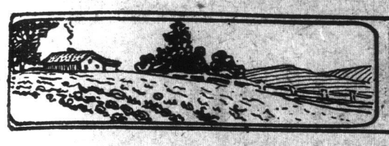


THE SIMPLE LIFE

WITH THE POULTRYMAN

WHY I BREED HOUDANS

I AM asked this question many times and to answer it in full each time would require about all the time I have at my disposal.

In a general way I will try and give a few of the most important reason why I breed Houdans, which for the most part I have given many times before, but the oft-told story is often the most interesting. In this connection I will say that I never tire of telling the story and Houdans become more and more interesting to me all the time.

The first reason why I breed Houdans, speaking in a general way, is because they combine attractiveness with usefulness. To be more specific, I will enumerate the many points of excellence in Houdans but do not wish to be understood as trying to detract in the least from other breeds. The Houdan is a distinct breed of fowls with distinctive qualities. They are unlike other fowls in many respects. While they in a way combine the good points in the smaller and larger breeds yet they are very much unlike the smaller breeds, except as to laying qualities, and very much more unlike the larger breeds from the fact that they have more activity. In comparing them to other breeds I will say that I have found them to lay more eggs than Leghorns, on the same or less amount of feed and are better size for table use. In comparing them to the larger breeds I find them to be as easily confined yet much more active. With the medium weight breeds they have the same advantage over them that the Leghorns have, that is, they are nonsitters and better layers.

Now, as I said, to be more specific as to why I breed Houdans—first, I breed them for their large white eggs which they lay in such great numbers, and in the coldest of winter weather at that. In size the Houdan egg will average one-half larger than the eggs of some breeds and from one-quarter to one-third larger than the eggs of almost all breeds. Those eggs are as white as snow and very choice for fancy market. Houdans hatched from April to June and even in July make the best of winter layers. I have had many breeders tell me that June hatched chicks of any brood would not do well but most breeders of exhibition stock will say that June or even July chicks will mature best for the winter shows. Owing to the great demand for Houdan eggs last season we did not set many eggs until late in May. Those hatched in June were given plenty of shade and watched closely for lice. They grew from the start and many of them commenced laying in December.

Another reason why I breed Houdans is because of the fact that they make one of the finest table fowl of any breed that I have bred so far. They carry extra large thighs and a plentiful supply of delicious white breast meat. The Houdan is of sufficient size to be well adapted to table use, for in addition to its being a very finely favored fowl it is plump and heavy. I have hens weighing seven to nine pounds and while the standard only calls for a six-pound hen I find them easily averaging seven pounds without being fat. In fact the Houdans never get too fat to lay. They are in this respect like the Mediterranean breeds and are much too active to take on any over surplus of fat.

Another reason why I breed Houdans is because of their great beauty and attractiveness. While the entries at our shows are small in the Houdan class yet they attract more attention than a dozen of the more popular breeds, but Houdans are fast coming into their own and the writer predicts that in ten years from now they will be as popular as almost any of our American breeds. The Houdans are indeed strikingly beautiful and many persons breed them for this point alone. This quality of attractiveness is blended with the highest degree of utility. The Houdan is essentially a fowl for the fancier and practical poultryman, for the fancier because the demand is many times greater than the supply, because it is a live breed and constantly growing in favor and because it requires great skill in breeding to the same degree of perfection as has been attained in other breeds—for the practical poultryman because of its desirable qualities as a table fowl and egg producer, because of hardiness and quick growing qualities.

There are many other good reasons that make the Houdan an almost ideal fowl for any purpose for which fowls are bred.

They are active, healthy, quick-growing, quick to mature, light feeders, non-sitters, ideal winter layers, famous table fowls, layers of large size white eggs, beautiful and highly profitable.

These last two reasons are the main reasons I breed Houdans. I find them very profitable because there is a greater comparative demand for them than for any other breed. In fact breeders cannot supply one-tenth the demand, and the prices paid for good stock is higher than for other breeds.—Dr. G. W. Taylor.

