

THE GUINEA FOWL.

BY W. WILLIS HARRIS.

THERE are several varieties of this bird, which is a native of the Dark Continent. The two most generally bred under domestication are the speckled or pearl, and the white; the speckled being the much more common variety of the two. The unpopularity of the Guinea Fowl is chiefly due to its wandering habits, the difficulty of finding its eggs, which are laid in very secluded places, and the unpleasant noise it gives vent to, very much resembling the grating of a cartwheel; but the latter has its advantages, making a flock as valuable at night as a first-class watch-dog. As game it has proved a failure, for when turned down in the coverts it drives away the pheasants, and will not rise to the gun, but will run before the dogs at a marvellously rapid speed. In the poultry-yard it is very spiteful (especially the cock) to young chicks, and is, generally speaking, of a very pugnacious disposition. But in spite of these disadvantages as a semi-domesticated bird, it is very profitable upon a farm or anywhere where it can have free range and plenty of liberty, clearing the ground of myriads of insect life, and being a small feeder in comparison with ordinary poultry. From March to October the female lays a great number of eggs of a speckled cream color, with very hard shells, averaging during the season about 150. Their nests are very secluded, and are generally made in the centre of a thick hedge in the midst of a shrubbery, or in the depth of a copse. As they are very cunning in the selection of their nesting places, their eggs are somewhat difficult to find, but can best be discovered by watching any suspected spot, when the cock will be seen keeping guard whilst his mate is laying. The nest discovered, the eggs should be removed daily, two or three being left, or dummies substituted in their place, otherwise the hen will desert the nest and make another in a still more secluded place. Several hens deposit their eggs in one nest, and it is therefore no uncommon thing to find twenty to fifty in a batch.

It is advisable to start keeping Guinea Fowls by either purchasing eggs and hatching them under ordinary hens, or procuring them when young, when they are more likely to localise themselves to their owner's wish than if purchased as older birds. If adult birds be purchased, they will require boxing up for three weeks or a month, and feeding carefully to tame them, otherwise they are liable to wander off at their own sweet will, possibly never to return.

It is seldom the eggs are infertile, and they should be set in rather a damp nest, the eggs requiring more moisture than

that of the common fowl. It is better to sit clutches of fifteen to eighteen eggs under ordinary hens (half-breed Game preferred), as the Guinea hen seldom sits until the later end of August, which is too late in the season for the young birds to thrive as they have not the stamina to withstand the early frost and autumnal wet. The period of incubation is twenty-six days, and if the eggs be fresh the chicks hatch out strong, and are of a brown colour, striped more than spotted, with bright red legs. For the first three or four weeks it is *absolutely necessary* to fix a wire run in front of the coop in which the hen and her chicks are penned, until the young ones have become used to the call of the mother, or they will quickly ramble away, which they do far from slowly and the major portion of the brood will be lost. They are somewhat delicate when young, but not so difficult to rear as turkeys or pheasants, requiring to be similarly treated and fed: the grass on which they are fed should be kept closely mown; insects and animal food or its substitute "crissel," or bullocks' liver chopped fine, is *absolutely essential* to successfully rearing the Guinea Fowl. The chicks should be fed for the first few weeks regularly five or six times a day; biscuit meal makes an excellent staple food, varied with oatmeal and small corn at night. At five to six weeks old they commence to put on their adult plumage, and may be allowed full liberty with the hen. At the age of three months they develop the wattles and horny crests on the top of their heads. The sexes are somewhat difficult to distinguish but the male is the larger bird of the two, and the wattles and horn of the cock are larger than those of the hen. I only the female that cries "come back, come back;" the cocks when running after the hens arch their backs, and run in a mincing way as if on tiptoe.

The Guinea fowl in a wild state is monogamous; but under domestication some state they have run one cock with three or four hens successfully, but I think it would be safer to run them in pairs. They are gregarious, and a flock reared together will always continue to run in company and roost in the same tree. It is seldom they can be induced to roost in ordinary poultry-houses or to lay in nests provided for them, preferring the semi-wild state, wandering with sweet liberty through copse and meadow; and though natives of a hot arid climate, braving the roughest of weather, and not being poisoned with the close atmosphere of artificial housing, they are, when mature, practically free from disease.

The adult birds should be fed similarly to ordinary poultry, but require more insect and animal food, which, if at liberty, they will find for themselves. It is also advisable to feed at regular hours, particularly at night-time, so as to