

General Characteristics of Brahmas.

The correct standard to which both Dark and Light varieties of the Brahmas should be bred to, has been the cause of considerable difference between fanciers of this breed. In both varieties the size, shape and carriage should be precisely alike, as are the different varieties of Cochins, only differing in color. In England the Light variety are not so large as the Dark, in this country they surpass the Dark in many cases, but are not so well shaped, and are coarser in bone. Several English fanciers have recently procured from breeders in the United States birds of the Light variety to cross with their stock birds, the result of which has been a great gain in size, and it only needs judgment in mating and care in rearing to breed them larger than the Dark. A full-grown cock of either breed cannot be regarded as up to exhibition standard if he weighs less than twelve pounds, while hens should weigh eight to ten pounds. Cockerels, six months old, should weigh from seven to nine pounds, and pullets six to eight pounds. These are very good weights, and for all practical purposes are to be preferred to heavier, but they will often be exceeded, and cocks have been known to have reached fifteen, sixteen and in an extreme case even eighteen pounds, while many hens have turned the scale on twelve pounds. There can be no doubt then that the Brahma may be made to attain a greater weight than any other breed, not excepting the Cochin. The head of the cock cannot be too small in proportion to the body. This point is not easy to attain, and is of great value as a sign of high breeding, being generally accompanied by fineness of flesh, the top of the head should be rather wide, with a slight fullness of the eye, but not so much as to cause a cruel or Malay expression. The whole head should be rather short, and well arched; a long head looking mean, and disfiguring many otherwise fine birds. The comb—known as a pea comb—is peculiar, but is simply described as resembling three small combs joined into one, the centre one being higher than the two outside. It is very difficult, in the cock especially, to get this point to perfection. No pure strain ought to breed a solitary comb in which the peculiar triple character is not perfectly distinct; but there is a constant tendency to grow too large or crooked or otherwise mis-shapen comb, which requires to be guarded against like any other fault, if even tolerable symmetry be desired. In a perfect comb, the centre ridge should be absolutely straight, and the whole so low as to be perfectly firm and free from shaking, however quickly the bird moves his head. A comb half an inch in height is preferable, but even three quarters, if straight and well shaped, makes a beautiful comb; above that there is a tendency to getting too large. With regard to the shape of the comb, the original was a uniform rise from the front towards the back, ending in a peak somewhat like the Hamburg, though not so sharp or well defined. The arched comb is now almost everywhere preferred to the peaked, and may be thus described,—after rising for half or two-thirds of its length,—decreases again towards the back, thus forming a kind of arch; this form of comb not only looks better to the eye, but is far more likely to breed well than the other, which has a tendency to grow large each successive generation. Single combed Light Brahmas, once so numerous, are now not to be found in good yards and stand no chance whatever at a show. The comb should be handsomely set above; neat and clean cut nostrils; the beak being rather short, thick at the base, and with rather a decided curve; but not too much curvature or it will be what is termed a hawk-bill, a great blemish, which gives a sinister aspect to the bird. In all the original Brahmas the deaf ears fell below the wattles, and this point was mentioned by early writers as a characteristic of the breed. It is often seen so still, and the perpetuation of this point should be carefully sought, as far as

possible. The neck of the cock should be unusually full in the hackle, and as much arched as possible, giving the appearance of stately pride. Just below the head, the hackle should start out with a very convex and clean sweep, making the junction at the head very distinct by an apparent hollow or depression. It should be long, and full enough to flow well over the back and shoulders; and with its full and graceful curve, which is almost peculiar to this breed, and rather reminds an observer of the neck of a spirited horse, adds greatly to the noble carriage and appearance of the bird. The neck may be either rather long or short, according to the general style of the bird all over; each has its beauties and its admirers, and each has contended successfully in the show pen. The neck harmonises best with a square compact body, somewhat resembling the Cochin in character, while a somewhat long neck, well arched, and combined with a proper tail, gives a more commanding and noble appearance. The back should be wide and flat across, but very short, the saddle appearing to take its rise almost from the back of the neck. A round back is a great deformity, and so is want of width, a narrow tail being of very little value. The saddle must be very broad and rise well towards the tail, without which there cannot be true symmetry and proportion. The saddle feathers should be long and abundant, so as to flow well over the points of the wings. The proper tail of the Brahma cock is very peculiar, though it is very rare to see it approaching perfection, the true inside tail should be closed except the two highest feathers. These should be very broad, and lay nearly or quite flat, not too long, and the ends turning outwards each way, and projecting on each side through the curved or sickle feathers. The breast of the cock should be deep, full, broad and rather projecting, the breast-bone being set well down between the thighs. The shoulders should be somewhat prominent, so as to make the back a little hollow between them when the bird stoops, and give a handsome proportion. The wings ought to be of medium size, and well tucked up, so as to make the bird look neat and trim. Disordered flights are a great blemish, and birds with any feathers actually twisted should be disqualified. The thighs should be well covered with fluff, though not quite so loose and downy as in the case of Cochins, and the hocks ought to be entirely and neatly covered with soft curling feathers, but not vulture-hocked. The vulture hock is a great blemish, and none but an unusually good bird should win any prize when thus disfigured, but only stiff feathers projecting so as to form a spur on the limb, are to be so regarded, and soft curling feathers, however plentiful, are only a beauty to be desired. The shanks should be of moderate length, and feathered as heavily as possible down to the ends of both outer and middle toes. Too short shanks in the cock look decidedly bad, but it is rather hard to fail in this respect. The shank feather should "stand out" well, not take a perpendicular direction, else it does not show properly. In hocked birds, both the inner and back toes are generally feathered, and in some instances birds free of this fault have their toes well furnished, while, on the other hand, some heavily feathered birds have the middle toe bare which is not desirable. The thicker the shanks are the better. Very large cocks are generally somewhat long in the leg, which if not too great, is not objectionable, provided it is not, as is frequently the case, associated with too long a back, or other defects in shape.

