

POULTRY NOTES.

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

WORK FOR MAY.

This is the month of chilly and damp mornings. The leaves, especially in the South Island, are rapidly falling, and these, if gathered dry, come in for a variety of purposes. But they should be used under cover, if at all, as they soon damp and rot. Dry ashes are a good thing for the bottom of poultry houses, and straw is preferable to hay; it lets the droppings go through more readily, and keeps clean longer than hay. The poultry keeper should be seriously thinking by the end of this month of mating up his birds. Even if eggs are not wanted until well into July it sometimes happens that despite all care some birds in the harem will not agree, and others have to be introduced and given time to settle down. Therefore it is not well to defer mating later than the end of this month. With all culls cleaned out and stock birds mated, the bulk of the season's work is practically over. Just the ordinary routine work has to be gone through daily. Birds should now be fed very discreetly, according to the state of the weather, and on as balanced rations as possible. Most of the adult birds will be well through the moult by the middle of this month. A liberal diet with good green feed will soon bring them on to lay. Maize or Indian meal must not be used too freely. If the weather be cold and raw I have found it beneficial to boil the corn. The soft food, too, is better boiled into a strong porridge and dried off with pollard. On very cold days give food more plentifully, and withhold it on mild days. Isolate any bought birds for a while till you are sure they have brought no infection. At this time of the year it is no uncommon thing to see birds almost as bad as they can be with roup or diphtheric roup, with healthy birds on each side. Therefore isolate all fresh birds for a few days, as the damage is often done before it is noticed. It is wise to add a small quantity of pure sulphate of iron to the drinking water. In the cruder form, as green vitriol, it can be purchased very cheaply, but the purified form can be obtained at any chemist's at a reasonable figure, and it is not necessary to use too much of it. It will most certainly assist any moulting birds and also go far as a preventative of roup. If it should by any means be desirable that the laying of pullets be retarded, move them about continually from run to run so that their growth for the time being may not be stopped. Allow the birds that are to be used in the breeding pens to have the best and most sheltered runs so that, with fairly open weather, there will be a prospect of the birds laying well when June sets in. So far as the breeding pens are concerned, do not feed on too stimulating a diet, but wait Nature's own course; for the forcing of eggs in the breeding pen will produce dead in shell, cripples, and unfertiles more than anything else. Do not allow the male bird to have too many birds to start with. Half a dozen hens will be quite sufficient. Of course much depends upon the condition of the stock generally. The breeder will, however, soon find out how things are going. Do not use any late hatched birds, but only those fully matured and from the earlier hatches, and if it can be avoided do not use birds of the same age together. Let there be some two-year-old stock on one side or the other. This will prove the most successful. The hen that lays is the hen that pays. This is true if she lays in the required season or when eggs are at a premium. Most poultry keepers can get eggs in the spring and summer, this being the natural laying seasons. To make poultry-keeping a success we must get eggs in winter. Eggs will never again return to the price of a few years ago, when it was possible to get them for 9d and 10 a dozen. Fowl feed is much dearer and the owners of fowls (those who are progressive) prove that it pays better to preserve new-laid eggs when they are cheap and plentiful and dispose of them as preserved eggs at higher prices when the supply

drops off, so that it will be seen that winter eggs are best. There are many ways of preserving eggs. Space will not allow me to give the many descriptive methods. The most popular, and in my opinion both the best and easiest, is that of waterglass or other liquid preservatives, put on the market by several firms. To return to the winter egg. To secure these much depends upon when you hatch your prospective layers. If it were possible to take a census of the opinion of the many poultry keepers in New Zealand it would result in widely divergent views as to how to obtain and how to retain the winter-laying powers of the average hen. In these days of high fecundity when the hen can be bred to lay some 320 eggs in twelve months—as the one in the New Zealand Utility Club's laying competition has done,—many would think the problem was solved. This is not so, as many would favor hens, others pullets, some sitters, and some non-sitters. Others would pin their faith to a certain strain breed, or variety. No matter which method is adopted, I would remind my readers that it is absolutely impossible to make up for lost time in the hatching and rearing of your future layers. The non-sitting breeds as a rule develop and mature more rapidly than the sitting varieties, and so need not be hatched so early. If sitters are hatched out in August or early September they should, if properly fed and cared for, be in good laying trim when the bad weather sets in, say by May. Yet with the light breeds September or October will be quite soon enough. Some pullets are so precocious as to lay at four and a half to five months' old. I would never advise any poultry keeper to force his birds by too liberal feeding or the uses of tonics and spices, as a fowl should be fully matured and developed previous to laying, otherwise they do not make the best of breeding stock, capable of transmitting prolific laying power. Most poultry keepers, judging from their conversation, appear to understand the general management of poultry keeping. Yet unfortunately, in practice it is either forgotten or neglected. As I have repeatedly pointed out, it is details that count for much in the general management of poultry. There is no need to go to the expense of building elaborate or expensive houses. They must, however, be built so as to be easily and thoroughly cleansed. Makeshift houses are useless. They should be damp-proof and draught-proof. Fresh air to fowls, as to human beings, is life, whereas draughts spell disaster. How often do we see tumble-down shelters, doorless and windowless. I have one of such in my mind not far away from my own place, a glaring example of the many farmsteads both in New Zealand and the Old Country, too. Farmers are the biggest offenders in this respect, and think anything will do for the old hens. Fortunately for most of them the birds are cross-breeds and seem to be hardy enough to remain healthy under such conditions. Thanks to the advice given in the various papers in the Dominion who devote space to poultry matters farmers are beginning to realise that after all there is money in poultry, and that dirty, stuffy pens with neither ventilation nor light are not consistent with success. If you neglect your poultry they in return will neglect to lay. Ample evidence can be given that where fowls are kept under favorable conditions, such as the covered run or scratching-shed system, they can and do lay well in winter. Environment counts for much in poultry keeping. I will deal with this subject later.

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