

**BURNHAM
GEORGE
PICKERING**

THE HISTORY OF THE HEN
FEVER. A HUMOROUS
RECORD

George Burnham
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George P. Burnham

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PREFACE

In preparing the following pages, I have had the opportunity to inform myself pretty accurately regarding the ramifications of the subject upon which I have written herein; and I have endeavored to avoid setting down "aught in malice" in this "*History of the Hen Fever*" in the United States.

I have followed this extraordinary *mania* from its incipient stages to its final death, or its *cure*, as the reader may elect to term its conclusion. The first symptoms of the fever were exhibited in my own house at Roxbury, Mass., early in the summer of 1849. From that time down to the opening of 1855 (or rather to the winter of 1854), I have been rather intimately connected with the movement, if common report speaks correctly; and I believe I have seen as much of the tricks of this trade as one usually meets with in the course of a single natural life.

Now that the most serious effects of this (for six years) alarming epidemic have passed away from among us, and when "the people" who have been called upon to pay the cost of its

support, and for the burial of its victims, can look back upon the scenes that have in that period transpired with a disposition cooled by experience, I have thought that a volume like this might prove acceptable to the hundreds and thousands of those who once "took an interest in the hen trade," – who *may* have been mortally wounded, or haply who have escaped with only a broken wing; and who will not object to learn how the thing has been done, and "who threw the bricks"!

If my readers shall be edified and amused with the perusal of this work as much as I have been in recalling these past scenes while writing it, I am content that I have not thrown the powder away. I have written it in perfect good-nature, with the design to gratify its readers, and to offend no man living.

And trusting that *all* will be pleased who may devote an hour to its pages, while at the same time I indulge the hope that *none* will feel aggrieved by its tone, or its text, I submit this book to the public.

Respectfully,

Geo. P. Burnham.

Russet House, *Melrose*, 1855.

CHAPTER I.

PREMONITORY SYMPTOMS OF THE DISEASE

I was sitting, one afternoon, in the summer of 1849, in my little parlor, at Roxbury, conversing with a friend, leisurely, when he suddenly rose, and passing to the rear window of the room, remarked to me, with considerable enthusiasm,

"What a splendid lot of fowls you have, B – ! Upon my word, those are very fine indeed, – do you know it?"

I had then been breeding poultry (for my own amusement) many years; and the specimens I chanced at that time to possess were rather even in color, and of good size; but were only such as any one might have had – bred from the common stock of the country – who had taken the same pains that I did with mine.

There were perhaps a dozen birds, at the time, in the rear yard, and my friend (*then*, but who subsequently passed to a competitor, and eventually turned into a sharp but harmless enemy) was greatly delighted with them, as I saw from his enthusiastic conversation, and his laudation of their merits.

I am not very fast, perhaps, to appreciate the drift of a man's motives in casual conversation, – and then, again, it may be that I am "not so slow" to comprehend certain matters as I might be! At all events, I have sometimes flattered myself that, on occasions

like this, I can "see as far into a millstone as can he who picks it;" and so I listened to my friend, heard all he had to say, and made up my mind accordingly, before he left me.

"I tell you, B – , those are handsome chickens," he insisted. "I've got a fine lot, myself. You keep but one variety, I notice. I've got 'em *all*."

"All what?" I inquired.

"O, all kinds – all kinds. The Chinese, and the Malays, and the Gypsies, and the Chittaprats, and the Wang Hongs, and the Yankee Games, and Bengallers, and Cropple-crowns, and Creepers, and Top-knots, and Gold Pheasants, and Buff Dorkings, and English Games, and Black Spanish and Bantams, – and I've several *new breeds* too, I have made myself, by crossing and mixing, *in the last year*, which beat the world for beauty and size, and excellence of quality."

"Indeed!" I exclaimed. "So you have made several *new breeds* during *one year's* crossing, eh? That *is* remarkable, doctor, certainly. I have never been able yet to accomplish so extraordinary a feat, myself," I added.

"Well, *I* have," said the doctor, – and probably, as he was a practising physician of several years' experience, he knew how this reversion of nature's law could be accomplished. I didn't.

"Yes," he continued; "I have made a breed I call the 'Plymouth Rocks,' – superb birds, and great layers. The – a – 'Yankee Games,' – regular knock-'em-downs, – rather fight than eat, any time; and never flinch from the puncture of steel. Indeed, *so*

plucky are these fowls, that I think they rather *like* to be cut up than otherwise, – alive, I mean. Then, I've another breed I've made – the 'Bengal Mountain Games.' These *are* smashers – never yield, and are magnificent in color. Then I have the '*Fawn-colored Dorkings*,' too; and several other fancy breeds, that I've fixed up; and fancy poultry is going to sell well in the next three years, you may be sure. Come and see my stock, B – , won't you? And I'll send you anything you want from it, with pleasure."

I was then the editor of a weekly paper in Boston. I accepted my friend's kind invitation, and travelled forty miles and back to examine his poultry. It looked well —*very* well; the arrangement of his houses, &c., was good, and I was gratified with the show of stock, and with his politeness. But he was an enthusiast; and I saw this at the outset. And though I heard all he had to say, I could not, for the life of me, comprehend how it was that he could have decided upon the astounding merits of all these different *breeds* of fowls in so short a space of time – to wit, by the crossings in a single year! But that was his affair, not mine. He was getting his fancy poultry ready for the market; and he repeated, "It will *sell*, by and by."

And I believe it did, too! The doctor was right in *this* particular.

He informed me that he intended to exhibit several specimens of his fowls, shortly, in Boston; and soon afterwards I met with an advertisement in one of the agricultural weeklies, signed by my friend the doctor, the substance of which was as follows:

Notice. – I will exhibit, at *Quincy Market*, Boston, in a few days, sample pairs of my fowls, of the following pure breeds; namely, Cochin-China, Yellow Shanghae, Black Spanish, Fawn-colored Dorkings, Plymouth Rocks, White Dorkings, Wild Indian, Malays, Golden Hamburgs, Black Polands, Games, &c. &c.; and I shall be happy to see the stock of other fanciers, at the above place, to compare notes, etc. etc.

The above was the substance of the "notice" referred to; and the doctor, coming to Boston shortly after, called upon me. I showed him the impropriety of this movement at once, and suggested that some spot other than Quincy Market should be chosen for the proposed exhibition, – in which I would join, provided an appropriate place should be selected.

After talking the matter over again, application was made to an agricultural warehouse in Ann-street, or Blackstone-street, I believe; the keepers of which saw the advantages that must accrue to themselves by such a show (which would necessarily draw together a great many strangers, out of whom they might subsequently make customers); but, at my suggestion, this very stupid plan was abandoned – even after the advertisements were circulated that such an exhibition would come off there.

Upon final consideration it was determined that the first Exhibition of Fancy Poultry in the United States of America should take place in November, 1849, at the *Public Garden*, Boston.

CHAPTER II.

THE "COCHIN-CHINAS."

BUBBLE NUMBER ONE

A public meeting was soon called at the legislative hall of the Statehouse, in Boston, which had the effect of drawing together a very goodly company of savans, honest farmers, amateurs, poulterers, doctors, lawyers, flats, fanciers and *humbugs* of one kind or another. *I* never attended one of the meetings; and only know, from subsequent public and private "reports," what occurred there.

On this *first* occasion, however, after a great deal of bosh and stuff, from the lips of old men and young men, who possessed not the slightest possible shadow of practical knowledge of the subject proposed to be discussed, it was finally resolved that the name for the (now defunct) association then and there formed, should be "*The New England Society for the Improvement of Domestic Poultry*"!!!

Now, the only objection I ever raised to this title was that it was not sufficiently *lengthy*! When applied to for my own views on the subject, *I* recommended that it should be called the "Mutual Admiration Society." But, though I was thought a great deal of by its members, – especially when the concern was short of funds, – in *this* case they thought my proposed title was altogether too

applicable; and the original name, above quoted, was adhered to.

I was honored with the office of vice-president of the society, for Massachusetts; to which place I was reëlected annually, I believe, until the period of its death. For which honor I was not ungrateful, and in consideration of which, "as in duty bound, I have ever prayed" for the association's prosperity and weal.

The first name that was placed upon the list of subscribers to the constitution of this society was that of His Excellency Geo. N. Briggs, formerly Governor of this commonwealth. He was followed by a long list of "mourners," most of whom probably ascertained, within five years from the hour when they subscribed to this roll, that causing the cock's spur *to grow between his eyes* was not quite so easy a thing to accomplish as one "experienced poultry-breeder" at this meeting coolly asserted it to be! How many attempted this experiment (as well as numerous others there suggested as feasible), I am not advised. But I am inclined to think that those who did try it found it to be "all in their eye."

While these gentlemen were arranging the details of the new "society," and were deciding upon what the duties of the officers and committees should be, I quietly wrote out to England for information regarding the somewhat notorious "*Cochin-China*" fowl, then creating considerable stir among fanciers in Great Britain; and soon learned that I could procure them, in their purity, from a gentleman in Dublin, whose stock had been obtained, through Lord Heytsbury (then Lord Lieutenant of

Ireland), direct from Queen Victoria's samples. I ordered six of them, – two cocks and four hens, – and in December, 1849, I received them through Adams & Co.'s Transatlantic Express.

At this period there was no telegraph established from Boston to Halifax, I believe. Some of the reporters for the daily city papers usually visited the steamers, upon their arrival here, to obtain their foreign files of exchanges; and here my birds were first seen by those gentlemen who have made or broken the prospects of more than one enterprise of far greater consequence than this "importation of fancy fowls" could seem to be.

But on the day succeeding the coming of those birds, several very handsome notices of the arrival of these august Chinamen appeared in the Boston papers, and a vast amount of credit was accorded to the "enterprising importer" of the outlandish brutes, that were described in almost celestial language!

After considerable trouble and swearing (custom-house swearing, I mean), the officers on board permitted my team to take the cage out of the steamer, and it was conveyed to my residence in Roxbury, where it arrived two hours after dark.

