OUR POULTRY DEPARTMENT

A FEW NOTES THAT WILL HELP OUR READERS KEEP IN TOUCH WITH THIS FAST-GROWING INDUSTRY

By Polk T. Bramble

There are two up-to-date hatcheries near Chestertown, and of the modern equipment that has made the growth of poultry raising phenomenal, perhaps our modern mammoth incubators stand out as the greatest achievement of the present time. We have them operated by electricity as well as by coal and oil burners. We have them as the last word in scientific construction, and a size to fit every need.

Mammoths are absolutely necessary for the hatcherymen who are in the the business of selling day old chicks. They are also necessary for the large breeder who hatches by the thousand and desires to grow to maturity large numbers of fowls of equal age and who is a producer on a large scale.

We sometimes wonder if the average poultry keeper really comprehends just what part the mammoth incubator has played in making the poultry industry what it is today. It would pay you to see these incubators right now when in full operation.

The 1927 mammoths are the last word in refinements. They demonstrate perfection in their respective makes. Just like the automobile, there have been marked improvements to what were considered perfect machines but a few years ago. With all these machines you can set as many eggs as you desire, limited by only capacity, just when you want to set them.

April, with its warm showers, bright sunshine, fresh succulent green feeds, etc., is an ideal month to start a flock of chicks. Get them out on the ground as soon as you possibly can. Do not be afraid to let them eat a few worms. Turn over some dirt for them each day. A bath in fresh turned soil, and the little they eat of it, will be good for them.

Geese and ducks have a very definite place on the general farm; that is, on the farm suited to their keeping, for it is true that all farms are not located right for waterfowl. First, we will consider the goose. Years ago, we had a flock which were given a pasture by themselves. This was a patch of low ground, watered by a spring and little brook which meandered the entire length of it. I suppose it comprised at least ten acres. Many years before it had been fenced and was known as the "calf pasture." About half of the area was cleared upland, while the remainder was a swale of swamp grass, huckleberry bushes and meadow hardhack. The brook was overgrown with cress and other water plants and grasses. The upland was natural pasture, affording a considerable growth of grass during the season of rains. Here the goslings fed during the spring and early summer, while they found much of their food for the summer and fall along the brook and in the lowlands.

Of course it is not always possible to provide a place like this for the geese, but there are many farms in our eastern and northern sections where a similar pasture is available. The goose is a grazing bird. In the wild state it is probable that nearly all of the food consists of vegetation, with an occasional minnow or frog thrown in for dessert.

Commercial poultrymen and farm poultry raisers have the annual problem of disposing of the surplus cockerels. It is inevitable that practically fifty per cent of every flock of baby chicks hatched during the spring season will be males, and the greater proportion of these little males, on most poultry plants, are surplus over the needs of the farm for future breeding purposes. This surplus of male chicks is and has been for many years a persistent and more or less perplexing problem.

Of the losses of chicks which we send out weekly from the Bramble Poultry Farm, chilling is the predominating cause.

Warmth is generally recognized as the greatest need of baby chicks. On the other hand, too low a temperature results in chilling, and is the greatest curse of successful brooding. Such a condition bring on digestive disorders, resulting in diarrhoea, and an immediate and lingering mortality, which greatly reduces the profitability of the brood. Just remember if you will, that chicks are hatched at a temperature of 103 degrees. They cannot be weaned from this rather high temperature quickly, so for the first few weeks of their life the most urgent requirement is that they be kept comfortably warm. The exact degree of heat will depend upon the type of brooder, the size of the building, the location of the thermometer, and other similiar factors.

During the first week the temperature in the area where the chicks hover at night should be from 90 to 95 degrees, but provision should be made that the chicks can get away from this extreme heat after they are two or three days old, providing they have access back and forth to the heated area. The most successful brooder operator discards the thermometer, judging the proper temperature by the comfort of the chicks. If the chicks are too hot and are kept for sometime in too hot a temperature they will pant. This condition is practically as injurious as too little heat. If they are too cold, on the other hand, they will crowd together and be extremely noisy. Just look at your chicks at night and if they are spread out in a contented manner, on the floor in a big ring around the brooder, you may be assured that the temperature is about right. In order to accomplish the above results, the chicks should be confined quite close to the heated hover for the first few days. This enables them to get added strength, and to learn where the heat is, and gets them by a very critical period in their life. Chicks have to be taught how to behave in reference to heat. They crowd easily if they get away from the heat, and do not know where to go to get warmed up. They should be kept out of corners where they crowd and kill each other by suffocation, by the use of slanting wire screens or slanted boards. It is a very desirable practice to watch the brooder temperature at night and to be sure that it maintains an even degree of heat. When coal is used, in the early morning hours, after the fire has been burning for a considerable length of time, the chicks may become chilled enough to do them serious harm, yet the operator may not be aware of the fact, for by the time he goes out in the morning to look at the brooder, the chicks will be running around and active, and not show the effects of such slight chilling. It pays to visit the brooder house the last thing before going to bed at night and occasionally at three or four o'clock in the morning, especially in very cold or windy weather, to see that the heat carries through properly and to take care of any variation in temperature. I hope I have made it plain that the one most fundamental-

