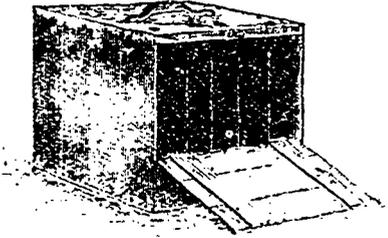


SETTING HENS.

SELECTING BROODERS—A HATCHING BOX

Eds. Country Gentleman—To nearly all poultry keepers, whether farmers or not, the question of the greatest importance in the early spring is the procuring of eggs for hatching, the obtaining of brooders to sit on them, and their care during the process of incubation, and a few words as to the management of sitting hens will probably be acceptable.

When broody hens are scarce it is often necessary to take the first one that comes to hand, but this is not always a satisfactory method; and it is better, whenever possible, to consider the disposition and trustworthiness of the hen to which valuable eggs are to be given. Still when time is precious and hens are not to be had very easily, some risk may be taken. But I have generally found it better to wait a few days longer for a trusty sitter, than commit the care of eggs to a hen which, though broody at the time, is not of a breed regarded as good for maternal duties. It often happens that broody hens which have to be sought for are mongrels, with no very defined characteristics, but very little experience will enable any one to tell whether a hen is likely to prove a good mother or not. In the first place, all feather-legged birds may be depended upon in this way, but if heavily feathered and clumsy in build, there is another danger, namely, that the eggs or chickens may be crushed through the awkwardness of the mother. Often have my plans been frustrated and temper ruffled by Cochins and Brahmas in this way, and thus I do not care to give eggs—pullet's egg



at any rate—to pure bred birds of either of these breeds. Early in the year the majority of eggs will be laid by pullets, and as in these the shells are generally much thinner and weaker than those laid by hens, this must be taken into account. But half bred birds, such as Brahma-Dorkings, or Cochin Dorkings, can be used with safety, and the first named I prefer before any pure or cross breed as sitters and mothers. They are large and can cover a goodly number of eggs, are careful but not clumsy, will fight in defence of their broods if needs be, and yet allow an attendant they know to handle them. Many poultry keepers in this country keep a number of these birds for hatching and rearing, and during the season they are in constant demand, as much as a dollar or even a dollar and twenty-five cents often being given for a two-year-old Brahma-Dorking.

Next to these I place the game fowls. Nearly all birds with game blood in them make good sitters and mothers. Pure bred game fowls may be employed, and where kept for other purposes can be used for this, but I should not advise that they be bought expressly for the purpose, as they are small in size and cover but a few eggs. They are very pugnacious, fighting almost any one who comes near to them. If two game hens are sitting in one place, and they get out together, there will be a battle royal, which may be interesting to witness and enjoyable to the combatants, but does not conduce to successful hatching. And also, as I always prefer to set the hens in boxes, which for convenience sake are all kept in one room, game fowls are difficult to manage, and are apt to be

very awkward. Half-bred game are much better, and thus Game-Dorking, Game-Brahma, Game-Cochin, or any other similar cross will be found very good indeed for the purpose.

Amongst pure bred fowls other than I have mentioned, the following list may be taken as a pretty complete one—Plymouth Rocks, Dominiques, Langshans, Scotch Greys and Silkies. The last named are very small birds and can only cover a very few eggs, but they make excellent mothers, and are very largely used by English bantam breeders. They can be taken when others are not available. I have not had myself any experience with Wyandottes, but have been told by an importer of these fowls that they make very careful sitters and mothers. I have mentioned all these pure-bred fowls, for sometimes it is possible to hire birds as sitters for a few weeks. This I have often done with advantage, both to the owners of the birds and myself. He has got rid of surplus brooders, and I have obtained just what I required when my own birds were not available. And it is generally beneficial to a hen to allow her to sit when she desires to do so, in order to give her a rest from laying; this loaning system can easily be adopted, especially by friends and neighbors.

In "Profitable Poultry-Keeping," I have given a brief description, with illustration, of a hatching box, such as I have myself used for many years. This is a box without bottom, and for ordinary sized fowls, about 15 inches square and 10 or 20 inches high. It is made of half or three-quarter-inch boards, and is solid, back, sides and top, save for the ventilating holes. Part of the front forms the door. This door is the width of the box, and 15 inches high. A piece of deal three inches in depth forms the lower section of this front, and a similar piece two inches in depth the upper, the door piece occupying the space between. At first I hinged the door, so as to open upward, but I prefer now to have it hinged to the lower section, and to open downward. It then forms a firm footing for the hen entering or leaving the nest, and prevents any accidents from the closing of the door unexpectedly while the hen is off, as it is not always possible to wait until a hen goes on again. I have at times found a hen shut from her nest for an hour or two, and this has led me to adopt the downward opening of the door. A button fitted on to the upper section of the front, and the door hinged to the lower section, completes that. In some sitting boxes I have seen this door a wooden frame with wire netting stretched over it, and it is one of this kind that is shown in my book, but I prefer the door solid, as then the inmate is entirely in the dark, and cannot be disturbed by the sight of other hens. Where rats are troublesome, it is a good plan to put some stout half-inch mesh wire netting over the open bottom. A handle on the top, as shown in the illustration, facilitates removal. Three ventilation holes in each of the sides and back, and half a dozen in the top, completes the box, and when it is well whitewashed, it is ready for use. I have sometimes made one in an hour, and at one time always put together my own.

The advantage of a box like this over the ordinary method is very great. I have kept as many as twenty hens in a room at one time, all upon batches of eggs, and how I should have managed if separate places had had to be provided, I cannot say. The boxes were placed about a foot from the wall, with their backs to it, and about a foot from each other. Each hen was allowed out from ten minutes to half an hour every day, and by an arrangement of movable wooden frame and wire netting screens or runs, four could be out at one time without disturbing or interfering with each other. Thus the youth who was in special charge of the poultry could, by visiting the hatching room every now and again, give the needed attention to the sitting hens without interfering with his other duties.

'STEPHEN BEALE'