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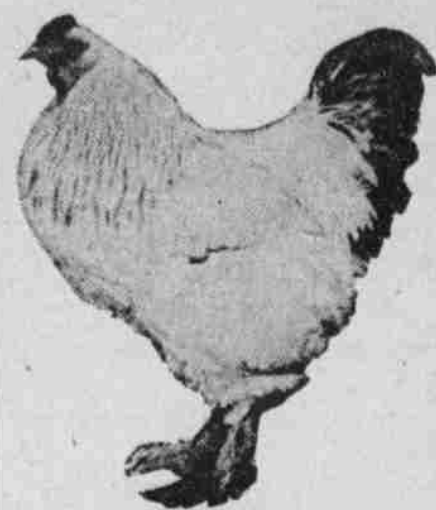
II.—What Breed of Chickens to Keep.

By **MILO M. HASTINGS,**
Formerly Poultryman at Kansas Experiment Station, Commercial Poultry Expert of the United States Department of Agriculture, Author of "The Dollar Hen."

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THE selection of the breed of poultry is always a momentous problem to the beginner. There are some poultry breeders and far too many farmers who make this problem of breed selection a continual one and are always changing or sending away for a sitting of eggs of some newly advertised breed of poultry or swapping roosters with the neighbors. Such fickleness, of course, prevents all progress.

For those who are breeding standard breed poultry and whose main object in keeping fowls is to win the prizes at the shows and thereby sell stock to farmers and other breeders the selection of breed is a most important question. Could one always select the breed which is to be popular five or ten years hence making money in poultry breeding would be an easy problem. Indeed, we could all get rich if we knew the future, but as it is the



WHITE BRAHMA COCKEREL.

majority of those who tie to novel and untried propositions, whether it be in fancy poultry or mining stock, get the worst of the deal.

The following general statement may be laid down as a safe guide: Poultry shows and the poultry fanciers are usually several years ahead of the farmers in their breed fancies; hence the man who selects the variety of fowls which are steadily gaining ground among the breeders will have good chances of finding a market for his stock among the farmers a few years hence, but of course his chances of selling stock to other fanciers will not be as good as the man who takes up with new breeds still earlier in the game. The reader must not interpret me to mean that poultry breeds come and go as do fashions in ladies' hats. They are rather more like men's clothes, in which there are always some changes of fashion, but also a few leading types which hold their own pretty well from year to year.

Popularity of Breeds.

Poultry breeds are supposed to differ in form and habits, while the varieties of each breed differ in the coloring of the plumage. The following list will give an idea of the leading breeds of chickens as judged by the numbers exhibited at shows advertised in leading poultry magazines. This listing of the games and birds have been omitted, as they are a class which have little interest to the practical poultryman: Plymouth Rocks, Wyandottes, Leghorns, Orpingtons, Langshans, Minorcas, Brahmans, Cochins, Hamburgs, Polish, Houdans and Indian Games.

Plymouth Rocks rank, Barred, White and Buff, in the popularity of varieties. These three types are shown in more nearly even number than in the case of Wyandottes, where the Whites are exhibited more numerous than the other five or six varieties put together. Among the Leghorns, the Single Comb White is now easily the leading variety, though a few years ago Brown Leghorns were the more popular.

That the representation of breeds on farms is quite different from that of the show room will be readily seen from the following percentage of breeds on farms, which the writer tabulated while poultryman at the Kansas experimental station:

Barred Plymouth Rocks, 45 per cent; Brown Leghorns, 12 per cent; Black Langshans, 10 per cent; White Leghorns, 8 per cent; Light Brahmans, 4 per cent; White Plymouth Rocks, 2 per cent; Buff Plymouth Rocks, 2 per cent; White Wyandottes, 2 per cent; other varieties and mongrels, 14 per cent. For those who are to consider the keeping of poultry for market the following ranking of breeds by poultry packers will not be without interest: Plymouth Rocks, Wyandottes, Indian Games, Langshans, Leghorns, Brahmans, mongrels.

