

Poultry-Yard.

THE DORKING FOWL.

WHAT IT HAS BEEN AND WHAT IT NOW IS.

We have now come to the point when it can be stated that the Dorking had assumed a distinctive form, and certain points were being recognised. It will be well, however, to summarise the conclusions which the evidence already adduced warrants us in accepting. Before doing so, I may quote from a letter by Mr. Harrison Weir, the well-known artist, who is himself a Sussex man, born not far from Cuckfield. It is most important in proving that the white leg, though not mentioned by any of the early writers, was a feature of this fowl. In it he says: "I have always been associated with it; my father keeping this breed before I was born, and he pointed out to me, when a mere child, the peculiarity of the breed (at an uncle's of mine), as having a pure white leg on a dark-bodied bird, and its also having five toes." He also states that he can call to mind the stocks of several of his relatives and friends "where the fowls were bred with the utmost care, and were of a uniform color in each case. So particular were they that on my taking a Cochin cock about the year 1849 to an uncle of mine in Kent, to see the effect of a cross, I was told at once that he would not have his breed of Dorkings spoiled after all the care that had been taken to keep them true."* (1)

The points we may therefore, accept are—

First—That a five-toed variety of fowl was known to the Romans, and that in all probability it was introduced by them into Britain;

Second—That what records are available prove the existence of a square-bodied, five-toed fowl in Britain and in France;

Third—That fowls having this distinctive feature have been kept far beyond the memory of man in the South of England, more especially in Surrey, Kent, and Sussex, and that these have been recognised for their excellent table properties;

Fourth—That the Dorking variety owes its direct descent to these fowls. Whether there has been any crossing, and if so, in what directions, we have yet to see.

Fifth—That the original pure-bred Dorking was white in plumage, and had a rose comb, being medium in size.

How far the Dorking type of fowl was disseminated in other districts is uncertain, but that they were not confined to the counties named is evident, for we find in "The Poultry Yard" (1850), that fowls of this variety were to be found in Kent and elsewhere.

While it can, therefore, be taken for proved that the Dorking as bred 100 years ago and more was white in plumage, there were evidently many other colors. In the revised edition of Moubrey's Treatise, published in 1854, which only acknowledges the white as pure, it is stated that "this, the genuine Dorking breed, owing to the innumerable crosses to which it has been subjected, is now becoming exceedingly scarce, and can scarcely be met with beyond a very circumscribed

district in Surrey." The same work gives the following sub-varieties of the "Sussex fowl, or the "Improved" Dorking:

- a, Greys—Speckled, Spangled.
- b, Reds—Speckled or Pied, Penciled.
- c, Black-breasted—Silver, Golden, Japan.
- d, Cuckoo breasted.

Of these more will have to be said in due course, but for the present we must leave them on one side, as there are one or two other points requiring our consideration.

The English Standard of Excellence gives as to the color of ear-lobe the subjoined details:

Colored Dorkings—Red or red tinged with white the former preferred.

Silver-Grey Dorkings, } Bright Coral Red.
White Dorkings, } white a disqualification
Cuckoo Dorkings, }

While the American Standard of 1890 says:

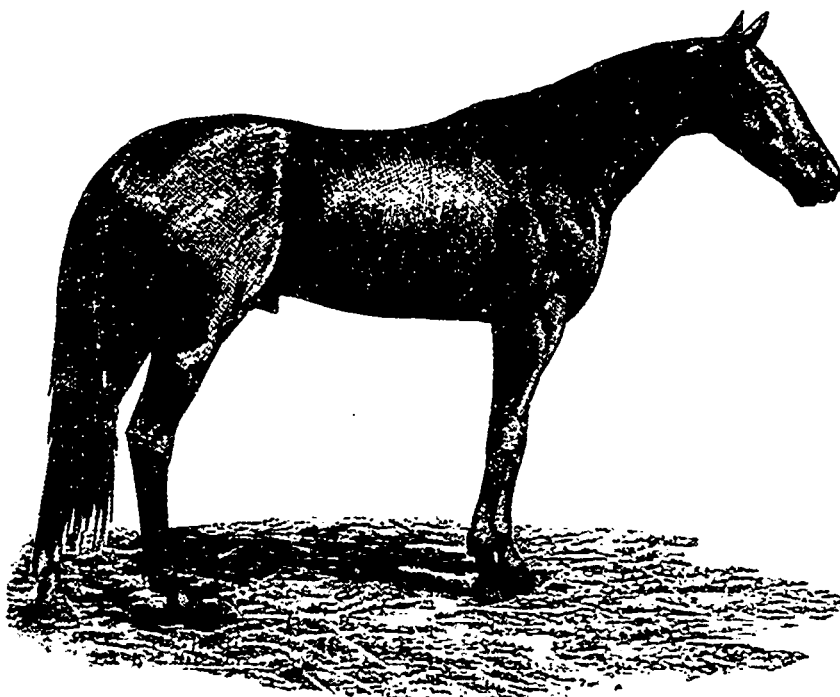
Colored Dorkings, } Ear-lobes of medium
Silver-Grey Dorkings, } size, and in color red preferred.

White Dorkings—Ear-lobes of medium size, bright red.

We thus have a distinct intimation that in some breeds, so far as the English standard is concerned, the red ear-lobe is a *sine qua non*, while in the

on to express his opinion that the red ear-lobe is due to crossing. Though it is more than likely that not much attention was paid to the color of the ear-lobes, the weight of evidence would seem to be in favor of white.