I had long been looking for the coming of these Celestial strangers, and the "fever," which I had originally taken in a very kindly way, had by this time affected me rather seriously. I imagined I had a fortune on board that steamer. I looked forward with excited ideas to beholding something that this part of the world had never yet seen, and which would surely astound "the people," when I could have the opportunity to show up my rare

prize, – all the way from the yards or walks of royalty itself! I waited and watched, with anxious solicitude, – and, at last, the box arrived at my house. It was a curiously-built box – the fashion of it was unique, and substantial, and foreign in its exterior. I supposed, naturally, that its contents must be similar in character. That box contained my "Cochin-Chinas," – bred from the Queen's stock, – about which, for many weeks, I had been so seriously disturbed.

I am *now* well satisfied that the "Cochin-China" variety of fowl is a gross fable. If such a breed exist, in reality, we have never had them in this country. Anything (and everything) has been *called* by this name among us, in the last five years; but the engraving on the following page, in my estimation (and I have been there!), is the nearest thing possible to a likeness of this *long* petted bird; and will be recognized, I think, by more than one victim, as an accurate and faithful portrait of this lauded "magnificent" and "superb" bird!

I was anxious to examine my celestial friends at once. I caused the box to be taken into a shed, at the rear of the house, and I tore from its front a piece of canvas that concealed them from view, to behold a – well! *n'importe*– they were *Cochin-China* fowls!

But, since God made me, I never beheld six *such* birds before, or since! They resembled *giraffes* much more nearly than they did any other thing, carnivorous, omnivorous, – fish, flesh, or fowl. I let them out upon the floor, and one of the cocks seized lustily upon my India-rubber over-shoe, and would have swallowed it

(and myself), for aught I know, had not a friend who stood by seized him, and absolutely choked him off!

This is truth, strange as it may seem; but I presume they had scarcely been fed at all upon their fortnight's voyage from Dublin, and I never saw any animals so miserably low in flesh, in my life, before. What with their long necks, and longer legs, and their wretchedly starved condition, I never wondered that the friendly reporters spoke of their appearance as being "extraordinary, and strikingly peculiar."

These were the original "Cochin-China" fowls of America. And they probably never had the first drop of Chinese blood in their veins, any more than had the man who bred them, and who knew this fact much better than I did – who knew it well enough.

I housed my "prize" forthwith, however, and provided them with everything for their convenience and comfort. The six fowls cost me ninety dollars. They *were* beauties, to be sure! When I informed a neighbor of their cost, he ventured upon the expressive rejoinder that I "was a bigger d – d fool than he had ever taken me for."

To which I responded nothing, for I rather agreed with him myself!

Nine months afterwards, however, I sold him a cock and three pullets, four months old, raised from those very fowls, for sixty-five dollars; and I didn't retort upon him even *then*, but took his money. The chickens I sold him were "dog-cheap," at that!

CHAPTER III.

THE FIRST FOWL-SHOW IN BOSTON

Never in the history of modern "bubbles," probably, did *any* mania exceed in ridiculousness or ludicrousness, or in the number of its victims surpass this inexplicable humbug, the "hen fever."

Kings and queens and nobility, senators and governors, mayors and councilmen, ministers, doctors and lawyers, merchants and tradesmen, the aristocrat and the humble, farmers and mechanics, gentlemen and commoners, old men and young men, women and children, rich and poor, white, black and grey,—*everybody* was more or less seriously affected by this curious epidemic.

The press of the country, far and near, was alive with accounts of "extraordinary pullets," "enormous eggs" (laid on the tables of the editors), "astounding prices" obtained for individual specimens of rare poultry; and all sorts of people, of every trade and profession and calling in life, were on the *qui vive*, and joined in the hue-and-cry, regarding the suddenly and newly ascertained fact that hens laid eggs —*sometimes*; or, that somebody's crower was heavier, larger, or higher on the legs (and consequently higher in value), than somebody else's crower. And the first exhibition of the society with the long name came off duly, at

last, as agreed upon by the people, *and* myself.

"The *people*"! By this term is ordinarily meant the body-politic, the multitude, the citizens at large, the voters, the – the – a – the masses; the – well, no matter! At the period of which I am now writing, the term signified the "hen-men." This covered the whole ground, at that time. Everybody was included, and thus nobody was left outside!

At this first show, the committee "flattered themselves" (and who ever heard of, or from, a committee that didn't do this!) that never, within the memory of the oldest inhabitant, – who, by the way, was then living, but has since departed to that bourn from which even defunct hen-men do not return, – never had such a display been witnessed; never had the feathered race before appeared in such pristine beauty; never had any such exhibition been seen or read of, since the world begun! And, to say truth, it wasn't a very bad sight, – that same first hen-show in Boston.

Thousands upon thousands visited it, the newspapers appropriated column after column to its laudation, and all sorts of people flocked to the Public Garden to behold the "rare and curious and inexpressibly-beautiful samples" of poultry caged up there, every individual specimen of which had, up to that hour, been straggling and starving in the yards of "the people" about Boston (they and their progeny) for years and years before, unknown, unhonored and unsung.

Gilded complimentary cards, in beautifully-embossed envelopes, were duly forwarded by the "committee" to all

"our first men," who came on foot or in carriages, with their lovely wives and pretty children, to see the extraordinary sight. The city fathers, the public functionaries, governors, senators, representatives, all responded to the invitation, and everybody was there.

The cocks crowed lustily, the hens cackled musically, the ducks quacked sweetly, the geese hissed beautifully, the chickens peeped delightfully, the gentlemen talked gravely, the ladies smiled beneficently, the children laughed joyfully, the uninitiated gaped marvellously, the crowd conversed wisely, the few knowing ones chuckled quietly, – everybody enjoyed the thing immensely, – and suddenly, prominent among the throng of admirers present, loomed up the stalwart form and noble head of Daniel Webster, who came, like the rest, to *see* what he had only "read of" for the six months previously.

The committee saw him, and they instantly lighted on him for a speech; but he declined.

"Only a few words!" prayed one of them.

"One word, *one* word!" insisted the chairman.

"I can't!" said Daniel.

But they were importunate and unyielding, that enthusiastic committee.

"Gentlemen!" said the honorable senator, at last, amid the din. "Ladies and gentlemen!" he continued, as a monster upon feathered stilts, at his elbow, shrieked out an unearthly crow, that drowned the sound of his voice instanter, – "Ladies and

gentlemen, really – I – would – but the noise and confusion is so great, that I cannot be heard!" – and a roar followed this capital hit, that drowned, for the moment, at least, even the rattling, crashing, bellowing, squeaking *music* of the feathered bipeds around him.

The exhibition lasted three days. Unheard-of prices were asked, and readily paid, for all sorts of fowls; most of those sold being mongrels, however. As high as thirteen dollars was paid by one man (who soon afterwards became an inmate of a lunatic asylum) for a single pair of domestic fowls. It was monstrous, ridiculous, outrageous, exclaimed every one, when this fact – the absolute paying down of thirteen round dollars, then the price of two barrels of good wheat flour – was announced as having been squandered for a single pair of chickens.

I *sold* some fowls at that show. I didn't *buy* any there, I believe.

The receipts at the gates paid the expenses of the exhibition, and left a small surplus in the hands of somebody, – I never knew who, – but who took good care of the money, I have not a doubt; as most of the officers at *that* time were, like myself, "poor, but honest."

By the time this fair closed, the pulse of the "dear people" had come to be rather rapid in its throbs, and the fever was evidently on the increase. Fowls were in demand. Not *good* ones, because nothing was then said by the anxious would-be purchasers about *quality*. Nobody had got so far as that, then. They wanted *fowls* only, – hens and cocks, – to which they themselves gave a name.

Some fancied one breed, or variety, and some another; but anything that sported feathers, – from the diminutive Bantam to the stork-shaped Chinaman, – everything was being sought after by "amateurs" and "fanciers" with a zest, and a readiness to pay for, that did honor to the zeal of the youthful buyers, and a world of good to the hearts of the quiet breeders and sellers, who began *first* to get posted up, and inured to the disease.

I was an humble and modest member of this latter class. *I* kept and raised only *pure* breeds of fowls.

CHAPTER IV. HOW "POULTRY- BOOKS" ARE MADE

Soon after this, I learned that one Asa Rugg, of Pennsylvania (a *nom de guerre*), was in the possession of a breed of fowls that challenged all comparison for size and weight. They were called the *Chittagong* fowl, and were thus described in the poultry-books published in 1850:

"The fowl thus alluded to has been imported, within the last two or three years, into Pennsylvania, and ranks at the head of the list, in that region, for all the good qualities desirable in a domestic bird. The color is a *streaked grey*, rather than otherwise, and the portraits below" (my birds) "are fine samples of this great stock. They are designated as the Grey Chittagongs."

"Asa Rugg," in his letter to me, described this stock as being at the head of the races of poultry, having "the *largest* blood in them of any variety of fowl with which he was acquainted." The pair he first sent me were light-grey and streaked, and "at less than seven months old weighed over *nineteen* pounds."

He said, in that insinuating and delicate manner so peculiar to the habits of gentlemen who possess what another wishes to buy of them, – "I did not intend, my dear Mr. B – , to part with these magnificent specimens at *any* figure whatever. I assure you

I had much rather retain them; for they are *very* fine, as you would say, could you see them. If, however, you are disposed to pay my price, I shall let you have them. I really shall regret their absence from my yard, however. Try and make up your mind to be satisfied with something else – won't you? *These* fowls I must keep, if possible," &c. &c.

Now, Asa *knew* very well, if he had charged me two hundred (instead of twenty) dollars for those grey fowls, I should have taken them from him. Of course I sent for them at once; and, within ten days, they were in my poultry-house, a new wonder for the hundreds who called to see my "superb" and "extraordinary" fowls.

A competitor turned up, a few months after this, a notorious breeder in P – , who, though a respectable man, otherwise, never knew a hen from a stove-pipe, but who had more money at that time than I had, and who, in the hen-trade, possessed the impudence of the devil, without the accompanying graces to carry out his object.

