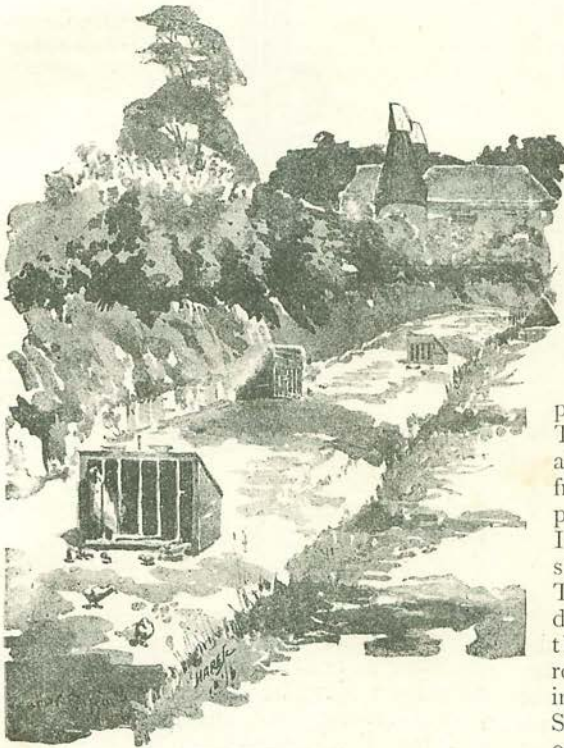


Chicken Manufacture.



A HEATHFIELD LANE.



HE first thing that strikes a stranger on entering the district of Heathfield, Sussex, is the number of chickens. In Heathfield itself and around, in Warbleton, Shoreham Road, and Cross-in-Hand, the domestic fowl is ubiquitous. He roams the lanes, and the dusty sides of the high roads are diaped with a pattern of chickens' feet; fields, commons, gardens, and not seldom the cottages themselves are pervaded by him. Coops, knocked up of any possible pieces of wood, stand on any possible patch of green by the wayside and, in the less frequented lanes, in the roadway itself.

A Heathfieldite once, asked by a hunting-man if many of the farmers around rode to hounds, made answer: "We preserve chickens, not foxes." Heathfield and the adjoining parishes form one vast preserve for poultry. But except the respectable matrons who brood and guard the young families, and here and there in the yards a strutting rooster with a few wives in his train, the fowls are all under full maturity. At all times of the year, from the little puff-balls that have just

broken shell to the hobbledehoy state of chicken youth, they are visible in their thousands. Past this stage they enter the manufacturing yards—the fattening farms.

But, as from Heathfield station alone, in specially constructed poultry vans, an average of between thirty and forty tons of dead poultry are dispatched weekly, so the everywhere present fowls can supply but a small part of the raw material needed by the fatters for manufacture. The deficit is supplied in two ways. Large numbers of Irish chickens are imported—especially from November to May. They come over many hundreds of dozens at a time, and at short intervals, mostly from the western parts of the Emerald Isle. The higglers supply the rest.

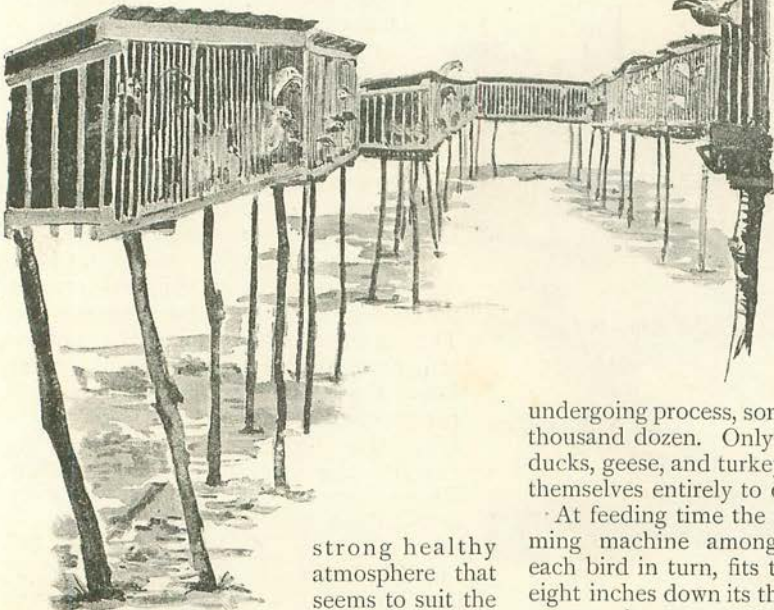
These men drive through the country round, and far into Kent and Surrey—thirty or forty miles in a day—picking up a few birds at this farm, a few at that cottage, and bring them to the fattening farms. Fattening is the staple industry of the place, and the exact process of the manufacture is to be seen nowhere else.

