

**THE COCKER; CONTAINING EVERY
INFORMATION TO THE BREEDERS AND
AMATEURS OF THAT NOBLE BIRD, THE GAME
COCK: TO WHICH IS ADDED, A VARIETY OF
OTHER USEFUL INFORMATION FOR THE
INSTRUCTION OF THOSE WHO ARE
ATTENDANTS ON THE COCK PIT**

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The Cocker; Containing Every Information to the Breeders and Amateurs of that Noble Bird, the Game Cock: To Which Is Added, a Variety of Other Useful Information for the Instruction of Those Who Are Attendants on the Cock Pit by W. Sketchley

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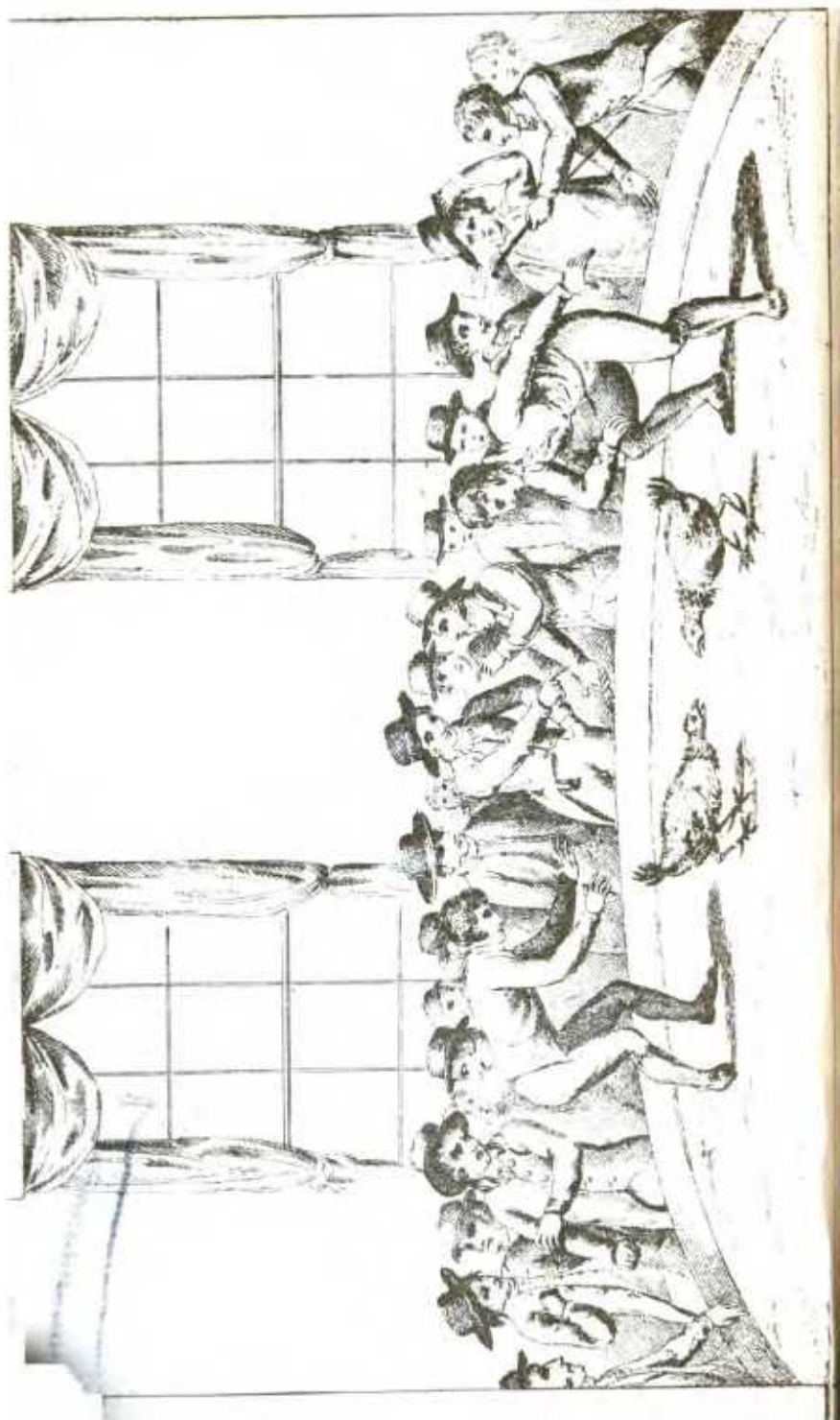
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W. SKETCHLEY

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FOR

The Instruction

OF

THOSE WHO ARE ATTENDANTS ON THE

COCK PIT.

By W. SKETCHLEY, Gent.

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1814.

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PREFACE.

THE author having been attached to the sod at a very early period of life—and having lived in a part of the country high in repute for that noble bird, the Game Cock; where as great a variety of birds were exhibited in all their various process of refinement as any individual amateur could enjoy, he flatters himself that by such superior means of collecting information his attempt at writing "The Cocker" will be found to contain not only instruction, but be a source of amusement to the reader, and as such may serve to plead his apology for undertaking the present task.

Under such a pre-eminent latitude of superior breed, no man of discernment could be at a loss (to mark those whose superiority of blood, mode of fighting, with all the necessary concomitants that constitute perfection in the game cock) how much to appreciate their worth.

