

OUR PETS.

RABBITS AND GUINEA-PIGS: HOW TO KEEP AND TREAT THEM.



HAT boy, what country boy, at least, is there who does not, or who has not at some time of his young life, kept rabbits? These bright-eyed, saucy, graceful pets are general favourites with our little folks. And yet it is a well-known fact that these animals are often badly, not to say

long, thin, and pliant, low set on the head, and hang close to the cheek, with a most graceful curve. In shape of body and head the creature is all that an artist could desire, while the eye is large, round, full, and lovely.

The Angora, if properly taken care of, are most beautiful rabbits, and are exceedingly quiet and affec-



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cruelly, treated through ignorance of their nature, habits, and proper feeding. In this short paper I will endeavour, therefore, to put my young friends right in many little matters concerning them. And I strongly advise those boys, or girls either, who have a bit of green lawn in front of their homes to ask permission of their elders to keep one or two rabbits. I like to see all animals as free to run or fly about as a state of domesticity will permit, for if they are allowed their freedom, they not only become more tame and affectionate, but there is ever so much more fun to be got out of them.

Of the many beautiful breeds of rabbits there are few, in my opinion, to beat the lop-ear. He is, or ought to be, a very large rabbit, and in colour the breed is often most charming. The ears are very

tionate. Their greatest charm consists in the length and texture of their woolly coats. When pure white this is very taking indeed, and once seen this rabbit isn't easily forgotten.

The Himalayan rabbit is a great favourite of mine. He is a most shapely little fellow, pure white, except the fore-arms, legs, feet, nose, and ears, which ought to be as black as possible. These rabbits are neat, agile, and daring, yet loving and gentle withal, and most jealous in the care of their young. They are extremely ornamental.

Another graceful and fairy-like wee fellow is the little Dutch rabbit. He is the smallest of the rabbit tribe, and commends himself to our favourable notice for many reasons. He is such a tiny mite, for one thing, and so neat and pretty, that he

seems to hop at once into one's affections with a single bound. He ought to have a white blaze up the face, a white collar around the neck, and the body should be of any self-colour, but black is very nice, and tortoiseshell rich and rare.

If the Dutch is the tiniest of rabbits, the Patagonians, as the name would indicate, are the giants of their race. They do not, as you may imagine, come from the far south of America, where they tell us human giants dwell, but usually from France. Large though they be—some specimens weighing as much as fourteen pounds—they are quiet and docile, and seem to be quite pleased and contented with their lot in life.

The Belgian hare is another breed, so called from its resemblance to the common hare; but as the animal is more often bred for table use than kept as a pet, I shall say no more about him.

A very beautiful and taking rabbit is the silver-grey, sometimes called the Riche, and when well treated it is as docile and affectionate as any other rabbit. They need a little more kindness, perhaps, than other breeds, but they never fail to respond to it. One thing in their favour is this—they are hardy, and stand exposure to the weather better than some of the other breeds.

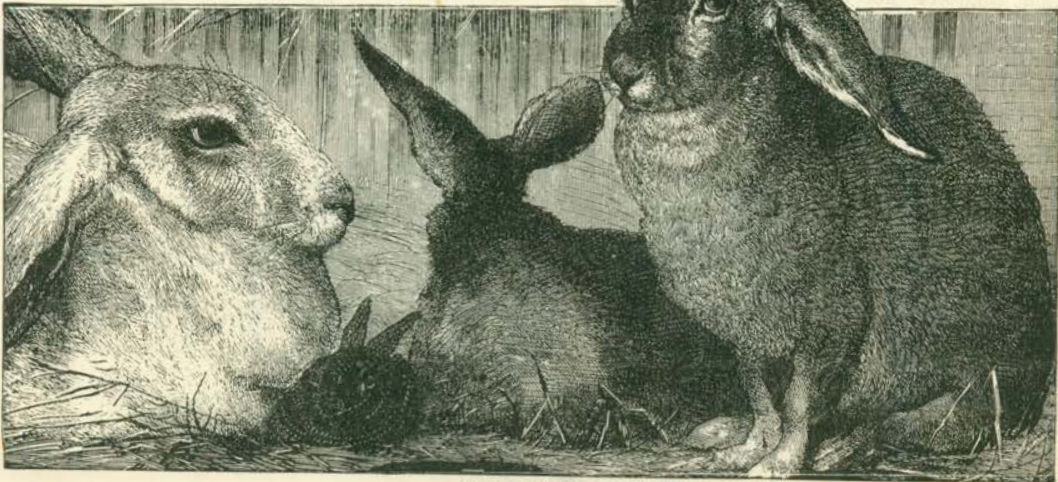
The feeding, breeding, and rearing of all rabbits are very much the same, only the tinier ones must be the most carefully dealt with.