This man chanced, while in Pennsylvania, to hear Asa speak of *me*, and at once he stepped in to "head me" in that quarter. He bought all the "*Grey Chittagongs*" that Rugg had left (most of which, when they reached P – , happened to be dark *red* and *brown*), and forthwith set up an establishment in *opposition* to me; for what purpose I never knew. I did not know him from a side of sole-leather, I had never spoken to or of him, and I could not comprehend why this person should render himself, as he

did, my future "death's head" in the fowl-trade.

If he went into the traffic for the purpose of making money out of it, he has found, by this time, I have no doubt, that he would have been, at the very least calculation, five thousand dollars better off had he never thrust himself into a business of which he did not know the first rudiments.

If he embarked in it to interfere with or to injure me, personally, he has now ascertained, I imagine, that it required a faster horse than *he* was in the habit of driving to keep in sight of *my* team.

If his purpose was the gratification of his own petty spite or ambition only, he has had to pay for the enjoyment of it, – ay, to his dear cost! – and he is welcome to all he ever made out of his contemptible, niggardly huckstering.

Soon after the first exhibition, it was announced by the publishers in Boston that Dr. Bennett's new Treatise would be immediately issued by them. The doctor had originally applied to the establishment in which I was then a partner, to issue this work; but I recommended him to the others, because our own facilities for getting it out were not so good as I thought were theirs.

I furnished a considerable amount of the matter for that book, and had already obtained, at my own individual expense, several of the engravings which appear in the work spoken of. After the original cuts were placed in the publishers' hands, they were reduced in size, and injured (for my purposes), as I conceived,

when they finally appeared in print.

The doctor's book on poultry had been announced again and again; but it did not make its appearance in the market, in consequence of his tardiness. Week after week, and month after month, passed by, but still no Dr. Bennett's book could be found. I saw some of the proof-sheets finally, observed the fate of the illustrations of *my* fowls, and made up my mind what I would do. The book was at last announced positively to appear in three weeks.

I immediately called at a stereotype foundery, and asked how much time it would require to stereotype a work of one hundred and fifty pages for me. I was told that it would occupy three to four weeks to complete it. "Can't it be done in *one* week?" I inquired. The proprietor smiled, and said that this was impossible. I replied, "Well, sir, to-day is Tuesday. I have engaged to deliver in New York city, on the morning of a week from next Saturday, three thousand copies of a book *which I am about to write*. Is there *no* way that you can help me out?" The gentleman looked at me incredulously.

I added, "Mr. —, I have been in the newspaper business a good many years, and I have had the message of the President of the United States — a document occupying a dozen columns of solid brevier and minion — set up and put to press within forty-two minutes from the time it reached our office. *Anything* can be accomplished, now-a-days, if we but will it."

"But, you say you *are about* to write it. When will the 'copy'

be ready?" said the stereotyper.

"I have thought of this," I replied, "but a few hours. The *title*, even, is not yet decided upon. I will give you fifty pages of manuscript to-morrow morning, the next day I will add another fifty, and you shall have the whole in hand by Friday morning."

He kindly undertook to aid me. I engaged three engravers, who worked day and night upon the drawings and transfers of the fowls for my illustrations; the paper was wet down on Monday and Tuesday; I read the final revised proof of my work on Wednesday night; the book went to press on Thursday; the binders were ready for it as it came up, the covers were put on on Friday morning, and I sent to the New York house (who had bespoken them), by Harnden's Express, on Friday evening, three thousand five hundred copies of the "New England Poultry-Breeder," *illustrated with twenty-five correct engravings of my choice, magnificent, superb, unapproachable, pure-bred fowls.*

This book had an extraordinary sale, – far beyond my own calculations, certainly. I got it out for the purpose of "doing justice" to my own stock, and calculated that it would prove a good advertising medium for me, – which it *did*, by the way. But the demand for the "New England Poultry-Breeder" was immense. And *thirteen* different editions (varying from three thousand five hundred to one thousand copies each) were issued within as many weeks, and were sold, every copy of them. This is the true history of the "New England Poultry-Breeder."

By and by Dr. Bennett's book appeared. The market was now

glutted with this kind of thing, and this work, though a good one, generally, dragged on the hands of its originators. I doubt if a thousand copies of this book ever found their way into the market, the author being too deeply engrossed with his then thriving trade, to trouble himself about urging the sale of his book, or of thinking about the interests of his publishers.

CHAPTER V.

THREATENING INDICATIONS

Another meeting was now called at the Statehouse, which was even more fully attended than the first, and at which much more serious indications of enthusiasm were apparent.

Old men, and middle-aged farmers, and florists, and agriculturists, and live-stock breeders, from all parts of this and the neighboring states, congregated together on this eventful occasion, and entered into the debate with an earnestness worthy of so important and "glorious" a cause.

Some of the speakers had by this time got to be so elated and so ardent that they rehearsed all they knew, and some of them told of a great deal more than themselves or anybody else had ever dreamed of, bearing upon the subject of poultry-raising. But, really, the subject was an exciting one, and the talkers were excusable; they couldn't help it!

Shades of *morus multicaulis* victims! Shadows of defunct tulip-growers! Spirits of departed Merino sheep speculators! Ghosts of dead Berkshire pig fanciers! Where were ye all on that eventful night, when six hundred sober, "respectable" representatives of "the people" were assembled within the walls of our time-honored state edifice upon Beacon Hill, in serious and animated conclave, to decide the momentous question that

"hens *was* hens," notwithstanding, nevertheless!

"Mr. President," exclaimed one of these gentlemen (whose speech was not publicly reported, I think), "Mr. President, the times is propishus. We're a-enterin' on a new ery. The *people* is a-movin' in this 'ere great, and wonderful, and extraordinary – I may say, Mr. President, this 'ere soul-stirrin' and 'lectrefyin – branch of interestin' rural erconomy." (Applause, during which the speaker advanced a step or two nearer to the presiding officer's desk, wiped his nose fiercely upon a fiery-red bandanna handkerchief, and proceeded.)

"The world, Mr. President," he continued, "is a-growin' wiser ev'ry day, – I may say ev'ry hour, Mr. President! Ay, sir, ev'ry minute." (Loud applause, amid which one old gentleman in a bob-wig was particularly vociferous.)

"I say, Mr. President, the people is a-growin' wiser continu'lly; and by that expression, sir, I mean to convey the idee that they are a-gettin' to know more, sir! Who will gainsay this position? Whar's the man – whar's the er – individoal, sir – that'll stan' up 'ere to-night, in this hallowed hall, under the shadder of this doom above our heads, sir, in view of the great American eagle yender, – that 'bird of promise,' sir, – and dispute the assertion that I now make, Mr. President, as an American citizen, without fear and without reproach!" (Deafening shouts of "Nobody! nobody *can* dispute it!")

"No, *sir!* I think not, I wot not, I ventur' not, I cal'k'late *not!* I say, Mr. President, it is no use for nun of us to contend

agin the mighty ingine of progress; 'nless we'd like to get our crowns mashed in for our pains, sir. That's the way it 'pears to *me*; and I've no doubt that this 'nlightened ordinance now present, sir, will agree with me on *this* p'int, and admit the truth that present indications, sir, p'int, with strikin' force, to the proberble likelihood that the deeds begun here to-night must be forever perpetooated hereafter, and that – a – they will – er – go down, sir, to our children, and our children's children, *a posteriori*, in the futur, forever!" ("Yes, yes!" and thundering applause.)

"But, sir, the p'int at issou seems to me to be clear as the broad-faced sun on a cloudy day. I'm no speaker, sir. I am not the man, sir, that goes about to proclaim on tops of houses! I'm a quiet citizen, and calls myself one o' 'the people,' sir. But w'en the questions comes up of *this* natur', – w'en it 'pears to me to be so clear and so transparent, – w'en the people goes abroad, sir, in their might, and – er – and can't stay ter home, – w'en *such* things occurs, sir, then *I'm round!*" (Shouts of "Good! good! good!" the respectable old gentleman in the bob-wig creating a cloud of dust about him with his stamping and excited gestures.)

"Mr. President, I have a'most done – " ("No, no! Go on, go on!" from all parts of the house.)

"No, sir; as I've said afore, I'm no speaker, an' I make no pretenshuns to oraterry. I'm a plain man, sir; but I feel deeply interested in this subject." (Nobody had yet ascertained what the "subject" was, because the gentleman hadn't alluded to any.) "And, sir, I feel that I should be unjust to myself and to this

ordinance ef I did not say what I have, sir. I go in for the poultry-breedin', sir, all over! Sir,

I love 'em, I love 'em, – an' who shall *dar'*
To chide me for lovin' and praisin' them *'are?*

"I love 'em, sir, – chickens or poultry, – dead or alive. My father afore me loved 'em, sir; and I'm rejoiced to see the feelin's that's exhibited here to-night. And, 'less anybody should suspect that I have ventured upon these few remarks with mercenary motives, Mr. President (though *perhaps* no such suppersishun would animate no man's bosom), I will state, sir, that I have no fowls to sell, sir, – none whatever. *No*, sir! not a fowl! I'm a buyer, sir, – I want to *buy*," shouted the excited man, – and he sat down amid the deafening plaudits of his associates at this meeting, who fully appreciated his speech and his palpable disinterestedness.

(*Item.* – I found this gentleman the next day, and informed him that I had heard of his destitution. I had understood that he had no poultry, but was in search of *pure-blooded* stock. Before night I had fully supplied him with *genuine* samples, at thirty dollars a pair, and no "discount for cash.")

Before this meeting concluded, the prices of fowls, and eggs, and feathers, were duly discussed, the details of which I will defer to the next chapter.

But all the indications at this convention were really of a threatening character; and it would have required the strength of

several stout men to have held certain of the speakers as they got warmed up, and rattled away, for dear life, upon the advantages that must accrue to the nation, in a thousand ways, from the encouragement of this epidemic, and the certain, inevitable losses that must be sustained by "the people" if they didn't go into this thing with a rush.

