

Treat those DRUMSTICKS

This big-city man made good on the farm—by outwitting a suicide-bound flock of turkeys

HOBART NORMAN is a tense, lanky man with thinning hair and a faintly worried expression, whose working hours are devoted to preventing turkeys from committing suicide. This is a task which requires ingenuity and eternal vigilance, since self-destruction is one thing for which the turkey, a notoriously stupid fowl, shows a real talent.

Norman's extraordinary success in eliminating untimely death from his flocks has made him one of America's most successful turkey farmers. Until 10 years ago he was a city man. Since then he has converted a run-down farm, Charlotte Hall, Saint Marys County, Maryland, into one of the most modern and pretentious gobbler factories in the country.

Keeping turkeys healthy and happy is a job that involves some very special risks and problems. There is the menace represented by a piece of paper blowing around the farm when the moon is full; it might cause a disastrous stampede. There is the turkey's suicidal penchant for making friends with carnivorous creatures. There is the problem of keeping the gobbler's ego high and his blood pressure low.

To be successful, a turkey farmer has to make certain that the young birds do not get too cold or too hot, that they don't catch their heads in crevices and strangle or catch their feet in wire and contentedly let the others trample them to death. If they get the opportunity, they will starve themselves to death or will let the other birds pick them to pieces.

Norman is on hand 24 hours a day to see that such disasters are avoided.

It was a draft on the back of his neck that got Norman out of the city and onto a farm, in the first place. The draft hit him when he was operating a grocery store in Washington, D.C., and gave

By **ALFRED TOOMBS**

him so many colds his doctor recommended that he get into some business where the cash register wasn't so close to the door. An independent soul, not caring to work for anybody else, Norman decided to move to a farm where he would be his own boss.

So he bought an old farm, consisting of 200 acres of nothing much, and moved out of the city in 1940. That year he planted corn and tobacco, the southern Maryland staple crops, and, as an afterthought, bought a few turkeys from his neighbors. Having no illusions about making a living off the land, he would get his chores out of the way early in the morning and spend the rest of the day selling brushes from door to door around the countryside. Homespun and sparing in his use of adjectives, Norman was a success as a salesman with country folk—who are wary of high-pressure talk.

"I enjoyed selling brushes," he recalls. "Made a hundred dollars every week I worked. But when I added up the books on my turkeys at the end of the year, I found my profit on them came to only \$49.20."

Some men, finding they had so much influence with people and so little with turkeys, would have made an obvious choice. But the following year Norman's neighbors saw a flock of 50 expensive purebred turkeys on his farm. They came to the conclusion that he must have been very successful with his first birds. One of them suggested as much to Mrs. Norman.

"No," she replied, in the amused-but-admiring tone she uses when discussing her husband's temperament, "we did poorly with last year's turkeys. That's just it—they made him mad, so he bought

some more. Says he's going to show them something this time."

Norman's victory in this matter has been conclusive. The original flock of 50 has multiplied to 7,000 birds. The old farmhouse has been remodeled into a colonnaded mansion, surrounded by lawn and stately shade trees. The colorful turkeys roam over acres of carefully cultivated pasture or take shelter from the heat in the woods at the edge of the range. Solidly built, bright white brooder houses, barns, refrigerating and power plants and an office building are within a short distance of the house.

"I don't know whether I'm a businessman on a farm or a farmer in business," Norman says, as he looks over his operation.

The turkey industry, which will market an estimated 41,000,000 birds this season for close to \$400,000,000, is made up generally of specialists. These are men who breed turkeys, who operate hatcheries, who raise young birds to market size or who process and market the turkeys. Norman is one of the few big-timers who do all these things. He can convert the gleam in a tom turkey's eye into an oven-ready bird without leaving the farm.

Norman, a perfectionist about everything, supervises every operation on the place. A nervous man, who looks as if he might acquire stomach ulcers even on a farm, Norman watches his workers like a hawk to make certain they do things as he wants them done.

The economics of the turkey industry appear to be predicated upon a rags-or-riches basis. Theoretically, the turkey should be one of the cheapest kinds of meat since it converts feed into flesh with greater efficiency than almost any other domestic bird or beast. It is the turkey's unhappy habit of dying young which accounts for the high cost of Thanksgiving. These birds are subject to

Hobart Norman and his farm manager, Lyle Hessler, check flock for breeders, in fall test. Any flaw, from knock-knees to a surly look, will slate bird for the oven



gently

practically every known disease and this, added to their ingenuity in killing themselves, makes raising them an uncertain venture. Everyone who goes into the business hopes to get rich, expects to go broke and is happy to come out even.

