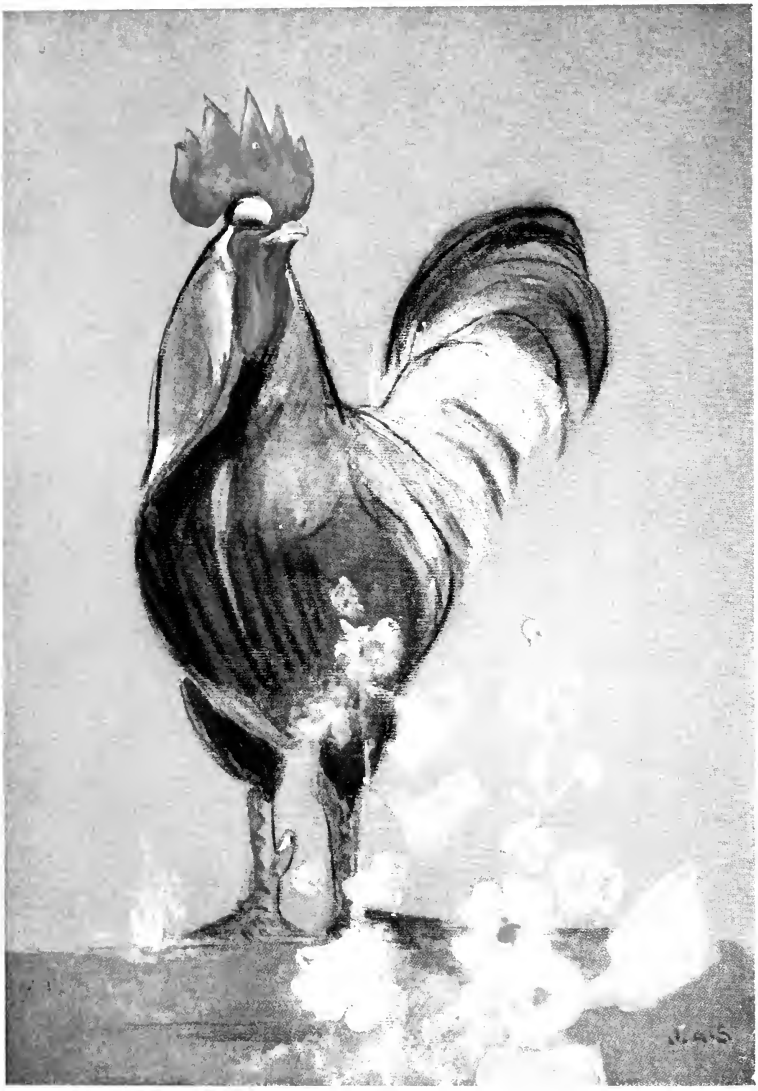
THE STORY OF CHANTICLEER



The Cock . . . alighted on the wall.

THE STORY OF CHANTICLEER

ADAPTED FROM THE FRENCH
OF EDMOND ROSTAND
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CHAPTER I

AMONG meadows, overlooking a valley, stood an old farm. The house was overgrown with wistaria, and a low moss-covered wall ran round the farm-buildings; from the fields the tallest flowers could peep over into the yard. Not far away lay the forest, where sometimes the jays could be heard laughing among the trees.

One summer evening, at the end of a long day of sunshine, when the hens were clucking happily in the farm-yard, and the chickens disputing about a worm, the warm silence down in the valley was broken by the sound of "Cuckoo! Cuckoo!"

"That's the Cuckoo!" said the White Hen to herself, and went on pecking.

The Grey Hen rushed up to her excitedly. "Oh, tell me," she cried, "is that the Cuckoo who lives in the woods, or the one who lives in the clock?"

"Cuckoo!" came again, but this time from farther away. The White Hen listened attentively. "It is the Cuckoo of the woods," said she.

"Ah," exclaimed the Grey Hen in a tone of relief, "I was afraid I had missed the other again."

"White Hen!" cried a voice

The White Hen wondered if a story she had heard in the farm-yard about the Grey Hen and the Cuckoo in the clock was true after all. She drew nearer to the Grey Hen, looking at her curiously. "Is it true then, that you love him?" she asked at length.

"Yes," replied the Grey Hen in a melancholy voice, "though I have never even seen him. You know he lives in a châlet hung in the kitchen?"

The White Hen nodded, and the Grey Hen went on:

"As soon as I hear him sing I run there, but alas, I only arrive in time to see him shutting his little door. But this

evening I mean to sit on the threshold." And she sat down there and then resolutely.

"White Hen!" cried a voice.

The White Hen looked all round with jerky movements of her head. "Who called me?"

"A Pigeon!" said the voice.

"Where?" asked the White Hen, still jerking her head this way and that.

"On the sloping roof."

She raised her head, and saw a little blue Carrier Pigeon. He was bearing an important letter, but, as he was obliged to pass over the farm he had ventured to alight for a few minutes.

He had been awaiting for many weeks the opportunity for a little talk, and the White Hen, he had thought, as he caught sight of her below him in the farm-yard, was just the person to tell him what he so much wanted to know.

However, he had scarcely begun to speak, when she caught sight of a seed, and quite unable to resist it, she hurried towards it, crying: "Excuse me one moment!" Another Hen, seeing her peck, ran up to her full of curiosity, and then, in a moment she was surrounded by all the other Hens, clucking and asking eagerly: "What's she got? Oh, what's she got?"

The White Hen swallowed, and looked round at them all in a leisurely manner. "Wheat!" she said at last.

Then her glance rested on the Grey Hen. There she sat before the farm-house door; but it was closed. How was

she going to see the Cuckoo, the White Hen wondered, and she went to ask her.

The Grey Hen, who had been longing to confide in some

They all nodded and smiled comprehendingly at one another

one, explained eagerly that when she heard the hour strike, she was going to put her head through the Cat's hole; and she pointed to a round hole at the bottom of the kitchen door — then at last she would surely see the Cuckoo.

But the Pigeon, meanwhile, was growing impatient; he had called "White Hen!" once, but she had not come,

so now he cried beseechingly: "Most White of White Hens!"

At that she hopped towards him. "Yes, most blue of blue Pigeons?"

"I should be so happy," he began, "If . . . if . . . but I am afraid I ought not to ask . . . if I could see . . ."

"What?"

The Pigeon was overcome with emotion. "Just for a moment . . ." he stammered.

The other Hens were listening, and they all cried out to him impatiently to tell them what it was he wanted to see.

"His comb!" he managed to say at last.

The White Hen laughed, and said to the others: "Ah, he wants to see . . ." and they all nodded and smiled comprehendingly at one another.

"Yes, I do!" cried the Pigeon, now very excited, and positively stamping on the roof.

"Calm yourself," the White Hen said, "you will break the roof."

"Oh, but we admire him so much," exclaimed the Pigeon.

The Blackbird poked his head out

Chanticleer was born there!

"Every one admires him," returned the White Hen coolly.

"And I've promised to tell my wife just what he's like," he went on.

The White Hen was pecking again.

"Oh, superb! No one can deny it."

"In our pigeon-cote we can hear him sing; his cry pierces the blue horizon. I think it is like a golden needle threading together the edges of the sky and the valley. Ah, the Cock!"

The little Pigeon's voice was full of admiration, and his eyes shone.

"For him all hearts go toc-toc!" said the Blackbird, running to and fro in his cage, which hung on the farmhouse wall, among the wistaria.

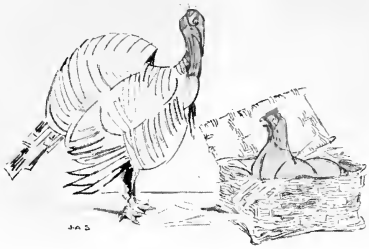
"Our Cock!" exclaimed a Hen.

The Blackbird poked his head out between the bars of his cage: "My, thy, his, her, our, your, and their, Cock!"

The Turkey had been listening in his supercilious manner to the conversation; he strutted now towards the Pigeon, and told him that Chanticleer would now soon be back from his rounds, so the Pigeon's wish to see him would be gratified.

The little Pigeon was delighted and murmured respectfully: "Ah, you know him, Sir?"

The Turkey gobbled and said in his important way that he had seen Chanticleer born.



"When the Peacock is away, the Turkey spreads HIS *tail!"*

"Oh, where?" asked the Pigeon eagerly, for he was interested in everything connected with the famous Cock he admired so much.

The Turkey pointed to a worn-out old basket with a lid. Chanticleer was born there! The Pigeon looked at the basket with deep interest, and then asked if the Hen who sat on the egg, still lived. The Turkey said she was inside the basket, and the Pigeon gazed at it reverently. How proud she must feel. But it was a humble kind of pride, the Turkey told him: "All she understands," he said, "is that her dear chicken is grown big, — for she is old and feeble now; but, when we tell her that he's growing, it always wakes her up." And he cried towards the basket: "Hi! He's growing!" And all the Hens cried together: "He's growing!" At this the lid of the basket was raised from within, and there rose up the ragged head of an old Hen.

The Pigeon, much affected at the sight of her, asked her if it gave her pleasure to know that He was growing.

The Old Hen nodded. "The corn of Wednesday does credit to Tuesday," she said, and disappeared. The lid of the basket fell down again.

The Turkey explained (he was very fond of explaining), "From time to time she opens the basket, and crack! out comes a proverb or a bit of old wisdom that she invents herself, or that she heard in the old days. And indeed," he added condescendingly, "she is often very apt."

The Old Hen appeared for an instant behind him. "When the Peacock is away, the Turkey spreads HIS tail!"

At that the Turkey turned round hastily, but the lid of the basket was closed.

"Is it true," the Pigeon asked the White Hen, "that Chanticleer is never hoarse?"

"Yes, it's true," said the White Hen, who was pecking again.

"And that his song makes work a pleasure, and puts to flight the birds of prey?"

"Yes," she said, between two pecks.