Most of these speakers, however, had fowls *for sale!*

CHAPTER VI.

THE EPIDEMIC SPREADING

While all this was transpiring, my "splendid" Cochin-China fowls had arrived from England, and I had had a nice house arranged, in which to keep and exhibit them to visitors.

The pullets began to lay in January, 1850, and immediately afterwards my trade commenced in earnest, which continued, without interruption, up to the close of the year 1854.

Among the "monstrosities" presented at the second meeting at the Boston Statehouse were several propositions that were suggested by gentlemen-amateurs and farmers in regard to the price that should be fixed on, by members of the Society with the elongated title, for *eggs* sold for incubation.

One man thought that *two* dollars a dozen for most of the fancy kinds would pay well. This gentleman (I do not remember who he was) probably calculated to furnish fancy eggs as a certain agricultural concern had been doing for some months: that is, by first purchasing them at a shilling a dozen from the eastern packets, or in Quincy Market. The next man thought that *three* dollars per dozen would be fair. Another member believed that *one* dollar was enough for twelve eggs, "but he didn't know much about it," he acknowledged; which was pretty evident from his remarks. At any rate, he had never fed a "laying hen" long enough

on good corn to ascertain how much she would devour while she was furnishing him with the said twelve eggs, I imagine! One gentleman, more liberally disposed, probably, ventured to express his willingness to pay *five* dollars a dozen for what he wanted. I understood he got home safely after the meeting, though it was feared he would be mobbed for his temerity in making this ridiculous offer!

I had already fixed *my* price for the eggs that were to be dropped by my "extraordinary and superb" Cochin-China fowls, which by this time had got to be "the admiration of the State" (so the newspapers said). I had the *best* fowls in this world, or in any other; this being conceded by every one who saw them, there was no necessity of "talking the subject up" to anybody. I charged *twelve* dollars a dozen for my eggs – and never winked at it!

And why shouldn't I have the highest price? Were not my fowls the "choicest specimens" ever seen in America? Didn't everybody so declare? Didn't the press and the poultry-books concede this, without an exception? Well, they did! And so, for months, I obtained one dollar each for my Cochin-China fowls' eggs; and I received order after order, and remittance after remittance, for eggs (at this figure), which I could not *begin* to supply.

And I didn't laugh, either! I had no leisure to laugh. I filled the orders as they came, – "first come, first served," – and for several months I found my list of promises six or eight weeks in advance of my ability to meet them with *genuine* eggs.

I was not so well informed, then, as I was afterwards. I think all the eggs that were then wanted *might* have been had. But, as the boy said, when asked where all the stolen peaches he had eaten were gone, "I donno!"

Will it be credited that, during the summer of 1850, I had dozens of full-grown men – gentlemen – but enthusiastic hen-fanciers (who had contracted the fever suddenly), who came to my residence for Cochin-China eggs, at one dollar each, and who, upon being informed that I hadn't one in the house, would quietly sit down in my parlor and wait two, three, or four hours at a time, *for the hens to lay them a few*, that they might take them away with them? Such is the fact, however it may be doubted.

I subsequently sold the eggs at ten dollars a dozen; then at six dollars; and finally, the third and fourth years, at five dollars. This paid me, because I sent off a great many.

But they didn't hatch well after having been transported away and shaken over in the hands of careless and ignorant or reckless express agents. Thus the buyers came again. Many of the early fanciers tried this experiment over and over again, but with similar ill-success; and when they had expended ten, twenty, or thirty dollars, perhaps, for eggs, they would begin at the *beginning* aright, and purchase a few chickens to rear, from which they could finally procure their own eggs, and go forward more successfully. But all this took time to bring it about.

And meanwhile *somebody* (I don't say who) was "feathering a certain nest" as rapidly as a course of high-minded and honorable

dealing with his fellow-men would permit.

CHAPTER VII.

ALARMING DEMONSTRATIONS

My premises were literally besieged with visitors, and my family attendants were worn out with answering the door-bell summons, from morning till night.

"Is Mr. B – at home? Can we see his Cochin-Chinas? Can we look at Mr. B – 's fowls? Might we take a look at the chickens?" were the questions from sun to sun again, almost; and I was absolutely compelled, in self-defence, to send the fowls away from home, for a while, for the sake of relief from the continual annoyances to which, in consequence of having them in my yard, I was subjected.

Fifteen, twenty, often forty callers in a single day, would come to see my "magnificent" Cochin-China fowls. But I sent them off, and then "the people" cried for them!

"Who's dead?" queried a stranger, passing my door one day, and observing the carriages and vehicles standing in a line along the front of my garden-fence.

"Nobody, I guess," said another; "that's where the *Cochin-Chinas* are kept."

"The what?"

"The Cochin-Chinas."

"What's them?"

"Don't you know?"

"No; never heard of 'em, afore."

"Never heard of Burnham's Cochin-Chinas?"

"Never! What are they?"

"Well, I reckon you ha'n't lived in these 'ere parts long, my friend," continued the other; "and you'd better step in and look at 'em."

In came the stranger, and after examining the fowls he returned.

"How do you like 'em?" asked the man who had already seen them, and was waiting for his friend outside.

"They're *ronchers*, that's a fact!" exclaimed the gratified stranger. And this was the universal opinion.

Nobody had ever seen such fowls (*I had seen a good many better ones!*) – nobody had ever beheld any so large, so heavy, so fine. And every one who came to look at them purchased or engaged either eggs or chickens from these "extraordinary" and "never-to-be-too-much-lauded" royal Cochin-China fowls!

For my first broods of chickens (at three and four months old) I readily obtained twenty-five dollars a pair; and every one of them went off "like hot cakes" at this figure. It was too low for them, altogether; and I had occasion to regret, subsequently, that I did not charge fifty dollars a pair; – a price which I might just as easily then have obtained as if I had charged but one dollar a pair, as events proved to my satisfaction.

But everything connected with this fever could not well be

learned at once. I was not a very dull scholar, and I progressed gradually. One year after the receipt of my Cochins, I got my own price for them, ask what I might. I sold a good many pairs at one hundred dollars the couple; and, oftentimes, I received this sum for a trio of them.

Things begun to look up with me. I had got a very handsome-looking stock on hand, at last; and when my numerous customers came to see me, they were surprised (and so was *I*) to meet with such "noble" samples of domestic fowls. "Magnificent!" "Astonishing!" cried everybody.

A splendid open carriage halted before my door, one day, and there alighted from it a fine, portly-looking man, whom I had never seen before, and whose name I did not then learn; who, leaving an elegantly-dressed lady behind in the vehicle, called for me.

I saw and recognized the *carriage*, however, as one of Niles'; and I was satisfied that it came from the Tremont House. As soon as the gentleman spoke, I was also satisfied, from his manner of speech, that he was a Southerner. He was polite and frank, apparently. I invited him in, and he went to look at my fowls; that being the object, he said, of his visit.

He examined them all, and said, quietly:

"I'd like to get half a dozen of these, if they didn't come too high; but I understand you fanciers have got the price up. I used to buy these chickens for a dollar apiece. *Now*, they say, you're asking five dollars each for them."

I showed him my stock, – the "*pure-bred*" ones, – and informed him at once that I had not sold any of *my* chickens, latterly, at less than *forty* dollars a pair.

He was astounded. He didn't want any – much: that is, he wasn't particular. He could buy them for five dollars; shouldn't pay that, *nohow*; wanted them for his boy; would come again, and see about it, &c. &c.

A five-year-old stag mounted the low fence at this moment, and sent forth an electrifying crow, such as would (at that period) have taken a novice "right out of his boots;" and a beautiful eight-pound pullet showed herself beside him at the same time. The stranger turned round, and said:

"There! What is your price for such a pair as that, for instance?"

"Not for sale, sir."

"But you *will* sell them, I s'pose?"

"No, sir. I have younger ones to dispose of; but *that* pair are my models. I can't sell *them*."

The gentleman's eye was exactly filled with this pair of chickens.

"What will you *take* for those two fowls?"

"One hundred dollars, sir," I replied.

"I guess you will – when you can get it," he added. – "Name your lowest price, now, for those two. I want *good* ones, if any."

"I prefer to keep them, rather than to part with them at *any* price," I insisted. "If, however, a gentleman like yourself, who

evidently knows what good fowls are, desires to procure the choicest specimens in the country, why, I confess to you that those are the persons into whose hands I prefer that my best stock should fall. But I will show you some at a lower figure," I continued, driving this pair from the fence.

"Don't you! Don't drive 'em away!" said the gentleman; – "let's see. That's the cock?"

"Yes, sir."

"And this is the hen?"

"Yes."

"One *hundred* dollars! You don't *mean* this, of course," he persisted.

"No, I mean that I would rather keep them, sir."

"Well – I'll —*take them*," said the stranger. "It's cruel. But, I'll take them;" and he paid me five twenty-dollar gold pieces down on the spot, for two ten-months-old chickens, from my "splendid" Royal Cochinchina fowls.

He had a tender spot *somewhere*, that I had hit, during the conversation, I presume. He took the two chickens into his carriage, and I have never seen or heard from him from that day to this. I trust, however, if "these few lines" should ever meet his eye, that his poultry turned out well, and that he himself is in good health and spirits!

I called this gallant young cock "Frank Pierce," in honor of my valiant friend now of the White House, at Washington. It will be seen that I thus sold Frank for fifty dollars; a sum

which the majority of the people of this country have since most emphatically determined was *a good deal more than he ever was worth!*

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FEVER WORKING

About this time an ex-member of Congress, formerly from Pennsylvania, was invited to deliver the address before one of the county agricultural societies of that state (where the fever had now begun to spread with alarming rapidity), who, in the course of his speech on that occasion, delivered himself of the following pointed and forcible remark.

Speaking of poultry and the rare qualities of certain domestic fowls, he said, "Ladies and gentlemen, next to a beautiful woman, and an honest farmer, I deem a Shanghae cock the noblest work of God!"