—o—

THE FRENCH BREED OF FOWLS

The French agriculturist is an eminently practical person and is not likely to waste his time breeding stock which is not profitable. He is patient if not very skillful, and his patience leads him to work out his ideals with a persistence which brings success in the end.

To him we owe several varieties of domestic poultry of great merit. The Toulouse goose and the Rouen duck are of French origin, both bred to great perfection from wild stock much inferior to the finished products of French industry and capacity.

The horses of France long have been famed for their might and beauty, and the cattle of the Channel islands and Brittainy are due to this trait of persistent attempts to secure practical qualities which mark the French agriculturist, a man who loves his home and his little farm with a devotion known to no other nation.

As a breeder of chickens, the French poulterer has perfected three or four varieties whose merits deserve more attention than they have ever received from American fanciers, although these varieties have been known in this country for many years.

The French class in the American Standard of Excellence is composed of Houdans, La Fleche and Creve Couers. The Creve Couer has never attained any degree of popularity in this country although highly esteemed in the market of France. The La Fleche is a black breed of rather massive build, heavily meated and a prolific producer of large white eggs. It would no doubt become quite popular in this country if it were not for its black color and its white skin. It is quite hardy, the eggs hatch well and the chicks mature rapidly. As soon as American prejudices are broken down so as to admit that a black fowl is as good to eat as a white one, the market merits of the La Fleche may become better known and the breed more popular.

The Houdan is the only French breed which has ever made a place worth mentioning for itself in this country. Its merits should make it more numerous, for of all the French breeds it is the best, and among all the breeds admitted to the Standard, it deserves to stand high in order of excellence.

A well bred Houdan is a striking fowl with its well rounded crest, striking black and white plumage—the colors about evenly divided, and its deep body, showing at a glance a large proportion of flesh on those portions of the body where the most desirable meat is to be found. Thick of thigh, deep of breast, long of keel and thick from side to side, the Houdan has been bred to perfection from the market poulterer's point of view.

The flesh is tender and palatable, the flavor, according to those of trained tastes, being delicious and appetizing. The chicks mature at an early age and are ready for the table from the time they are very young. The pullets do not begin to lay so early as do those of the Mediterranean class, but they lay very large eggs, compared with those of the Black Spanish, Minorcas and Langshans. The eggs are a very pure white and are produced in very large numbers. There is probably no breed kept in this country that could be developed into better layers than the Houdans.

This breed endures cold much better than any breed with large combs can. The comb of the Houdan is very small and often is not at all developed as the crest seems to take its place. This gives freedom from frozen combs and its attendant evils. Being heavily feathered, the Houdan is protected from the cold and becomes a fine winter layer.

Now that winter laying is becoming one of the things the practical poultryman demands in his fowls, it is likely that the Houdan will become more popular. It has had some earnest friends for a good many years, but these have not made any attempt to keep their favorites prominently before the public. If they had done so there would now be in this country a great many more of the valuable fowls than are to be found.

Houdan pullets will weigh as much as six pounds at six months, at which time they will begin to lay. It is a characteristic of the Houdans that they lay well for a longer period than almost any other breed.

Houdans are naturally protected from disease and are less liable to the commoner ailments of fowls than the average breed. They have been bred for many generations of men along lines that make for hardiness and prolificacy and will well repay any one who will take them up and let the public know he is breeding them.

