

Utility of Snowbirds.

To the Editor.

SIR,—Observing a few days ago a number of snowbirds perched on my apple-trees, seemingly very industriously employed, I felt curious to know what they were about. Taking care not to disturb them, I took a spy-glass, and saw they were busy pecking at the stems of the branches, but not touching the buds. I concluded they were picking off the lice, which, owing to the warm summer, seemed to have greatly multiplied.

After they left, I examined the trees, and found they had cleared them in good style, choosing the worst for their operations. The branches presented a white, speckled appearance after the operation, on the spots where the lice had adhered.

The surface of the snow being very crusty, and smooth, the shells lay thickly upon it, giving it the appearance of being thickly dusted with coarse pepper. Out of a few dozen of these shells picked from the surface of the snow, I could not with a microscope observe an egg in one.

This trait in the character of these birds not being generally known, I thought it might be interesting to some of your fruit-growing subscribers.

I have also observed what I call small flocks of canaries all through the winter. Their note is exactly the same, although they are darker in plumage than in summer. Perhaps some of your corresponding ornithologists may have observed the same, and will enlighten us on the subject, as I think it very uncommon. J. McL.

Owen Sound, February, 1869.

NOTE BY EDITOR.—We have long been of opinion that the Snow-birds (*Fringilla hyemalis*), as well as other members of the Finch family, are eminently insectivorous, and hence useful to the agriculturist. They may, and probably do, often pick up a useful insect such as a Lady-bird, a Syrphus fly larva or a Spider, but still, with all due deference to Mr. Walsh, we believe they do more good than harm. In the case referred to by our correspondent, they appear to have made a severe raid upon the eggs of the apple-tree Bark-lice (*Aspidiotus conchiformis*), which are covered by a shell-like scale, the secretion of the female insect. They would probably devour also the eggs of the Apple Plant Louse (*Aphis mali*), which are laid in the interstices of the bark, and any other insect which chanced to be up and about on the occasional mild days of winter.

The canaries referred to are, as our correspondent supposes, the same birds as we have with us in summer, but in very different plumage. Few who see these dingy little birds about their gardens and orchards in winter fancy that they are the same as the gay yellow and black goldfinches, or wild canaries, of summer. Yet such is the case, as ornithologists well know. They, too, are useful birds, devouring the seeds of thistles and other weeds, and multitudes of plant lice and other minute insects.

Poultry Yard.

The Use of Poultry Shows.

To the Editor.

SIR,—The Ontario Poultry Society are trying to come to the front once more with their fourth exhibition, and their efforts have been most liberally aided by donations from several firms in this city, and there is every reason to expect that Hamilton and London will also contribute towards the prize list. But whilst soliciting contributions for this purpose, we are met with various objections (I use the pronoun "we," not that I have the least personal interest in the proposed exhibition, but that simply I wish a good beginning successfully carried out.) These objections are made, in some cases, even by those who themselves keep poultry. One says:—"I only keep common birds, and do not believe in your fancy articles." Now, the Society's aim is not to encourage poultry as a fancy merely, although in many instances such will be the result, but to foster a branch of stock-keeping that might prove a lasting, solid advantage to the country. What I am writing is a thrice-told tale, has been already written by myself and others, and I am afraid will yet have to be reiterated. People who keep fowls might, at least, as well have good saleable articles as mongrel rubbish, at the same cost.

Again, another will say, "what is the use of your points? Why is a Spanish bird with less comb not as good as another? Why should Aylesbury ducks be rejected because their bills have tinges of yellow and black spots? Why withhold a prize from Dorkings which have not five toes?"

There is an excellent reply to this sort of reasoning in the *Journal of Horticulture*, March 3, 1863, which I shall quote in my aid:—

"It has been necessary to lay down certain rules, which have been admitted for some years. The great end they answer is to form well defined marks, which may guide the enquirer and beginner. The use of poultry shows has been to publish the merits and properties of divers breeds, and to point out those that are fitted for certain soils and certain markets. The characteristics of a breed being pointed out, a purchaser cannot be easily deceived as to whether it will suit him or not. He will not buy a Dorking without five toes; but if he were to be told that Dorkings with four are as good as those with five claws, he has nothing to guide or protect him. He is at the mercy of any one whose fowls he sees for sale. Or take the Aylesbury duck. If the buyer is told the bird must have a pale bill, he will not buy one lacking that mark. If any bill will do, every white duck, to the uninitiated, becomes an Aylesbury. These are but two instances; many more could be given."

Has any good quality been given up to attain the standard of excellence as regards

points? Have Dorkings lost size or constitution? Have ducks diminished in weight or lost appearance? Dorkings have gained much in size, and in weight over two pounds each, while Aylesbury ducks, whose average weight two years since might be three to four pounds, now generally weigh four to eight pounds.

Again, take Pencilled Hamburgs. Roup was thought to be their natural state. People avoided the breed. There was no inducement to take pains with them, till competition and the requirements of exhibitions supplied the spur, since which time they have been shown in perfect colour, shape and markings, and strong enough to bear any trial in the way of climate. These are facts that speak for themselves.

Before I conclude, I should like to try and persuade those that now keep fowls not good enough, as they say, for exhibition, but an inferior lot, to try some recognized breed suited to their taste and means. They will cost no more to feed than the mongrels, and will be infinitely more remunerative in the sale of eggs; or by sending to exhibitions two or three picked from the lot, a price can be obtained which will pay for the consumption of food by all the others.

I have kept, myself, fowls to some extent for home consumption. They cost something to feed. I cannot say if they paid or not; but on getting a pure breed, and picking out a few and exhibiting them, I was paid more than the keep of all the rest, and had eggs and poultry on table gratis, or next to it.

I trust these facts will convince sceptics, induce the support of poultry exhibitions and improvement of the breed, and lead to the abandonment of that heterogeneous mixture of sorts that results in a mongrel race of fowls, and keeps our markets badly supplied with the wretched specimens we are constantly meeting with.

If a thing is worth doing, it is worth doing well, as my grandmother used to tell me. Every man that keeps poultry should keep good birds, and every grain and feed dealer should do his best as well to support the exhibitions of poultry; and need I say, the farmer and his family, as sellers of grain and eggs, should do likewise.

F. C. HASSARD.

Ontario Poultry Association.

The Ontario Poultry Association will hold their fourth exhibition of poultry and pigeons in the Agricultural Hall, Toronto, on Wednesday and Thursday, April 21st and 22nd. It was a disappointment to many poultry fanciers that no exhibition was held by this Society last fall, but it is confidently expected that the ensuing spring show will outrival any of its predecessors. The number of persons who take an interest in poultry is increasing in this country, very marked improvement is manifest in the various breeds of fowls, and a number of fresh importations from Europe have been made since the last