Now, this expression might be looked upon, by some persons, as savoring of demagogism, or, at the least, as an approach to "running this thing into the ground" (or into the air); but the honorable gentleman no doubt felt just what he said. I have seen many sensible men who felt worse than this – a good deal – on this self-same subject; and who expressed themselves much more warmly in regard to the characteristics and beauties of domestic poultry; but, to be sure, it was *after* they had "gone through the mill," and had come out at the *small* end of the funnel.

In New England, especially, prior to the *second* show of poultry in Boston, the fever had got well up to "concert pitch;"

and in New York State "the people" were getting to be very comfortably interested in the subject – where *my* stock, by this time, had come to be pretty extensively known.

The expenses attendant upon this part of the business, to wit, the process of furnishing the requisite amount of information for "the people" (on a subject of such manifestly great importance), the *quantum sufficit* in the way of drawings, pictures, advertisements, puffings, etc., through the medium of the press, can be *imagined*, not described.

The cost of the drawings and engravings which I had executed for the press, from time to time, during the years 1850, '51, '52, and '53, exceeded over eight hundred dollars; but this, with the descriptions of my "rare" stock (which I usually furnished the papers, accompanying the cuts), was *my* chosen mode of advertising. And I take this method publicly to acknowledge my indebtedness to the press for the kindness with which I was almost uniformly treated, while I was thus seriously affected by the epidemic which destroyed so many older and graver men than myself; though few who survived the attack "suffered" more seriously than I did, during the course of the fever. For instance, the large picture of the fowls which I had the pleasure of sending to Her Majesty Queen Victoria (in 1852), and which appeared in *Gleason's Pictorial*, the *New York Spirit of the Times*, *New England Cultivator*, &c., cost me, for the original drawing, engraving, electrotyping, and duplicating, *eighty-three dollars*.

All these expenses were cheerfully paid, however, because I

found my reward in the consciousness that I performed the duty I owed to my fellow-men, by thus aiding (in my humble way) in disseminating the information which "the people" were at that time so ravenously in search of, namely, as to the person of whom they could obtain (without regard to price) the *best* fowls in the country.

This was what "the people" wanted; and thus the malady extended far and wide, and when the fall of 1850 arrived, buyers had got to be as plenty as blackberries in August, whilst sellers "of reputation" were, like the visits of angels, few and far between. *I* was, by this time, considered "one of 'em." I strove, however, to carry my honors with Christian meekness and forbearance, and with that becoming consideration for the wants and the wishes of my fellow-men that rendered myself and my "purely-bred stock" so universally popular.

Ah! when I look back on the past, – when I reflect upon the noble generosity and disinterestedness that characterized all my transactions at that flush period, – when I think of what I did for "the cause," and how liberally I was rewarded for my candor, my honesty of purpose, and my disingenuousness, – tears of gratitude and wonder rush to my eyes, and my overcharged heart only finds its solace by turning to my ledger and reading over, again and again, the list of prices that were then paid me by "the people," week after week, and month after month, for my "magnificent samples" of "pure-bred" Cochin-China chickens, the original of which I had imported, and which were *said* to

have been bred from the stock of the Queen of Great Britain.

But, the Mutual Admiration – I mean, the "Society" whose name was like

"Lengthened sweetness, long drawn out,"

was about to hold its second annual exhibition; and, as the number of its members had largely increased, and as each and all of those who pulled the wires of this concern (while at the same time they were pulling the wool over the eyes of "the people") had plans of their own in reference to details, I made up my mind, although I felt big enough to stand up even in this huge hornet's nest of competition, to have things to suit *my* "notions."

I *now* had fowls to sell! I had raised a large quantity of chickens; winter was approaching, corn was high, they required shelter, the *roup* had destroyed scores of fowls for my neighbors, and I didn't care to winter over three or four hundred of these "splendid" and "mammoth" specimens of ornithology, each one of which could very cleverly dispose of more grain, in the same number of months, than would serve to keep one of my heifers in tolerable trim.

Such restrictions were proposed by the officers of the Society with the lengthened cognomen, that my naturally democratic disposition revolted against the arbitrary measures talked of, and I resolved to get up an exhibition of my own, where this matter could be talked over at leisure, and which I did not doubt would "turn an honest penny" into my own pocket; where, though I had done *well* thus far, there was still room, as there was in hungry

Oliver Twist's belly, for "more."

CHAPTER IX.

THE SECOND POULTRY-SHOW IN BOSTON

On the 2d, 3d, and 4th days of October, in the year of our Lord 1850, the "grand exhibition" (so the *Report* termed it), for that year, came off at the large hall over the Fitchburg Railroad Dépôt, in Boston, "which proved a most extensive and inviting one" (so continued the Report), "far exceeding, both in *numbers* and in the *quality* of specimens offered, anything of its kind ever got up in America.

"The birds looked remarkably fine in every respect, and the undertaking was very successful. A magnificent show of the feathered tribe greeted the thousands of visitors who called at the hall, and all parties expressed their satisfaction at the proceedings.

"The Committee awarded to George P. Burnham, of Melrose, the *first* premiums for fowls and chickens. The prize birds were the '*Royal Cochinchinas*' and their progeny, which have been bred with care from his imported stock; and which were generally acknowledged at the head of the list of specimens."

The prices obtained at this exhibition ranged very high, and "full houses" were constantly in attendance, day and evening, to examine and select and purchase from the "pure-bred" stock

there. "Mr. Burnham, of Melrose" (continued the Report), "declined an offer of \$120 for his twelve premium Cochin-China chickens, and subsequently refused \$20 for the choice of the pullets."

"The show was much larger than the first one, and the character of the birds exhibited was altogether finer, though the old fowls were, for the most part, moulting. A deep interest was manifested in this enterprise, and it went off with satisfaction to all concerned," added the Report.

In order that the details of this experiment (which *I* projected and carried through, myself) may be appreciated and understood, I extract from the "official" Report the following items regarding this show, the expenses, the prize-takers, &c.

The "Committee of Judges," consisting of myself, G.P. Burnham, Esq., and a gentleman of Melrose, made the following statements and "observations," in the *Report* above referred to:

"The Exhibition was visited by full ten thousand persons, during the three days mentioned. The amount of money received for tickets was four hundred and seventy-three dollars and thirty-eight cents; and the following disbursements were made:

Cash paid for rent of hall,	\$175.00
" " amount of premiums and gratuities,	135.00
" " for lumber and use of tables,	17.60
" " for lighting hall, advertising, etc.,	70.40
" " tickets, cards and handbills,	18.21
" " carpenters and attendants,	27.50
" " police and door-keepers,	15.00
" " grain, seed, buckets, pans, etc.,	25.56
" " coops, cartage and sundries,	7.37
	<hr/>
Total expenses,	\$491.64
Amount received, as stated,	473.38
	<hr/>
Deficit,	\$18.26

When the state of the funds was subsequently more particularly inquired into, however, it was found that the amount of money actually received at the door was a little rising *nine* hundred and seventy dollars, instead of "*four* hundred and seventy-three," as above quoted. But this was a trifling matter; since the "Committee of Judges" spoken of above accounted for this sum, duly, in the final settlement.

The "Committee" aforesaid awarded the following premiums at this show, after attending to the examination confided to them – namely:

"*First* premium, for the best six fowls contributed, to *George P. Burnham*, of Melrose, Mass., \$10.

"For the three best Cochin-China Fowls (Royal), to *George P. Burnham*, Melrose, Mass., \$5.

"For the twelve best chickens, of this year's growth (Royal Cochin-China), to *George P. Burnham*, Melrose, \$5."

And there were some *other* premiums awarded, I believe,

there, but by which I was not particularly benefited; and so I pass by this matter without further remark, entertaining no doubt whatever that all the gentlemen who were awarded premiums (and who obtained the amount of the awards) exhibited at the Fitchburg Hall Show *pure*-bred fowls.

After making these awards, the "Committee of Judges" (consisting, as aforesaid, of myself, Mr. Burnham, and a fancier from Melrose) state that "they find great pleasure" – (mark this!) – "they find great pleasure in alluding again to the splendid contributions" of some of the gentlemen who had fowls in this show, – and then the Report continues as follows:

"The magnificent samples of *Cochin-China* fowls, contributed by G.P. Burnham, of Melrose, were the theme of much comment and deserved praise. These birds include his imported fowls and their progeny – of which he exhibited nineteen splendid specimens. To this stock the Committee unanimously awarded the *first* premiums for fowls and chickens; and finer samples of domestic birds will rarely be found in this country. They are bred from the Queen's variety, obtained by Mr. Burnham last winter, at heavy cost, through J. Joseph Nolan, Esq., of Dublin, and are unquestionably, at this time, the finest thorough-bred *Cochin-Chinas* in America."

My early hen-friend the "Doctor" – alluded to in the opening chapter of this book – exhibited a fowl which the "Committee" thus described in their report:

"The rare and beautiful imported *Wild India Game* hen,

contributed by Mr. B.F. Griggs, Columbus, Geo., was a curiosity much admired. This fowl (lately sold by Dr. J.C. Bennett, of Plymouth, to Mr. Griggs, for \$120) is thorough game, without doubt; and her progeny, exhibited by Dr. Bennett, were very beautiful specimens. To this bird, and the '*Yankee Games*' of Dr. Bennett, the Committee awarded a gratuity of \$5."

So miserable a *hum* as this was, I never met with, in all my long *Shanghae* experience. It out-bothered the Doctor's famous "Bother'ems," and really out-*Cochined* even my noted Cochinchinas! But I was content, *I* was one of the "Committee of Judges." I had forgot!

This Committee's Report was thus closed:

"It has been the aim of the Committee to do *justice* to all who have taken an interest in the late Fowl Exhibition, and they congratulate the gentlemen who have sustained this enterprise upon its success."

They did *ample* justice to this Wild Bengal Injun Hen, that is certain. The Cochinchina trade received an impulse (after this show concluded) that astonished even *me*, and I am not easily disturbed in this traffic. And I have no doubt that the people who paid their money to witness this never-to-be-forgotten (by me) exhibition, were also satisfied.