The shape and carriage of the hen should correspond with that of the cock, allowing for the difference in sex. Her head, in particular, should be as small as possible, this point being of much greater moment in her case, with the same slight fullness of the eye. The head short and well arched, with the back rather short and curved, but not too much so. The neck should always be short, the hackle spreading out very full at the base, and flowing well over the back and shoulders; the back flat, wide and short, as in the cock, with a very broad and ample cushion, resembling somewhat that of the Cochin. There is however this difference, that whereas the cushion of the Cochin rather droops at the extreme end, burying the tail, the cushion of the Brahma rises

to the last, the short tail rising nearly upright out to the end, so that the lower feathers of the tail are further behind than the upper. The shoulder should not be too sharp, but very neat; and the wings tightly held to the body, and well tucked into and nearly buried in the cushion above, and the fluff of the thighs below. Breast as broad, deep and full as possible, with the crop low down, and the breast-bone well down between the thighs. The hock ought to be very abundant, and stand well out, covering the hock precisely as in the cock, a Brahma hen must be short on the leg, a leggy hen is of very little value, either for show or for the breeding yard. In both sexes the shanks should stand as wide apart as possible, any approach to knock-knees being instantly disqualified; and the feet should be rather large, with straight well spread toes.

Winter Management of Poultry.

Mr. C. W. Dickerman tells us in the *New England Homestead*, how he feeds and cares for his hens so as to "make them lay." His winter management is as follows:

I fill several boxes or half barrels with earth before the ground freezes, and keep it where they can have access to it at all times during the winter. I have also had a barrel of air-slacked lime standing for years in the hen coop, and found it an excellent preventive of lice. Further, I have a load of clear sand hauled on my premises just at the edge of winter, and occasionally throw a few shovelfuls into their winter quarters. This gives them the grindstones, without which they cannot digest their grain.

My winter quarters for them are not as large as they ought to be, being only 12 feet square for from 20 to 30 fowls, but they have the yard whenever the snow does not forbid. Instead of cleaning out these quarters weekly or oftener, as it is often recommended in the books, I occasionally throw a few shovelfuls of earth (from the boxes before mentioned) over the droppings. Their quarters are not so warm as I should provide were I to build a house expressly for them, but I have two large windows in the south and east sides (discarded sash from an old house), which gives them all the benefit of the sun's warmth and makes up for considerable lack of battenning.

Cold weather is the trying time when most people complain that their hens do not lay. It requires more attention to the fowls to get eggs in the winter than in the summer, but they can be had. Give them sunlight and keep them warm in the first place, and secondly give them varied food.

I feed principally corn through the winter, but vary it with wheat, oats, buckwheat, potatoes and meat scraps. Part of the corn I feed whole, and a part I have cracked and ground into meal. I prefer the cracked. I feed whole grain at night, and the ground in the morning, on the principle that through the long night they need something that will stand by them, that having digested all their night's feed by morning, they need something that they can act upon quickly. For the same reason, in the very coldest weather, when I go out to give them their morning's feed, I carry a basin of warm water from the tea-kettle and wet up their dough with that. It will warm them quickly and make them feel comfortable; an essential, as I have before said, to a supply of eggs. The wheat I feed in screenings, which can be had at any feed store probably.

Mashed potatoes fed warm are just the vegetable food they need, and were I on a farm, I should carefully husband a few bushels of the small potatoes for this purpose.

The meat scraps I buy of the butcher in large cakes, and I believe it is as cheap as corn, while it answers a purpose like that of the bugs and worms of the summer.

A very important part of the egg is the shell; in fact an egg without a shell don't amount to much. And unless the hen has a material for the shell, the other preparations are void. In winter the hen has little chance to secure shell material for herself, and hence it must be furnished her. I have found the simplest way to be this. Occasionally I throw a handful of bones upon the coals, clear them a little, pound them fine and mix them with the feed. If bones are not to be had, oyster shells may be served the same way.

The tendency to set is a troublesome one out of its proper place; but this difficulty, which seriously annoys some poultry-keepers, is easily obviated. I have a large covered coop in the yard, into which, as soon as I find a hen inclined to set, I put her with a rooster, feeding her liberally and with a variety of food, shells, bones, etc. A week of this treatment will cure her every time, and usually set her immediately to laying again.