Poultry Yard.

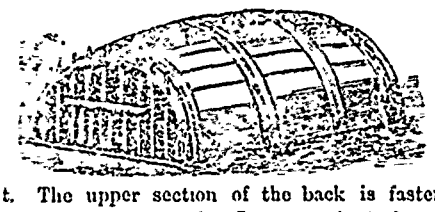
Poultry Notes—No. 16.

Fancy Points—Their Benefit and Utility.

In selecting birds for exhibition it is very important to choose none but the best; but to be able to select the best only, involves a practical knowledge of all the fancy points of a fowl. But what are the fancy points, and of what benefit are they? In 1872 the New York tate Poultry Society requested the Hon. J. Staunton Gould to deliver an address on poultry, and in speaking of fancy points, this gentleman said: "I must say that in my judgment the rules laid down in our 'points of excellence' are not worth the paper on which they are written as guides to the selection of good fowls. They tell us absolutely nothing about the physiological condition of the birds, nothing about their capacity for laying on flesh, nothing about their capacity for laying eggs, nothing about their hardihood or endurance—nothing, in short, that it is most desirable we should know." Mr. Gould then went on to say, "In the rules for judging Brahmas, I am told that the beak 'must be well curved.' I would respectfully ask, why? If I have two Brahmas, A and B—A having a well-curved beak, and B having a beak which approaches more nearly to a straight line—is the curved beak any evidence that A will lay on more flesh for a given amount of food, or lay more eggs, or is in any other respect a better hen than B? I read further in the same standard of excellence that the Brahma must have a pea comb. But why, I ask, in the name of common sense, is it necessary that a Brahma should have a pea comb? If it is true that a pea comb is no indication of the excellence of a fowl, or of its profitableness, or of its purity of blood, and if it does not minister to the æsthetic gratification of its owner, is it not simple nonsense to include it among the points of excellence of the breed?" Mr. Wright, in his Poultry Book, undertakes to give a reply to Mr. Staunton Gould's objections to arbitrary standards in fancy points, which so completely meets the point under discussion, that we have much pleasure in quoting it, with a few remarks on other points also made in the same address. "The speaker," says Mr. Wright, "then further urges that the value of size in any breed is much exaggerated. It is not contended, he says, by any one that a hen which weighs a pound or two more than another will necessarily lay a greater number or a greater weight of eggs than a smaller one; all the superiority, therefore, is at the utmost increased by the price that the extra pound will sell for the market. Suppose it turns out, as the result of experiment, that this extra pound costs more to put on than the market price, surely then it cannot be considered that this extra weight is a merit; it must rather be looked upon as a demerit. Passing on then to what he considered should be the points to be encouraged, Mr. Gould advocates in the first place the seeking of 'the greatest weight in the smallest relative compass;' and in the second those breeds in which the greatest 'bulk is concentrated round the most valuable parts.' It is impossible to put such questions more forcibly and fairly than they have been put by this able speaker, and we devote this short chapter to their answer, because they are constantly asked by parties who only have a partial acquaintance with the subject or with the fowls themselves, and the answer has a very important bearing upon the question of poultry cultivation considered as a whole. When, then, Mr. Gould complains that the arbitrary standards 'tell us nothing about the physiological condition of the birds, nothing about their capacity for laying on flesh, nothing about their capacity for laying eggs, nothing about their powers of digestion and assimilation, nothing about their hardihood,' he asks why they are not judged according to these points. The first answer which occurs after a little thought is the very simple one that it *cannot be* done. Such matters must of necessity depend chiefly upon testimony and hence are inadmissible in a show. We could not see in an exhibition pen which was the best layer of two competing hens; but color, or shape, or size we can see, and therefore by these we determine, since they are the only elements which can bring fanciers into visible competition. To go by evidence would never be tolerated, and would lead to many evils which do not need to be here specified. We need something which can be brought actually before our eyes. And even with regard to shape the feathers in which a bird is clothed prevent such nice discrimination as is possible in the case of a short-horn bull. The actual outline of the body cannot be seen, and to decide by carnal feeling would be simply impossible in the time given for judging large numbers of poultry pens. So with regard to size Mr. Gould's objection is plausible, but will not stand the test of consideration. When a man buys a ram at a high price, because both flesh and fleece are better than the common breeds, the extra flesh and fleece will most certainly be worth only an infinitesimal fraction of the price paid; but the animal stamps these features on a progeny, and in this way his cost is well repaid. So in poultry, it may cost five shillings to put on a fowl an extra pound, which may only sell for ninepence in the market. But in the next generation the extra pound will cost far less to produce; and so in a little while a race is established, and this standard of size is by the same means maintained and is a permanent benefit; for even were it the case that an extra pound which sells for ninepence cost ninepence in food to produce it, there would still be a gain, from the fewer number of fowls to feed, and hence less cost of labor to produce a given weight of meat. But this is not the case, for it is always found that large breeds cost less to produce per pound than small, besides the weight at so much earlier an age, and hence give a quicker return for the capital invested in them. We might say, indeed, that the bare fact of our possessing large breeds at all is an evidence of the value of this cultivation of size, being simply the result of that selection which arouses Mr. Gould's doubts as to its utility. Lastly, Mr. Gould's own cardinal principles will not stand when practically applied. The breed which combines the greatest weight in smallest relative compass is unquestionably the Game; and that which has the greatest proportionate weight in the choicest parts is probably the Malay, which in relative weight of the breast, merrythought, and wings together, exceeds any other fowl; but neither of these breeds in ordinary circumstances can be called profitable poultry. Mr. Gould in the same address admits the Brahma to be one of the most valuable breeds; yet by both these canons it would be excluded. There are, in fact, a dozen circumstances to be considered before the value of a breed is known. There are not only to be weighed its proportion of parts, but its laying, its hardiness, its domesticity, its precocity, and the comparative cost per pound to produce its carcass; and from these various causes almost every breed has some special value, for the sake of which it could ill be spared, and even when comparatively of little value in itself is often highly useful as a cross." Continuing still further his argument, Mr. Wright says, "We have thus shewn how 'the knowledge, enthusiasm, and patient perseverance of the fancier are necessary to improve and maintain any breed in perfection for even the utilitarian.' But it may still be asked, If in the fanciers hands these breeds have lost some of even the original economic value they had, how then? The answer to this is also very simple, and consists in the fact that however much these qualities have diminished, they usually reappear in all their original perfection *in the first cross*; and therefore as most cross-breeders usually employ such birds as crosses, which are better for nearly all purposes, every practical end is still secured. Thus supposing a strain of Brahmas to have deteriorated in laying, and a strain of Houdans to have suffered in the same way through long breeding to merely fancy standards, and omitting to select the best layers, the chickens produced by *crossing* these two families will in almost every case reproduce the laying in all its original perfection. This is a fact we have seen often, and it further establishes the truth demonstrated by Mr. Darwin on other evidence, that 'the very act of crossing gives an impulse to reversion, as shown by the appearance of *long lost* characters,' and the destructive effect of which on his own well-known theory of development it is very strange that this eminent naturalist does not see." We will not offer an apology for quoting so fully from Mr Wright, as he so clearly answers Mr. Gould's objections, and proves the usefulness of maintaining fancy points in a breed of fowls, that they are well worthy the perusal of all breeders and fanciers.