The experiment was perfectly successful, however, throughout. I forwarded to all my patrons and friends copies of this Report, beautifully illustrated; and the orders for "*pure-bred* chickens from the *premium* stock" rushed in upon me, for the

next four or five months, with renewed vigor and spirit.

This first exhibition at the Fitchburg Dépôt Hall proved to me a satisfactorily profitable advertisement, as I carried away all the premiums there that were of any value to anybody. But then it will be observed that the "Committee of Judges" of this show were my "friends." And, at that time, the competition had got to be such that all the dealers acted upon the general democratic principle of going "for the greatest good of the greatest number." In my case, I considered the "greatest number" Number *One*!

CHAPTER X.

THE MUTUAL ADMIRATION SOCIETY'S SECOND SHOW

In the month following, to wit, on the 12th, 13th and 14th of November, 1850, the second annual exhibition of the Simon Pure Society with the extended title was held at the Public Garden, in Boston.

No premiums were offered by the society this year, and there wasn't much to labor for. I was a contributor, and I believe I was elected a member of the Committee of Judges that year. How, I did not know. At any rate, I wrote the published *Report* upon the exhibition. A Mr. Sanford Howard was chairman of this committee, if I remember rightly; and though undoubtedly a very respectable and well-meaning man (if he had not been so, he wouldn't have been placed on a Committee of Judges with *me*, I imagine), this Mr. Howard knew positively *nothing* whatever in regard to the merits or faults of poultry generally. He had acquired some vague notions about what he was pleased to term "crested" fowls, and five-toed, white-legged, white-plumed, white-billed, white-bellied Dorkings, – of which he conversed technically and learnedly; but as to his knowledge of the different varieties and breeds of domestic poultry then current, and their characteristics, it was evidently warped and very limited.

But Mr. Howard had been connected for some months with a small monthly publication in New York State, and, like myself, I presume, among the board (God knows who they were, but I don't, and never did!) who originally chose this "Committee," he had "a friend at court," and was made *chairman* of the committee too, —*how*, I never knew, either.

In their Report, the Committee observe, again, that "*never* in this country, if in the world, was there collected together so large a number of domestic fowls and birds as were sent to this exhibition, probably; and, though the most liberal arrangements were made in advance, it was found that the accommodations, calculated for *ten thousand specimens*, were entirely insufficient. The Committee merely allude to this fact to show the actual extent of this enterprise, and the importance which the undertaking has assumed, in a single year from the birth of the Association.

"According to the records of the Secretary, there were contributed to the Society's exhibition of 1850 some four hundred and eighty coops and cages. There were in all over three hundred and fifty contributors; in addition to which about forty coops, containing some six hundred fowls, were sent to the Garden and received on exhibition upon the two last days of the Show; and which could not be recorded agreeably with the regulations made originally.

"The palpable improvement in the appearance of the fowls exhibited in 1850, as compared with the samples shown in 1849,

offers ample encouragement to breeders for *further and more extended efforts*; and your Committee would urge it upon those who have already shown themselves competent to do so much, *to go on and effect still greater progress* in the improvement of the poultry of New England."

This Report (the second of the series) did *my* stock ample justice, I have not a doubt. I wrote it myself, and intended that it should do so. The text was in nowise changed when printed, and a reference to the document (for that year) will convince the skeptical – if any exist – whether I was or was not acquainted with adjectives in the superlative degree!

A very singular occurrence took place about this time, the *basis* of which I did not then, and have never since, been able to comprehend, upon any principles of philosophy, economy, business, benevolence, or even of sanity. But I am not very clear-headed.

In the *addenda* to my Report (above named) there appeared the annexed statement, by somebody:

"The Trustees refer to the following with mixed pride and pleasure; the munificence and motive of the gift are most creditable. A voluntary kindness such as that of Mr. Smith is a very gratifying proof that the labors of the Society are not regarded by enlightened men as vain:

"Boston, 12th February, 1851.

"G.W. Smith, Esq.

"Sir: A meeting of the Trustees of the 'New England Society for the Improvement of Domestic Poultry' was held last evening, Col. Samuel Jaques, President of the Society, in the chair, and a full quorum being present, when the Treasurer announced the receipt of your very handsome *donation of one hundred and fifty dollars* in aid of the Society's funds; whereupon it was moved, and unanimously agreed, that the most grateful thanks of the Society were justly due to you for such a munificent testimony of your desire for its prosperity; that the Secretary communicate to you the assurance of the high appreciation with which the donation was received; and that its receipt, and also a thankful expression of gratitude towards you, should be placed on the records of the Society.

"I can only reiterate the sentiments contained in my instructions, in which I fully and gratefully concur; and, with best wishes for your long-continued welfare,

"I am, sir, very truly yours,

"John C. Moore, Rec. Secretary."

Now, it will be observed that this was not *John* Smith who presented this sum, but another gentleman, and a different sort of individual altogether. He gave it (one hundred and fifty dollars in hard cash) the full value of a nice pair of my *best* "pure-bred" Cochin-Chinas, without flinching, without any fuss, outright, freely, "in aid of the Society's funds."

Liberal, generous, benevolent, charitable, kindly Mr. Smith! You did yourself honor! *You* were one of the kind of men that I should very much liked to have had for a customer, about those

days. But, after due inquiry, I ascertained that you did not keep, or breed, poultry. You were only a "friend" to the Society with the elongated name, – the *only* friend, by the way, it ever had! Heaven will reward you, Mr. Smith, sooner or later, for your disinterestedness, but the Society never can. Be patient, however, and console yourself with the reflection that he who giveth to the poor, lendeth, &c. &c. The Society with the long-winded title was *poor* enough, and you cannot have forgotten that he who casteth his bread (or money) upon the waters will find it, after many days. You will find yours again, I have no doubt; but it will be emphatically "after *many* days."

The second show closed, the expenses of which reached the sum of one thousand and twenty-seven dollars eighteen cents, and the receipts at which amounted to one thousand and seventy-nine dollars eighty-four cents, exclusive of the above-named donation. The Society had now a balance of two hundred and two dollars sixty-six cents in hand, and it went on its way rejoicing.

Col. Jaques (the first President) now "resigned his commission," and Moses Kimball, Esq., was chosen in his stead. I found myself once more among the Vice Presidents, John C. Moore was elected Secretary, Dr. Eben Wight was made Chairman of the Board of Trustees, and H.L. Devereux became Treasurer for the succeeding year.

These officers were all "honorable men" who were thus placed in position *to watch each other!* The delightful consequences can readily be fancied. What my own duties were (as Vice-President)

I never knew. I supposed, however, that, as "one of 'em" thus elevated in official rank, I was expected to do my uttermost to keep the bubble floating, and to aid, in my humble way, to maintain the inflation. And I acted accordingly; performing my duty "as I understood it"!

CHAPTER XI.

PROGRESS OF THE MALADY

Immediately after this second exhibition, the sales of poultry largely increased. Everybody had now got fairly under weigh in the hen-trade; and in every town, at every corner, the pedestrian tumbled over either a fowl-raiser or some huge specimen of unnameable monster in chicken shape.

I had been busy, and had added largely to my "superior" stock of "pure-blooded" birds, by importations from Calcutta, Hong-Kong, Canton and Shanghae, direct. In two instances I sent out for them expressly, and in two or three other instances I had obtained them directly from on shipboard, as vessels arrived into Boston and New York harbors.

I was then an officer in the Boston Custom-house, – a democrat under a whig collector, – otherwise, a live skinned eel in a hot frying-pan. But I found that my business had got to be such that I could not fulfil my duty to Uncle Sam and attend appropriately to what had now got to be of very much greater importance to me; and so I resigned my situation as Permit Clerk at the public stores, very much to the regret of everybody in and out of the Custom-house, and especially those who were applicants for my place!

I had purchased a pretty estate in Melrose, and now I enlarged

my premises, added to my stock, and raised (during the summer and fall of 1851) over a thousand fowls, upon my premises. This did not begin to supply the demands of my customers, however, or even approach it. And, to give an idea of my trade at that period, I will here quote a letter from one of my new patrons. It came from the interior of Louisiana, in the fall of 1851.

"Geo. P. Burnham, Esq., Boston.

"I am about to embark in the raising of poultry, and I hear of yourself as an extensive breeder in this line. Do me the favor to inform me, by return mail, what you can send me *one hundred pairs* of Chinese fowls for, of the yellow, red, white, brown and black varieties; the cocks to be not less than eight to ten months old, and pullets ready to lay; say twenty pairs of each color. And also state how I shall remit you, in case your price suits me, &c.

" - ."

I informed this gentleman that I had just what he wanted (of course), and that if he would remit me a draft by mail for fifteen hundred dollars – though this price was really too low for them – I would forward him one hundred pairs of fowls "that would astonish him and his neighbors." Within three weeks from the date of my reply to him, I received a sight draft from the Bank of Louisiana upon the Merchants' Bank, Boston, for fifteen hundred dollars. I sent him such an invoice of fowls as pleased him, and I have no doubt he was (as he seemed to be) perfectly satisfied that he had thus made the best trade he ever consummated in the

whole course of his life.

During the next spring I bred largely again, and supplied all the best fanciers in New England and New York State with stock, from which *they* bred continually during that and the succeeding year.

In the spring of 1852 the Mutual Admiration Society of hen-men got up their *third* show, at the Fitchburg Dépôt (in *May*, I think), where a goodly exhibition came off, and where there were now fowls *for sale* of every conceivable color and description, good, bad, and indifferent. I contributed as usual, and, as usual, carried away the palm for the *best* samples shown. And here was evinced some of the shifts to which certain hucksters resorted, to make "the people" believe that white was black, that they originally brought this subject before the public eye, and that *they* only possessed the pure stock then in the country.

