

"dropped tails," twisted backs or beaks, or any physical weakness.

Quite a few poultrykeepers are reluctant to cull pullets, but it is advisable to remember that only birds with sound bodies, showing vigour and constitution, are likely to stand up to the strain of long, continued, profitable egg-production.

It is also advisable to keep a careful watch on pullets during their first laying year, and if a ring is placed on the legs of those that may suffer from any ailment or show undesirable characters, such as excessive broodiness, the laying of small or poor-shaped eggs, etc., later culling and selection will be more efficiently carried out.

### *Culling the Adult Flock*

As indicated, the most business-like plan is to cull regularly and to get rid of the unprofitable birds as soon as they are detected, for the poultry-farmer who culls his flock only once a year is not likely to obtain the very best reward for his labour.

However, the best time to do the main culling is immediately the poorer birds stop laying, which is usually during January or early February. A good time to select breeding stock is during February or March.

It is true that some birds moult before January, but on well-managed plants only a few of the poorer birds moult before that time. If a large percentage cease laying and go into a moult in December, it is usually a sign of some mismanagement, and such conditions are an indication of under-feeding.

### *Main Conditions*

Before starting to cull a flock consideration should be given to the conditions under which the birds have been managed. For instance, if birds have been subjected to a change of house or yard or a sudden change of feed, say, in December or January, many good birds may be driven into a moult.

Birds housed under artificial light during the autumn and winter will usually moult earlier than others.

Yearling hens which started laying during last February or earlier will not lay as late as the second-year hens which did not begin laying until August because of their undergoing a moult during the autumn. As it is very difficult to cull a flock of birds of different ages satisfactorily, it is advisable to keep those of various ages



Fig. 2.—Two Black Orpington chickens of the same age and from the same hatch. The bird on the right is healthy, while that on the left is stunted and never likely to give the best results.

apart, and if this is not practicable at least the birds of different ages should be marked.

### *Age to Keep*

Birds which are 2½ years old or more should be culled as soon as they stop laying, for after that age very few hens are profitable, unless, of course, the birds show exceptional breeding qualities.

### *Early Moulters*

Experience has shown that the first birds of a given age to moult are usually of weaker constitution and poor layers, and it is usually safe to cull these. The last hens in a flock to moult are generally the strongest and best producers.

All birds showing lack of vitality should be culled. Such birds are usually inactive, weak of head, dull of eye, and often show a looseness of feather. Slow-moving, sluggish birds are never great producers. The best producers are those which are constantly on the hunt for feed and never seem satisfied with the amount of food given them. They are first off the perch in the morning, and last to go to roost at night.

The big eaters are usually the best layers. It will be noticed that increased food-consumption means increased egg-production. The good producers have good crop capacity and good depth of abdomen, while the culls have small crops and less depth of abdomen.

### *Heavy Birds*

Any exceptionally heavy hens for the breed they represent or over-fat

birds are better culled, for such birds are not good layers. Birds of the yellow-fleshed breeds, if they have been producing heavily, will have pale beaks and legs at this time of the year, while the poor producers and the over-fat birds will usually have yellow shanks and beaks.

The novice will find that the medium birds are the most difficult to select, for they may have some good and some bad points, and it takes much experience to classify them. However, the poor to medium birds are usually on the small side, and lack vitality or that quick alert movement.

### *Exceptional Cases*

As indicated, the culling points given cannot be applied regardless of the method of management of the birds. For instance, some hens which have been broody a few times during the year may just now show those points that indicate good producers, or a hen which has reared a batch of chickens may also show up well. It is advisable to place a ring on the leg of a hen each time she goes broody, and if broodiness occurs three times during the season the bird should be culled.

### *Good Birds*

The best birds will have good length, breadth, and depth, with broad backs, the width carried well back to the tail. The chest will be square and full, and the abdomen deep and full. The texture of the skin and abdomen will feel loose, soft, pliable and velvety.