Tradition says that a man once came to Heathfield who had been engaged in the Norfolk turkey breeding business and experimented with chicken, so founding the trade. Be this as it may, chicken fattening



STILES

has gone on in the district for some fifty years, growing gradually into the prosperous industry it now is. And it is little likely that it could be carried on in the same way in many other places. High up on the Sussex hills, Heathfield enjoys a



David Clifford.
FATTING PENS.

strong healthy atmosphere that seems to suit the chicken race admirably, so that they hatch out

with impunity and run strongly at all seasons. Nearer to town it would be impossible to let the birds run free as they do here—certain light-fingered gentry of pedestrian habits would be too numerous—and in most other parts of southern England foxes are too plentiful. Then, again, the markets are handy; it is not a far cry to London, and the big Sussex watering-places are all within easy reach. And, as with all developing industries, as the business has grown among the people, so the people have grown into the business, acquiring the skill and rapidity that can only come of long usage, and which helps so greatly to make the trade profitable. The people are brought up to the management and handling of chickens from childhood, for every cottager rears a few birds, and the majority of the labouring population are in some way con-

nected with the trade as killers, stubbers, or the like. The birds, once taken in hand by the fatter, are shut up in coops, six birds to the pen, and are crammed twice daily for about three weeks.

The fattening coops are ranged in alleys or, perhaps, in small businesses, round gardens—some under cover, some not—on posts three feet from the ground. The small man has his ten dozen or so of fowls

undergoing process, some of the largest several thousand dozen. Only the larger ones deal in ducks, geese, and turkeys, the others confining themselves entirely to chickens.

At feeding time the fatter wheels his cramming machine among the pens, takes out each bird in turn, fits the feeding tube some eight inches down its throat and, with his foot, pumps the crop full, disengages the tube, and puts the bird back in the pen. The



THE CRAMMING MACHINE.



KILLING AND PACKING.

rapidity with which this is done by a good workman is astonishing, the knack of handling the birds wonderful.

In spring, chickens are taken in hand at about thirteen weeks old, later in the year a bit older, and are crammed for about three weeks with a mixture of ground oats, fat, and milk. As running birds, picking by the wayside with but small allowance of ground oats, they are muscular and athletic; in the course of two or three weeks' fattening they put on flesh at a great rate, and it is this rapidly manufactured flesh that gives its delicacy to the "Surrey" fowl. One of the peculiarities of the trade is that though the birds come principally from Kent and Ireland, and are of Sussex manufacture, they are known as "Surrey chicken." When they are fatted enough for the market they are intended for—what is called "half fat" for some of the

watering-places, or "full fat" for London; then comes the process of killing, plucking, etc. This was formerly done by "chicken butchers," men who went from farm to farm for that only—but now it is generally done by the farmer himself or his men.

