"A THANKSGIVING BUSINESS"  BY ELOISE ROORBACH

THREE girls born in Mississippi—reared in luxury that endowed them with soft, helpless white hands, a knowledge of dancing steps and becoming ways of dressing their hair, suddenly found themselves adrift upon a world that demanded hard practical work in exchange for the food, shelter and dress necessary to keep them alive. A magazine containing an article upon the fabulous wealth earned by the "simple and easy" process of raising chickens fell into their hands. They bought more of the literature, consulted poultry books of all kinds, spent hours figuring out possible profits, and at last with what they felt to be a calm, unbiased comprehension of the whole subject, they put on the khaki bloomers and heavy boots of a California rancher and began to climb the long, steep and difficult ladder of success by the process of chicken raising. After six months of travail and investigation of various sections of different States they decided upon a bit of a ranch near Morgan Hill, a small town in the heart of the lovely Santa Clara Valley, California. They named their ranch "Crystal Spring Turkey Ranch," for their intention was to concentrate finally their energies upon turkeys, having Thanksgiving in their hearts and "a market in sight."

They began with ten hen turkeys and one gobbler; the second year, even after selling many, they had forty hens and four gobblers as stock; the third year they kept fifty hens and five gobblers. All the others were sold when the market was high and when it declined the herd was turned loose upon the range. In spite of large losses from chill, incubator troubles, etc., they made so great a gain that the third year found them in possession of eight hundred turkeys and with several pages of their bank-books well balanced and comforting to look upon.

Though all three worked and consulted together yet each had some special duty. Clara managed the nine ducks (hatched under hens as a starter) with such skill that the second year found her the owner of sixty layers. These White Indian Runners were fed on bran mash, "mids" and corn meal, and when ready for the oven had cost on an average fifty cents each. She found that they had paid well, that the feathers brought good prices, but that the greatest profits resulted from the sale of the eggs. "Mary Jane," a floppy-eared puppy, was trained to help keep the procession of one hundred and twenty-five runners in line. She would also drive the turkeys and hens away from the feeding ground of the ducks—not a turkey or a hen could sneak even one bite of food when "Mary Jane" was around, and she never willingly left those irresponsible ducks alone for a minute.

To Olive belongs the credit of the money-making chicken department, the bookkeeping and business management generally, running the distillate engine in the incubator house, the setting of broken legs and wings, sewing up of wounds, ministering to
the sick, the crop bound. Former experience in nursing now proved to be a most valuable asset and saved the “Company” many a loss, and therefore many a dollar.

To Lennie’s care is due the flock of eight hundred turkeys—all thoroughbred Mammoth Bronze—that she is now in the third year of caring for, having sold hundreds in the markets. She says that each turkey costs on an average seventy-five cents to raise and sells at from three to four dollars. She has sold many pounds of feathers at forty cents a pound and many dozen eggs and young chicks to neighboring ranchers. The young “poults”—all incubator nurslings—were fed on the yolks of hard boiled eggs at first, then given chopped alfalfa, young onions and kale (of which they are ravenously fond) and a very little cracked grain. When the young turkeys are three months old, the real fun of the whole undertaking—the herding—be-
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Lennie on her pony when about to drive her ludicrously obedient flock to a place of safety.

Gins. Lennie takes a lunch, a book, a pencil and pad, a shotgun to keep away coyotes, and drives the turkeys (which obey her in the most ludicrous but praiseworthy way) over the rounding hills of the Santa Catharina Range, that her brood may pick up the dried seeds of that useful little plant alfelteria, the round nourishing seeds of the Burr clover, grains of wild oats, sandwiched in with grasshoppers and many other insects. In the fall, when her flock is of larger growth, the turkeys are driven under the oaks and allowed to feed on the acorns, which are very fattening. This turkey shepherd wanders with her flock over the “Company’s” range of five hundred acres, and on beyond over a tract of one thousand acres, belonging to a friendly neighbor. These long days are spent in study, in the reading of good books, in letter writing, also in preparing lectures on poultry raising to be given at farmers’ institutes or agricultural schools. While her mind is being filled with the beauty of hills and skies, with practical knowledge of useful things, her body is growing strong, supple, tireless, and her heart is full of joy in her work and thanksgiving that she dared venture into the land that is kind to whoever comes to dwell in it outfitted with faith, courage and capacity for hard work.

The usual markets for the sale of poultry were not satisfactory for the sale of the “Company’s” specialized products, so Lennie discarded her bloomers, donned street costume and went from door to door in San José, Palo Alto, Los Gatos and several other surrounding towns, offering her wares. And she generally succeeded in getting an order for a regular delivery of turkeys; for they were so fat, tender and well dressed that knowledge of her wares was spread around from friend to friend, bringing her more orders than she was able to fill.

White runners as they file with turkey dignity past the feeding table.
Naturally there were many conflicts with trying conditions which only brought out unsuspected ingenuity, developing quick judgment and a vast fund of common sense. The "Company" soon found out that young turkeys were prized by coyote, skunk, badgers, hawks and wood rats to such an extent that the enemies would make stealthy raids, risking their lives nightly in search of them. They would sneak down from the wild canyons far back in the hills, jump over the fence or dig under the doors and escape with so many of the turkeys, ducks and chickens that they became a very serious menace to the business. Finally the girls taught the turkeys to roost on a fence so high that they were just beyond the reach of "Br'er Coyote," who would distractedly jump his highest in a vain endeavor to reach the coveted meal. But he could catch and hold on to so many drooping tail feathers that the poor turkeys were a sorry sight marching about in their peculiarly pompous way with but one or two ragged tail feathers waving sadly aloft! Something had to be done. So for a while the girls put their bed down in the ravine where the turkeys roosted and slept with a double-barreled shotgun on one side and a rifle on the other. They also trained dogs to help guard their stock, set traps and put poison where the enemy would find it, and the turkeys would not. But the best trick of all proved to be the tying of little bells around the necks of a few gobblers. A tinkle of tiny sleighbells caused the puzzled enemy to vanish at top speed! The "bell turkeys" soon became used to their useful baubles, and the coyotes have never yet dared venture to face a flock patrolled by that mysterious sound.

It is interesting to watch one of the girls hover around her nurslings with motherly care, to see her make pets of them; with the hose, sprinkling the flock in hot weather; driving them under the shelter of boughs she had built for them and kept well watered so that it might be cool and inviting; climbing nimbly upon the roosts so her "babies," which could not be induced to leave her a minute, might catch the trick of perching. She was their only model, to her they looked for food and instruction in polite deportment!

It is good, too, to see these girls, lariat over the saddle, mount their pony and away after the coyotes with vengeance in their hearts. It is stimulating to watch them saw lumber and nail it briskly into brood boxes and shipping crates; to see them train a dog or bake a pan of biscuits equal to the best to be had.

Thus have they fought their way to success, by their own courageous efforts.