

A Turkey Tragedy.

By Edwin Hobbs.



"I DON'T deny they're pretty fine birds," said Rogers, when I stopped to admire his plump turkeys; "but there ought to be just about five times as many. There was an even hundred and three to start with, but at least a dozen died because the fool hens dragged them through the wet grass when they were little. My opinion is that no hens and no women have any business fooling with turkeys."

"Women?"

"Women, sir. If it hadn't been for women there would have been a hundred and three, leastways ninety, deducting the dozen the hens killed."

Something was evidently on his mind, so I did not interrupt to correct his arithmetic, but encouraged him to proceed.

"Yes, sir, women. You see, my wife had always attended the poultry, and I don't deny that she did well enough generally. She made all the groceries last year out of eggs and spring chickens, and made a goodish bit, too, out of turkeys in years gone by. But this year—just you wait a bit." He shot out a broad hand and caught a bronze beauty for my inspection.

"Just feel that crop."

"Pretty full."

"That ain't the point. Put your finger underneath. So."

"It seems like a scar; almost like a seam."

"It is a seam. That is some of my wife's needlework. But I cut out the work for her."

"What was that for?"

"It was like this. I came home one evening and the poultry yard looked like Pittsburg after a strike riot. The dead and dying were everywhere. Some were kicking a little; some were all screwed up into knots of feathers; and whole dozens of them were stone cold. Every pesky one of them was poisoned."

"Who ever did such a thing?"

"Mrs. Rogers did it. Not on purpose, of course. You see, we had emptied a barrel of pork, and I had unthoughtfully turned the brine into the swill barrel, and there you have it. My wife mixed corn meal with the brine, and the salt had killed them. Leastways, they were not all dead, but would have been if I had not come along to be Red Cross society, army surgeon, and all the rest. The old lady was trying to pump water down them with a syringe, but it wouldn't work. I says to her, 'Get your needle and thread and see if you can repair the damage you have done.' So I takes my jack-knife (I had just ground it and it was good and sharp), and then I slit their crops open, put my finger in, and took the stuffing out. What do you think of that?"

"It was heroic treatment, certainly."

"I says to the old lady, just as calm as could be, though I was mad clear down to my boots. 'Now, see if you can't darn them birds up. They say it's never too late to mend.' So I held them and she darned, and maybe I 'darned' a little, too, as you may say. Anyway, we got them all done, and after a few days they seemed as well as ever—the dozen and a half that was left, only a couple went the wrong way and died."

"I hope you will come out all right with these."

"I calculate, too, I shall take care of them myself, and when the time comes to market them, J. Rogers himself will see to it, and maybe take care of the money. There would have been none to market but for me." And then he grew confidential. "Still, I don't mean to hog it all myself. I shall let on that I am going to, but I am going to buy the old lady a new dress and bonnet, and perhaps a rocker, just as good as that turkey money will buy. And when I bring them home I shall say, 'There, Mrs. R., you may thank your husband

for all them fine things. But for my presence of mind in an emergency you never would have had them, and then it will be a closed incident, as the diplomats say. A married man must crow a bit, but not keep it up too long."

Several months afterwards I saw Rogers again. He nodded distantly, as

though he was not anxious to enter into conversation.

"How are those turkeys getting along?" I inquired.

"Turkeys? O, yes, I did have some turkeys, come to think of it."

"How did you get along with them?"

"All right."

"Did you market them?"

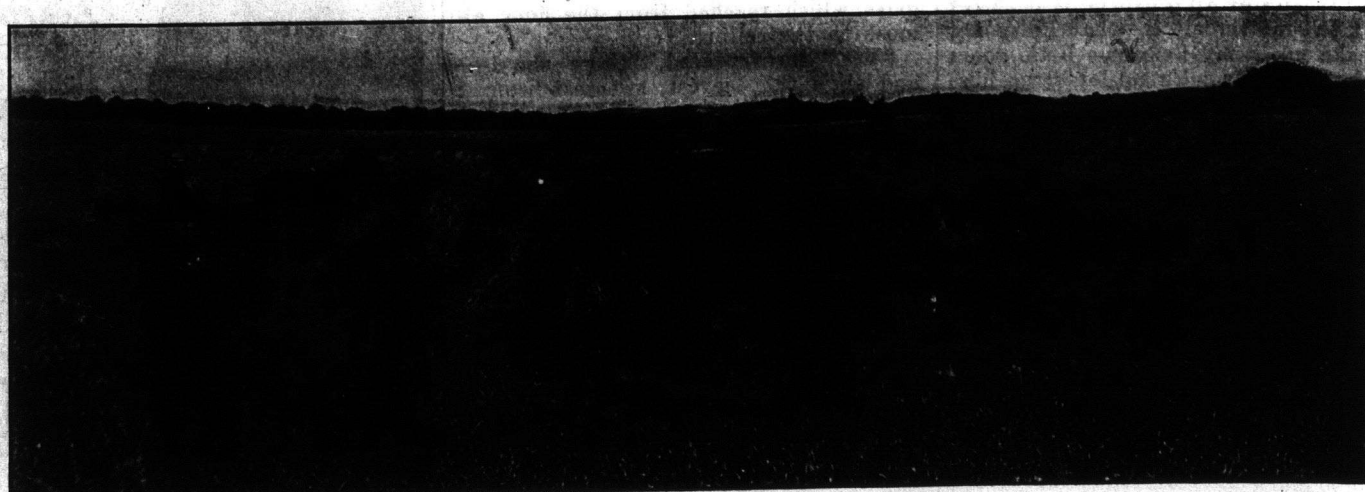
"Yes." And then with an effort he began talking of the weather and ex-President Roosevelt's travels, and the Egyptian troubles, and Tur—and then he pulled himself up short on the first syllable. Something had happened that

he did not care to discuss. Just then his wife came into the store, and for her husband's good I asked her about the turkeys. His face had grown red as a gobbler's wattles in spring. Her's wore a look of placid triumph.

"I will tell you all about it," she said. "For three months that man made my life wretched over those turkeys."

"Mrs. Rogers!"

"You did; you know you did. There was scarcely any living with him. We had turkey morning, noon and night. He served them up at every meal and lectured me about them week-days and



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