

HOW TO KEEP POULTRY FOR PROFIT.

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THE extent to which poultry has been cultivated during many years merely for exhibition purposes, has beyond all doubt made many people more sceptical even than before as to the possibility of fowls "paying" for merely practical purposes, and perhaps more is said now

(say eighteen or twenty feet wide) can be given, fowls ought not to be kept. They are naturally active, and in a miserable wet and filthy wired place a yard wide by a couple long, no one can reasonably expect anything but ill-health. A wooden fowl-house, four to six feet wide, off one end of such a strip of garden will be enough for half a dozen; and, again, more ought not to be kept unless the space is more also. But that house must be tight, with no cracks or other draughts in it, or place where air can enter except a hole in the bottom for the fowls, and some ventilator near the top; and the perch must be so adjusted that they are not in the natural draught between. A capital plan is to make a broad shelf half a yard from the ground, at the back, and about as wide; put the nests under this at the back, and the perch a few inches above it, as in the diagram. Then the shelf can be sprinkled with sand or ashes every morning after scraping off all the droppings, which must be done every day, putting them on the garden. All will be easily cleaned, and all will be to the back, with the front space clean and clear.

about "eggs costing sixpence each" than ever before. The matter really stands much as it always did. People who manage their fowls will make them pay, as a great many balance-sheets honestly published every year amply prove; people who do not, cannot make them pay, and that is no new thing either. Perhaps the owner is rather more likely now than some years since to hear about some pure breed or other; and as these pure breeds have been kept for years, and purposely cultivated for quite other purposes than eggs, he is a little more likely than formerly to get hold of fowls which do not lay remarkably well; but even these will generally pay with good management.

Let us first see what are the usual kinds of bad management, that these may be avoided. First, fowls are often insufficiently housed. That always brings bad luck, except in the rare case of birds brought from a farm—those conditions sometimes seem to make up for almost anything. Next, it is very common, after getting the fowls, and fussing a great deal over them at first, afterwards to leave them to themselves or to the servants. Now fowls have few wants enough, but those are imperious; and not one servant in a thousand can or will satisfy them. Unless one of the elder children has a positive fancy for the work, they never ought to be kept unless one of the heads of the family means constantly to attend to them. Lastly, in mistaken kindness, fowls are very often grossly over-fed. They may also be half-starved, of course; but that does not occur nearly as often as the other fault.

Let us first see to the housing. Unless as much space as a strip all across the bottom of a small garden

This cleaning every day is a necessity for health and profit, and applies virtually to the run as well, if it is as small as supposed. It should be roofed to keep dry, the splash as well as the drip being kept out by a bottom board, and well stocked with loose dry earth or ashes—earth far the best. This can be raked every two or three days, dug up every now and then, and two or three times a year flung out and changed for fresh dry earth from the garden; or if there is a good dry ashes bin, this will do, clearing all out as soon as a fresh lot is ready, since damp and foul ashes breed parasites. One small hard place can be kept clear to feed on, and for the fountain; it should have also a broad earthenware saucer, kept well replenished with gritty gravel, old pounded mortar, and pounded oyster-shells. The particles of gravel are "hen's teeth;" the rest will be wanted for egg-shell. To some all this will seem great trouble, while others will think nothing of it. It is just the sort of thing no servant can be depended upon to do; and those who object to it had better not keep fowls. To lay out the place so that the fowls will neither get wet nor exposed to draught, and to attend to cleanliness regularly and scrupulously, are the primary essentials. Feeding is very little trouble, and bringing in eggs is less; the burden really lies in the constant cleaning and care. Those to whom such will be a burden should not undertake it.