I do not think it necessary to discuss at any length the question of comb in the Dorking, for the testimony on this point has already been given. But a single further quotation will be sufficient in addition to what has been stated before. Mr. R. P. Brent, who was regarded as a careful inquirer by Darwin, writing in 1853, says: "All the true, old-fashioned Dorkings I have had, or seen, have had rose-combs; and it is my belief that the single combs are to be attributed to the crosses with large single-combed varieties, by which their size has been so much improved. I do not think that a single comb is any objection, if the fowl has to be eaten; but as a point of breed, I consider it of as much importance as a short neck, short white legs, five toes, or square build." Probably combs of all kinds were to be met with, and an attempt is now being made to re-establish the rose-combed Colored Dorking. Columella, he it noted, speaks of the Roman breed as having "small, erect, bright-red combs."



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American standard, red lobes are in all cases preferred. It will be well, therefore, to learn what was the case before, so far as we possibly can.

Columella, speaking of the Roman fowl, which he recommends, the five-clawed variety, says that they had "white ears." Markham makes no reference to the ear-lobe, unless when he says "his combs, wattles and throat would be large, great in compass, jagged, and very scarlet-red," meaning by throat the ear-lobe, which is very doubtful. Neither Moubrey nor Rees mentions this point, and other writers are equally silent, which is somewhat surprising, considering how many of them quote Columella's description. Nor does Mr. Tegetmeier, in his Standard of Excellence, published about 1857, make any reference to the ear-lobe, but in the colored plates by Harrison Weir, in Wingfield and Johnson's Poultry Book, the Grey Dorking is shown with a nearly white lobe, and the White Leghorn with a red lobe, tinged with white. Mr. Weir, writing in 1881, says: "More than forty years ago, I painted Dorkings. They had then nearly white ears." And he goes

Now a few words as to size, a subject which has caused considerable controversy. It is evident that birds were to be found of all sizes. The White Dorking was not a large bird, not so large as many of the ordinary type found in Surrey and Sussex, they being carefully bred for marketing, in which abundance of flesh was most important. Some of the crosses made were with the object of adding to the weight. But it does not appear that they reached the great weights attained by some fowls now, for a bird had been known to scale fourteen pounds. (1) Still they were large, as compared with ordinary poultry. A Norfolk clergyman says: "I remember some birds being brought from Sussex in 1840 or 1841 into a district in Norfolk, which even then enjoyed a reputation for fattening fine poultry. I remember that the introduction of the Sussex blood was followed by a distinct enhancement of size, without disturbing the beautiful white skins and the plump

(1) In February 1852, we had two May pullets for dinner, in Kent, that scaled 19 pounds the pair.—Ed.

shapes, which were already the attributes of our local birds. * * * Not on one farm only, but on several adjoining ones, the use of the Sussex-bred cocks was followed by so great an improvement in size, and early fitness for spring chickens, that the local higglers (1) remarked on it and scrambled for the produce." Ten to twelve-pound cocks were then known, and this point is chiefly important in showing that fanciers, in this variety at least, have not destroyed the economic quality of the ordinary or non-exhibition fowl.

STEPHEN BEALE.
Country Gentleman.

Manures.

HOW TO SPREAD MANURES.

EDS COUNTRY GENTLEMAN.—Not long since I saw an inquiry in your paper as to the best way of spreading manure on grass ground. I practised drawing out manure in winter and spreading on the snow for many years, being the first to do so in my section, and as it would be frequently frozen in lumps, making it impossible to spread evenly, I had to devise some way to pulverise it in the spring. So in the spring of 1867, I made a bush spreader as follows: I took a basswood log, roughly making it into an octagonal shape, 12 feet long and 6 inches in diameter, boring 2 rows, of 1 inch holes 12 inches apart, starting one row 6 inches from the end, the lower row 12 inches from the end, so the holes would be odd and even with each other, as a farmer would say, the rows of holes being two inches apart. These were filled with as stiff, scraggy brush as I could get. I used some small wild plum trees 5 or 6 feet in height and 1 or 2 inches through, using a wedge to hold them in place, then attaching a chain 2 feet or so from each end to draw by, having one shorter than the other, so that the timber would be at an angle. In some cases I used to lay a plank on the brush and ride.

To be most successful in its use the manure should be wet, after a rain or as soon as the snow is gone. Then the timber, striking it first, breaks it, and the fine twigs of the brush passing over it diagonally literally grind it to powder and distribute it evenly over every inch of the ground, mixing it with the fine soil thrown up by the frost, leaving it in the best possible condition for giving the grass immediate benefit and preventing waste by drying winds.

I have never seen an implement equal to it for this purpose, or for use in putting in grass seed with grain, and one of these will last several years and then the head can be filled again.

La Cygne, Kas.

D. S. B.

SAVING ALL THE MANURE.

New England farms need all the manure that they can get, and much more. Very little land receives manure enough to bring it up to the highest point of productivity, the yield of the various products would be immensely increased, and profits would proportionately increase. The great need of our farms is more manure, and the need is so pressing that it should serve to enforce the importance of saving all the manures that are made on the farm.

(1) Higglers = peddlers of poultry who travel round from farm to farm.—Ed.

(1) If we wanted to spoil the flesh of the Dorking, the Cochin is the fowl we should use for the purpose.—Ed.

* Live-Stock Journal, 1881.