

HATCHING HAPPINESS

By Nellie Schoyer Lockard*

A touring car was moving slowly along a well-paved road, and had you asked the two persons sitting on the front seat why they were in that particular place on that particular occasion, you would have been surprised to receive two entirely different answers.

The younger woman, scarcely more than a girl, would have assured you in all sincerity that she was driving Mrs. Hilton's car because her regular chauffeur had gone away for a little while and she had been asked to drive for her friend for the day.

Mrs. Hilton, on the other hand, could have divulged the "real" reason. Sending the chauffeur away and the consequent calling upon her neighbor to drive the car for her were but maneuvers that she might have this time alone with Helen Chamberlain. Furthermore, she could have told you of the cloud, "no larger than a man's hand," 'tis true, yet still a cloud, which had arisen on the matrimonial horizon of her dear young friends John and Helen Chamberlain, whose pretty bungalow nestled under the shadow of her own home. Mrs. Hilton was much too wise to offer herself as *confidante* to this bride of less than a year, but she was praying the way might be opened and was hoping that she might be privileged to help in some way in adjusting the trouble which seemed to be developing in the home of these two friends.

"O Mrs. Hilton," said the girl at the wheel, "do look at that sign. No, to your left; see? Isn't it the funniest thing you ever saw? Let's stop and find out what 'TIThen Eggs' are. I never heard of that breed before, did you?"

With the words and a deft turn of the wheel, the car came to a stop before the little hen-house to which this placard was attached:

Strictly fresh EGGS
25 cents a Dozen
TIThen EGGS
27 cents a Dozen

In answer to Helen's "Honk! Honk!" a little old-fashioned woman came hurrying from the porch of the vine-covered farmhouse, wiping the suds from her arms as she came. Pushing back a stray lock of hair, she looked up at the ladies in the car out of the clearest, smilingest eyes in the world, and inquired, "Which would you wish to have, the strictly fresh or the tithen eggs?"

The driver of the car replied with her irresistible smile. "I can't tell whether I wish the tithen eggs or not, until I know just what kind of eggs they are." "Them," replied the farmer's wife, apparently surprised at such ignorance, "why they're the Lord's eggs, you know." "What on earth do you mean by 'the Lord's eggs'?" inquired the girl. Mrs. Hilton and the faded little woman exchanged a smile of understanding. They needed no secret grip to tell them they were sisters, daughters of the King. "It's this way," said the latter, fixing her blue eyes on the questioner, "I always put by the biggest egg out of every ten my hens lay, for the Lord's share, and so give Him back a part of what He has given me; by reason of their being so big, I can easy get a couple cents more a dozen for 'em. I use that money to help His work along just as far as it'll go."

A shade came over the fair face of the young woman as she listened, and she said rather listlessly, "You may give me a dozen of the tithen ones, please;" to Mrs. Hilton she added, "They'll

appeal to John! He's simply 'crazy' on the subject of stewardship! It makes me tired!"

But Mrs. Hilton seemed not to hear the remark, as she watched the careful packing of the large snowy eggs. Then she spoke to the woman, leaning forward as she did so, "Please put up two dozen of the tithen ones for me, too. And would you tell me how you came to begin to 'bring your tithes into the storehouse'? I ask because we are very much interested just now in the subject of stewardship in our Woman's Society."

"Really," said the little woman, "I don't know how I first came to know about my stewardship. It appears to me as long as I've known anything, it's been clear to my mind that I ought to set aside a separate portion for God. I didn't have much of my very own to divide with Him before I was married, except my time and my work; but since then He's always had His share and a bit over, for you remember His directions about giving, don't you, ma'am? 'Pressed down, shaken together and running over'? I surmise He likes us to give to Him the same sort of way. 'Course," she added, smiling, "you can't do that literal with eggs—press down and shake together—but you can put in an extra one now and again for good measure."

At this juncture the younger woman interrupted the speaker with the question: "And what does your husband think of tithing?" "My Jimmie," in a surprised tone, "why Lord love you! Jimmie's worse at it than I am! He says it's awful good business, too, for what's left we separate a part for God appears to stretch out more than if you kept it all for yourself. But that ain't the reason we're stewards, Jimmie and me. No, ma'am. It's because the dear Lord's done so much for us. It seems like we can't, if we try ever so hard, show Him how thankful we are and how we love Him." She paused, then after a shrewd glance into the young woman's averted face, continued, "Just you give it a try, Miss, and see for yourself."