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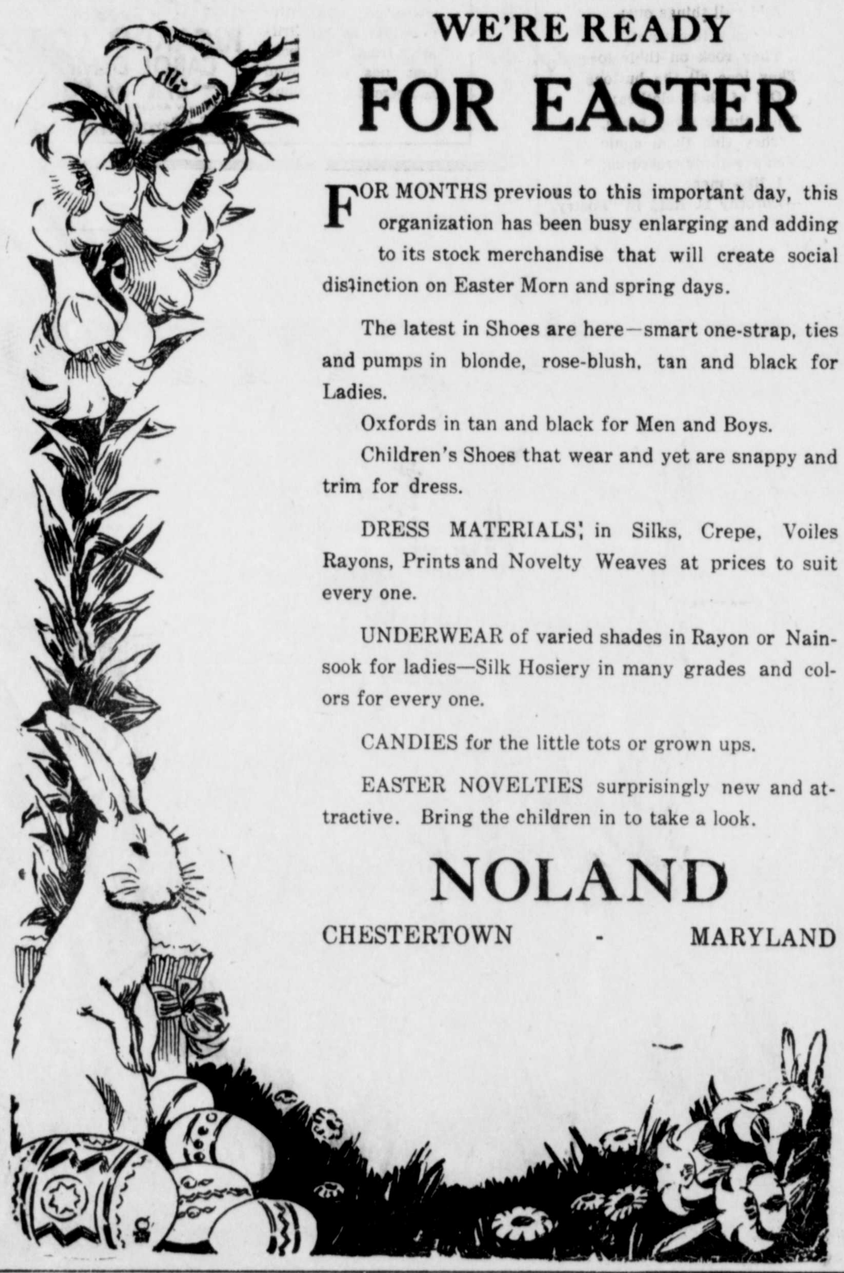

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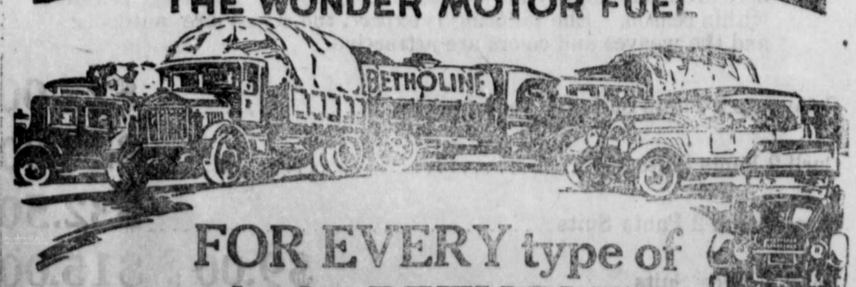

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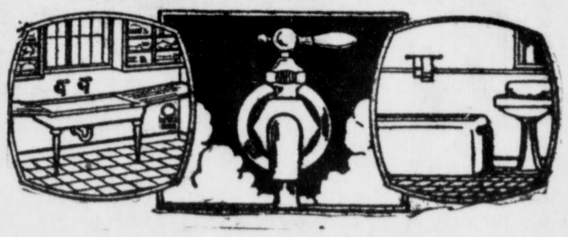

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