A Simple Chicken Coop.

"Being engaged in raising chickens," says a correspondent of the *Rural New Yorker*, "I found it necessary to make clean coops to keep them in for a few weeks. I take an old barrel and tack every hoop on each side of a seam between the staves with an inch-wrought nail; after clinching the nails, I saw the hoops off on the seam. Then I spread the barrel open, as in the following figure, by cutting a board about 20 inches long for the back of the coop, and two small pieces to tack laths on for the front



part. The upper section of the back is fastened with leather hinges, so that I can open it at pleasure. Everybody has old barrels which are almost valueless, and the trouble and expense of making a coop of this description is so small it is not worth mentioning, while to buy the material and make a coop of the same size, would cost about $1.

INFLUENCE OF THE COCK.—In the early part of May I removed all my Dorking hens from the male bird, and continued to put their eggs in the incubator. All eggs laid during the following nine days were good, and produced chicks. No egg was laid on the tenth day, and after that time they were all clear. After three weeks' separation I put two hens back in the run with the same cock. One egg laid twelve hours afterwards was clear, two laid thirty-six hours from the time the hens were put in the run were fertile, and the same with others laid since.—*Cor. Fancier's Gazette.*

A HINT FOR POULTRY EXHIBITORS.—An English poultry fancier at the late Crystal Palace show exhibited specimens which were of remarkable feather and brilliancy of color. The cause of his conspicuous success was simply feeding cayenne pepper, and causing his birds to moult in warm cages. The plan is accepted as a legal and proper one, for the reason that if, by ingenuity or accident, any means of improving the appearance and character of the birds by the use of food which acts upon the natural growth or secretions are discovered, the use is already allowed by existing rules, and does not come under the category of tricks, by which is meant the employment of outward applications or devices, to change the natural appearance for a disguised and fictitious one.