ more civil to folk, if not more sociable like.”

“If folk’d on’y mind their own concerns, things would be consider’ble more smooth, Lib Henny, an’ I jest tell you aforehand, if that preacher comes pryin’ round here after he’s showed his nose the oncet, he’ll find Ann Henny won’t put herself out to keep the dog tied up, so there!” saying which she whisked up the clothes-basket, and went into the woodshed.

One sultry afternoon shortly after this, Miss Ann took her sewing out under the trees near the front gate. Here she had a view of the road as it wound up from the village. A man in an empty waggon nodded to her good-naturedly as he drove by, then went rattling down the hill, and rumbled over the little bridge across the creek, leaving a trail of dust to drift off lazily over the pasture. Ann’s eyes wandered to where Irene was languidly chewing her cud beneath the shade of the poplar row, then to the old white horse with the lame foot at the upper end of the field. A few ducks were floating about the little frog pond near the road, but there were no noises; it was a drowsy afternoon.

She had reached a difficult bit of stitching, so that he was quite close up before she noticed him. Not so the dog, who bounded