

FORTUNES INVESTED IN FANCY POULTRY



HERE IS A MAN in Massachusetts who has sold, it is said, nearly a million dollars worth of fancy poultry. His birds have gone to China, South Africa and many remote regions. In his office are enough blue ribbons to carpet the floor.

He is a rich man now, with houses and lands — paid for by his hens. He is, in short, one of several poultry breeders who have been able to steer a successful course along a coast strewn with wreckage.

To the average man, a chicken is a pot-pie — potentially, of course — but to the fancier it may represent a gold-lined punch bowl or a hundred-dollar purse. The average man would gasp at the thought of paying even ten dollars for a rooster — a crower, as the country people sometimes call him — no matter how big and lordly and self-complacent he might appear; but sales at five hundred dollars among fanciers are not uncommon, and several times an enthusiast has attached his name to an order for one thousand dollars to pay the price of a single quality specimen. It is common report that Madam Paderewski, wife of the great Polish pianist, paid a breeder in this country \$7,500 for a pen of five birds.

IN THE matter of enthusiasm, a chicken fancier is close second to a baseball fan. He rides his hobby hard and fast, and is never happier than when surrounded by thousands of cackling, crowing, singing, scolding birds at one of the big mid-winter exhibitions. These shows, so far as this country is concerned, have come into existence practically within the past quarter century. From a very small beginning they have grown to mammoth proportions. Over 7,000 specimens have been gathered under one roof in Boston, with numbers almost as large in New York and Chicago. As high as seven thousand dollars in prizes have been offered, in addition to many

specials. Probably, the value of the stock shown at the biggest shows would total a hundred thousand dollars. And the attendance runs as high as 18,000 persons.

There are now over a hundred distinct breeds and varieties in the United States alone. The fowls in some foreign countries, where different lines of breeding have been followed, are entirely unlike those found here. Breeds even, that bear the same name, have different characteristics.

Japan has some wonderful breeds. Among the most curious of them are the Phoenix fowls, five males among which often have tails five feet long. It is the custom to keep these birds in houses, the only windows in which are near the roof and with perches suspended in front of the windows, so high that the tails of the cocks will not drag on the ground. Each day the birds are taken for a walk, while an attendant carefully holds up the tail so that the feathers will not become broken or soiled.

Another interesting Japanese product and one more often seen in this country is the Silkie, a dainty fowl with a floss-like



Fleecy Japanese Silkies

covering in place of feathers, with curious crests and with mulberry-colored faces and skin. So soft and downy are these birds that the hens often are used as mothers when the eggs of tender pheasants are being incubated.

New breeds constantly are being created. Others are continually being changed, sometimes for the better, but often just the contrary. Sometimes a fad carried to extremes will spoil a one-time good variety. One of the greatest fascinations about poultry-keeping, from the fancier's standpoint, is the wonderful plasticity of poultry and the fact that results are secured in a few months.

The Barred Plymouth Rock seems like an institution in this country. No doubt, many people imagine he was found testing his lungs on the old stone at Plymouth when the Pilgrims hove in sight. In point of fact, this breed can not boast even an ante-bellum existence, dating back only forty years. The progenitors of the Barred Rock were the Dominique and the Black Java, although it is probable that the blood from some other

breeds was added. The first Rock was very different from the stylish-appearing bird of today, was, in fact, a very blotched, brassy, poorly-marked specimen. Constant breeding to an ideal has produced the fine carriage and the uniform barring of the feathers found now.

But what of the Dominique and the Java? They are the birds of yesterday, as tomorrow the Barred Plymouth Rock may be. And yet they were common a few years ago and occasional specimens are still to be seen at the shows. Within a decade a Connecticut breeder advertised himself widely as "the Java man."

Some time ago the White Wyandotte came to dispute the supremacy of the Barred Plymouth Rock; but no real rival appeared until the Rhode Island Red entered the lists. Now, the Wyandotte, like the Rock, was strictly a fancier's product. Fanciers made it and then turned it over to the utility breeder.

The case was reversed with the little red hen, which had been bred on the shores of Long Island for twenty years or more before the fanciers sought it out. It was created by and for egg-farmers who wanted first-class layers of brown-shelled eggs along with a hen big enough to make a respectable appearance on the dining table of a Sabbath day. As soon as the fanciers had taken it up, fixed the type fairly well and given it some prominence, the Reds began to sweep the country. Today, they are bred in large and increasing numbers, supplanting the Plymouth Rock on thousands of farms.