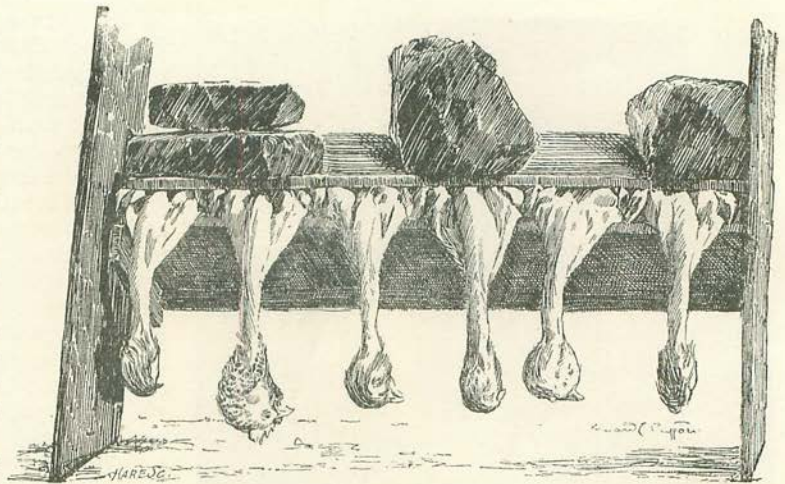
A shed is set apart for the purpose, and so many men and girls, according to the amount to be killed, assemble. A crate of live fowls is brought in. The men take each a bird and kill it. Picking then commences. With the bird on the knees the feathers are allowed to fall in a large basket, to be afterwards packed and sent to some of the large furnishing firms of London—all except the flights and stiff plumes, which are thrown apart. In ten minutes the bird is handed to a girl who, with a blunt knife, takes out the immature "stubs" of feathers that are missed in the picking. The "stopping" takes another ten minutes or so and the bird



STUBBING.

is handed to the "dresser," who, with sundry pushes against a post and little skilful pats, gets it into marketable shape, dusts it with flour, and puts it in the "press"—a V-shaped trough with a board on the top laden with stones. There now remains but the packing—one or more dozen to a crate—and they are ready for the carrier.

The carrier is one of the powers of the neighbourhood. All day and every day his carts are passing along the roads, now with full crates to the station, back again with returned empties; now piled up with Irish imports, then with consignments of ground oats, new coops, cramming machines, and the various necessities of the trade. He collects and sends to London the dead poultry at so much a bird, paying carriage at so much a ton, and making a profit on the transaction. As much as eighty tons of dead

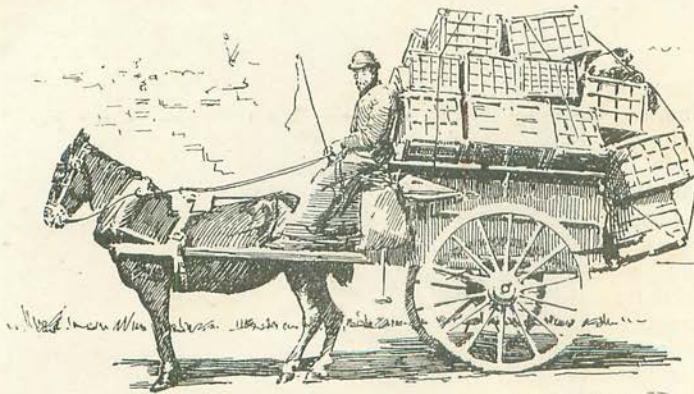


PRESSING.

butchers deal in fat by the bushel, and large quantities of milk are supplied by the surrounding farmers.

Heathfield is beautifully situated: wide views of hill and dale, of wood and down, and the sea away there in the distance. The neighbourhood has interest for many. It is the site of one of the principal iron workings in the south of England. The first cannon was bored there; and place-names and quaint

old fire-backs still testify to the old industry. The memory of Richard Woodman, ironfounder and martyr, of Mary's time, is still kept alive in Warbleton. Historic remains are numerous: a stone marking the place where Jack Cadé was killed by Iden is in the village. Pevensey and Hurstmonceaux are within easy driving distance. Botanists may find rare flowers here, notably the little



THE CARRIER.

poultry have been sent to market in a week from Heathfield, which, reckoning between four and five pounds to a bird, means some 500 to the ton, or 40,000 birds.

Such a trade naturally calls other trades to its aid. Millers become purveyors of ground oats, carpenters turn coop and pen makers,

blue gentian (*Gentiana verna*). Many frequent the place as an invigorating health resort in summer. But all interests are subservient to the chicken trade. The whole place is pervaded by poultry, and there are but few of the inhabitants who are not connected in some way with its staple industry.