

PLAIN CHICKEN TALK.

—
FANNY FIELD IN FARM-POULTRY.
—

Yes, Mr Editor, "the chicken season is at hand again," consequently chicken talk is in order, and here is one chapter. No, I shall not at this "sitting" attempt to tell you how to raise and hatch chickens by the use of incubators and brooders. Mr Boyer has already done that in good style; and besides the woods are now so full of people who are telling us how to do it artificially, that I really begin to fear we are in danger of forgetting the thousands of beginners who are more anxious to learn how to manage a sitting hen successfully than they are to learn how to run incubators and brooders.

And after all, after all the time and talent, thought and labor, and cold cash that has been expended in the effort to make incubators and brooders that will "beat the old hen," have we one that will do it? In the language of the unpoetical but level-headed western hustler, I answer, "nary one." Where, oh where, is the combination of wood, iron, and kerosene lamp that will tuck thirteen eggs away under its wooden wings and care for them as an intelligent hen will? Did you ever know a sitting hen to allow her temperature to run down below the proper point? Do the sitting hens ever have any bother about the proper degree of moisture, ventilation, and all the rest? And has the ingenuity of man ever yet contrived a brooder that is equal to the mother hen.

Now you needn't imagine that I am down on incubators and brooders, and am trying to give them a set back, for I am not. I believe in incubators and brooders—some of them. I know that there are incubators and brooders that under the intelligent supervision of a level-headed man or woman will hatch and raise as good chickens as ever grew. And I know too that these same incubators and brooders are necessary, that the poultry keepers who raise large numbers of chickens and ducks for market could not do so large and profitable a business without these artificial helpers. But the average farmer who does not care to raise more than two or three hundred chickens each year does not need an incubator and brooders any more than a hen needs a fifth toe. And it would be well for those who are starting in the poultry business with the intention of making a "big thing" of it,

to stick to the natural methods of hatching until the business gets so large that it is impossible to get sitting hens enough to do the work in season.

Now after all this preface, or whatever it is, I will come right to the business of setting the hen. "Everybody knows how to set a hen?" Perhaps so, and perhaps not. Some overdo the business, "fuss" too much, and others don't take pains enough, not all hit the happy medium.

To begin with, be sure that your hen wants to sit, *i. e.*, let the sitting fever get a good grip on her before you trust her with the eggs that you desire to have transformed into chickens. Don't let her sit where the other hens can bother her, but put her somewhere where she can sit undisturbed by the tumult and din of the rest of the poultry world. Have the new nest ready and move the sitter after dark. Shut her in the new nest until she gets used to it, and will go back to it after her meals, letting her sit on nest eggs only until you are sure she will stay. Our way has been to have a separate room for sitters, put the hen on after dark, shut her in the nest until after dark the next evening, then remove the board in front of the nest. In nine cases out of ten the hen comes off the next morning at feeding time, eats with the others, and returns to her nest just as if she had chosen that particular spot to begin with. If she does that—settles down in a contented fashion—you may be sure she will stick to business, and you can trust her with the "eggs for hatching." But if she should not return to her nest in due season, put her back with as little fuss as possible, and fasten her in another day and night. At the end of that time she will either accept the situation or give up the job of sitting. A good deal of your success in moving hens and inducing them to sit where you want them to depends upon your previous management. If you have kept your hens tamed you can do about as you please with them.

Guard against lice by having a clean nest to begin with, dusting the hen thoroughly with some good insect powder when she begins to sit, again ten days later, and once more three days before the chicks are due. If this part of the work is thoroughly done, the sitter's room kept clean as it should be, and a dust bath provided where the sitters can dust themselves when they take a notion that way, I should be perfectly willing to offer ten cents a piece for

every louse or nit found on the newly hatched chicks or the mother hen.

Feed and water the sitters regularly every day, and do it at about the same time each day. The food should be grain, chiefly corn, and the drink, water. While the hens are off for their food, look to the nests and see that everything is all right. If any nest should have a broken egg in it, the other eggs daubed, etc., the soiled eggs must be washed, and new nesting put in.

When the hens are all back on their nests, remove the food that is left, so the hens may not be tempted to leave the nests again during the day. If any of the hens stay on their nests at feeding time, don't bother yourself to take them off. Hens usually know when they are hungry, and if now and then a hen chooses to eat only every other day, let her follow her own inclination. There is not the slightest danger of her starving. Beyond this necessary care of the sitters, let them alone. Don't be fussing around among them a dozen times a day, poking under the hens that are about to hatch to see how they are getting on.

When you set a hen, mark the date when her chicks are due on the box; then you can't forget. When the hatching is going on, go to those hens at feeding time before you put out the corn for the others, and give them some corn in the nest; then close the front of the nest while the others are off. Would I test the eggs placed under hens? Generally speaking I would not, for if the poultry raiser understands his business, eggs in March and April are nearly all fertile and will nearly all hatch.

Moisture? Well, I used to think it necessary to sprinkle eggs that were set anywhere except on the ground, but later I had a new revelation on the subject of moisture—the old hens told it, and I didn't sprinkle any more—neither did I put the traditional "sod" in the bottom of the nest, and the eggs hatched just as well as before.

It may be that all cannot have a separate room for their sitters, but all can follow out the main features of my plan—adapt them to suit their convenience and circumstances.

Where but a few hens are set, a separate coop with small run attached may be used for each sitter.

●●●

If the editors of certain poultry papers would spend less time telling other editors how to run their papers, and more time trying to improve their own, they would perhaps overcome the suspicion that their heads are full of adulteration.—*Reliable Poultry Journal.*