"And is it true that his song defends the warm and precious eggs, upon which the Hens are sitting; that often it prevents the Weasel from . . . from . . . having marks on his breast of . . . of . . ." The Pigeon was really rather embarrassed as to how to put his question politely. But the Blackbird helped him out: he was never at a loss: —

"Of Omelette?" he cried, putting his head through the bars.

"It's true," nodded the White Hen.

"And is it also true," continued the Pigeon, coming to the edge of the roof, and speaking still more eagerly, "that he has a secret — some secret that makes his voice so red, that the Poppy, hearing his 'Cock-a-doodle-doo!' moves as if she heard her name called?"

"Yes," said the White Hen shortly. She was getting rather tired of these questions.

"And no one knows the secret?" pursued the Pigeon.

"No!"

"He doesn't even tell his wife?"

"His wives!" the White Hen corrected.

"Oh! Has he several?" The Pigeon was rather shocked, for he had only one himself.

"He sings — you only coo," the Blackbird told him.

"Then even to his favourite wife he has said nothing?"

"Oh, nothing!" said the Houdan Hen, promptly.

"Oh, nothing!" said the White Hen, eagerly.

"Oh, nothing!" said the Black Hen, just as eagerly.

At this moment they saw a large green net rise over the wall, and move very gently towards a Butterfly, who had settled on the honeysuckle. The Blackbird, watching indifferently, remarked that it was easy to make a Butterfly — one merely took a W and put it on a Y; a Hen gave him an admiring glance: she thought him very clever. Meanwhile the net on its bamboo stick drew slowly nearer and nearer, and was almost over the Butterfly, when:

"Cock-a-doodle-doo!" sounded in the distance.

Warned by the cry, the Butterfly spread his wings, and

flew away. The net hovered disappointedly for a moment, then disappeared behind the wall.

"Chanticleer playing at chivalry!" jeered the Blackbird.

He told the Ganders to take the Geese to drink

"Chanticleer!" exclaimed the little Pigeon, trembling with emotion; he could scarcely believe the great Cock was coming, that he was quite near!

"After all, it's extremely easy to make a Cock too," began the Blackbird. "You take a melon for his body, and two pieces of asparagus for his legs, for his head an all-spice, and for his eyes two currants, a leek for his tail, and for his ear — a little haricot bean. And there you are! It's a Cock!"

The Turkey listened full of admiration: he too thought the Blackbird extremely clever; but the Pigeon said gently:

"A Cock without a crow."

"Yes, but except for that little detail, don't you see a resemblance?"

"Not at all!" cried the little Pigeon indignantly; and then held himself very straight and still, and gazed at the Cock, who had now alighted on the wall. To him, Chanticleer, with his trembling crest and golden collar, seemed some magnificent Knight of the summer. The evening sun shone on his lovely plumage as he stood there motionless, his head raised; he seemed to notice no one, but sighed, and in his throat sounded "Co . . . Co . . ." soft and tender. Then he spoke in a kind of ecstasy: —

"O Sun! O Light! I love you! You dry the tears of the little flowers; you enter into each one, and into every cottage; dividing yourself you yet remain whole, like a mother's love! I sing to you, for you will accept me as your priest: — you who shine

A young Cock was despatched to practise crowing four hundred times

amongst the soap bubbles in a tub of water, and who often, when you are about to disappear, choose some humble pane of glass, on which to fling your last good-bye.

"You shine on my golden brother up on the church tower; a clout set out to dry, you change into a banner: and when you come among the lime-trees, mysterious circles move along the ground, so lovely, one dare not walk!"

Chanticleer came down into the yard. The Turkey and the Blackbird were making fun together of what he had said, and the hens indifferently continued pecking and scratching; only the Blue Pigeon listened with delight.

It was a kind of hymn to the sun which Chanticleer sang: —

"O glory to you in the meadows, and in the vines; in the grass, in the eyes of lizards, and on the wings of swans! O you who make the great lines and all the little details. You double the number of the objects we love, giving to each a shadow, often more beautiful than itself. You put roses in the air, and flames in the fountains; shining in some obscure tree you make it wonderful. O Sun, without you, things would be only what they are!"

"Bravo!" cried the Pigeon. "Oh, I shall tell my wife all about it!"

Chanticleer now caught sight of him.

"Unknown Blue Bird," he said with courtesy, "I thank you. Will you tell her that I bow before her coral feet?"

The Carrier Pigeon flew away delighted.

"One must flatter one's admirers!" scoffed the Blackbird;

"Do tell me," implored the Black Hen
"The secret . . ." added the White Hen
"Of your song?" completed the Houdan Hen

but Chanticleer cried in a hearty voice: "Now, gaily to work, everybody!"

He told the Ganders to take the Geese to drink; and sent a Chicken to pick up at least thirty-two slugs, before the evening was over. A young Cock was despatched to practise crowing four hundred times, and to listen to the echo.

He was rather vexed, and Chanticleer told him that he had learnt in that way himself, whereupon a Hen who had a great opinion of herself, remarked: "Really, that's not very interesting!"

"Everything is," replied Chanticleer, and sent her to sit on some eggs.

Other Hens he ordered to gobble up everything which gnawed and nibbled amongst the vervain and cinquefoil, and to destroy the enemies of the cabbages. Then he saw the Old Hen, who had just raised the lid of the basket, and was looking at him with admiration. "Good-evening," said he. "Have I grown?" and he smiled at her affectionately.

"Sooner or later the Tadpole must become a Frog," she said, and the lid fell down again.

Chanticleer told his Hens to be off to the fields to pick up what they could, and the White Hen ran over to the Grey Hen and asked her whether she was going.

"Hush!" said the Grey Hen, "I am going to stay to see the Cuckoo," and she hid herself behind the basket.

Chanticleer was looking at the Houdan Hen, who wore

a discontented air he thought; he asked her what was the matter.

"Cock . . ." she hesitated.

"What?"

"I whom you like best . . ."

"Hush!" exclaimed Chanticleer.

"It annoys me not to know . . ."

"What?" he said again; but at that moment the White Hen approached.

"I, your favourite," said she in a wheedling voice.

"Hush!" said Chanticleer sharply.

"I want to know . . . "

But the Black Hen had drawn near quietly. "Cock . . ." said she.

"What?"

She spoke in a coaxing tone: "You are so especially fond of me . . ."

"Oh, hush!" said he.

"Do tell me," implored the Black Hen.

"The secret . . ." added the White Hen.

"Of your song?" completed the Houdan Hen; and drawing nearer to him she added: "I think you have some little brass thing in your throat!"

"Oh, yes," said Chanticleer, smiling, "and very well hidden too!"

But he had no intention of telling them his secret; instead he said that when they pecked among the flowers in the fields, they must take care not to spoil them, and to eat

only the insects which did harm there. Just as they were going, he called them back —

"And you know, when the Hens go to the . . ."

"Fields . . ." said a Hen, bowing.

"The first Hen . . ." said Chanticleer.

"Goes in front," said all the Hens together, bowing.

"Go!" ordered Chanticleer, and then suddenly called them back a second time, telling them in a grave voice, that they must never peck while crossing the road.

The Hens bowed and turned to the gate.

"Now you may cross!"

Just then from the distance, came —

"Pouh! Pouh! Pouh!"

A motor car was coming; and hurrying in front of his hens, Chanticleer spread out his wings, crying: "Wait!"

The hooting grew louder, and the Hens trembled as the car roared and whizzed past them. Only when the road was clear again Chanticleer stood aside for them to pass.

"How jolly," remarked the Houdan Hen, who crossed the last; "everything we eat will smell of petrol!"

And the Grey Hen hidden behind the basket, said to herself: "No one has seen me."

CHAPTER II

CHANTICLEER returned slowly to the farm-yard. Of late he had pondered much upon his secret: the famous secret of which even the little Pigeon and his wife down in the valley had heard and which all his Hens desired to know. Daily now it seemed to weigh more heavily upon him, making him long to share it with someone. But whom? Could so glorious a secret be confided to a frivolous Hen?

The Houdan Hen?

The Black Hen?

The White Hen?

The Grey Hen?

They all longed to know, but it seemed to Chanticleer impossible to tell any one of them.

He shook his feathers vigorously. No; he would put his secret out of his mind and confide in no one. He would be gay just because he was THE COCK.

At that thought he threw out his chest and strutted proudly about the yard and round the haystack.

"How beautiful I am!" said he to himself, thinking that the red upon his head, and beneath his eye, was brighter than a robin's breast, or the waistcoat of a bullfinch. He looked up at the sky, and then at the meadows; it was a

lovely evening: what should he do? Chat for a while with his friend the Blackbird, or have a little feast of barley perhaps?

After all, he had done his duty that day, and troubles might surely be left to take care of themselves till to-morrow.

Some of these thoughts he spoke aloud, and suddenly from the Watchdog's kennel there came a warning:

"Rrrrrrrr . . ."

The straw rustled loudly, there was a bark, and Chanticleer could just see a shaggy head, covered with wisps of straw, peering out at him from the darkness. It was Patou, the Watchdog; and Patou and Chanticleer were the best of friends; for had they not the same ideas about things?

Chanticleer was never happier than when singing to the sun and scratching the earth; as for Patou, when he wanted to enjoy himself thoroughly, he lay down on the earth and slept in the sunshine. This love which they shared for sun and earth was a bond between them. The old Watchdog used to explain that because he loved the sun so much, he always howled at the moon, and because he loved the earth so much he dug holes and pushed his nose into them. In the garden there were many traces of Patou's earth-love; indeed Chanticleer, more than once, had heard the gardener grumbling about it. But then to Patou much was permitted. Was he not the trusty protector of them all: guardian of the fields, the house, and the farm-yard? Above all he was guardian of Chanticleer's song, and when he growled, without doubt there was danger. But why should

he growl now, and what dangers could there be? To Chanticleer everything appeared as usual; surely nothing threatened his reign in the farm-yard? But, though he did not know it, he had enemies; the Blackbird and the Peacock were two of them, and there were others. When Patou told him this he was incredulous. What, the frivolous, mocking Blackbird, and the Peacock who thought of nothing but his clothes and the latest fashions, his enemies! What could they do? and he smiled indulgently. Patou tried to convince him that in many small and secret ways they were doing harm; they scoffed at everything, even at Chanticleer, and by spreading foolish affected ideas among the animals, they were destroying simple tastes in the farm-yard, and killing love and work.

