

Hearth and Home.

FARMING FOR BOYS.

CHAPTER XIII.

HOW THE PETS SUCCEEDED.—GOING TO THE FAIR.—A
YOUNG HORSE-RACE.—TRYING FOR A PREMIUM.

It must be supposed that, during all this period, from spring to fall, the boys had neglected giving their pigs and pigeons whatever care they needed. The pigeons had long been released from their prison in the loft, and now went and came as they pleased. They flew away over the farm, picking up the seeds of weeds, and, so far as could be discovered, were doing no injury to the crops. Not one of the neighbors had complained of them. Even Farmer Spangler could find no fault, though he had so stubbornly resisted their introduction on the premises. On the contrary, he began to think they were very convenient things to have about; for as they had hatched out and reared several pairs of squabs. Uncle Benny had been shrewd enough to have the boys present a couple of them to Mrs. Spangler, who served them up in a pie for her husband's dinner.

This little stroke of the old man had a prodigious effect on Spangler's opinions as to the value of pigeons on a farm, as many of his seemed to be formed on his stomach instead of in his brain.—Moreover, he was particularly fond of pot-pie. Uncle Benny being aware of his weakness, and knowing also that the most direct way to a man's good opinion is in the direction of his stomach, he thought the offering of one or two pairs of squabs on the altar of Spangler's appetite would be about the cheapest form of conciliation he could adopt. But Uncle Benny is not the first person who has discovered the power of a good dinner in carrying a favorite point.

The boys kept their pigeon-loft as clean as possible, and stored up a considerable quantity of manure that was almost equal to guano. The floor was constantly supplied with gravel, lumps of clay, or common soil, or salt. These were not needed for the older birds, which ranged over the farm, as they could find all such materials for themselves, except the salt. But such articles are indispensable to the health of a pigeon, hence it is better to provide them where they can be handy. In a pigeon-loft there are always some young birds called *squakers*. These are such as have outgrown the condition of *squabs*, and, having all their feathers, have left the nest to run about the loft, without as yet having courage enough to use their wings out of doors. Such must be carefully looked after until able to fly out and shift for themselves.

Pigeons living a reasonable distance from the

ocean, or from salt marshes, obtain salt by drinking freely of the briny water. They have been known to swallow snails for the sake of the materials contained in the shells. In chalky countries they pick up the chalk as it lies on the ground. They are also very fond of certain fragrant matters, such as lavender, which they often break off, and carry to their nests. When these necessities are not provided for them, they can be easily enticed off to some other home where such luxuries are kept on hand.

It is a well-known trick of pigeon fanciers to draw to their premises their neighbors' birds by keeping a good supply of what they call "salt cat." This is made by taking a barrel full of loam, and converting it into mud by mixing up old brine in which meat has been pickled. Then a gallon of coarse sand, a peck of salt, and a little saltpetre. If some cummin seed or lavender is worked in, it will be better; in fact, anything to give the compound a pretty strong smell, so much the more will it be relished. Then keep it under cover, and no birds can be enticed away to other roosts. Various preparations of "salt cat" are in use, some of which are very far from being as fragrant as an orange blossom or a rose. On the contrary, experience has proved that the worse they smell the better the birds like them.

So far the boys found it the easiest thing in the world to raise pigeons, as the rearing of the young gave them no trouble. Plenty to eat and drink, with constant cleanliness, was all that was needed. At six months old the new broods began to go in pairs, each laying a couple of eggs. In eighteen days after the laying of the second egg, the young were hatched. Thus their flock went on increasing, until it made a very respectable show when its members came down from their perches to take part in the several distributions of corn among the poultry; but they would have to wait another year before having any to sell.

It was not quite so encouraging with Nancy and the pigs. The whole brood, excepting three that died, increased prodigiously in size, as they were taken care of, Bill continuing to curry them daily. To perform this now extensive duty more easily, he mounted an old curry-comb on the end of a long stick; and, taking both hands to it, he was able to do a great amount of currying in a very short time. It was laughable to witness the movements of the pigs the moment Bill showed himself and his currying-stick alongside of the pen. They ran, grunting, to where he stood, lay down on their sides, and waited patiently for him to begin operations. It was much easier to tire out Bill than it was to tire out them, for they never had too much of it. Every one who saw the pigs, even their neighbors the