

Poultry Yard.

Raising Chickens.

The time to assist nature in developing the size and growth of fowls is early chickenhood. During this time the frame of the future bird is moulded, its size increased or its growth retarded, just in proportion to the degree of care and attention then bestowed. Whatever be the object sought in raising chickens, whether to supply the table with delicious food, the breeding yards with choice stock, or the exhibition pen with prize birds. Size, with one or two exceptions, is one of the principal points looked for, and this can only be obtained to a degree of perfection by the proper treatment of chickens from the time they are hatched until they arrive at maturity. Feed well, feed often, giving no more at a time than will be all picked up, and keep the chicken pen scrupulously clean, are rules which must be strictly adhered to by all poultry fanciers. Inattention to cleanliness brings on nine-tenths of the diseases to which chickenhood is liable, and is the cause of so many poorly looking fowls frequently to be found in poultry yards; and to it may be attributed the large proportion of deaths which occur among chickens. Let fanciers on this side the Atlantic bear in mind that to enable them to compete successfully for a Birmingham prize cup, not only must care be taken in the mating of fowls for breeding, but also greater attention be bestowed on the feeding of chickens than that usually given. Without this we cannot have size, and without size all breeders know their chance of success in a show-pen is very much lessened, and neither are small birds such as should be placed in a breeding yard.

For a little time at least the food for young chicks should be mixed with milk instead of water, and a little meat of some kind be given every day. For very early chickens, new milk warmed, given to drink early in the morning, has a wonderful effect in bringing them through cold weather, and they soon get very fond of it; but neither this nor the food must be left so long as to become sour, which it will soon do, and if so cause serious trouble. After a few days at most, some kind of grain must be given in addition to the soft food or the gizzard will not have healthy exercise. Even the first day some chopped grain may be given which will be greatly relished. In a week or two this may be varied with other seeds; but as the little beaks become stronger, coarser grain may be substituted, in the shape of wheat screenings, cracked barley, bruised oats, or buckwheat. The last feed at night should always consist of some kind of grain, and a little may also be left for the brood to partake of in the morning before any one is up to attend to them, for chicks are early risers and have good appetites. The one great secret of success in rearing fine chickens is to give food so as to fully satisfy their appetites, and no more; they should never be left so long without food as to be really hungry; just so much food should be given as to satisfy their appetites and none left. In the first week every two hours will do, then for a month every three hours, and after that four times daily, for the times of supply; but something will depend upon the season, and in early spring they will need to be fed more frequently during the early stages of growth, and also require better diet, which last will, however, be compensated by the better birds. Dryness of soil is of great importance in rearing chickens. Many breeds will endure with impunity very severe cold; but none can withstand damp underfoot, which generally issues in cramped feet. At a period varying from four to ten weeks, the hen will discard her young charges; and at this time they will want special attention if they are not to suffer by the deprivation of her care. Strong-winged hens will fly up to roost, and if the chickens also be of a light

and active sort and are well-grown, there is no better plan than to put a perch in the accustomed house or shed, about two feet from the ground, and to allow them to fly up to her. For several nights she will partially brood them on her perch. Large breeds, however, should not be allowed to roost, unless they are, when forsaken, nearly three months old; and not even then, except they have abundant range of grass to give tone to the system, and thus prevent crooked breasts. Chickens, when abandoned by the hen, do best if they can have a pretty good shed to themselves, floored with loose earth and fronted with open wire. At ten or twelve weeks old the cockerels must be separated from the pullets, and only chickens of about the same age be placed in a run together, else the weaker will stand no chance. Without separating the sexes the birds will never grow so large, besides which it prevents trouble, as a number of cockerels may be kept by themselves in perfect peace till full-grown. At this time the birds must be well and liberally fed or all pains previously bestowed on them will be lost. Their four good meals must be regularly given, mixed nice and dry, and thrown about the grass run if that be at command, or put in clean vessels if not; their water kept clean and frequently changed, and some animal food occasionally given to all except pullets, which it is not desired should lay early. Milk may be still mixed with their food and given to drink, even up to six months old, if the range is good; but for birds in confinement it should be discontinued after about three months, being in such circumstances too much for the more sluggish digestive organs.