"I laugh at him in detail, but I admire him as a whole"

But to Chanticleer, so frank and sincere himself, it did not seem possible that here in his own farm-yard he could be deceived. Faithful Patou was surely exaggerating. "And after all," he exclaimed, "what does it matter to me? I have my Song, and I have my Hens."

But Patou, old and wise, knew well it was foolish to put much trust in the hearts of Hens, or in the fickle farm-yard crowd; and he growled another warning so loudly, that the Blackbird, hearing, left his cage, and hopped along the twisted branches of the wistaria towards them.

"Rrrrrrr . . ."

"Quiet, Patou!" Chanticleer exclaimed. "This is a friend!"

But as the Blackbird was the kind of friend who says all sorts of things behind one's back, it seemed to Patou a good opportunity to get him to declare his honest opinion, before the Cock; did he really admire or jeer at Chanticleer?

"I laugh at him in detail, but I admire him as a whole!" replied the cautious Blackbird hopping about. "You see," he explained with a great air of frankness, "everybody enjoys my jokes about Chanticleer."

Patou was annoyed; he was very outspoken himself, and the Blackbird, he thought, always pecked two grains at a time as it were. "But what can be expected," cried he, "of a bird whose cage is left open in sight of the honeysuckle, and the woods full of lovely golden mist, and who goes inside to eat a stale old biscuit?"

"Ah, yes," replied the Blackbird, "but the golden mist might change into shot, you know."

Patou gave him a scornful glance: "Do you think the stag loves the forest less because one day he happens to

strike his hoof against an old cartridge? Ah, think of the violets in the woods, and liberty, and love!" The old Dog's eyes shone.

"Oh, all that's not worth the new trapeze I've got in my cage! Why I live like a Duke! I have filtered water to drink! I have a bathroom!"

Patou was infuriated by these boasts; he had always disliked the Blackbird and now he would have thrown himself upon him, but his chain held him back.

Just then was heard from the house: "Cuckoo!"

At the sound the Grey Hen sprang out from behind the basket, raced across the yard and thrust her head through the hole in the door. But alas, the Cuckoo did not appear again, and the Grey Hen was in despair; once more she was too late!

"It was only the half hour!" cried the Blackbird; and Chanticleer, who had been watching her in great surprise, asked her why she was not in the fields.

The Grey Hen turned round with a start.

"What are you doing with your head through the Cat's hole?" he asked.

The Grey Hen stammered: "I was . . . just . . . stretching . . . my neck. . . ."

"To see whom?"

"Oh . . ." She really could not answer.

"Whom?" repeated Chanticleer.

"Oh . . ." she said again.

"Answer!" he commanded.

"The Cuckoo . . ." murmured the Grey Hen at last, in a guilty voice.

Chanticleer was dumbfounded. "The Cuckoo! You love him then?"

When she owned that she did, he turned away from her, and she hurriedly made her escape from the yard. His Grey Hen in love with a clock! Where could she have learned such nonsense?

"From the Guinea Fowl," Patou told him.

"From that old hare-brained Guinea Fowl who paints her beak!" he exclaimed disgusted.

"And who has an At Home to-day!" added Patou.

"An At Home — Where?"

"Oh, in a corner of the kitchen-garden," said the Blackbird, "under the protection of the scarecrow. You see, owing to him it's more select: he keeps all the small and unimportant birds away."

Chanticleer was mightily astonished. The Guinea Fowl with an At Home day! The Blackbird imitated her voice: "On Mondays! From five to six!"

"The evening?"

"No, the morning!"

"The morning!" he exclaimed, more and more astonished. The Blackbird explained: "Well you see, they had to choose a time when the garden would be empty; and as five o'clock is the right hour, they decided on the early morning, when the gardener is not there."

"How absurd it is!" exclaimed Chanticleer.

There flew wildly over the wall a beautiful Golden Pheasant.

"Absolutely," agreed the Blackbird.

"YOU needn't talk," interrupted Patou, "you go yourself!"

"Well," the Blackbird admitted, "I do. They admire me so!"

Patou growled something.

"What's that you're muttering?" Chanticleer asked him.

"That one of these days a Hen will make you go too. Rrrrrr . . ."

"What! MAKE me go!"

"Yes, lead you by your beak!" Chanticleer was a little annoyed, but Patou went on. "When you see a new Hen whom you admire, you know, you lose your head!"

"Yes, you do," put in the Blackbird, "you begin to turn round and round," and he imitated the Cock, "and you sing Co . . . Co . . ."

"What a silly bird he is!" said Chanticleer.

The Blackbird continued to mimic him, "You trail your wing like this — and with your foot —"

Just then a gun was fired in the distance, and the Blackbird stopped, frightened. They all listened, Patou pricking his ears and sniffing the air. Soon another shot was heard, and just as the Blackbird ran to hide behind the Old Hen's basket, there flew wildly over the wall a beautiful Golden Pheasant, who dropped into the yard, crying, "Hide me! Oh, hide me!"

"Heavens!" ejaculated Chanticleer.

She ran to him. "Are you not the great Chanticleer? Oh, if you are, save me!"

Again a shot was fired; the Pheasant started violently, but she had run far, and was so breathless and exhausted that she could do no more; she fainted. Chanticleer held her up with one wing; he could not help admiring her lovely orange ruff, which spread itself out as she leaned upon him. Indeed her colouring was so glorious — red, green, and gold, blue and black — that, as with his other wing he splashed water over her from the drinking trough, he almost feared to spoil her.

The moment she recovered consciousness, she begged them again to hide her, and began to run to and fro distractedly, while the Blackbird, looking at the dazzling scarlet of her breast, exclaimed: "I can't think how they missed you!"

"Oh, they were so surprised," she said; "the gamekeeper only expected a grey lark, and when I rose he saw nothing but gold, and I saw nothing but fire! But the Dog pursued me, a dreadful Dog! . . ." then as she caught sight of Patou, she added hastily, "a sporting Dog!" And once more she implored Chanticleer to hide her. He was distressed, for it would certainly not be easy: she was so conspicuous. It would be like trying to hide a rainbow, he thought. However, Patou suggested that she could conceal herself in his kennel; it seemed a good idea, and she went in immediately. As the end of her long tail remained outside, and could be seen, Patou sat upon it.

She fainted

Scarcely had he done so, when over the wall appeared the drooping ears and loose hanging cheeks of Briffaut, the sporting Dog. Patou pretended to eat his supper out of the porringer which lay in front of his kennel. "How do you do?" he said, as indifferently as he could.

Briffaut sniffed. "Hum! What a good smell!"

Patou modestly showed his porringer, intimating that it must be his dinner which smelt so good.

"Look here!" said Briffaut quickly, "haven't you seen a Golden Pheasant pass?"

"A Golden Pheasant?" repeated Patou thoughtfully, while Chanticleer, though he was feeling anxious, contrived to say in a gay tone: "I say, how ferocious old Briffaut looks!"

"Well," drawled Patou at last, seeing that Briffaut was waiting for his answer, "I think I saw a Golden Pheasant over in the fields."

Briffaut sniffed again. Was that smell really Patou's dinner? As he sniffed once more Chanticleer grew really nervous, but fortunately at that moment a whistle was heard in the distance, and Briffaut obediently disappeared.

Just as they were all feeling extremely relieved, the Blackbird cried out: "Briffaut!"

"Heavens! What are you doing!" Chanticleer exclaimed.

The Blackbird called out louder still: "I want to say a word to you, Briffaut!"

"Haven't you seen a Golden Pheasant pass?"

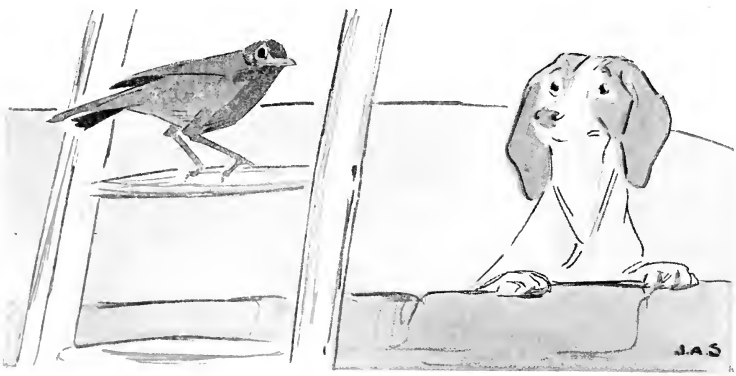
Briffaut's head appeared again over the wall. Chanticleer was angry, for he knew that the Blackbird was simply amusing himself at their expense.

"Look out!" said the Blackbird to Briffaut, "you are going to lose something!"

"What?" Briffaut demanded.

"Your cheeks!"

With a growl of fury Briffaut disappeared; and the Blackbird calmly went back to his cage.



Briffaut's head appeared again over the wall

CHAPTER III

WHEN Briffaut was at a safe distance, Chanticleer went to tell the Pheasant, who bounded out of the kennel, and began to walk excitedly about the yard. Chanticleer stood watching her. He admired her greatly, and as he gazed at her brilliant plumage it seemed to him that to fire a gun at her was like shooting at some lovely jewel.

Chanticleer was rather put out of countenance by this

Drawing nearer he asked:

"Do you come from the East then, like the day?"

"I live in the forest, but it is not from there I really come." She stopped before him. "From where then?" you will ask: "From Persia? From China? No one knows! But I am of an old and proud race, and it is quite certain that I was made to live happily beneath blue skies, and great conifer trees, and not to fly from a Dog!" her tone was scornful.

"See," she continued, making the colours on her neck play in the light, "only the dawn and I carry these shades. I am Princess of the under-woods, and queen of the forest-glades; and for my palace I choose the rustling iris which border the forest pools. Ah, how I love the forest; only there do I really live, am I really happy." And the lovely wild creature threw up her head and began to pace the yard again.