Drink is simple enough: perfectly clean water in the fountain every day, without exception; it is easily remembered, and easily attended to. But food requires some reflection. Fowls kept in confinement like this must not be fed on whole grain, though that may be their natural food; for they are not kept under natural conditions. We may give them gravel, but they will eat far less of it than if at large, and their

whole system is less hardy. Their first meal in the morning must consist of what is usually called "soft food" of some kind. In nearly every house there are a few scraps of various sorts—leavings of vegetables, a few crusts and crumbs of bread, and perhaps a stray corner of pie-crust, now and then an odd potato, and so on. Now, if one vessel be kept for these odd things (only it must be kept sweet and healthy as if for your own table, and scalded in the same way), you cannot give the fowls a better breakfast than all this mashed up warm, with a little hot water if necessary, and well mixed with what is variously called in different places sharps, middlings, coarse country flour, and even pollard in some towns, though pollard is properly the coarse bran, which is quite unfit. The proper stuff is something like very fine bran, only more pinky, and with some flour in it. Half of this and half of the house-stuff make about the best food that can be had if it is enough; if it runs short, it can be made out with a little barley-meal, or some of the crushed biscuits sold as poultry-meal. This ought to be given as early as possible after the fowls are up. And one more meal of some grain, *not* maize—it may be old wheat, or barley, or heavy white oats, or dari, or buckwheat—must be given about half an hour before the fowls go to roost.

They only need these two meals a day of solid food, and more does them harm, unless the meals are very sparing ones indeed. That would be best of all, but nearly all people who have fowls in confinement, if they feed them three times a day, give them considerably too much. They must have enough; but that means keeping them hungry, and in fact almost ravenous for food; and hardly any other rule can be given, they eat so differently according to their size, breed, and whether they are laying or not. Perhaps on an average a mass of crumbly paste about as large as a small orange, in the morning, and a largish wine-glassful of grain at night, is as near the general mark as can be stated. But besides this regular feeding they must have some fresh green food every day, best perhaps in the middle of the day between the meals; and if any scraps of meat are minced up and given at the same time, there will be the more chance of eggs. From any well-ordered average house they will never get too much of this.

If good fowls are procured and treated like this, they will *pay*; and that brings us to the fowls. The main points of importance about these are, that they be both young and well nourished. There is no certain test of age, whatever people may say, though the legs of young hens look softer and fresher, and there is also a young and an old look about the face. Testimony must chiefly be depended upon, and ought to be, if respectable people vouch for anything. But this really

is a chief thing, because an average hen only really pays for two seasons—the year following that in which she was hatched, and the year after. She ought not to be kept beyond that time; and, of course, to buy one which has already yielded all her profit cannot turn out well. When fowls are purchased in autumn, they should be those hatched the same spring, pretty early, but not too early—say, from March to early April—which will begin early to lay winter eggs. If in the spring, then get pullets hatched the spring before, which need not be so early. As a rule, early hatching means winter laying, but not so many eggs in the spring and summer after; while April and May chickens lay less or none in winter, but more in the summer. It is much the best for beginners to start in the spring, because they have something to learn and probably some mistakes to make, anyhow. In spite

of all these, in spring and summer they will get eggs with almost any fowls, and under very middling management; and that is a great encouragement.

Good cross-bred fowls will generally lay very well, and are cheap. Got from a farm where they are really fed, such are almost always healthy and profitable. If any distinct breed is got, the non-sitting breeds suited for confinement should be chosen, as chickens can hardly be reared, and to have hens getting "broody" is both trouble and loss. The sort of hen called "Black Spanish" generally does well, but is not the true Spanish, having a red face instead of white, and only white ears;

fanciers call it the Minorca. A similar fowl, called the Andalusian, of a blue-grey colour, is also a good non-sitting layer of large eggs. White or brown Leghorns also do well; and, if kept *very* dry, Polish. Hamburgs seldom thrive unless they can run at large. Crosses between some of these breeds generally lay better still, recovering those laying qualities which fanciers have sometimes lost by breeding for other objects; such a bird has been known to lay 200 eggs in a year. High-priced fancy fowls should be avoided. Good crosses can almost always be obtained with a little trouble, or even from a study of the advertisements in the poultry papers.

If there are more eggs than are wanted for immediate family use, they may be either preserved for winter, or sold. Often some neighbour is very glad of any that can be spared; but if direct private disposal is objected to, the family grocer, if he has at all a respectable connection, is generally only too happy to give a good price for all that can be thus personally warranted as new-laid. What are called "new-laid eggs" are so often a delusion and a snare, that even a few of known genuineness, as soon as it is known they can be had, are usually sought after with eagerness, always at good, sometimes at very high prices.