To collect a stud from these renowned war-

riors was the pleasing task of the author, whose situation in life enabled him to obtain the object of his pursuit. But our juvenile endeavours are not always adequate to the difficulties attendant on true breeding; for notwithstanding the judicious choice of cocks so made, we are liable to fail from some incompatible choice of our ideas. To unite their crosses, (in order to complete a uniform set of birds,) similarity of feather, constitution, colour of the beak and legs, are in themselves so requisite, that for the want of a monitor in our early progress we too precipitately anticipate all we want in procuring these models of perfection, when, in fact, we have perhaps accomplished very little essential to the constituent part of breeding. The author trusts that an extensive routine of practice for fifty years, aided by the acute observations of others, and committing to paper from time to time those of his own, has enabled him to afford such information as may pilot the juvenile breeder through so pleasing, yet so arduous an undertaking; knowing well that observations founded upon experience, are the surest guide to truth in every science, and are more likely to succeed than the most refined and plausible theories.

March 30th, 1814.

THE COCKER.

To Breeders.

IN our early attachment to, and pursuit after, cocking, and on our commencement of breeding, we are frequently hurried on in our choice of a single cock from a day's fight, or a promiscuous match, that has exhibited appearances of courage and heel. Although condition will not give heel, yet it very much promotes courage, inasmuch as to carry an indifferently-bred cock through a tolerably well contested battle.

From these superficial trials and our own want of experience we are induced to purchase cocks of this description to breed from, which must inevitably involve us in error. But maturer experience will inform us, that high condition will incite courage in a half-bred cock; and a bloody heeler in that situation may succeed against one of superior game and less heel. It therefore shews how necessary it is to guard against a prepossession of any single cock however meritorious.

To avoid this youthful partiality, if you attend regular mains, you will have an opportunity of seeing a number of well-bred brothers, whose mode of fighting and supporting their battles in any stage, mark them for steady fighters, good heelers, ready mouths, and deep game. Such proofs would warrant your endeavours to procure one of these warriors the least injured in his contest, more immediately if their feathers and other concomitants are to your wish. Practice and acute observation will tend to inform you what feathered birds are the most approved, as well as the best in constitution. But of those endowed with every sought-for requisite, the black-reds are most in estimation. The difficulties attendant on our

early endeavours are only to be surmounted by a steady attention to those particulars that are requisite in this pursuit; and when you have fixed on such cocks, whose originality is well known, and whose breed has stood the test of experience, it will not be difficult to procure such, either by interest or connexion. If hens or pullets cannot be obtained (which should if practicable) you must be equally cautious in selecting them from other sorts similar in feather, constitution, and every other attendant. Having once arranged your brood, conform to your directions: and at a proper season you may commence

Breeding.

GENTLEMEN who have been in the habit of breeding, may have, from keeping the old brood too long together, brought their cocks to a stand still; when by a judicious mode of keeping in and in, that circumstance might not have taken place. It is generally admitted, that a cock is in full prime and vigour at two years old. But how frequently we find that cocks are continued with hens until they are six or seven years old. At three years old it is well known that he begins to lose that sprightly bloom he wears at two; his length of plume increases, and his hack exhibits too loose a texture, dangling over his throat. When this is discerned, we ought to substitute another in his stead; for he will become inactive, languid, and balk his craving partners—and you may breed in vain. The hens may in general be held to a longer date, as they retain the power to propagate beyond the period allotted to the cock. If this opinion is granted, the impropriety of continuing them beyond that period may account for the slow and inactive cocks so frequently met with.

To elucidate the foregoing remarks, in order to enable you to judge of the constitution of the brood-cock you mean to select, he should have every apparent feature of health: such as a ruddy complexion—his feathers close and short—not cold or dry—flesh firm and compact—full breasted, yet taper and thin behind—full in the girth—well coupled—lofty and spring—a good thigh—the beam of his leg very strong—a quick large eye—strong beak, crooked and big at setting on—not more than two years old, put to early pullets, or a blooming stag with two-year-old hens—and when a cock, with pullets of his

own getting. Great experience justifies me in vouching for the prosperity of the practice. In order that you may attain a sufficient number of in and in for your establishment hereafter, March, April, May, and June, if they have been early together, are the months to propagate: the latter month will not be too late for two-year-old cocks. For the two first days of a long main very early chickens have their inconveniences; and if you have none at hand till April they will probably be esteemed sufficiently early, as the springs are not so congenial for breeding as formerly.

In the choice of your hens let them be rightly plumed to your cock: nor let your choice fall upon those that are large but rather suffer the cock to make up deficiency in the hens being small: their shape should be similar to the cock—lofty necks—short and close feathered. A true blood hen is seldom or never gummy in the bone of her leg, but clean, sinewy, and, in length, proportionate to the rest of the body, with a well-set thigh, long, clean, and taper toes, so that they may, as far as is practicable, be as near in every respect to your original brood, as the nature of breeding will admit of. Deviation will take place in feather, &c. instances of which have frequently occurred with me, where Dame Nature has interfered in her varying change: that notwithstanding every well adapted system, she will prevail in surprising us with some productive alteration which inexperience is at a loss to account for. Fifteen years or more I had enjoyed an invariable production of the most complete black-reds bred by any amateur, without a single instance of deviation during that period, but on the sixteenth year I had several light Piles in one hatch;—no change of eggs could possibly take place—or was there a shadow of doubt of interference with any other cock, but a strong recurrence to the Pile at that distant period. A well regulated account of my cocks enabled me to ascertain that there had been a Pile in the cross five years previous to my having them out of Shropshire: so that they held highly regular for twenty-one years, not only in plumage but in every desired requisite. To have gone on with this deviation; would in the end have produced Spangles, &c. Of course the pullets were cast aside, and the cocks fought off. By a persevering conduct in selecting the darkest, or those most resembling your original attachment, is the surest criterion you can possibly pursue in keeping up, not only their feather, but constitution.