Meanwhile Chanticleer had begun to turn round and round, trailing his wing and making soft sounds in his throat, just as the Blackbird had mimicked him only a little while before.

The Golden Pheasant paused and watched him in silence. Imagining she was encouraging him, Chanticleer turned and turned, and trailed his wing more than ever. At last she said:

"Sir, if you are doing that for me, I had better tell you at once, — though perhaps it is very well done — that really, it has no effect on me!"

Chanticleer was rather put out of countenance by this.

"Oh, I know," she continued with a smile, "you are the famous Cock; and of course any Hen would be delighted to see you doing that for her. But I am not so easily affected. Besides, for my taste you are too famous a Cock, you know. The only Cock I would care for, would be one who was not glorious at all, and to whom *I* should be everything."

He admired her greatly.

There was a little pause. Then Chanticleer offered her his wing:

"Would you care to walk round the yard?"

"Yes," she agreed, "like two friends."

So he showed her round. First they passed the new drinking trough in galvanized iron (the one from which Chanticleer had splashed water over her when she fainted). That was ugly, he said, but all the rest was old, worn, and beautiful, and he pointed to the crumbling gateway, the stable door, the roof of the hen-house.

The Pheasant looked about her. Accustomed as she was to the dangers of the forest, it seemed strange to her that they could all live quietly and in safety here. Chanticleer said that they had nothing to fear, for the farmer was a vegetarian, and loved all the animals.

They passed the Cat asleep on the wall, looked at the hay-stack and the plough, and admired the lilac cascades of the wistaria flowers.

"And what does *he* do?" inquired the Pheasant, pointing to the Blackbird, who had just flown into the yard. He had hurried away to tell the Guinea Fowl of the Golden Pheasant's arrival, and she was now on her way to the farm-yard in a great state of excitement.

"The Blackbird?" Chanticleer replied. "Oh, he's extremely busy."

"What about?"

"Seeing that no one gets the better of him. That's very hard work, you know."

"Perhaps," she admitted, "but rather ugly work, it seems to me."

Then Chanticleer pointed out the grindstone and the old wall.

"When I sing," he said, "the lizards run all over the wall, and the grindstone bends over. I sing just here, you see, where I have scratched the earth, and when I have sung I drink in this old bowl."

The Pheasant smiled. "Does your song really matter at all?"

"Very much," returned Chanticleer gravely.

"Why?"

"That is my secret."

"And if I ask you to tell it to me?" She looked up at him in a very charming manner as she spoke, but Chanticleer turned the conversation, and showed a pile of branches tied together in a corner: "My friends the faggots!"

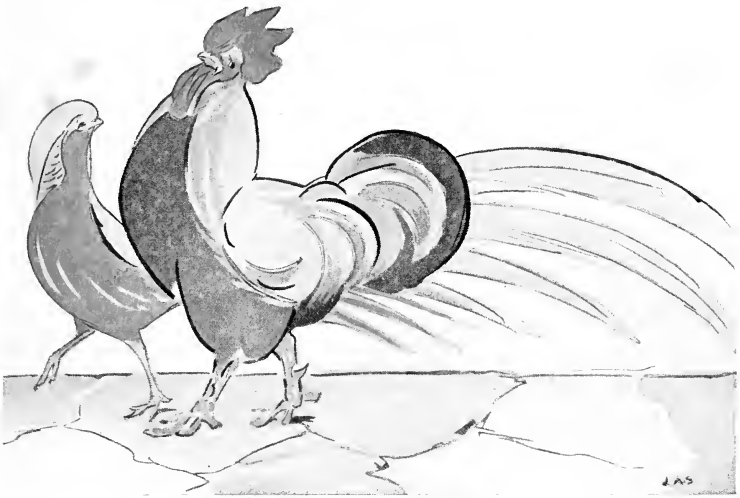
"Stolen from MY forest!" exclaimed the Pheasant. "Then what I have heard is true," she went on; "you have a secret?"

"Yes, Pheasant," he said, so drily that though she longed to know what it was, she felt that it would be useless to press him further just then.

He climbed on the wall at the end of the yard from whence the rest of the farm lands could be seen. In the evenings down there in the kitchen-garden, he told her, they dragged about a long serpent ending in a watering rose.

And this was all! To the Pheasant it seemed a very

limited world, full of poor and shabby things. Surely when Chanticleer saw a flight of birds crossing the sky, he too must long to go to new and wider lands; here everything was always the same.



"And if I ask you to tell it to me?"

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Chanticleer, "nothing under the sun is ever the same, because of the sun — because of light!"

"Light!" repeated the Pheasant, wonderingly.

"Yes, light!" said Chanticleer. He showed her a geranium which the farmer had planted.

"It is never twice the same red," he said; "and this old clog full of straw, how beautiful it is, and the wooden rake over there with some of the hair of the fields still in its teeth! And look at the old pitchfork in the corner: it sleeps standing up, and dreams of hay! And see the skittles in their tight stays dancing quadrilles together — which Patou interrupts! And round that enormous worm-eaten bowl over there, the ants make the tour of the world, in eighty seconds! No, none of these things are for two moments the same!" he declared, glancing round his little kingdom; then he smiled happily at the Pheasant:

"And as for me," he said, "for long now, a rake in a corner, — a flower, fill me with rapture. My wonder at all lovely things is never-ending, and has made my eye grow round!"

The Pheasant became thoughtful. Chanticleer's enthusiasm for these simple things was indeed very wonderful. One could be great then, in a quiet place like this, behind a farm-yard wall, and far from a stirring life? It was a new idea to her.

"When you know how to look at things, and how to suffer," said Chanticleer, "you know everything. In the death of an insect you see all sorrows, in a round of sky you can watch the stars pass."

The Old Hen pushed up the lid of her basket: "It's the water in the well which knows the sky best!" she cried.

Chanticleer hastened to introduce the Pheasant before

the lid should fall again, and the Old Hen winked at her. "Ah," said she, "he's a fine Cock."

"Yes," returned the Pheasant graciously, going towards her; "and interested in so many things, too."

Chanticleer was just telling Patou that the Pheasant was a Hen with whom one could really have an interesting conversation, when they heard piercing cries, and a loud cackling and chattering outside. Then, tumbling over one another, there rushed into the yard a crowd of Hens, Chickens, Ducks and Geese, headed by the Guinea Fowl, who, wildly excited, shrieked the moment she caught sight of the Pheasant:

"Oh, how lovely she is!" Then she rushed up to her, saying breathlessly: "We have run here to make your acquaintance!"

The admiration was general; they made a circle round the Pheasant, all talking and clucking together. Chanticleer stood a little apart, watching her. How well she walked! He glanced at his Hens — better than his Hens! The Guinea Fowl presented her son, who like everyone else was full of admiration for the stranger.

Chanticleer then told his Hens to go in, and the Pheasant was so full of polite regret at their departure, that he was obliged to explain that they always went to bed early.

The Hens were annoyed at being sent off, and they mounted the ladder to the hen-coop slowly.

"Yes," said one, "we are going into our house."

The Hens were annoyed at being sent off

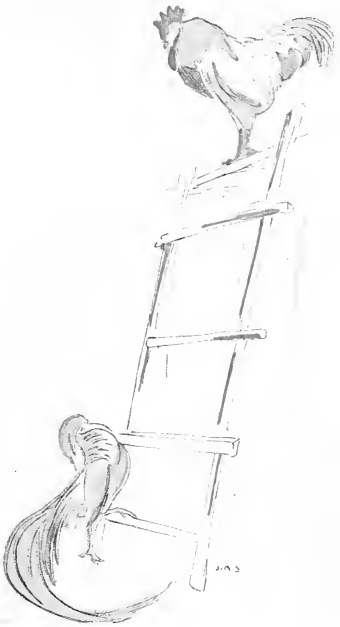
"Good gracious! By a staircase!" exclaimed the Pheasant, unable to conceal her astonishment.

The Guinea Fowl approached the Pheasant and chattered eagerly to her; she hoped they might become friends, but the Pheasant explained that she was going back to the forest. As she spoke a gun was again fired; and as the shooting was evidently not yet over, they all agreed that it would be unsafe for her to venture out. Chanticleer especially was most anxious that she should remain.

But where could she spend the night?

Patou offered his kennel once more; he could sleep outside, he said, when she asked what he would do. To the Pheasant it seemed a dreadful thing to be under a roof all night; but she resigned herself: after all it was only till the next morning.

The Guinea Fowl gave a cry of excitement. The next morning would be her AT HOME! Oh, would the Pheasant come, she asked impulsively. Chanticleer told her to speak lower, and climbing the ladder, he inspected the yard. For darkness was coming on now, and he looked to see if all were in their accustomed places for the night: the Turkeys on their roost, the Ducks in their little pointed house, the Chickens safe beneath their mothers' wings.



The Pheasant looked up at him from the bottom of the ladder

Meanwhile the Guinea Fowl, determined if possible to secure the Pheasant for her At Home, whispered to her: "The Peacock will be there . . . we shall be underneath the currant bushes, you know, . . . from five to six. . . . I think the Tortoise will perhaps join us. . . . Oh, and the Houdan Hen has promised me the Cock."

Chanticleer heard the last remark; so did the Houdan

Hen, who put her head out, and told Chanticleer in an authoritative voice that he must go.

"No!" said Chanticleer.

The Pheasant looked up at him from the bottom of the ladder.

"Yes!" she said in a gentle tone.

"Why?"

"Because," returned the Pheasant, in a whisper, "you said 'no' to the Houdan Hen."

Chanticleer hesitated. "I . . ." Then he said firmly: "No, I shall not go. Good-night."

The Golden Pheasant went into the kennel; she felt a little annoyed by Chanticleer's refusal.

He called softly: "Pheasant!"

The night came on, bluer and bluer; one after another the animals fell asleep: Patou before his kennel, the Guinea Fowl murmuring over and over again to herself: "from five to six,"—the Blackbird with his head beneath his wing.

