

POULTRY

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POULTRY BREEDING.

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No. II.

PERFECTING OLD BREEDS.

THE work of the majority of breeders is and ever will be, the perfecting of old breeds. By old breeds is meant those which are recognized as established, whether their origin dates back ten years or ten scores of years. In this sense the Wyandottes produced in our own day, are to be regarded as old breeds.

This is work that needs to be done, for no breed has yet reached the point where no further perfecting is possible. Not one of them is absolutely perfect. The comb, the body, the tail, the plumage in shade or in markings, some one, at least, of these various points is deficient, and perfection is lacking. And then, too, the internal, as well as the external, qualities are susceptible of improvement. The number, the size and the color of the eggs, the color, quality and amount of flesh, the hardiness and unsusceptibility to disease, the readiness to fatten and the easiness of keeping, all these qualities are yet somewhat imperfect and offer a field for labor, not only inviting but profitable.

But improvement of the old breeds depends upon the principle of variation, discussed in the second article in this series of papers, for variation makes selection

possible, and selection is the key that unlocks improvement. A breeder who expects to improve an old breed must start first with a definite idea of what he wishes to accomplish. His ideal must be clearly defined, otherwise he cannot make selections of any value. If his ideal is vague and musty, if it changes from year to year, his course as a breeder will be uncertain and vacillating and his results unsatisfactory and valueless.

Again he must have a trained eye for form and color, quick to detect defects and discover excellencies, in order that his selections may be wisely made. But he must be able to see not only the characteristics of each fowl selected for a breeder—a not easy task—but also the characteristics which will result from the union of the fowls so selected—by far a more difficult matter. Such training means considerable experience, the only reliable teacher upon this theme. Breeders are both born and made, that is there are men born with a natural aptitude for successful breeding, but they require training before they really become successful breeders.

And yet again he must have a settled purpose to succeed. Failures must not discourage him, successes must not elate him beyond measure. Each failure and each success should be a stepping stone across the slough that lies between his start and the solid ground of his achievement. The man who does not learn alike from failures and successes will never make a great breeder, and who allows either to swerve him from his course is unworthy of his calling.

And, yet again he must be patient of details. Disraeli, the English Premier, once said that he was not a mustard-seed man, but a breeder's success depends upon having a mind that will look after the little details. Whether

a comb has five or six points is a very trivial thing in itself, and yet in a breed where five points are preferred it may make all the difference between success and failure. Little things often produce great results, a pebble at the source may change the course of a river, the loss of a horse-shoe nail may cause the loss of horse and rider. George Elliott, in that wonderful romance, ROMOLA, shows how a single deception wrought chains that were unbreakable about Tito Melema, and made a villain out of one who otherwise might have been a gentle and lovable character. Little things are not petty in character if they are capable of producing great results, and the mustard seed mind is the only one which can successfully manage the finances of a great nation, or produce the exquisite results which are the glory of a breeder.

If a man selects one of the established breeds, suitable to his locality, has a definite idea of what he wishes to accomplish, a natural aptitude for breeding which has been cultivated by experience, a settled purpose which nothing can swerve him from, and the necessary patience to deal with the many vexatious details that are inseparable from this pursuit, he will make a success of his undertaking, for he will summon to his aid the great principles which underlie breeding, and will, through the plastic quality of the stock, mould it to his will. Such a man will, in time, out of even ordinary specimens of a breed, produce fowls improved in every direction, in useful as well as ornamental qualities, and will make of them a delight to the practical poultryman, because of their profitable character, and to the fancier a "thing of beauty" and "a joy forever."

What shows will you visit this winter? Now is the time to get your birds in shape.