Reverends, and doctors, and deacons, and laymen, – all were there, in force. Every man cried down every other man's fowls, while he as strenuously cried up his own. Upon one cage appeared a card vouching for the fact that a certain *original* Shanghae crower within it, all the way from the land of the Celestials, weighed fourteen pounds and three ounces, and that a hen, with him, drew nine pounds six ounces (almost twenty-four pounds). When the birds were weighed, the first drew ten and a half pounds, and the other eight and a quarter only. This memorandum appeared upon the box of a *clergyman* contributor, who had understood that size and great weight only were to be the

criterion of merit and value thenceforward. Another contributor boldly declared himself to be the original holder of the only good stock in America. A third claimed to be the father of the current movement, and had a gilded vane upon his boxes which he asserted he had had upon his poultry-house for five years previously. Another stated that all my fowls (there shown) were bred from *his* stock. And still another proclaimed that the identical birds which I contributed were purchased directly of him; he knew every one of them. Finally, one competitor impudently hinted that my birds actually then belonged to *him*, and had only been *loaned* to me (for a consideration) for exhibition on this occasion!

When the fair closed, however, the matter was all set right, as may be gathered from the following extract from the official Report of the third show, of the Committee of Judges, of which I was *not* a member:

"At this third Boston Show," says the Committee, "the best and most faultless descriptions of Red and Buff Shanghaes were shown by G.P. Burnham, Esq., and others. And of the Cochinchinas, the specimens of Geo. P. Burnham, etc., were each and all notable, and worthy of public appreciation."

This was satisfactory to me, and I made the most of this "werry fav'able opinion" of the august Committee, – who added the following, in their Report, in reference to the action of Southern purchasers:

"It seems, from reliable information received by members of

the Committee, that fowls raised in New England, and exported South, attain to a much larger size, and are vastly more prolific, than in our colder climate. This is specially so in reference to the produce of stocks recently imported from the East, namely, the Shanghaes, Cochin-China fowls, and others of larger varieties. *So sensible have some of the most eminent Southern breeders become that such is the case, that they are annually in the habit of buying their young stock from the Northern States, and they find the system profitable.* In this way, New England bids fair to become the supply-market, in a great measure, for the South and West."

This was beautiful! "*Annually in the habit.*" I liked *that* portion of it. And Southern buyers seemed to like it, too, judging from the manner in which orders poured in upon us, after this gentle hint from *such* authority! I believe that the Chinese fowls really did better in the South than they did with us, this way. At least, I *hope* they did!

CHAPTER XII.

MY CORRESPONDENCE

By this time my correspondence with gentlemen in all parts of America and Great Britain had got to be rather extended. I took from the post-office from ten to twenty-five or thirty letters, daily; and amongst them were some curious samples of orthography, etymology, syntax, and prosody. I offer the annexed specimens – of course without names or dates – merely to show how the young aspirants for fame (in the poultry-trade) felt, about those days; and, also, to give some idea of the progress of the fever among us, as time passed by, etc. etc.

No. 1

Sir – Mr. Burnham;

i red in Nu england poultry breeder that yu kep fousls an aigs for sail. i want one duzen aigs if tha doant cum tu tu mutch. ime a poor mann an carnt pa a gret pris. wot can yu cend me a duzen of yure best aigs for. ansur by male and direck yure leter tu me tu mi dress.

Yr Respec'y, &c.

–.

No. 2

My Dear Sir:

I am a poor clergyman, and I have some leisure, which I can devote to raising a few good fowls. If your price is not too high for the rather limited contents of my purse, please inform me, by return of mail, what you can furnish me with *pure* Cochin-China eggs for. I am desirous to procure a few; and I prefer that you would select for me, – in a half-dozen, say two *male* and four *female* eggs. I suggest this, because I am informed that your long experience in this interesting branch of rural economy has enabled you to decide (upon examining them) whether eggs will produce cocks or pullets. Your early answer will confer a favor on,
Sir, yours, truly,

–.

No. 3

Mr. Burman:

I close you ten dolls. Cend me a doz. of your Cotchen Chiny eggs rite away – cause I hav a hen thats been a setting on some stones I put under her now most a week. You rote me that you would hav them about this time, you know. Cend them by – 's Express, and tell the man who fetches them not to turn the box over, at all. I want half and half –

that is to say, half cock eggs, and half hen eggs. You know what I mean by this. Them that has the sharp ends on to one side – them's the cocks, and them that's round and smooth at both ends – them's the hens. Forwud immediately, and mark *with care glass this side up – don't shake this with speed.*

Yours, &c.

–.

No. 4

G.P. Burnham, Esq.

Dear Sir: I saw your beautiful Cochín-China fowls last week, in the paper, and am desirous to obtain a few eggs from them, if possible.

Will they hatch under our common hens? Or, must we have the *pure* bloods to sit upon them? I am a novice, somewhat, in this business. I enclose you twelve dollars (the price for a dozen, I believe), which please forward, at your early convenience, by express, and oblige

Yours, &c.

–.

No. 5

Friend Burnham:

Enclosed please find ten dollars for another dozen of

your *pure* Cochin-China eggs. The first ones you sent me (from some cause) did not hatch. I have kept a hen (a very good sitter, too) upon that first lot, *constantly*, for four weeks, now – and I don't believe I shall get a chick, you see! So, please forward these now, *right away*– because my hen will get tired of waiting, you know, if I don't keep her right along, steady. The \$10 you will find within.

Yours, resp'y,

–.

P.S. Can you inform me what is good for *lice* on fowls? I find that my hen is covered with a million of them, now. Don't forget this, please.¹

No. 6

Sur – wen i cum to boston nex weak i want to see yure poltry i am a ole hand at the bizness myself an I like to see good kinds of poltry every ware. i see yurn in the paper an i like them verry much can yu sel a hen without a cock, i have sevral cocks now of the *black dawkin* pure bred and fine an i would change one of them with yu for a cochon chiner hen if yu say so. answer by fust male.

Yure in haist

–.

¹ After a hen had set over four weeks on her nest, I should suppose she *might* have been thus affected!

Mr. P.G. Barnum, }
boston. }

No. 7

Dear Sir: Yours duly received. I did not suppose that the price of the "Cochins" was so high – but I must have a trio of them, at *any* figure. I enclose you fifty dollars for them, agreeably with your proposal, relying upon your known good taste in selections, and upon your proverbial reputation as regards the keeping only of *pure* stock. Send them by Adams & Co.'s Express, in a roomy cage. If they are prime, my neighbors will very shortly order from you, I am sure.

Yours, resp'y,

–.

No. 8

Mr. Barnam:

Them two fowls I bought of you, by seeing the pictur in the newspaper, and which I paid you \$35 cash down on the nail for, aint what they're cracked up to be – not by a long short, sir. Now, what I want you to do is to sen me back my munney, or I'll prosecute you and put you in prizon for cheating people by false pertences. I was so mad when

I took them out of the box that I'd a good mine to kill an eat em both on the spot.² I aint no *hen*-man, I'd have you to understan, an you can't come none of this kine of nonsense over *me*. Sen me back my munney, or I'll complain of you in tu days before a Justis of the Peas – a friend of mine, that'll give you *fits* if you *air* a big man. I don't keer for that. I want my munney. The fowls is both sick, too. Answer this tu once, or els sen me back my munney.³

–.

No. 9

G.P. Burnham; Esq.:

I saw a cage of superb Cochinchina fowls from your yard, yesterday, *en route* to Mobile. Can you duplicate them? If so, at what price? I had understood that a Mr. – kept choice fowls. I visited his place, but saw none there that seemed worth the taking away. If you can send me such a trio as I saw at Adams & Co.'s, let me know it immediately, and your price for them. How shall I remit you?

Yours, &c.

–.

² O, the cannibal!

³ I never heard from this customer again, and should now be glad to know if he ever got his "munney"!

No. 10

Mr. Burnham:

I enclose you one hundred dollars, by check on Shoe and Leather Dealers' Bank, Boston (No. 417), to your order, for the fine fowls you describe in yours received this day. They should be *good* ones, as I have no doubt they are. Forward, at once,

And believe me,

Yours,

—.

No. 11

G.B. Burnham, Boston.

Sir: When I paid you \$25 (twenty-five dolls.) for a pair of *Cochin-China* chickens, according to your own terms, I did not suppose you would dare to send to *me* (whom you must know to be a judge of all kinds of poultry) a pair of *Shanghaes*, instead of those I ordered!⁴ I want none but *pure*-bred fowls in my collection, nor will I have them there, either. I have now a plenty of the *Shanghaes*, and I ordered a pair of *Cochin-Chinas* of you. Now, I want to

⁴ *Here* was a "lawyer," who knew the difference between a *Cochin-China* and a *Shanghae*!

know what you will do in this matter. Will you send me a pair of *Cochins*, or not? That is all I want to know at present.

From

Yours, truly,

—.

P.S. I am a lawyer by profession; and I submit to no imposition of this sort, you may be sure.

No. 12

G.P. Burnham.

My Dear Sir:

The magnificent "Cochin-China" birds you forwarded me last are the admiration of every one who beholds them; and I am greatly your debtor for this superb lot of fowls. My neighbor, Hon. Mr. M — , desires me to request you to forward him four as nearly like mine as possible, and your draft on me, at sight, for the cost, will be duly honored. He can afford (and is willing) to pay liberally for them.⁵ Charge him accordingly; but be careful that you do not send him finer samples than *mine* are, — which, by the way, I do not think possible. I enclose you draft for \$120, on Merchants' Bank, Boston, for your bill. And am

Yours, truly, —.

⁵ This was the kind of gentleman I loved to fall in with.

No. 13

Sir – I hav alwas heerd yu was a scamp, and now I *know* yu are.⁶ Them eggs yu sent me was smasht all up, an they was runnin' down the sides of the box. What am I to do with them, sir – do yu think? Do yu spose I've gut money so plenty as to throw it way in this manner? Yu didn't put in *harf* meal anuf, and the hole of them was spilte, besides being roten I hav no manner of dout. Now if yu send me back the six dolls. that the postmaster see me put into my fust letter to yu, all's well an good. And ef yu don't, see if I don't publis yu and yure carактер tu the hole wurd yu infermus cheet yu. Yu'd aughter be ashamed tu send a man eggs that wa, anny how. So no more at present tell I heer from yu.