Chanticleer still stood at the top of the ladder, then think-

ing all were asleep he was about to go in, when he saw a Chicken run out. He scolded him and chased him back; then finding himself close by the kennel he called softly: "Pheasant!"

"What?" said the Pheasant in a sleepy voice from amongst the straw.

Chanticleer hesitated. ". . . Nothing," he said, but still hesitated; "nothing . . ." he said again with a sigh, and then slowly mounted the ladder. "It is time," he said aloud at the top, in a rather sleepy voice, "it is time for me to shut my eyes too," and he went into the hen-house.

There was silence.

Then on the wall glistened two green eyes. "And time for me to open mine!" It was the Cat.

Immediately two yellow eyes shone in the darkness up on the barn roof.

"And mine!" said a voice.

Two more yellow eyes opened, and then two more. "And mine! And mine!"

The forms of three Owls could just be distinguished. The two green eyes and the six golden eyes gleamed at one another.

"Cat, are you there?"

"Owls, are you there?"

The Blackbird woke up. He heard an Owl say: "There's a great plot against him!"

"This evening?" asked the Cat.

"Yes! Yes! Yes!" said the three Owls.

The Cat spat joyfully. "Where?"

"In the hollies! hollies! hollies!"

"What time?" asked the Cat.

"Eight! Eight! Eight!"

Bats came zig-zagging through the air; the night seemed to be juggling with them. "Are they on our side?" asked the Cat, watching them.

"Yes!" said the Owls.

Then was heard the scratching of the Mole. "Is the Mole for us?"

"Yes!" said the Owls again.

The Cat turned towards the house: "Little Cuckoo, don't forget to strike eight!"

"Is the Cuckoo for us too?" inquired the Owls.

"Yes," returned the Cat, "and oh, Night-Birds, there are even some of the Day-Birds on our side too!"

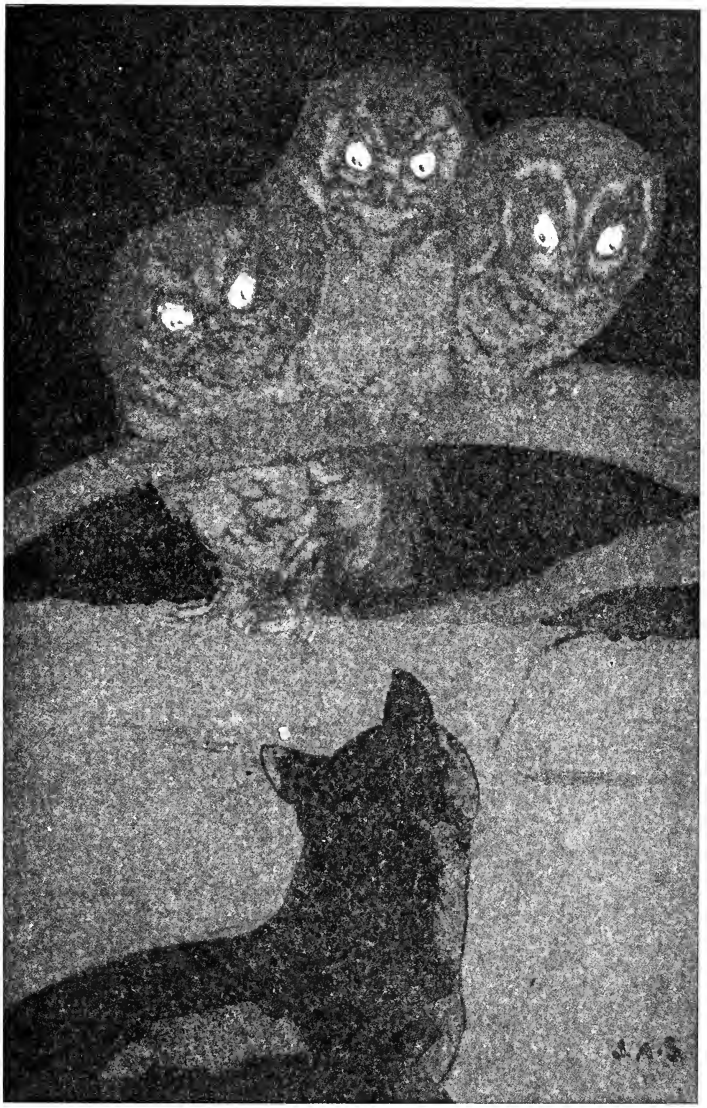
And indeed the Turkey and some other birds had hidden themselves in a corner of the yard. They came out now.

"Dear Round-Eyes," said the Turkey, "is the plot to-night, and are you all going?"

It was to-night, the Owls said, and all the Round-Eyes of the neighbourhood would be there.

The Blackbird wished he could go too. Then Patou growled in his sleep and the Cat assured the startled Night-Birds that he was only dreaming; but when the next moment, Chanticleer sounded a little "Co . . ." from the hen-house, the Owls were terrified.

"It's He! He! He!" they cried trembling.



"There's a great plot against him!"

"Fly!" advised the Turkey.

But the night was very dark, and the Owls knew that by merely shutting their eyes they would become invisible. So all the shining eyes closed, and darkness reigned again.

Chanticleer appeared at the top of the ladder. "Did you hear anything, Blackbird?"

"Yes, old chap!" replied the Blackbird, and the Owls shook with fear.

"There's a great plot," he went on.

"Ah?" exclaimed Chanticleer.

The Blackbird put on a melodramatic tone: "Against you. . . . Tremble!"

"Humbug!" cried Chanticleer, quite reassured, and he went in.

The Blackbird was delighted with himself.

"I have deceived no one," he thought.

But the Owls were a little doubtful about him: was he on their side, they wanted to know, as they opened their eyes again. The Blackbird said ". . . No . . ." but he would like to go and hear the plot. The Owls consented, saying that the Night-Birds never ate Black-Birds. They gave him the password: "Shadows and Loot!"

Meanwhile the Pheasant found it very stuffy in the kennel, and waking up she put her head out for a breath of air; when she caught sight of the Night-Birds she started back. They all shut their eyes; then, hearing nothing further, they opened them and went on talking.

But the Golden Pheasant watched and listened.

A voice from the group which had hidden in the yard, cried: "Good luck to you, Owls!"

"Thank you," said an Owl, "but tell us why so many of you are on our side?"

It was the Cat who answered first. "Ah," he said, as if something forced him to speak: "the night brings out things which one hides, even from one's self — I don't like the Cock because the Dog likes him!"

"My reason for not liking him," said the Turkey, "is that I knew him when he was a mere chicken, and I will NOT acknowledge him Cock!"

"And I," said a Duck, "don't like him because he has no webs on his feet, so that when he walks he leaves the print of a star."

A Chicken said that because he himself was ugly he did not like the Cock; another disliked him because he had his portrait on so many plates; and a third because his statue was on the weather-vanes.

"Cuckoo!" cried the little Cuckoo in the kitchen clock.

"I will NOT *acknowledge him Cock!"*

From behind the clouds the moon peeped out, and a white ray fell upon one side of the yard. The Mole put his head out, and an Owl who saw him asked him why he disliked the Cock.

"Because I've never seen him," replied the Mole in a sulky voice.

"And you?" said the same Owl to the Cuckoo, who had just called "Cuckoo" for the seventh time.

"Because he never needs winding up. Cuckoo!"

It was eight o'clock.

The Owls opened their wings. "And we don't like the Cock," they said, "because . . . because. . . ." And rising in the air, they flew silently away into the blue night.

The Pheasant came slowly out of the kennel.

"And I," she said, "am beginning to love him!"

CHAPTER IV

THE place the Owls had chosen for their meeting lay just beyond the farm garden. It was a wild, uncultivated slope, at whose summit stood a great cluster of dark and gloomy holly-trees. The ground was choked with brambles, nettles and hawkweed, amongst which wound a faint path worn by the cow-herd in his daily passing. By night it was a drear and melancholy place, but when the sun rose all was changed, for then one looked upon the lovely valley, dotted here and there with groups of poplars, and guarded by the surrounding hills.

The hollies grew so thickly that no moonlight could filter through, and the darkness and silence were so intense, that at first an Owl, perched upon a tree trunk, seemed alone in that gloomy spot; only the two circles of his widely opened eyes shone in the darkness, making it more profound.

Suddenly he began to call the roll of the Owls; and at every name he screeched, two large luminous eyes opened:

"Strix!"

"Scops!"

"Grand Duke!"

"Yew-Tree Owl!"

"Tawny Owl!"

"Church Owl!"

"Long-eared Owl!"

On every side of the Screech Owl eyes shone like phosphorus; Owls of all kinds and sizes were upon rocks, stones, branches, and brambles, one above the other, forming a great circle.

"Ivy Owl!"

"Hawk Owl!"

"Snowy Owl!"

"Horned Owl!"

"Caparacoch!"

(No eyes opened at that name.)

"Ca-pa-ra-coch!"

Caparacoch flew into the hollies, and settling hurriedly on a branch opened his eyes. He was breathless, and as soon as he could speak excused himself, saying that he lived far away.

"Then you should hurry more," returned the Screech Owl severely.

When the roll call was over the Grand Duke advanced, and said in a loud and solemn voice: "Before we commence, let us cry the cry that makes us one!"

Then through the night surged a cry, long, wild, and mysterious, broken by the beating of wings:

"Long live the Night!"

And the Owls whispered and chuckled, hooted and sang of what were to them the glories of the night; the darkness, and the silence in which they pounced upon unsuspecting enemies, cracked their bones and drank their blood. Hail

to the great night whose only fault was its stars! Long live its frightening shadows among which they reigned as kings! Long live vengeance! Long live the Night!

At last the hooting ceased, and in the silence that succeeded it, the scratching of the Mole was heard. The Blackbird whispered: "He came by the Underground, I suppose!" In the darkness too the Cat could be heard licking his paws. They were all there; never had the mournful old holly-trees witnessed such a gathering.

And now the word was with the Screech Owl, for he was the oldest of them all: "Night-Birds!" cried he, and all the luminous eyes turned to him, "we are here among the blackest and most ancient trees, ready to do evil; we desire evil; let us not fear to speak our thought!" He paused, and then in a voice of hatred screeched: "The Cock is a thief!"

