



THE BLACK SILKY.

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AT the tenth annual exhibition of the Rhode Island Poultry Association, held in Providence, Dec. 10-13, 1895, there were exhibited by the Rhode Island Poultry Yards some black Silkies. These birds were like the whites in shape, size and character of plumage, but instead of being white were a soft black. The coloring of the neck was more or less tinged with yellow but the body coloring was pure black. These birds were novelties here in New England, and were, I think, the first the writer ever saw. He remembers of seeing a brown fowl with this silky or downy plumage exhibited at Indianapolis some seven or eight years ago, under the name of Fur Fowl, but that was a larger bird than these Silkies and different in other respects.

These black Silkies made a very handsome contrast with the white Silkies which were there on exhibition. The whites, though more common, are by no means plentiful, and the whites at this exhibition were the best the writer ever saw. As some of them scored 96½ and one 97 points, it will be seen that they lacked very little of perfection. When the blacks were ranged up by the side of such whites as these they needed to be good birds or suffer by the comparison. But they were good birds and attracted quite a lot of attention.

The Silky fowl makes an excellent sitter and mother for delicate chickens and is used, to some extent, by rearers of pheasants for a mother to their very delicate young. The

disposition is naturally quiet and the inability to fly seems to render the bird even more tame. Tameness is very essential to successful hatching and brooding. A nervous, scary hen will smash eggs, kill chickens and raise mischief generally. But one of these Silkies is not that kind of a hen.

The Silky has a black skin which renders the poultry uninviting to the eye. But, if one has the courage to taste it, he will find that it is as sweet and palatable as though the skin were yellow or white. Just how the black Silky originated we do not know, though the white Silky, crossed upon some black fowl, was probably used. If one would cross the Silky with a long, soft feathered fowl, like the Cochin Bantam, he would find that it was not very difficult to produce this kind of plumage. The nib of the Cochin feather is not so compact as that of the Game, for example, and sometimes loses its firm character altogether. Silky plumaged Cochins have occurred more than once. By crossing birds, then, of this character with the true Silky the plumage ought to be very easily obtained. Then the birds by selection, could be bred to the requisite shape. We think that, by one who has the necessary patience and skill, a buff plumaged Silky could be produced quite easily and would be very handsome. We would prefer it to black. Then the class would be pretty well filled by the white, the black and the buff. In the meantime we have but the two and the black is the rarest one of them.

One peculiarity of the Silky is the great preponderance of male chickens in the broods. Just why this should be so no one seems to know, but the fact has often been noted. This seems to be an unfortunate peculiarity, for the females are the ones most to be desired. It doesn't so much matter in good market fowls if the males are in excess—the market will take care of them, but Silkies are not the fowls for general market purposes.