The big car moved off through the flickering shadows cast by the trees bordering the road, each occupant engrossed in her own thoughts. Finally, Helen Chamberlain broke the silence with the words, "I don't care! Five hundred dollars a year is entirely too much for us to give away when we need furniture and all sorts of things for ourselves!" As Mrs. Hilton, on whom light was beginning to break, made no reply to this speech, Helen went on, "Of course, you who are just naturally good can't possibly, by any stretch of your imagination, conceive of a greater joy in life than doing without things, so as to help other folks; but I believe 'charity begins at—'" Pale to her lips, Mrs. Hilton interrupted, saying earnestly, "Please, Helen! If you love me, do not use that hackneyed phrase! Wherever charity begins at home, it generally stops there. I hid behind that old saying until I nearly wrecked, not only my own Christian life, but my husband's as well."

Startled at this unexpected outbreak, the girl stammered, "I beg your pardon, Mrs. Hilton, but I always thought you were a born tither." Sadly shaking her head, the elder woman said, "I believe I'll tell you the painful story; it may be of help to you just now. When Mr. Hilton and I were first married, we were active in the church and a very happy and congenial couple. Later, as we began to get on in the world, Rob became convinced that the only right way to finance the affairs of the kingdom was by systematic giving—a tenth or more according as one prospered. Now, I too, longed to have a beauti-

ful, well-furnished home and begrudged every cent we gave away, to such an extent that I could neither eat nor sleep. When my husband was promoted and sent to a distant city to live, I nagged and nagged at him until, to get a little peace, he surrendered and told me he would, from that time forth, place his salary entirely in my hands to be administered as I thought best.

"That was exactly what I desired. I cut out giving to almost nothing; I bought things for the house, fixed it up and yet was dissatisfied. Our house was the prettiest on the street, but Robert, my own dear husband, seemed to have lost all interest in church work, and even gave up the class of boys he had so greatly loved to teach; and he became so indifferent that I was greatly worried about his soul. Just fancy! My own soul had shrivelled into almost nothing because of my selfishness, and I never gave it a thought; and the cause of this change, my greed and selfishness, that did not trouble me one little bit! But I was concerned about what was happening in Rob's life.

"Well, to make a long story short, one day I was in a store being fitted with a pair of shoes. I was sitting on one of those high-backed chairs, peculiar to shoe stores, hidden from the other side of the place completely. Here, without being seen, I overheard a conversation not intended for my ears. One of the members of our church was talking with our minister and saying, 'Well, doctor, the committee on finance has seen every man in the church except that man Hilton. There's not a fellow who is willing to tackle him. A coldness comes over the conversation and he shuts up like a clam as soon as money is mentioned to him. He's mortal stingy, and he hasn't manhood enough even to refuse himself, but puts the unpleasant business of saying "no" off onto that little wife of his. She's a mighty fine woman, too. It's hard on her to be married to such a tight-fisted chap as Bob Hilton. Everybody pities her!'

"If a knife had pierced my heart, Helen, I could not have felt a sharper pang than those words gave me! With my face buried in my hands I just heard the murmur of the minister's voice, as he tried to apologize for Rob. My generous-hearted, manly husband! The truest Christian and the best man I have ever known! Then these words came to me more clearly. It was the minister still speaking, 'I was never so bitterly disappointed in any one as I have been in Robert Hilton. His former pastor wrote me the most glowing accounts of his work and influence in the church and throughout the whole community. I fear since coming into his present fine position, it has been a choice between God and mammon, and alas! mammon is once again the winner!'

"It broke my heart to think of my husband bearing the onus of my miserable selfishness, but the very hardest thing of all to bear was the unmerited praise bestowed upon me! I was simply crushed. I don't know how I got home. That night Robert and I came to an understanding. My husband forgave me freely, and my Lord forgave me, but I can never forgive myself for those wasted years and those lost opportunities! We began in a real way to recognize our partnership with God. A new joy entered our home, and our religious life glowed with a new warmth of experience. God became very real in all life's work.

"I haven't time now to tell you the whole story, but we began to make our whole home a partnership in a new way, not only with God but with one another. You'll be interested to know that from that time we have set at least a tenth