

POULTRY NOTES

(By MR. G. H. AMBLER, Christchurch.)

CHICKEN LOSSES AND TROUBLES.

By no stretch of imagination can this season be termed one of the best for chickens. The early season was accompanied with an abundance of wet, and as the conditions improved in this direction we were treated to cold and biting winds. This did not ensure fertility, consequently there have been many poor hatches. We have only had about a couple of weeks of what may be termed good chicken weather this season, and early birds, I think, will be scarcer than usual. It seldom pays the utility man, however, to begin breeding before September—I mean those who are engaged upon the delicate mission of attempting record-breaking in egg production—as this, I think, is the most complicated and intricate labor of all the field of poultry culture, and good weather is absolutely necessary. Early chickens are, of course, wanted for table purposes and for show, but these are problems of quite another class. The fact is too well known that it is foolish to wink at it, and most breeders of bred-to-lay pure strains need hide the question of constitution no longer. The small men in back gardens suffer in like ratio to the big breeders, and it is the small man who can afford to open out a discussion on the subject. At the outset, our pedigree layers of several breeds were introduced from Australia mainly, and it was first thought that the losses in chickens was due to some form of sickness which had followed the importations. It has been discovered both here and in England that the disease confined itself to these pedigree-bred layers, and a reasonable conclusion is that it is wholly and solely a problem of constitution, and not contagion. The wonderful records that have been achieved by both White Leghorns, Black Orpingtons, and White Wyandottes have opened out great possibilities, and have proved what a national asset these heavy layers must eventually prove to be if they can be propagated, surrounded by merely ordinary difficulties. I have personally held diverse opinions upon the matter, and at the present moment my observations have led me to the conviction that this "chicken mortality" is not a disease, but purely a condition resulting from a weakening of the constitution, brought about by a system of breeding which has merely outstretched Nature's more or less elastic rules. It was never intended that fowls should lay 300 eggs in the course of a year; but still, lines of breeding have been employed that have made this result possible. In fact, at the last laying competition at Papanui a White Leghorn pullet laid 317 eggs. Nature said, however, that two clutches, or about 30 eggs, would be ample provision to cover all eventualities, and there is obviously a vast difference between 30 and 300. By proper feeding, the abundance of eggs may be provided for effectually, but the question of rendering each egg reproductive is quite another matter. As I have frequently pointed out, each time an egg is laid it is an effort at reproduction, and in that direction it is a drain upon the birds. The unnatural strain upon the generative organs cannot be provided for by any course of feeding—not to any material degree—and Dame Nature's provision for 30 eggs being spread over 280 to 300 eggs just results in constitutionally fragile produce. To gain these exceptionally high records, and to gain their object as quickly as possible, some breeders have resorted to indiscriminate in-breeding. Pullets have been employed for stock purposes and used with the object of increasing the rate of fecundity, during their first season, when they are at their highest degree of productiveness, and this is, I think, clearly responsible for the lack of stamina in many of the highly-fecund strains of poultry.

A Remedy.

A big improvement may quickly be brought about if breeders set about the task with a will. Some breeders

I know aim at procuring a high average of eggs from their birds in their pullet year, and then put them into the breeding pen. As previously stated, this is a mistake, which sooner or later will take its toll in the chickens. None should be set apart for breeding purposes until their second or third season. As a means of discovering their powers of fecundity, pullets should be either trap-nested or single-penned in their first season, and the birds with the best records put on one side for the following season's breeding. The idea is that second or third-season birds' fecundity is not so pronounced, the drain upon the birds is not so severe, while fertilisation being demanded for fewer eggs, the resulting germ is essentially stronger, more hatchable, and consequently decidedly easier to rear. Some individual specimens in some strains are very fruitful in the second year, and in that case I would advise holding such birds over for a third season, since I am satisfied that the maximum of vigor cannot be produced if the bird is producing eggs inordinately. To have any really appreciable effect, and to work a lasting good, the system must be carried out with the support of our large breeders. Fortunately, or perhaps unfortunately, there is always a big demand upon the resources of successful studs, and it is a temptation to use every available bird to meet requirements. While it is not dishonest in a sense, it is against the interests of the industry to spread throughout the country a race of fowls which will be delicate and unprofitable. I have met one or two breeders who are quite alive to the matter, and who are taking sensible measures of prevention in the manner outlined, and there is no doubt they will assuredly reap the reward for any added care and labor it may entail.

Napier

(From our own correspondent.)

November 17.

The recent bazaar realised £3500 net. The grand finale was the coronation ceremony, held in the Municipal Theatre on Monday, November 10, when Miss Lucy Takarangi, the beautiful Maori queen, was crowned in true native fashion. The ceremonial pageant, comprising the queen in her royal robes, seated upon a beautifully decorated and illuminated throne, surrounded by her maids-in-waiting, dancing girls, native warriors, Boy Scouts, and City Band, presented an effective spectacle. Mr. B. J. Dolan composed and read the "Proclamation" in his usual masterly fashion. Natives from all parts of the district were present, and the Maori haka, poi dances, choruses, and instrumental items delighted the immense audience.

Fathers Doherty and Kelleher, of the archdiocese of Sydney, spent a few days here. At evening devotions on Sunday, 16th inst., Father Kelleher preached a stirring discourse on the Holy Mass.

The devotion of the Forty Hours' Adoration will begin at St. Patrick's Church on Sunday, November 23.

The untimely death of Mr. Martin Murray, J.P., Town Clerk, caused deep and widespread regret.—R.I.P.

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Prospectus and particulars may be obtained on application to the Rector.

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