If, then, you mean to go in for a few rabbits, do not make your purchase on any account until you have first prepared their hutch, or home. If you have a little ingenuity and a taste for mechanics, from a large roomy box you can easily construct a very comfortable hutch for your coming pets. As I write, reminiscences of my own early struggles as

a rabbits' architect and builder crowd upon me. I used to be ably assisted in my masonic labours by a favourite school-fellow, who, alas! now fills a warrior's grave. Our buildings consisted of wood and stones and mortar. With the exception that our roofs always evinced an inclination to tumble down, and our walls, much to the *discomfiture* of the furry tenants, to tumble in, I think we got on as well as amateurs could expect.

I see no reason why rabbits' hutches should not be made ornamental as well as useful; but here I shall merely describe what is actually wanted, first, in a living-hutch, and secondly, in a breeding-hutch, where young ones may be bred and reared to a certain age. If, after that, any of my readers want to go in for ornament they must consult their own skill and judgment.

You may make a simple hutch, then, out of any large box—the bigger, remember, the better. It ought to a great extent to be open in front, if not indeed altogether, the open portion to consist of a well-made and well-hinged door of iron or zinc galvanised wire. The hutch should have a bench inside, and this should be filled with bedding, for rabbits dearly love their comforts. A door should open behind big enough to enable you to get your hand and arm in, for the purpose of cleaning it out. A better plan still is to have a double floor in the hutch—the lower to be a kind of zinc-covered drawer; the one above, about two inches higher, to be composed of laths a little way apart, to allow the droppings to pass through it. Both of these floors should pull out so that perfect cleanliness—so



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essential if you want your rabbits to look sweet and healthy—may be ensured. The breeding-hutch is somewhat similar in construction so far as floors and door are concerned, but attached to the main compartment, or parlour, is a dark room. This is called the breeding-box, and should be in size about equal to one-third of the whole. It is separated from the larger portion of the hutch by a sliding partition, with a hole in the centre large enough for the mother rabbit to pop out and in at her pleasure. Thus a breeding-hutch is not only a rabbit's parlour, but a parlour and bedroom combined, and the latter should have a wooden doorway opening outwards, independent of the sliding partition.

Rabbit-hutches may be placed either out of doors or in a well-ventilated stable or out-house, but if they are kept in the open air great care must be taken to give protection against wet and high winds. The hutches ought to be some distance from the ground, and have a southern exposure, as rabbits like the sunshine.

Exercise is essential to the well-being of rabbits, and when they once get to know you, you may let them out to scamper about on the grass or in the garden whenever you choose, and very pretty, in my opinion, they look, frolicking about on a well-kept lawn.

The best bedding for rabbits—and they ought to have an abundance of it—is *clean, dry* oaten straw. I have put the words "clean" and "dry" in italics to show their importance.

You cannot be too careful with the ventilation and cleanliness of your hutches, and I earnestly entreat you not to keep rabbits at all, unless you can assure yourself it is your duty to see to their comforts—not one day now and then, but every day. If you try breeding at all you will have double, treble delight; but, mind you, they must on no account be disturbed at the breeding season.

Quietness when the mother has young ones is most essential, but when the young ones are old enough to be let out on the grass (dry) then the fun begins, and it is better than all the doctors' medicine in the world to see them frolic, and to watch all their manoeuvres.

During the spring and summer months, when vegetation is nice and juicy, rabbits want but little, if any, water to drink; but I myself always like to let them have a sip now and then, and they nearly always seem to relish a drop of luke-warm milk and water; and this being the case, it is almost cruel, I think, not to let them have it. Too much moist food, however, should be avoided, as well as vegetables that are damp and wet. The best plan is to feed little and often, say three or four times a day, giving fresh food every time. Let them have in the morning a little nice hay, with a little scalded meal, not too wet; at mid-day some carrots, turnips, and green food; and dry food for supper, such as oats, and peas that have been soaked. But you ought to remember that change of diet is essential, so keep varying it every third day at least. Here are some of the things that rabbits are fond of—bran, turnips, carrots, clover, beet-root, mangolds, Indian-meal porridge or barley-meal porridge, well-boiled potatoes and grains. Well, if you cannot keep your rabbits healthy and happy by selecting a scale dietary from that list, you must remember the old saying, and try to learn from experience.

I had almost forgotten my little friends the guinea-pigs. Their hutches are much smaller, but built upon the same principle, and with a raised bed. Their feeding is precisely the same as that of the rabbit, only they like more green food. Give them whatever they care or ask for, and they do not allow themselves to be forgotten. They are even more funny, if less interesting, than rabbits, and if kept clean and sweet they make charming pets.