"A thief!" they all cried, "a robber! He steals from us!"

"What?" inquired the Blackbird, not much impressed.

"Health! Joy!" they cried, hooting savagely.

The Blackbird hopped lightly on some faggots: "But how?"

"By singing! Oh, when he sings we are filled full, full of most bitter hatred, and we suffer and we ache — for he foretells . . ."

"Oh, yes!" said the Blackbird carelessly, "the light!"

At his words so strange a stir passed through them all, that he rushed in terror to hide behind some faggots.

"Never say that word!" screeched the Grand Duke, "for when it is said a longing is put into the night."

"Well," said the Blackbird coming out, "we'll say the day."

Again the same movement passed through them all; they rocked as if in pain, and cried in agonised tones: "Not that word! Not that word!"

The Blackbird hid himself anew. How terrible they were!

"Say that which will come," said the Grand Duke after a pause; and the Blackbird took courage once more. "Never mind what he foretells," said he, resuming his gay and indifferent manner, and ignoring the hooting by which the Owls sought to prevent his saying the dreaded words again: "that which will come, will come!"

"But it's torture to us to hear it!" cried the Grand Duke in a voice of despair. "That metallic cry of his recalls what, alas! we know too well is true."

"True! True!" came from them all in mournful, wailing tones, and they writhed and twisted in pain, for the mere thought of day was horrible to them.

"He sings," said the Grand Duke indignantly, "when the night is still young and sweet . . ."

"He is a robber! A robber!" they cried.

"He spoils what is left of the night," went on the Grand Duke.

"Spoils it! Spoils it!" they wailed. It was like a dirge rising and falling in the night. Then from all sides, one

Not that word! Not that word!"

after another the Owls cried out the wrongs they believed the Cock had done them:

"He makes me quit my watch upon the Rabbit's burrow!"

"I must leave the game-feast!"

"And I the meetings of the witches!"

"His song in my ears, I know no longer what I am doing!"

"I do evil in haste!"

"And I do it ill!"

"And I am forced to take only what I need!"

"I know the night is becoming less and less black each moment!"

"When his metallic song cuts the night, I twist like a worm in the half of a fruit!"

The Blackbird listening to all these plaints was puzzled. Why did the Owls hate Chanticleer so bitterly? "After all," he began aloud, "all the other Cocks . . ."

"We do not fear THEIR songs," interrupted the Grand Duke, "it is HIS which must be stilled!"

"Stilled! Stilled!" moaned all the Night-Birds, flapping their wings.

There was a pause; then the Screech Owl remarked in a more cheerful tone than he had yet used: "The Blackbird, at any rate, has done something for us."

"I?" cried the Blackbird in astonishment.

"Yes, you've scoffed and jeered!"

And at that they all rocked to and fro: "Ha! Ha! Ha! Hoo! Hoo! Tu-whit! Tu-whoo!"

"Sh . . . !" hissed the Grand Duke, spreading his wings, and immediately they resumed their threatening silence.

"Still he doesn't care if he is thought ridiculous," said the Screech Owl in a tone of regret, "he sings all the same, and his song hurts us as much as ever. Now that dandy, the Peacock . . ."

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" chuckled the Owls again, and "Sh . . ." hissed the Grand Duke.

"The Peacock works on our side too," continued the Screech Owl; "he makes Chanticleer appear old-fashioned! Still, it must be admitted that, out of fashion or not, his song is no less of a nuisance to us!"

A savage cry broke from an Owl: "Let us kill the Cock!" and a chorus of voices cried: "Yes! Yes! Kill the Cock! Kill the Cock! Hoo-hoo! Hoo-hoo!"

The Grand Duke quelled the tumult once more by flapping his wings furiously.

"Night-Birds, stand!" he cried as soon as he could make himself heard, and they all rose up, puffing out their feathers, drawing themselves erect, with spread wings and wide eyes; they made the night seem more immense. Then in the darkness a voice cried: "How can we kill him? When he comes forth we can no longer see!" It was true, and they groaned at the thought.

Suddenly from the upper branches of the tallest holly-tree, a little voice piped out: "Duke! Will you hear my plan?"

"Scops, I will hear it," replied the Grand Duke graciously.

A little Scops Owl . . . advancing with tiny leaps towards the Grand Duke, bowed before him

A little Scops Owl dropped down from the holly, and advancing with tiny leaps towards the Grand Duke, bowed before him. Then, turning to the assembled Owls he cried: "All you who see by night, do you know that in the gardens over there on the hill, there lives a man who rears strange birds? He has Cocks of the most splendid and extraordinary races. Now the Peacock, who is a great discoverer of rare birds, and loves nothing more than to make strange animals known, has a plan!" He paused, and stepped forward in a confidential manner: "You all know he has but one cry which pierces the ear-drum, and he cannot endure the song we know of which pierces the shadows." (They all nodded in approval of this way of referring to Chanticleer and the day.) "So, to-morrow, in the kitchen-garden," continued Scops, "he intends to present all these strange Cocks to the . . ."

"Guinea Fowl!" they all cried laughing.

Little Scops chuckled: "Ha! Won't their magnificence put Chanticleer in the shade!"

Someone reminded him that the Cocks were always kept shut up, but Scops had thought of a trick to overcome that difficulty. He explained that when the girl who fed them came to open their cages and scatter grain, he would fly out from a tree into her face, and she, terrified at the sight of so unlucky a bird as an Owl, would be sure to run away and leave the cages open. Then the Cocks could all be taken to the kitchen-garden to meet Chanticleer.

The Blackbird said that Chanticleer had refused to go.

"He'll go," the Cat remarked, and the Blackbird looked at him in surprise; how could he know?

"I saw how interested he was in a certain Pheasant. He will go," said the Cat, as if there were no doubt whatever about the matter.

"So," thought the Blackbird, "the Cat sees when he is asleep."

Scops continued to unfold his plan: "Now it must be admitted," said he, "that Chanticleer, though famous, has remained simple and unaffected. Well, when he arrives at this At Home and sees all the farm-yard snobs in a ridiculous state of excitement (as they certainly will be) about the gorgeous foreign Cocks — there'll be trouble!" His tone was significant.

"Ah!" exclaimed the Grand Duke with immense satisfaction. He was the first to see Scops' meaning. "A cock-fight!"

Scops nodded, and all the other Owls nodded too, as they took it in.

It was certainly a splendid idea, they thought.

"But, Scops," objected the Cat suddenly, "supposing Chanticleer wins?"

"Let me tell you," replied Scops, "that among the fancy Cocks there will be a real fighting Cock, a famous fighter who has scratched out the eyes of the most renowned champions, and who kills his enemies with two terrible steel spurs that Man — ingenious Man — has attached to

his legs! To-morrow evening" — Scops' voice rose in triumph — "Chanticleer will be eyeless and dead!"

At that the Owls screeched in savage glee, swelling and puffing out their plumage, and swaying from side to side in their strange manner. Above their screeching and hooting the Grand Duke's voice was heard:

"We'll go and look at his corpse, and we'll take his proud, red comb — and eat it!"

"Eat it! Eat it! Ha! Ha! Ha!"

Their gruesome laughter echoed through the night, till the Grand Duke commanded silence again.

"Dear me," said the Blackbird; "now, if I took things seriously I should go and tell the whole affair to the Cock — but I shan't!" and he gave four little hops: "Because I'm sure — that everything — will end — very well —"

"Very well indeed!" said Scops ironically; "and," continued he, in a tone of growing excitement, "if all the strange Cocks don't go back to their cages, we'll eat them too, for of what use are they?"

"And for dessert we'll eat the Blackbird!"

The Grand Duke whispered in his neighbour's ear: "And for dessert we'll eat the Blackbird!"

"And then," Scops was continuing, when from the distance was heard:

"Cock-a-doodle-doo!"

A sudden silence fell. Scops stopped abruptly, his body bent and bowed down almost to the ground; the swollen forms of the Owls seemed to shrink, their puffed out feathers drooped; they appeared quite thin. Blinking and bewildered, they asked in trembling tones: "What is it? What's the matter?" Then, opening their wings, they began to call one another, while the Blackbird hopped to and fro, crying: "Are you going? There's no hurry!"

They paid no heed.

"It won't be daybreak for a long while yet," he went on; "you've plenty of time!"

"No! No!" they said, blinking helplessly.

The Blackbird watched them, stumbling and slipping on the stones and brambles, entangling themselves in the most absurd manner in their wings, and all the while blinking, blinking their great eyes, crying: "It hurts! Aï! Aï! It hurts!" Then one after another they flew away till only the Grand Duke remained, muttering furiously: "Oh, this horrible Cock! How on earth can he have a voice which hurts our eyes?"

And he, too, flew heavily away.

The Blackbird heard them calling to one another as they went, and looking over the valley he saw dark wings crossing its blue depths, plunging, turning, growing smaller and smaller in the distance, till at last none remained; he was alone.

He looked round, hopped, laughed to himself: "Why,

I declare, this is the time some people have supper! Now I wonder if I could find a grasshopper!"

At that moment there was a rustling in the bushes close at hand, and the Pheasant bounded out.

"You!" he cried astonished.

She had hidden herself at some little distance, and had heard, she told him in a trembling voice, part of the Owls' plot. She panted as she spoke. Oh, it was horrible, but the Blackbird was Chanticleer's friend, and perhaps he had been able to find out everything, and could save him.

The Blackbird, rummaging gaily amongst some moss, laughed to himself, wondering what he could find for supper. "A haunch of Owl would be good!" said he.

The Pheasant stared at him in surprise, then seeing he paid no attention to her, but continued to scratch merrily in the moss, talking to himself about his supper, she cried out in distress: "Oh, answer me!"

"What?" he cried, astonished at her anxiety.

"This plot," she said.

The Blackbird replied calmly: "It all went off extremely well!"

"What?" The Pheasant thought she had not heard him aright.

"The shadows were a lovely blue, and the Owls said wondrous things!" he said, with his head on one side.

