

AN ESSAY ON HENS.

It is my purpose in the course of this essay to set down a few of my personal observations on the subject of "Hens" for the benefit of unborn generations. I have had exceptional opportunities for studying the habits and customs of hens, and I have often been visibly affected by the alarming scarcity of literature bearing upon this important subject.

The hen is a wonderful bird, and I have always thought she deserved more attention from the outside world than she gets. I have felt a deep-seated interest in the hen for a good many years, and I have done all in my power to start a wave of popular sympathy in her favor; but for a long time it seemed that my gray hairs would have to go down in sorrow to the grave without tasting the fruits of my labors. Many times I have stood with tears in my eyes and great lumps of undigested agony in my breast and watched the world go dashing on in its mad career, all unmindful of the faithful hen. I have heard the smart wags of the country turn out various and sundry rough jokes at the expense of the hen, while she stood afar off with her face buried in her handkerchief, weeping one great sorrowful wope right after another.

The hen is very chicken-hearted and cannot bear to be snubbed. A snubbed hen is a very pitiful sight. The hen does not possess such a brilliant and side-splitting sense of humor as your humble servant happens to be the proprietor of, and for that reason she cannot take a joke. Then hen takes life very seriously, as a general rule. I have been personally acquainted with a great many different hens in my time, and almost without an exception they have gone through life with a sad and melancholy expression on their faces. The hen never laughs except on certain occasions, but when she thinks the occasion demands it she throws off her henly dignity and goes into it heart and soul. Whenever she becomes the mother of a new egg she most always climbs onto the fence and devotes several minutes to laughter. On these occasions her face expands into a very respectable smile, and the ripple of her musical laughter goes echoing out across the adjoining plantations in a manner that is altogether satisfying. But with the exception of these ovations which the hen gives to her new-born eggs, she is very meek and lowly in heart.

The infant hen is called a biddy, and when she reaches her early henhood she is sometimes called a pullet. When a young hen becomes the author of her first new and original egg she throws aside all her maidenly reserve and abandons herself to a season of unalloyed enjoyment. She thinks there was never anything to equal her performance, and the novelty of the situation appeals to her with such force that she has to cackle right out. The greatest day of a hen's life is the day she lays her first egg. She may go on laying eggs for years and years, but her bosom will never again heave with so much unmingled joy as it hove with on that occasion.

After the novelty of the thing wears off, the young hen will usually go on laying eggs for a few weeks in a very quiet sort of manner, and then she will take a notion all at once that she

would like to get out a new edition of little henlets, and when she takes that notion there isn't any use to argue with her. She won't listen to argument. She will turn her head to one side and walk off talking to herself in a subdued and absent-minded tone of voice. She will take long walks about the plantation all alone, and will look suspiciously at every person she meets. Presently she will entirely disappear and remain in that condition for quite a long time. And the next thing you know she will walk up into the barn-yard some fine morning with ten or fifteen little henlets trotting at her heels. By this time she has assumed a very motherly attitude and goes about scratching worms for her baby hens to fight over.

I can understand the hen very well until she takes a notion to set, but after that I am not able to cope with the deep mysteries of her nature. All I can do is to take off my hat, bow my head reverently, and walk away.

For several thousand years we depended entirely upon the setting hen to multiply and replenish the earth with chickens, but we are somewhat more independent of the huffy old dame in these latter days if mechanical ingenuity and ready-made majorities. Several years ago one of these inventor fellows turned his attention to henology, and before the rest of us learned what he was up to, lo and behold, he had turned out a big wooden hen that could do the work of a dozen feathered hens. All you have to do is to pour a bushel of eggs into a hopper and start the machine and it will grind out hundreds of little infant hens while you wait—if you care to wait long enough.

The discovery of the incubator, or mechanical hen, marks a great step forward in the culture of the hen. The faithful old setting hen, who has worked hard all her life to supply the market with spring chickens, can now retire to a reserved seat in the first balcony of the hen-house and spend the remainder of her life in comparative ease knowing that the work which she began will be pushed to a successful climax by the aid of these new labor-saving machines.

I have just one more suggestion to make along this line. I rise as one man to suggest that all setting hen who have worn themselves out in the service of the poultry market, and who are now removed to give room for more improved machinery, be placed on the pay roll of the retired list.

A KNOTTY PROBLEM.

Here is a knot of the knottiest knots that were ever knotted in the name of a knot, and I'm going to print it whether or not.

Not knowing the number of knots, it will not be unwise to count the knots, or else, as apt as not, we shall not know the number of knots when we get done with this knotty bundle of knots.

First, there is the nautical knot; for do you not know that a ship sails so many knots whether the wind blows or not; and I want to know if a nautical knot is the same knotty sort of a knot as the old-fashioned pine knot? And if not, why not? And that's knot number one.

And then there is the pine-knot. And who has not, as apt as not, set up by the light of a knot and worked

out many a knotty mathematical knot? And was not the pine knot a great blessing when lamps were not? And if not, why not? And that's knot number two.

And then there's the love knot. And who has not, whether in love or not, tied many a love knot in the name of love that dies not? And did not the love-knot come in handy when speech was not? And that's knot number three.

And next comes the top-knot which hens and women forget not, and which most men admire not. Is the top-not a pretty knot? I answer, certainly not. And if not, why not? And that's knot number four.

Right here I have struck a knot and can't get any further with this knotty collection of knots. But this is enough knots, is it not? And if not, why not? And that's knot number five.

16 AND 40.

This world is full of mysteries. In jolting around through the world we have bumped up against things that we couldn't understand. And there are other problems that we can't approach close enough to bump up against, much less solve them. We have often strayed our optics on matrimonial misfits that would have puzzled all the Wise Men of the East and caused the philosophers of Greece to commit suicide.

We can understand why pumpkin vines don't lay goose eggs, and why a black-snake can't straddle a log, and a thousand other questions of less magnitude. But when it comes to shaving our puny intelligence down to a fine point and figure out the reason why a sweet-faced, bright-eyed, intelligent feminine fairy of sweet sixteen will consent to marry an old hunch-backed, crimson-nosed, swaggering swill-tub with a breath like a buzzard and a record like a convict—one who for forty long, lingering summers has prowled about in the vineyard of human nature—then we just hold our breath, swap ends with ourself and scream out: "Take us, tied, tangled and tumfoozled.—Laws' Lash, Moravian Falls, N. C."

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