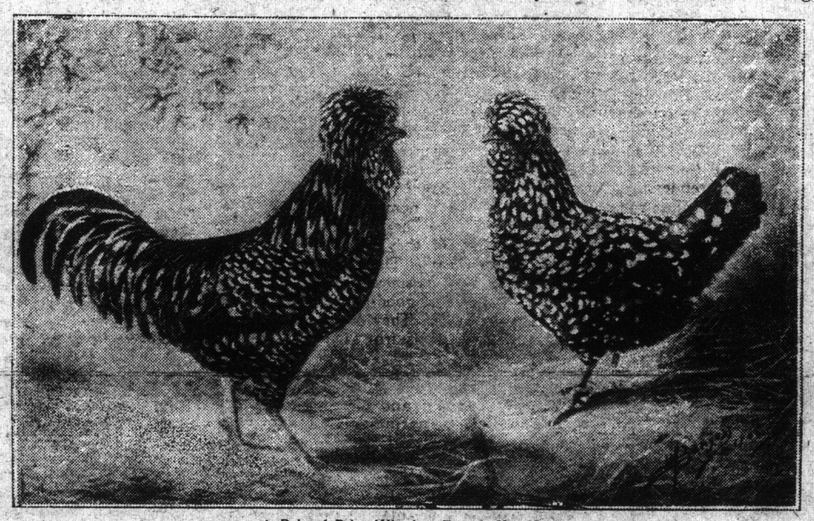
A flock of Houdans is a beautiful sight and will attract attention anywhere. There seems to be an increasing inquiry for these birds and those who own good strains should take pains to maintain a high standard in shape, color and prolificacy, for (unless the signs are misleading) this variety will be in demand before very much longer. It is worth cultivating by fanciers and market poultrymen alike and good specimens will sell at high prices, while in the market it is able to hold its own with any of them.

COLORATION RELATED TO EGG PRODUCTION

"Fine feathers make fine birds," and sometimes denote fine layers. Of all the external characters which have been drawn upon to guide us in selecting layers, color has perhaps been least emphasized as showing any marked variation in relation to reproductive powers. Former experiences of my own having been so curiously confirmed by the records of many of the pens in last winter's laying competition, I have compared notes on the subject with some breeders of wide experience and find that their observations coincide with my own.

In considering the laws affecting secondary characters, such as the plumage of male birds, Professors Geddes and Thompson ascribe their brilliancy of color to excessive energy which leads to the laying down of more pigment in the energy expending male. This vital energy being an inherent part of living things, permeating the whole being, one would naturally expect that the vitality that shows in the great reproductive powers of a good layer, would be evident in her plumage also. I have found that in many breeds coloration does appear to be distinctly associated with reproductive powers.

My attention was first drawn to this in the case of three birds which came into my possession. All were bred under conditions that were not favorable to the development of great vigor, and as they were not nearly hardy enough for my farm, and laying of the best was not record breaking; but in each brood there was one very poorly colored bird which proved to be such a bad layer that



A Pair of Prize-Winning French Houdans

all three were killed. When examined they were perfectly healthy, but the egg cluster consisted of only a few pin-head eggs, at a time when the othrs had been in full lay for months. They were Campines, Buff Orpingtons, and cross Buff Orpington-Campines.

From the best layers in each brood eggs were set, crossed with a Scots Grey cock. This gave the required hardiness. Out of thirty pullets kept, two were very poorly colored. These had not commenced to lay in January, so they were killed, showing on examination, like those of the previous year, only the poorest cluster of undeveloped eggs. Since then I have killed several birds which were poorly colored, at six to eight months, and have always found the same to be the case.

Of these cross-breeds, the Scots Grey-Silver Campine produced on the one hand birds with slatey-blue bodies and black heads which were excellent layers; and on the other, birds with barred bodies and white heads which were moderate poor layers. The latter produced all their eggs in spring and summer, while the former laid fairly well in the winter.

In speaking of a breed which is very similar to this cross, namely, the Braeckel, M. Vander Snickt mentioned at Reading those birds which, with grey bodies, barred, flowered or ashen grey, have white necks as being typical; then he added: "Very often birds are seen with a black head on a gold or silver neck. These are the best." This is precisely what I had found with the cross-bred pullets. The dark headed, more intensely colored pullets showed greater vitality, were better foragers, better winter layers, and stood the inclemency of weather to which they were at all times exposed, sleeping as all did in the trees, summer and winter.

Amongst other breeds, in the meantime, I found that the lightest, that is the most poorly colored, of each brood were the poorest layers, and in some I noticed that the converse held. Thus, out of five Silver Wyandottes one very darkely marked one was far the best layer, two somewhat light ones came next, while one nearly white on the breast, and with light fluff, was not worth keeping. I do not mean to imply by this that black birds are better layers than white. There appears to be in every breed a mean of coloration which is the expression of moderate physical well-being and vitality, and in those which have come under my notice, all diverging from that point in the direction of paleness of feather, (not light color but poor color,) show a lessening of vitality, which is further borne out by poor reproductive powers; while those diverging in the direction of greater intensity of color are markedly better layers. When we remember that color implies rate of vibration of light waves we can comprehend why it may indicate greater or less vitality.

