

## FANCY POULTRY CULTURE.

THE following is an address delivered by Mr. C. H. Hallam before the members of the Birmingham and Mid-England Poultry Society, on 27th ult. Mr. J. W. Ludlow, president, was chairman.

After some preliminary remarks, Mr. Hallam said:—I do not pose as an expert in poultry matters. My knowledge and experience are fairly extensive, but are no doubt equalled by most, and exceeded by several, members of our important society.

In his splendidly illustrated lecture, our president (Mr. Ludlow) told us that fancy poultry culture is of quite recent growth; that he remembered, and attended, the first show ever held in this country (that was in Birmingham), and that many of the most beautiful and popular breeds had been "made" during the past twenty years.

There are to-day scores of different varieties and sub-varieties of fowls. Nearly all the most popular are the result of crossing—what many older fanciers still regard as mongrels. They are not original or ancient races of fowls. They are "made" breeds, whose characteristics have now become more or less fixed by careful selection and persistent breeding. In fact there is no such thing as a pure breed. It is only a relative and not an absolute term, at best. Purity of breed entirely depends upon the length of time a variety has been bred without mixing with other races, and the consequent fixity of its characteristics.

The subject of fancy poultry culture naturally touches the much-debated question of utility *versus* fancy fowls. Ought the prime object of breeding to be for utility or beauty? And are these really incompatible objects? There are large arguments on both sides. But I am sure that in the main fancy breeding subserves utility. If it were not for the fancier breeding for distinguishing characteristics, in a very few years there would scarcely be a single distinct variety, and the value of crossing, as well as distinctive size, type, and beauty, would be lost.

I used to have rather large sympathies with the utility advocates, but larger information and experience has carried me into the fanciers' ranks. With indiscriminate crossing there is soon a degeneracy of the two chief utility points, size and egg production. Without careful cultivation there is the same rapid deterioration in all animal and vegetable life. Without careful breeding the cow would not maintain her present wonderful milk supply. And without cultivation the raspberry would soon become the useless road-side bramble.

Science tells us that life has a constant tendency to rever-

sion—in a large sense, deterioration. Nature's great object does not seem to be ideal perfection, nor utility, but survival; and when science speaks of the survival of the fittest, it means not ideally the best, or most useful, but merely the fittest to survive the struggle for life under certain circumstances. So that it is the circumstances in which any form of life has to grow which determine its fitness. The conditions of life almost entirely determine the kind of survival. By altering the conditions of life of plant or animal we can alter and improve its form, usefulness, or beauty enormously.

In consequence of this law of Nature that it is the conditions of life which decide its fitness, it seems often the worst or most undesirable form which does survive. For instance, in our slums it is the worst and not the best humanity born and bred there that the bad and terrible conditions of slum life allow to survive. So, too, with our present competitive system of "grab who can," it is not generally the best and noblest men and women who survive the scramble and achieve power and fame, but those whose natures are most in accord with the competitive principle of each for himself, and who can play, with the least compunction, the ignoble game of beggar my neighbour. Here as with fowls, by altering the conditions of life we should change the motive of action, and change the type which survived. So with fowls left to nature, it would be those hardy enough to withstand their conditions of life which would survive, and not the largest, the handsomest, the most meaty, or best layers. To get and increase the qualities we must carefully select year after year, and provide conditions of life favourable to them. It is this judicious selection, and the providing of favourable conditions to obtain the desired results, that constitutes scientific breeding. Scientific breeding during the last thirty years has produced some dozens of varieties, some with special laying powers, others with special table qualities, and all with great beauty and interest. The utility man has now but to select that variety most useful to him. The fancier will preserve the variety for him. No doubt in a few breeds the fanciers' idea of type, form, and feather has not improved the useful qualities, but in others he has immensely improved them; and, further, it is to the fancier that all the various breeds are due.

There are several rather large maggots in the minds of utility theorists, one is that by breeding only from extraordinary layers a strain would be produced which would lay 250 eggs a year each. Another is that by careful mating, laying and table qualities can be combined. And another is that we could by these methods produce at home the £4,000,000 worth of poultry and eggs which we annually import