At the time Norman started out in earnest to show the turkeys who was boss, he was fortified with a library of information on the subject and, more important, his wife. Mrs. Norman, an attractive and friendly person, had been working in a Washington bureau. She knew as much about turkeys as she knew about the Paleolithic period, but she realized how important it was to her husband to be successful with them. Mrs. Norman now understands every phase of the operation of the farm, although she bows to her husband's superior knowledge in every detail except cooking turkeys. She works full time in the turkey business except for the hours she devotes to her bright, blue-eyed daughters, Jeanie, five, and Joanie, four.

When they moved to the farm, the Normans had only the furniture from their two-room city apartment. This gave them chairs and tables for only a few of the farmhouse's eight rooms. And they didn't have much of any equipment for raising turkeys. "So we used a spare bedroom for the incubator and another room for a brooder," Mrs. Norman recalls. "Sometimes I kept young ones under the stove in the kitchen so they'd stay warm."

New Germicide Was Too Efficient

One day Norman tried out a new germicide. Next morning he discovered the stuff had killed not only germs, but 90 of his young turkeys. It was a hard blow, but he persisted. After a couple of years of nursing his flock through sickness and danger, he was doing well enough to establish himself in the turkey business full time. As the money rolled in, Norman invested in new equipment and more buildings. He got more and more scientific in his efforts to prevent disease.

At this time Norman was breeding, hatching and growing birds which he sold at live-weight prices in Baltimore. A few days before Thanksgiving one year he was trucking his birds through downtown Baltimore when one of them escaped. He left the truck where it stood and pursued the turkey. The chase was soon enlivened by the addition of numerous pedestrians and two platoons of police. The first platoon was trying to help Norman catch the turkey. The second was simply trying to catch Norman. By this time his truck was surrounded by a crowd looking for free turkey, and the police accused him not only of blocking traffic but of inciting a riot.

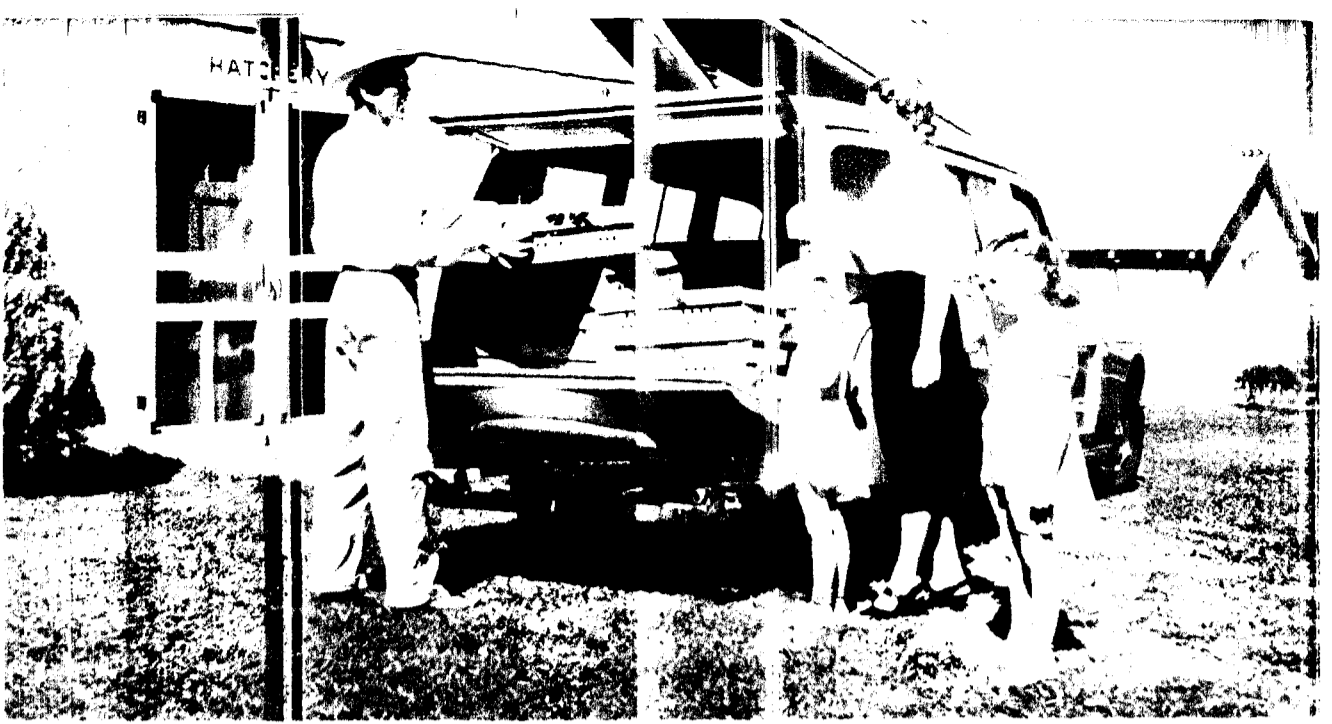
The turkey was finally recaptured, but Norman found that a parking ticket can reduce the profits. On the way home he kept comparing the price he had received for his birds with the price of turkey in the retail market. That year's profits were set aside for construction of a dressing and quick-freezing plant. After that, Norman not only grew his own birds but sold them oven-ready at retail prices. He's never chased another bird down a city street.