On comparing notes with others I find that their experiences with most black and white breeds have been the same. One breeder tells me that when he mated up two pens of Anconas, one with yellow legs and the other with mottled, the former produced hard feathered, dark birds which were good layers, while the latter produced soft feathered, light birds which were poor layers. Among the Barred Greys this also appears to hold good. In Scots Greys pure, the black headed dark pullets are the best, with a dark cockerel with reddish hackles produces not only the best colored birds for show, but also the best layers.

In cross bred birds, as in newly-made breeds, another factor is apt to complicate matters. One cannot always tell whether departure from the normal color is an expression of individual vitality, or an outcropping of color from some particular ancestor of a different color altogether. But I have never known a poorly colored bird, pure or crossed, which was a really good layer. Some of the pens in last winter's laying competition might almost have been made to order in support of this statement, notably the Silver Wyandottes. One pen consisted of four large handsome birds, very showy, decidedly light in color and with brilliantly red combs. The other pen presented a great contrast. They were very dark, small and insignificant at first, with no combs noticeable on arrival. But they developed quickly and proved excellent layers once they made a commencement, while the brilliant beauties, although from one of the best of strains, steadily decline under the trying conditions and proved to be very poor layers.

Among black birds the same thing was noticeable, birds of a rich beetle-like sheen proving to be better layers than those of a dull, sooty black.

Among white birds, I have always found that those of a rich opaque white were better layers than those whose color was of a thin bluish tinge. In this fact, I believe, lies the explanation of the good laying of the White Wyandotte, even when bred for show. In this instance the farmer has hit upon a utility point at his ideal, the white color he aims at being the external sign of those qualities which produce great layers. So long as this remains one of his aims he can scarcely spoil the White Wyandotte. Let us hope his fancy may never soar from opaque creamy white to skim milk blue.

When we come to the buff breeds of modern make it is more difficult to detect the medium of color. Without exception, all those that I have met with among Buff Orpingtons and Buff Plymouth Rocks which were decidedly light, of a pale sand tint, have been poor layers. But when the shade is so dark that it becomes another color and is not buff but "red" or cinnamon brown, then we do not find the birds to be the best layers of the brood. But the confusion of color and names of color among so-called Buffs is so great that it is difficult to judge of what we hear or even see. We can scarcely tell whether, in these cases, we are looking at density of pigmentation or at a different pigment altogether. I know of one pen of Buff Orpingtons which is an object lesson on the point of color. There are four pullets, who vary in tint from a light sandy color to a rich rufous shade and during their first few months laying they produced eggs in exact accordance with their color. The lightest laid worst, the next in shade laid half as many again, the next exactly double the first and the fourth laid just an egg or two under four times the number of the first. Many of the pens last year confirmed my own previous notes on the Buff breeds; though in my very limited experience I have not been able to detect any marked difference in the color of moderate to excellent Buff Rocks.

Of all the external characters to which we ascribe importance in the selection of stock for laying and breeding, I have found this one of intensity of color the most helpful and most reliable. For in selecting these birds we are choosing those with the greatest amount of vitality, hence the strongest constitutions. And I have found here, where the stock has to be the hardiest possible, as Professor Gowell found at the Maine agricultural station, that among excellent layers (even the derided "sprinter") "one feature is common to all these hens; they all have strong constitutions."—A. S. Gailbraith, in Poultry, England.

—o—

POULTRY NOTES

In planning house to be occupied by fowls it is well to allow at least four square feet of floor space or twenty-four cubic feet of air space per fowl.

Fowls should be permitted as free a range as possible. Any plan that gives the birds the freedom of the fields is excellent, providing they do not get in places where they are not wanted.