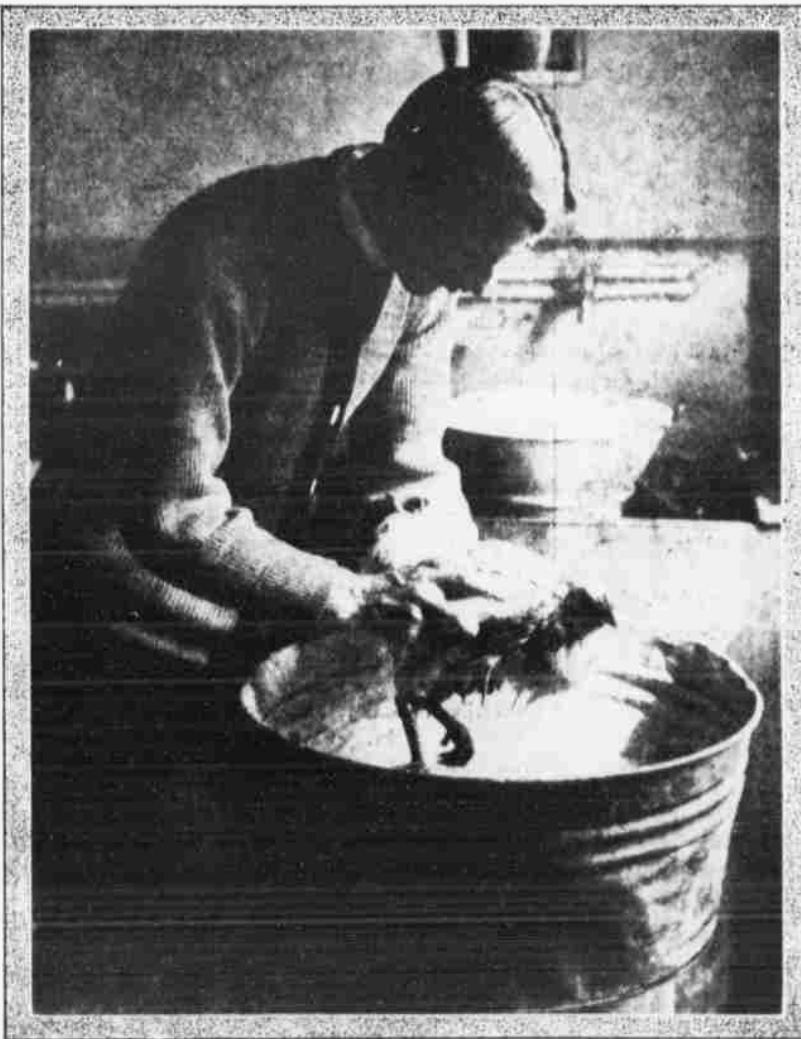
SOME new breeds just happen, as with the popular and handsome Columbian Wyandotte, which came into existence because a White Wyandotte hen saw fit to crawl through a hole in a fence, there being a flock of Barred Plymouth Rocks on the other side. The owner of the hen — a clergyman — liked the cross which resulted so well that he proceeded to perpetuate it. The Columbian exhibition at Chicago gave it its name.

The results achieved by careful crossing are amazing. In this way feathers with gold and silver lacings have been produced, tails have been lowered and raised, combs made larger or smaller and feathered legs made smooth. The ideal toward which each breeder works is found in the American Standard of Perfection, a book issued by the American Poultry Association, the organization which directs the progress of the "fancy" in this country.

Many wealthy men enter their birds only for the honors that they may win. They are in

the game purely for the sport it provides, and they are likely to favor such breeds as the Polish and Hamburgs which require special care and are not adapted to the use of the utility poultry keeper. Many other entries are made by men who breed fancy poultry for profit and are well aware that a long list of winnings constitutes the best form of advertisement. There are shrewd, calculating men among these professional fanciers. Some years ago one of them scented a boom in a new breed. Very quietly, he bought breeding stock here and there until, when the next season opened, he had a larger number of birds from which to make a selection than any

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The method does not matter, so long as the bird is thoroughly lathered



First Prize Silver Laced Wyandotte Hen