The ranking of the breeds of poultry for egg production is quite different from the popularity in the show room or among the market men who consider the carcass of the fowl. As is generally known, Leghorns are the best layers, and the Single Comb White Leghorn, chiefly, because they are more readily bred true to type, is the most popular variety. The main bone of

contention in the choice of a breed for commercial poultry keeping seems to be between White Leghorns kept for egg production and Plymouth Rocks, White Wyandottes, Rhode Island Reds or other general purpose fowls. At the present time the latter type of fowls is more popular upon the general farm. The Leghorns are gaining in popularity, however, and will probably continue to do so as the use of incubators and public hatcheries increase.

The Leghorn has a much smaller carcass, and hence there is not so much income from the sale of young cockerels and old hens. As a matter of fact, the smaller size of the Leghorn fowl is not as much of an argument against the breed as is commonly supposed, for Leghorns eat less food, occupy less house room and when not confined are better hustlers and secure a larger portion of their living off the range than do the larger breeds of chickens. A more important objection to Leghorns is that artificial incubators and brooders are necessary to keep up the flock. Again, Leghorns are wild, nervous and thinly feathered, and if ill treated and poorly housed the egg yield, especially in winter, will be less than that of the general purpose fowl. Leghorns when kept in large numbers by those who give careful attention to poultry keeping can be made very profitable, but for the reasons just given the farmer or the beginner at poultry keeping should be slow in taking up this breed.

Strain or Family Important.

In the mind of those who are not experienced in animal breeding too much stress is laid upon the breed and not sufficient consideration given to individuality of particular families or strains of the breed. The reason for this will become clear when it is explained that the majority of our common breeds of poultry have originated in the last forty years and have been selected chiefly for feathers rather than for meat, egg yield or general vigor. This does not mean that pure bred chickens will be any less practical as meat and egg producers than mixed or scrub chickens. On the other hand, standard bred poultry are better from any viewpoint than scrub chickens, but one strain of a breed may be vigorous growers and excellent layers, while another flock of the same breed whose ancestors have been carelessly selected with regard to practical points may be poor in these qualities.

Egg laying tests of a few lots from different breeds of fowls are of little value in determining the worth of breeds, for it is quite possible that a good strain of the poor breed may excel a poor lot of the best breed and the results of such tests be exactly opposite to the real truth. For this reason I consider the majority of the breed tests as published by poultry papers and government experiment stations as of little value.

In Australia, however, the government has conducted egg laying tests on such a large scale and with pens entered from hundreds of different breeders that the average of their results is worthy of more consideration. The ranking of the three leading breeds in the Australian tests is Single Comb White Leghorns, Black Orpingtons, Silver Wyandottes. It should be stated, however, that Barred Plymouth Rocks, White Wyandottes and Rhode Island Reds, the favorite general purpose American breeds, are practically unknown in Australia.

Principles of Breeding Simple.

The art of breeding fancy poultry is less complicated than many old breeders would have us to believe. Various so called systems of breeding have been advertised and much talked about, but any breeder having a thorough knowledge of the desirable points in the breed and who breeds from the best birds has about all the system necessary.

"Inbreeding" means the mating of individuals that are related, but because of the analogy taken from human relationship a deep seated popular prejudice exists against this custom. Inbreeding is the shortest and quickest way of intensifying any characteristic. The reason for this is because outside qualities are not brought in to interfere with family traits; hence the inbreeding of fowls or other animals that have a tendency



BARRED PLYMOUTH ROCK.

toward some particular weakness or disease results in the production of still weaker offspring, so that the strain will soon die out. On the other hand, the breeding of related stock that is particularly vigorous will result in the increase of health and vitality and the intensification of what ever good points it may possess. In practice it is well to breed related fowls for three or four generations and then bring in some fresh blood. But the miscellaneous introduction of new blood as practiced by farmers who get new roosters every year practically prevents all improvement of the flock.

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