AROUND THE FARM

THE ART OF DRIVING

THOSE who have been brought up to the management of horses have naturally acquired that delicate touch and that firm and confident demeanor which so impress the horse that he forthwith subordinates his own will and wishes to that which he wisely and diplomatically considers as the overpowering will of the rider or driver. The touch on the driving reins or bridle is one of the most important acquirements of the expert, and it is called good hands; but the terms are misleading, as the hands are ever rigid, and success lies in the well-regulated flexibility of the elbow, shoulder and wrist-joints. Beginners who note this fact will forthwith turn their attention to the cultivation of these joints, or, rather, to the nerves which control the muscles which work these joints, and when once so thoroughly acquired as to become a habit, that admits of no variation, no departure, no error; then, and only then, has a promising lad solved the first problem of driving a well-mannered and generous horse.

In harness, the driver has greater control over the quiet horse than can ever be attained in riding, as the shafts help to keep him straight, and the terrets on the collar cause the reins ever to pull in one and the same direction, subject only to the changed position of the horse's head. Many harness horses habitually toss their heads about, and this up-and-down motion of the head is annoying to drivers of small experience, and they then unwisely snatch the horse. When a harness horse annoyingly and excessively tosses his head up, the fit of the collar should be suspected, and another collar may be substituted But, if, in riding, the horse tosses his head similarly, it is, of course, useless to change the collar. It is a remarkable fact that a horse which tosses his head is usually an untiring animal, and if he be not hurried and flurried at starting, and time allowed him to adapt his entire system to the long journey before him, he will go fifty miles or more without flagging.

Many good long-journey horses are bad starters, they being called cold-shouldered; and some men of experience take the trouble to warm the collar at the saddle room fire ere they put it on. The best way, however, is to start on an incline—down hill, of course—and as the horse warms to his work, he may go uphill with the courage of a lion. Idleness is not the usual cause of balking, as may be seen in double harness; the horse that is difficult to start in single harness, now in double doing far above his equal share of the work.

If anyone can drive one horse well, the extra knowledge to drive a pair is easily acquired, and even a team or tandem can soon be handled. In putting strange horses on the pole, take the quieter horse first and attach him by the pole straps, then turn him to the pole, as one has seen 'bus horses changed in the streets. Then bring up the other horse, and, if wild, excitable or nervous, let him first speak to his already attached stable companion, and he will be less nervous. They know each other by the smell, but there is a decided objection to such indulgence to inquisitive strange horses.

A gardener can almost drive an ordinary pair, as the horses do not usually act in concert against him. If one horse shies or bolts, the other holds him; in fact, the wildest colt is fixed in strong, double harness. There have been cases where a pair have agreed to bolt, and if not stopped by ordinary means, the driver should imitate the pulley principle by throwing one leg over the reins, the while he remembers the steerage. Mischief of this sort is traceable to bad stable management.—W. R. Gilbert in Rider and Driver.

—o—

DETERMINING THE AGE OF CATTLE

Disputes frequently arise at fairs as to the elegibility of a certain animal to compete in a certain class. It may be alleged that the animal is over the age limit for that class, and while the exhibitor may produce a pedigree for it, in case the class is a pure bred one, it doesn't always happen that the pedigree is taken as conclusive proof of age. To overcome these difficulties and to provide something for judges to use in the ring as a basis for determining the age of cattle, the management of the International Exposition, have adopted the following mouth specifications, which apply to cattle between the ages of twelve and thirty-nine months:

Twelve Months—An animal of this age shall have all its milk (calf) incisor teeth in place.

Fifteen Months—At this age centre pair of incisor teeth may be replaced by centre pair of permanent incisors (pinchers,) the latter teeth being through the gums but not yet in wear.

Eighteen Months—The middle pair of permanent incisors at this age should be fully up in wear, but next pair (first intermediate) not yet cut through gums.

Twenty-Four Months—The mouth at this age will show two middle permanent (broad) incisors fully up and in wear, and next pair (first intermediate) well up but not in wear.

Thirty Months—The mouth at this age may show six broad permanent incisors, the middle and first intermediate pairs fully up and in wear, and the next pair (second intermediate) well up but not in wear.