Artificial mothers are frequently made use of by breeders when chickens are left too soon by the hen, especially for early broods; in such cases they are essentially necessary; later in the season they may be used for very young chicks, and the hens placed in their ordinary pens to again commence laying. The manufacture of an artificial mother is the easiest thing possible. Purchase an ordinary colored sheep-skin mat, about two feet long by sixteen inches wide, which will make two mothers. The mat should be chosen with fine, soft, and rather long wool, but too thick a fleece is bad as the chicks may become entangled in it and perish of suffocation. A box, or rather box-cover without a front, must then be constructed of the size required, which will be about five inches deep at the open front, sloping back to three and a half inches behind, so that the chicks may creep back to the proper place where the sloping woolly cover comfortably cherishes them. Some small holes being bored in the sides and top for ventilation, this open cover is to be sprinkled with paraffine, to guard against vermin, and the sheep-skin then tacked inside with common tin tacks, fastening it round the edges only, and not too tightly, so that its own weight may cause it to bulge a little downwards. The mother is now complete, and is best set upon a large board covered a full inch deep with sand or ashes finely sifted, into which the chicks will nestle and keep themselves warm. The board under will quite prevent cramp, and a little carbolate of lime sprinkled in the ashes, with the paraffine above, will keep away vermin; while cleanliness is easily procured by passing the whole through a sieve daily. In case of young chickens it is necessary to confine them for some days in a small run, the mother being at one end; for if this be not done, having no hen to call them back, they may run off and get lost, but as soon as they learn to know their artificial parent this confinement may be dispensed with, only taking care always to feed them close by it. For Spanish chickens, more especially, such an aid to the hen is particularly beneficial, and will save many a chick that would otherwise be lost at the stage when they are nearly bare of feathers, and require such constant nursing as the hen rarely gives them.

Slipped Wings.

There are few breeders of Asiatic fowls who have not occasionally among their chickens, especially the cockerels, a deformity, known in the fancy as "slipped" or "turned wings;" that is the primary feathers or those which ought to be nicely tucked away out of sight when the wing is closed, protruding in more or less disorder outside the others. This tendency is said to be hereditary, to some extent at least, and it mars the beauty of the bird completely, amounting almost to disqualification in close competition. Pullets, it is asserted by good breeders, are far less liable to it than cockerels, and therefore, when it occurs in the female sex it is proportionately far more

serious in character. In the most aggravated form, the flight feathers appear actually twisted round the quills, so that the proper inside feather becomes outside; and in this form the affection is both strongly hereditary and believed to be incurable. But when it merely amounts to a failing to tuck the flight feathers in, without any disorder among those feathers themselves, it may almost always be cured if taken



in due time. It usually occurs about four to five months old, and in confined yards is occasioned by the bird being driven by others, or otherwise frightened, causing the wing to be so rapidly extended that in re-closing, the feathers are not properly returned, after a few times this becomes habitual and the mischief is done, and thus mars the beauty of the bird, and as it occurs at an age when the quills are not hardened, becomes permanent if not cured. In a wide run it occurs less frequently, or in the master-bird of the yard. The cure is perfectly easy, simple, and unailing. As soon as any displacement of the feathers is observed, the wings should be carefully tucked up every night at roost, but nothing further can be done till they are grown enough to hold a ligature, when one or both wings, as required, should be carefully bound up each feather in proper position. The manner in which this is done is shown in the engraving, the wing being bound round rather tightly as near the shoulder as possible, after which the cord is carried from the knot at A, round the shoulder at B, to the inside part of the ligature at C; this is, of course, simply to prevent the ligature from slipping off, which the bird will inevitably use all his endeavors to effect. Soft string, about the thickness of stout whip-cord, should be employed, and the operation be performed at night for the sake of quietness. The beginner may occasionally find he has made either the ligature or the retaining cord too slack; in which case he will next morning find the bird has again slipped the flights out of place, and the work must be done over again the following night. If, on the other hand, the shoulder or retaining cord be drawn too tight it will cut and become embedded in the web of the wing, causing the bird much pain and distress. Patience and tact are therefore required before the wings are properly tied up, and the feathers retained in their proper place, as the greatest care must be taken that every feather is placed in proper position. The bird must be kept with his wings thus tied for at least three weeks, or until the quills appear grown their full length, when the ligature may be cut, and if the result is satisfactory of course all is over, if not, the wings are to be again confined, and in some cases even so much as two months of this watchful care is necessary. There are few but may be thus cured if taken in due time. The ligature in many cases has a tendency to cut the feathers, but this may be avoided by using instead of a simple cord a diamond-shaped piece of calico with a string sewn at each end, when the shorter diameter of the calico, instead of the cord, will go under the wing at D, and preserve the wings from injury. Pullets are subject to the same fault, but not nearly so often as the cockerels; and even adult birds will sometimes require attention to their wings during moulting time, those of the Asiatic breeds more especially. If the wings are seen properly tucked up every night at roost nothing further will commonly be needed, but if the blemish should appear to be becoming habitual, it must be treated in the manner just described. Birds that have a run in a good grass field are rarely subject to twisted wings.