With Norman, there's no question about which comes first—the turkey or the egg. The backbone of his operation is the breeding flock. He raises only broad-breasted bronze turkeys, which carry a high proportion of white meat. He has developed a bird with the kind of feet, feathers and other characteristics he wants; it is known in the trade as the Norman strain.

Once he hatched a bird which had three legs. For a time he dreamed of getting on the market with a turkey that had not only ample white meat but three drumsticks.

"But it didn't live long," he says sadly.

Norman's breeding flock is selected with more care than are the members of a Yale secret society. He chooses new breeders every fall, examining



Hard working Norman sells thousands of day-old poults. Wife and daughters watch him load a shipment



After Hessler, right, records the weight on each wrapper, Norman packs the oven-ready turkeys for market

every bird from beak to toes. For reasons which could be explained only by a turkey psychiatrist, the toms cannot be touched in the process. Handling them damages their ego and makes them worthless for breeding. Norman will eliminate birds from the flock for any cause from knock-knees to a surly expression: these are sent to market. The 3,000 most nearly perfect birds are kept for breeding.

Normally, turkeys would wait until spring before they would start raising families but Norman practices a major deception by artificial lighting in December. By January the turkeys' days are getting longer and they are convinced it must be June. It takes the toms a little longer to get the proper dreamy-eyed spring look and so the lights are turned on in their pens three weeks earlier than in the hens'.

One year Norman turned on the lighting in the toms' and the hens' pens at the same time. This precipitated a crisis which the Norman business barely managed to survive. When the toms and hens were mixed, every hen in the flock was in the mood for love. They flirted and flung themselves at the toms, who paid no attention to them. When a few of the toms became aroused to the idea that spring had come early, they found themselves confronted with nearly 3,000 prospective brides.

These toms sallied forth and, first hen they came to, began their courting dance. About halfway through this ceremony, a tom would spot another flirtatious hen. He would promptly terminate his

engagement to the first and run off to court his new love. Then the same thing would happen again. This went on for weeks, with dog-tired toms rushing madly from one prospective mate to another—completely unable to decide which to choose.

"It was six weeks before things straightened out," Norman recalls ruefully. "We finally got some eggs we could hatch, but by then we were way behind on orders."

The hens begin to lay eggs in January, and by February the flock is turning out 12,000 eggs a week. To Sid Ellis, quiet, good-natured hired man, falls the job of collecting the eggs from the nest. At the height of the season Sid does nothing else, making his rounds every 45 minutes.

"I figured up one day," said Norman, "that Sid walks between 8 and 10 miles every day just picking up eggs."

Ellis is a man of even fewer words than Norman. A conversation between the two will go something like this:

"Just ran over a turkey with a tractor," Ellis will say.

"Can't keep running over turkeys," Norman will reply.

"Nope."

"Make them stay out of your way."

"Yup."

Before the eggs have even been laid, growers have contracted with Norman for his entire season's output of day-old poults. It's when he puts the eggs in the incubators (*Continued on page 77*)