"Heavens!" ejaculated the Pheasant, "they plotted his death!"

"No, his decease! It's much less dangerous!"

"But —"

"Don't get excited! After all, there may be nothing at all in anything they said."

"But these Owls —" she began.

"Oh, it's an old game!"

"What?"

"It's a stale old game!"

"Ah? . . ." she was bewildered.

"Do you know," said the Blackbird in a pitying voice, "they have actually got eyebrows all round their eyes? That's really more than I can stand! And did you see the Grand Duke's eyes? They are like two lighthouses, and the Horned Owl's remind me of acetylene lamps. Then all this silly plotting and scheming!" and the Blackbird laughed and winked, and hopped and joked, explaining everything away till the Pheasant felt thoroughly bewildered. "For," said she to herself, "I never quite understand people who joke."

But surely the Blackbird would not laugh if Chanticleer were in any real danger, she thought. Oh, how afraid she had been for him!

"It will be all right!" the Blackbird assured her, "don't worry, everything can be arranged."

She felt consoled, and began to think she had greatly exaggerated Chanticleer's danger, though it still seemed to her that they ought to warn him. But the Blackbird pointed out that to do so would be most unwise, for Chanticleer would then certainly go and challenge his enemies.

The Pheasant admitted that he probably would. Really the Blackbird had so much common sense that it would be well to be guided by him!

"Co . . ."

They turned round. They could hear Chanticleer advancing towards them.

"Who's there?" he called.

"I," replied the Pheasant.

He recognised her voice, and asked if she was alone. She looked meaningly at the Blackbird and answered: "Yes!"

The Blackbird understood, and said he would go and have his supper; then, signing to her not to speak a word of the affair, he disappeared behind some old flower-pots which had been left among the brambles.

CHAPTER V

CHANTICLEER was delighted to find the Pheasant up so early, but when she said that she was remaining only for the sake of the Guinea Fowl's At Home, he was disappointed. He felt that he detested the Guinea Fowl; but when he said so to the Pheasant, she begged him to come to the At Home all the same. She wished to see whether or no he would do what she asked. He refused.

"Very well," said she, "we had better say good-bye."

"No."

"You won't come?"

He was silent for a little, then quite suddenly he said he would go; but he was angry with himself for consenting. He thought it weak.

The Pheasant smiled, for she was not serious in asking him to go; she drew nearer to him, and said in her gentlest and most persuasive voice:

"Chanticleer, tell me, do tell me, a little of your secret?"

He trembled. The secret of his song!

"Tell me," she pleaded again.

"Oh, Golden Pheasant!" his voice quivered, "my secret!"

When she told him how sometimes, as she stood at the borders of the woods in the first rays of light, she had heard his song, he could not help being flattered at the thought

of this glorious forest creature listening to him in the dawn.

Then suddenly he drew back. How could he tell his secret? She was watching him, and slowly, in a languid tone, she began to recite:

"The Cock and the Pheasant. A Fable . . ."

"A Cock loved a Pheasant," said Chanticleer.

"But he would tell her nothing . . ." said the Pheasant.

"The moral . . ." went on Chanticleer.

"Oh, it wasn't a nice moral at all!" she exclaimed; but he came close to her: "The moral is that your dress makes a whispering sound like silk," he said.

She drew away from him, and asked haughtily why he did not go and talk to one of his Hens; and at that, beside himself with anger, he stamped and pranced.

"Oh, don't be angry!" she cried, putting her beak to his; "sing Co . . ."

He sang "Co . . .", furiously.

"Ah no! better than that!" she begged.

"Co . . . ." This time it was a long and tender warble.

"Look at me . . . tell me your secret. . . . You know that you are longing to!"

It was true; he longed to tell her. But somehow he felt that he ought not to. He walked away, thinking; then turning abruptly, he went up to her: "Will you be worthy of being chosen? Is your breast a true red to the very depths?" He looked at her searchingly.

"Speak!" she said.

"Tell me, do tell me, a little of your secret."

And then he told her.

"Look at me, Pheasant," he began. "Try to discover my vocation yourself; my body is the sign of it, and in my lines you may read my destiny — bent like a trumpet, curved like a living hunting-horn, I am made for sound to wind and sink in, as the King-Duck is made to swim. But wait . . . Have you seen me proudly scratch the soil with impatient claws, seeming to search for something the while?"

The Pheasant said she supposed that he was looking for grain; but it was not so, for if by chance he found any, disdainfully he gave it to his Hens.

"What are you searching for, then," she asked, "when you claw and trample the earth?"

"For my standing place! I never sing till all my eight claws have dragged away the grass and pebbles, and reached the sweet black soil. Then in close contact with the good earth, I sing . . . and that's already half the mystery, Pheasant, half the secret of my song. For it is not a song that is found by searching; it is the kind which rises like sap from the soil of one's country. And the hour above all others, when the sap rises in me, is the hour when the dawn is hesitating at the edge of the dark sky. Then I am sure of myself, and though I tremble, I know that I am needed. I bend, and I curve, and the earth speaks into me as into a shell; ceasing to be a bird, I become a trumpet, through which the earth's cry escapes to the skies!"

"Chanticleer!" exclaimed the Pheasant.

"And this cry which rises from the earth," he went on,

eager now to pour out all his thoughts to her, "is for the light, for that golden thing called Day. It is the cry of the rose trembling in the dark alone, of the hay longing to be dry, of the tools forgotten by the reapers and fearing to rust, of the wet fields praying for a little rainbow in each green blade, of the stream desiring to be seen to its depth, even of the mud wanting to be dry earth once more! All things long for their colours and shadows again, wondering what they have done to be deprived of the light; and I hear their cries: the great cry of the fields asking to know again the growth of crops; the cries of the beasts, of the trees and the fruits, and the cry of the bridge trembling and longing for people to pass and shadows to play over it. I hear the little pebbles pleading to be made warm, in case a hand shall touch them, or an ant run over them! All things cry towards light, towards beauty and health, wanting to live, and sing, to work, and be glad in the sunshine!" Chanticleer paused. "And when all these cries reach me," he went on slowly, "I try to make myself great, that I may hold them all; and for one moment I keep them back to gain strength, and then my song bursts out, so clear, so strong and proud, that the horizon is seized with a rosy trembling and obeys me!"

"Chanticleer!"

"I sing, and in vain the night offers me the twilight. I sing on, and then suddenly — I start back, dazzled, to see that I am all crimson, and that I, The Cock, have made the sun rise!"

Wonderingly the Pheasant said: "Then the whole secret of your song . . . ?"

"Is that I dare to fear that if it were not for me the East would sleep!" And he walked away, proudly, though he was not thinking of his own glory, but of light; for he never sang merely that the echo might answer him; to sing was his way of striving and believing, and if his song was, as some said, the proudest of all songs, it was because he sang so clearly — in order to make all things clear.

But the Pheasant, now that his eager tones were no longer sounding in her ears, had withdrawn herself, as it were, from the glamour his wild belief had thrown over her, and when he turned to come back to her, she exclaimed: "But these are mad words! You . . . you . . . bring . . ."

"That which opens flowers, hearts, eyes, and windows! Yes!" he cried; then added quietly: "when the sky is grey, it is because I have sung ill."

"And what about your singing in full daylight?" she asked.

"I am practising; or else I am promising the ploughshare, the spade, and harrow, and scythe, to fulfil my duty of waking."

"But what wakes you?"

"The fear of forgetting!"

"And do you really think," she asked, "that at your voice the whole world is inundated with light?"

"I'm afraid I don't know very well what the whole world is," Chanticleer replied simply. "I sing for my valley,

hoping that in every valley some other Cock does the same."

Then Chanticleer realised that it was time to call the dawn, and began to mount the slope. He felt sure that once the Pheasant had seen him make the sun rise, she would never again call his belief mad. How he loved her! She inspired him, and it seemed to him that a song, more beautiful than any he had ever sung, was surging within him; and something told him that because of her, and because of love, the dawn would be the fairest the valley had ever seen. Was not the sky already paler, because his first song had told the sun to wait behind the horizon?

The Pheasant studied his form outlined against the sky. How beautiful he was! "So beautiful," she said to herself, "that I feel all he says must be true!" And she looked again at his gaily coloured body, and at his scarlet comb, which reminded her of the pointed flames of a forge fire she had once seen. How proudly he bore himself; was he laughing with glee in those red wattles of his? Now he stood superb, erect, and filled the air with a piercing:

"Cock-a-doodle-doo!"

"Obey me!" he cried to the East, "I am the Earth and Work!"

She heard him chuckling mysteriously: "Yes, yes, Month of July!" To whom could he be talking? She listened again.

"Yes," he was saying, "I'll give it to you earlier than the

Month of April!" He leaned to right and left: "Yes, Bushes; yes, Ferns . . ." and caressing the ground with his wing, he murmured: "Yes, Grass." For having become the voice of all these things, he must not forget the least among them, and he turned to speak to other invisible beings: "A golden ladder? Yes, little Atoms, you shall have a golden ladder that you may all dance in the air together."

"Cock-a-doodle-doo!"

The Pheasant, watching the sky and the valley, thought that a blue shiver passed over the fields, and that a star grew dim. Did Chanticleer then put out the stars when he called the day? But he told her proudly that he did not know how to dim anything, but she would see how he could light the world. And even as he spoke, the blue of the sky was no longer blue, it was green; the green changed to orange, and the distant plain was purple; everything seemed to end in fields of heather. When yellow gleamed among the pines Chanticleer filled the air once more with:

"Cock-a-doodle-doo!"

For the yellow must turn to gold, he said, and the gold to grey, and the grey to white:

"Cock-a-doodle-doo!"

". . . See! See!" he cried to the Pheasant, "at my voice the East has grown dappled! Horizon," he commanded, "show once again the lines of the poplars! Cock-a-doodle-doo! Hills in the distance, make clear your shapes! Cock-a-doodle-doo!"

The Pheasant, bending over the valley, saw a wonderful world coming forth from the shadows — a world created by Chanticleer, she thought, quite carried away by his wild enthusiasm. Then close beside her she heard his voice: "Pheasant, do you love me?"

