



One man's memories . . .

TO THOSE who know chickens as something more than mere egg-producing machines, they are as individual as people. They have different dispositions, different carriage, mannerisms, kinds of voices, even different facial expressions. They maintain a very definite, even rigid, social order.

It is common knowledge that roosters in a flock fight until one whips all the rest and becomes the boss. But, as a small boy, watching the denizens of our family chicken yard, I learned that hens are just as strict in their observance of precedence. One hen could whip certain other hens and could be whipped by certain others; and once her place in the social scale was fixed, she seldom forgot it or tried to overstep it. There is this

He Learned About Women

...FROM HENS

by Walter Allen Harris

difference from the roosters: no one hen would necessarily be able to whip all the other hens.

In my own yard there were three who stood at the top of the social ladder—a big white hen, a barred Plymouth Rock and a slim, smoky-colored hen. Whitie could whip Rocky, Rocky could whip Smoky and Smoky could whip Whitie. And any one of the three could whip any other hen in the flock.

When a new hen was introduced—and in those times, before the days of so much specialization, ours was a motley and mongrel flock—she would have to fight all the other hens until her place in the hens' social system was established. Occasionally, as sometimes happens in any group of ladies, one would suddenly become ambitious and try to climb to a higher rung on the social ladder, an attempt that was sure to cause hen feathers to fly.

In appearance hens do not look alike. There was one hen in my flock whose carriage was almost

the waddle of a duck, a white hen had a form much like that of a swan, and a silky-plumaged blue hen with a topknot carried herself as straight and stiff as the blue-gowned, blue-hatted lady who sat in front of me at church, whom I had heard other ladies call "stuck-up."

EVEN MY HENS' voices were different. One sang almost all the time. We called her Tetrizzini, although her voice left much to be desired. She had an unfailingly happy and friendly disposition. Nothing ever worried her, and unlike most chickens, she never shied from humans, but would let anyone pick her up and pet her.

Some of my hens, like some people, were worriers. There was one lean brown hen, with a chronically worried expression. She constantly fussed at the other hens. She dodged the roosters, too, but they didn't seem to find her attractive. She was like a certain spinster who, I'd heard my mother say, had soured on the world.

A dignified black hen possessed a deep contralto voice and talked in her sleep; I sometimes wondered if her supper wasn't digesting well. And Speckledy, my brown and yellow hen, was forever leaving her nest, before her eggs hatched, and gadding about the yard. She was much like our irresponsible neighbor, whose children were left untended while she traipsed all over

town. She was known as the town gossip and talebearer.

Once we had a hen with few of those qualities of femininity desirable in a female. She was a *crowing* hen. She *crowed*, or tried to crow, all over the yard. She seemed such a freak that we put an end to her misdirected career and ate her for dinner.

"I couldn't stand her crowing any longer," my mother said. "And let this be a warning to you," she added, addressing my sister, who liked to whistle, "remember that 'Whistling girls and crowing hens Always come to some bad end!'"

But that was long ago, before our advanced era of women's rights, when the women claim the right to do—and get away with it—all the things that men do, not only whistling, but cussing and smoking and wearing pants, and crowing about themselves, too.

It's been years since I learned from my hens about the mysteries of feminine psychology, but I remember with affectionate gratitude the lessons they taught me.

Perhaps they taught me too well. A confirmed and aging bachelor, I sometimes recall—usually when I am shaving and have to look into the mirror—the scrawny, old rooster that always stood, drooping and alone, in a fence corner, shunning—and shunned by—every hen in the flock. Mother made soup of him. She said it was all he was good for.



HOW COMMUNISTS KILLED MY FATHER

by Chang Kou Yen

This sad bit of history is the second memoir which has come for MERCURY readers from faraway Formosa. In the April MERCURY Mr. Chang told us of "The Best Advice I Ever Had." In this short, nostalgic chapter of a Chinese gentleman's life and trials, he tells of his esteemed father's murder by the Red Communists who overran free China's land. His father's sin, in Communist eyes, was that of being a "Landlord." Can it be that the same fate is somewhere in store for American landlords?—THE EDITORS

MY FAMILY was wealthy through hard work and lived in Tang Shan, from Nanking about twenty kilometers. My grandfather had been of the Ching Dynasty. He had left us more than six hundred beautiful acres of China's good earth. Since he died,

we still lived in ease and comfort because of our heritage.

My father, named *Chang Yu Fen*, was a teacher who taught chemistry many years. After his fifty years of age, he was in weak health and stayed at home to devote himself to philanthropic serv-