Cinderella Rides Again

Continuing the story of a girl who
didn't need a fairy godmother

By ADELA ROGERS ST. JOHNS

The Story: When JOHN V. MERRYWEATHER, the eccentric society editor of the New York Chronicle, drew up a list of the girls who were candidates to become the wife of CYRUS SAYRE FALKLAND, the country's richest young bachelor, he had never heard of BESSIE KEEGAN of Tuckapack, New Jersey. Bessie was an added starter, and none of the wealthy, famous and beautiful young women who would gladly have married the handsome Cyrus knew what serious competition Bessie was destined to be. She was an obscure little hairdresser, working in the Rosebud Beauty Salon in Tuckapack; but Bessie hated the poverty and shabbiness into which she had been born, and her ambition was to marry money. An ambition with Bessie was no mere dream: she had good looks and a scheming brain and was not burdened by scruples. One day in the Rosebud she learned that MRS. MYRA MATTHEWSON, wife of MOOSE MATTHEWSON, the country's leading amateur sportsman, needed a maid. Bessie, who wanted to study the ways of the rich, applied for the job and got it. The Matthewsons were close friends of young Falkland and of his mother, MRS. ANTOINETTE FALKLAND, famous and beloved for her many philanthropies. Bessie's Papa, JAMES KEEGAN, a hard-working bricklayer, didn't think much of Bessie's new job; neither did JAKE FUCELI, who owned a garage in Tuckapack and wanted Bessie to marry him. But Bessie was not much concerned about their objections. At Suffolk Acres, the Matthewsons' estate near Tuckapack, she waited for a chance that would further her ambition. She thought it had come when Myra Matthewson gave her a letter to mail to CLIFF QUARRIER, a man-about-town who had a doubtful reputation with women. Bessie's determination was whetted by the fact that Cyrus Falkland was staying with the Matthewsons before departing for a tour of Europe, presumably on a government mission, for he was an idealistic young man with serious ideas about the responsibilities of wealth. Bessie took Myra's letter to her room to decide exactly what use she would make of it.

PART TWO OF FIVE PARTS

BESSIE caressed Myra's letter as though it were a precious keepsake, as in a sense it was, but for reasons not in the least sentimental. The letter was a blank check on which Bessie would fill in the amount as soon as she decided what the amount should be. Not that she was after money in any crude way; her ambition went beyond mere wealth and even its pleasant appurtenances, like this splendid house and the closets of exquisite clothes which Bessie kept in order for Myra Matthewson.

These were the outward signs of what Bessie wanted; and she could not even give a name to the inward grace she believed wealth could create. It was intangible, but Bessie could recognize it in women like Myra or like Germaine Landis, who were so used to having money that they really didn't need to think about it very much—it was simply there.

Bessie was disturbed by a sudden memory of her

father and annoyed with herself for being disturbed. She looked around her little room, as if its very littleness were the justification she needed. Papa would applaud her ambition, though he might grumble about it a little, and he would approve her determination to get where she wanted to go. But what would he think of the means she was using? An ugly word formed on Bessie's lips, and again her eyes roved restlessly around the room.

It was a pretty room, prettier than any Bessie had ever lived in before. The wallpaper was ivory, with tiny gold figures. On the floor was a braided rug of bright colors. But—and the bitterness rose in Bessie so that the guilt of the ugly word no longer mattered—it was a maid's room, the kind of room that people who could afford to be considerate would not begrudge a servant.

"And I am not a servant," Bessie said aloud. "I won't be a servant." Her fingers tightened on the gray envelope of the letter; the use she planned to make of it—she told herself—was legitimate. She walked quickly to the door and opened it. Then the breath almost left her body when she heard the voice of Cyrus Sayre Falkland in the corridor.

"I'll stay overnight, if I may, Moose," he was saying. Bessie closed the door, but not so much that she couldn't hear the rest of their conversation. "The plane leaves tomorrow afternoon, so I'll have to get an early start from here in the morning," Cyrus said.

"Sure, Cy," Moose said. "It couldn't have come at a more convenient time. We're closing this place for the season, you know—except we'll be back for Thanksgiving and Christmas. But Myra and I are driving into the city bright and early. Most of the things have already been moved, and most of the servants are already in the town house. You ride up with us. Plenty of room—no one else but Myra's maid, Bessie What's-Her-Name."

Their voices were more distant now. They must be standing in front of one of the guest rooms. "How long will you be in Europe, Cy, you old statesman, you?" That was Moose, being funny in his heavy-handed way. "I'll be back in less than a month," Cy said. Then a door closed and Bessie could no longer hear them . . .

Later, Bessie lay on her bed, wakeful but not minding it at all. Myra's letter to Cliff Quarrier was safely tucked away at the bottom of her little trunk, which would be stowed in the back compartment of the Matthewson's big town car in the morning. Cliff Quarrier wouldn't miss the letter, or if he did, what matter? It was not the kind of letter Myra would risk making a fuss over. In the darkness, Bessie blushed when she remembered the bold phrases of the letter; the shameless confession in language she hadn't heard except on street corners in Tuckapack. It was enough to make any decent girl blush, and Mr. Cliff Quarrier must be as nasty a bit of goods as the gossips made him out, if women wrote him letters like this.

In a room down the hall, (Continued on page 45)