–.

No. 14

Friend Burnham:

I have heard creditable accounts of thy poultry (of the Cochín-China variety), and I am induced from common rumor to believe thee a man who dealeth justly and honorably. I desire to procure a few of these choice fowls, if

⁶ Some persons would consider this personal!

not too expensive; and will thank thee to inform me what thy price is for such, at ages varying from four to eight months old. Thy early reply will oblige thy friend and well-wisher,
—.

No. 15

G.P. Burnham, Esq. — Dear Sir: Send me ten trios more of the Cochin-China chickens, *immediately*. If you can put them down to \$35 the trio, now, it will leave me a better margin. All the others are sold, at \$60 the trio. Enclosed is draft on Bank of Commerce, Boston, for \$400.

In haste, yours,
—.

No. 16

Sir —

I want tu get sum coshin chiney aggs, them as will hatch out chickns with fethers onto the leggs an no mistaik. if you got them kind yu can cend me wun dusen an i will cen yu bak the munny wen the chickns is hached with fethers onto there leggs not otherwise. If yu dont like tu cend them on this turms yu can keepe 'em yureself. I bort too duzsen eg in bostun an their wasn't none of em had no fethers on the leg, i mene the chick'ns, wen tha was hached. an I dont expek i

shall be fuled no mor by no such humbugg by a good dele. i pade my munny for genwine aigs and I donte see no reesun wy people isn't onnest. How could i tell wether their was chickns in the eggs or not? of course i cou'dn't. and i doant consider sech bissiness no bettern than cheetin rite out. i bort em *twict* this wa, an i sharnt be fuled agin arter waitin as I did both times over three weeks. ef yu will ples to sen me the pure aigs abuv menciond and wate tell tha hach fether leggs chickns, well an good, ive no dout yu air a onnest man, cos all the noospapers pufs yu. But sum of the hen traideres aint no better than thaid oughter be – that's *my* pinion.⁷

Yours &c. etc. –.

No. 17

Mr. P.B. Burnum; Sur,

If you hav enny of them big Cokin Shiney fowl, that eat off tops of flour barils, I want sum. I gut a big nufoulan dogg that ways hard onto 140 pouns, and I want tu cell him, an git sum of them Cokin Shinys. This dogg is a gud dogg and dont eat much. I feed him on fish and hoggs hasslits and it dont cost much to keep him. He bitt a pedler's arm most off yisterday, but he woudnt be much trubble to you, if you kep him chaind *all the time* sose he couldnt bite nobody. If you will rite me what you ask for yure fowls, I will inform

⁷ I would liked to have seen the dealer that could "fule" this customer more than "twict."

you what I ask for my dog. I dont want none nless thay can eat off tops of flour barrils, of course. Them's the kind for me.⁸ Anser by return mail.

Yours Resp'y,

—.

No. 18

G.P. Burnham, Esq.:

I have got a Shanghae cock weighing 15-1/2 pounds, and I want a few hens to match him. Can you supply me? My crower stands three feet four inches high, and his middle toe measures 7-1/2 inches in length. What do you think of that? I want six twelve-pound hens. Dr. Bennett can supply me, I presume; but I want *pure*-bred stock. I have no doubt my crower will weigh eighteen or nineteen pounds, at two years old; he is now only eight months old! Let me hear from you.

Resp'y, —.

No. 19

Mr. Burnham:

I always took you to be a man of honor, and I supposed

⁸ I informed this purchaser that I could send him a pair which, if they "couldn't eat off the tops" of his flour-barrels, I'd warrant would eat up the *contents* of one as quickly as he could desire!

you knew (if anybody did) what a Cochin-China fowl was, because you imported your stock. Now, those you sent me, and for which I willingly paid you \$40 for the three, are feathered on the legs; this should *not* be, of course. How is this? They are fine, but I am certain they can be nothing but mere Shanghae fowls. Let me know about this, will you?

Yours, &c.

—.

No. 20

My Dear Sir:

I hardly know what to write you about the stock I had of you, six months ago, for "Cochin-Chinas." That they are *not* Cochins I feel positive, however; for one half the chickens came smooth-legged, and the rest are heavily-feathered on the legs!! I consider them only *Shanghaes*, and now I want to know if you can send me a trio of *pure* bloods, that you *know* to be Cochins. If so, I care nothing about price. I want *blood*. "Blood tells," you know. Let me hear from you, and state your own views in this matter. I will be governed by your advice. Enclosed is ten dollars for a dozen of your "Cochin" eggs —*pure*, you know.

In haste,

Yours truly, —.

No. 21

Mr. Burnham.

Sir: Do you call yourself a man of honor? I bought one doz. Cochin-China eggs of you, for which I paid you six dollars, cash. I set them, and I got but *ten* chickens out of them (two eggs I found rotten, in the nest). Every one of these chicks are cocks, sir —*cocks!* Now, what the devil can *I* do, do you imagine, with ten cocks? I want to breed fowls. That is what I bought the eggs for; to begin *right*. You must have *known* better than this. Anybody could have seen that these were all male eggs. *I* saw it, at once (I remember), but *I hoped* I was mistaken. What do you propose to do about this? Let me know, *at once*, without fail.

In haste,

—.

No. 22

Sir: You may think well of the Cochin-China fowls, — *I don't*. Those you sent me are long-legged, and there are no feathers on their legs, or feet, as there *ought* to be. *I* know what a Cochin-China fowl is, too well to be deceived in this way. *I* will keep them. *You are a humbug*. You are welcome to the thirty dollars I paid you. *I* don't ask you to return it. *I* don't want it. *I* can get along very well without it. You need

it. Keep it. Much good may it do you!

In haste,

—.

P.S. Don't you wish you may get another \$30 out of me, that way? O, yes – I guess you will – ha! ha!

No. 23

Mr. Barman. Dear Sir: I see in the Poultry Books that the Cotchin-China fowls lays two eggs every day,⁹ and sometimes three a-day. I have hens that lays two eggs a-day, frequently, but I want to get the breed that will lay *three* eggs a-day, reglar. If you have got anny of the Cotchins that you *know* lays three eggs a-day, I would like to get a few, at a fair price. I don't pay no fancy prices for 'em, though. The hen fever won't larst forever, I don't believe; and then when its busted up, what's the fowls good for, even if they *do* lay three eggs a-day? Let me hear from you, – but don't send

⁹ "This gigantic bird," says Richardson, a noted English writer, "is very prolific, frequently laying two, and occasionally three eggs on the same day!" And, in support of this monstrous assertion, he subsequently refers, as his authority for this statement (which was called in question), to the "Rt. Hon. Mr. Shaw, Recorder of Dublin, to Mr. Walters, Her Majesty's poultry-keeper, and to J. Joseph Nolan, Esq., of Dublin." This was, in *my* opinion, one of the hums of the time, and I never had occasion to change that opinion. I do not believe the hen that *really* laid two eggs in one day ever lived to do it a second time! I have *heard* of this thing, however. But I never knew of the instance, myself.

any fowls unless you are *sure* they lay three eggs every day!
Yours, &c.,

—.

No. 24

Mr. Burnham. — Sir: I am a gentleman, and I have no disposition to be fractious. I sent you twelve dollars, in a letter, for a dozen "Cotchin" eggs, and I set them. After waiting twenty-three days, I found two grizzled-colored chickens in the nest yesterday, both of them with huge *top-knots* on their polls! What does this mean? Am I to be swindled out of my money thus? By return of mail if you do not refund my money, if I live I will prosecute you, if it costs me a thousand dollars. You may rely on this. I am not a man to be trifled with, and I refer you to Messrs. — & —, who know me; you evidently do *not*!

In haste,

—.

[I did not reply to this spicy favor, because, if the gentleman really was not a "fractious" man, I imagined he would like his pure-bred chickens better as they grew up; and, besides, I could afford to wait for "a gentleman" to cool off. I never heard from him, afterwards; and concluded that he didn't *live* to carry out his laudable intention of expending a thousand dollars in prosecuting me! I trust that, before he departed, he became hopefully pious.

Peace to his manes!]

No. 25

Sir: Them fowls you sent me, got the sore-hed. I gin em tuppentyn and unyuns and brandy, but it want no use. The poletry books sed so, and I follered the direction, and *it killed 'em both deader'n thunder, in one night!* Now you've gut my mony, and I haint narry fowls. What'll I do? Don't you think this a pooty impersition? Send me another pear, to once – if you don't want *fits*.

In haist,

–.

[I sent this man "another *pear*," – only I didn't!]

CHAPTER XIII.

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE QUESTION

The foregoing are only a very few samples of hundreds upon hundreds of similar letters I constantly received, for nearly five years.

All the blame occasioned by careless express-men, of false blood imposed upon me originally, of tardy hens, of the hatching or non-hatching of eggs transported hundreds of miles, of feathered legs upon chickens, or the absence of them, of every species of mishap that could by any possibility befall the fancier and amateur, through his own ignorance or errors, – every kind of mistake was charged to *me*! But, with a Christian meekness, I bore it all.

I was threatened with civil prosecutions, with the House of Correction, the State Prison, the Penitentiary, and all sorts of other punishments, for my remissness; but I submitted with a quiet resignation, because "the people" were so deeply engaged in this pursuit, and everybody now had the fever so shockingly, that I sympathized with all mankind, and attributed these trifling ebullitions of ill-will, or raving, to the spasms caused by the prevalence and the severity of the epidemic.

On the other hand, I was so often cheered on in my labors

of love by the kind consideration of a very different sort of patrons, that I did not sink under the persecution of those who would gladly have floored me, could the thing have been readily accomplished. I pocketed the money of my customers, however, bred good fowls, followed up the trade sharply, and found myself sailing easily along, in spite of the contemptible and small-fry opposition of which I was continually the object. As an agreeable offset to the complaints and murmurings in certain quarters, the following few letters will tell their own story:

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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