She was silent; then she said slowly: "Anyone would love to be in the secret of him who wakes the dawn."

"You make me sing better," he said fondly. "Come closer, help me."

At that, she bounded to him, crying: "I love you!"

She could conceal it no longer. To him it seemed that every kind and tender word she uttered, became so much more sunlight, and he told her that if she were to say that she loved him best in the world, he could gild a mountain in a moment. When she whispered that she did, he looked up at the highest mountain and cried:

"Cock-a-doodle-doo!"

Gold shone upon the peak, then crept down the violet-coloured slopes, till they gleamed golden too. It was so lovely that she held her breath. Then in the growing light they saw the distant villages.

"Cock . . ." his voice broke, and the Pheasant feared he could sing no more; but grey things still floated here and there — he could, he must! And drawing himself up, he sent forth two desperate cries. She almost feared he would kill himself, but she need not have been afraid, for Chanticleer was never more alive than when he sang.

"Cock-a-doodle-doo!"

Looking up at the sky, they saw the morning star fade away, and from little cottages in the distance, ribbons of smoke rose, and floated in the dawn. And all this was Chanticleer's work, thought the Pheasant, her proud head bent to him; how splendid he was! As for Chanticleer, he gazed at her wing, shining in the increasing light, and at her ruff, thinking that never had his daily duty been so delightful to perform, for he gilded at one and the same moment her brilliant plumage and his own loved valley. He glanced round; and seeing that shadows lingered here and there, and that there was still work to do, he began:

"Cock . . ." and then paused, listening. The songs of other Cocks mounted from the valley; they too were singing in the rose-coloured dawn. They believed in the light when they saw it, but Chanticleer had faith even during the long darkness of the night, and sang the first of all. Now he stood upon a hillock, and he and all the other Cocks together sang:

"Cock-a-doodle-doo!"

And hearing them the Pheasant grew indignant: how should they dare to mix their voices with Chanticleer's? She did not know, what he presently told her, that their cries, though tardy, were so numerous that all unconsciously they hastened the coming of the dawn.

As the chorus died away, Chanticleer caught sight of a cottage grey and shadowy still: "There must be gold upon that little roof!" he cried, "and green in the hemp-field over there!"

"And white on the road!" cried the Pheasant in a transport of joy.

"Blue in the river!"

"Cock-a-doodle-doo!"

Suddenly the Pheasant gave a great cry: "The sun! The sun!"

"I see him!" cried Chanticleer rapturously; "but I must draw him forth from the wood!" And together they stepped backwards, making movements, now as if they were dragging him, now as if enticing him towards them, Chanticleer lengthening out his song the while:

"Cock . . ."

("He's coming!" cried the Pheasant.)

"a . . . doodle . . ."

("from behind . . .")

"doo! . . ."

("the elm!")

"Cock-a-doodle-doo!" sang Chanticleer once more, in a harsh and desperate voice; then they both staggered back as the light flooded over them. It was done at last! They gazed at the sun, and Chanticleer, murmuring that "it was indeed an enormous sun," fell back exhausted. The Pheasant would have liked him to salute the risen sun with one more song, but Chanticleer had no voice left; he had given it all. Just then the Cocks down in the plain sang again, and he said: "It does not matter, you see, that I cannot greet him. He has a flourish of trumpets from the others."

"But when he rises, is YOUR trumpet never sounded for him?"

"No, never."

"But then," she said rebelliously, "perhaps he thinks THEY have made him rise!"

"Never mind!"

"But . . ."

"Never mind," said Chanticleer again; "come close to me, I want to thank you. Never has the dawn been so successful."

She came, but still not satisfied: "I do not understand. What will make up to you for your trouble and for your pain?"

"The sounds of awakening rising from the valley," he said.

The Pheasant listened, and indeed faint sounds reached her ears. She ran up the slope to the highest point overlooking the valley, and leaned over. Chanticleer, lying with closed eyes, pleaded faintly to her to tell him the sounds she heard.

"I hear a finger knocking upon metal in the sky," she said.

"The Angelus!" Chanticleer's voice was a murmur.

"And some other knocking, which sounds a little like Man's angelus, following God's . . ."

"The forge!"

"Now I hear lowing . . . and a song . . ."

"The plough!"

The Pheasant listened silently for a while, and then, puzzled, she said: "A nest seems to have fallen into the little street!"

"The school!" Chanticleer's voice was gaining strength, and he raised himself a little.

"Tiny imps I cannot see, are slapping one another in the water . . ."

"The washing!"

"And from every side come . . ." she leaned farther over in the effort to see. "What are these things — iron grasshoppers rubbing their wings? . . ."

Chanticleer stood up eagerly, and in a voice grown strong and glad again he cried: "Ah! If they're sharpening the scythes on their whetstones, it means that the reapers will cut the corn!" He listened with delight to the many sounds, growing louder now, and mingling: bells, hammers, laughter and songs; the grating of steel, the cracking of whips. Every one, every thing was working. And he had done this! Was it possible? And as he asked himself he was seized with a violent trembling. The moment he dreaded above all others was upon him.

"Oh, Pheasant, help me!" he cried in a voice of anguish, gazing wildly round him, as if he knew no longer where he was: "Have I made the day come?" he asked incredulously. "Why? How? Where? Oh, as soon as my reason returns to me, I become mad! For I, — who think I can light the skies . . . oh, it's horrible!" His voice was agonised.

"What is it?" asked the Pheasant anxiously.

"You will tell nobody if I tell you?"

"No, indeed, my Chanticleer," she assured him in her gentlest voice.

"You promise? Ah, if ever my enemies should know of it!"

"Chanticleer," she murmured, deeply touched that he should confide in her.

"It is that I feel so unworthy of my glory," he said, and his voice shook. "Why should I be chosen to chase away the dark night? As soon as I have lighted the skies, the pride which buoyed me up is dashed away, and I sink. What! can I, so tiny, make the immense dawn? And having made it, must I make it again? I cannot! I shall never be able to do it again! Oh, comfort me!" In his voice was the sound of tears.

"Dear Chanticleer," she murmured again and again, lovingly.

Presently he looked up at her. "I feel that I am responsible," he said. "The whisper for which I wait when I scratch the soil, will it ever come back? The future seems to hang on something — I know not what — which may never return again. Do you understand my torment now? Ah, think of the certainties of others! The Swan stretches his neck beneath the waters, sure of finding weeds; the Eagle drops from the sky, sure of striking his prey; and you, Pheasant, are certain of finding Ants' nests in the earth. But I? — my calling is a mystery, and I go in

fear of to-morrow; can I be sure of finding my song in my heart?"

The Pheasant put her wings fondly about him. "Yes, yes," she said confidently, "you will find it."

Her words were sweet to Chanticleer. "Tell me again, tell me . . ."

"You are beautiful," she whispered.

"No, that — I don't care about that . . ."

"You have sung well."

"Say that I have sung badly, but that I have made the . . ."

"Yes, yes," she said hurriedly. "Oh, how I admire you!"

"No, tell me that it's true . . . what I have just said . . ."

"What?"

"That it is I who make the . . ."

"Oh, my glorious Chanticleer," she cried at last. "Yes, it is you who make the sun rise!"

"Hallo, old chap!" cried a voice, and to Chanticleer's dismay the Blackbird suddenly appeared before them. He bowed to Chanticleer, whistling admiringly.

Was it possible that this mocking bird had heard his secret, Chanticleer wondered anxiously, and he whispered hurriedly to the Pheasant: "Don't leave us alone." He felt he could not bear laughter just then.

"Oh, it was lovely," said the Blackbird, bowing again.

"Where on earth have you sprung from?" Chanticleer asked him.

The Blackbird pointed to an old flower-pot, which lay

upon the ground, empty and overturned. "I was in there," he said, "eating an earwig, when suddenly — ah! I can't describe how fascinated, how dazzled I was!"

"But . . ." Chanticleer began.

The Blackbird gave a little mocking laugh. "You don't

"Hallo, old chap!" cried a voice

enjoy hearing that a flower-pot is occasionally not quite as deaf as usual!"

"So you listen in a flower-pot!" Chanticleer's tone was scornful: "Can one really be brought so low?"

But the Blackbird paid no attention. "Oh," said he,

"I was so excited about it all! I peeped through the hole!"

"You were looking?" the Pheasant asked.

"Yes, of course! You see this black hole at the bottom of the pot? I poked my yellow beak through there. Really it was all too lovely to resist, you must forgive me; I have the best of taste, you know!"

"I," said the Pheasant, "can forgive you anything, since you admire him so much!"

Perplexed, Chanticleer watched the Blackbird hopping excitedly to and fro, and whistling: "Phew . . . Phew . . . It was lovely! Phew . . . Phew . . ." He had never seen him so enthusiastic before; but — was he scoffing?

"When I'm lost in admiration of you," cried the Blackbird, "I don't send a Carrier Pigeon to tell you about it, you see! Phhhew . . . Phew . . . The singing Cock! The shining dawn!"

"I think," said the Pheasant to Chanticleer, "I can leave you with him."

"But where are you going?" he cried.

"I am going to the —" she began, but the Blackbird interrupted: "Why, of course, the Cock's morning serenade has brought even the Guinea Fowl's day!"

Chanticleer asked her in a whisper if he should come too; but she told him that now she had seen him in his great hour, she no longer desired to persuade him to go to the At Home.

He looked at her a little reproachfully: "But you are going yourself?"

"I want to show your sun on my dress!" she exclaimed gaily, glancing down at her plumage, which flashed and gleamed in the sunlight. "I shall come back. Stay here."

"Yes," the Blackbird put in, "it is better that he should stay away."

"Why?" asked Chanticleer, looking at him closely.

"Nothing!" said the Blackbird quickly, and began his raptures again, while the Pheasant, whispering to Chanticleer that he had dazzled even the Blackbird, flew away.

"After all," said Chanticleer simply, looking at the Blackbird who was nodding his head gravely at him, "you are not really bad; I said so to Patou."

"Don't," said Chanticleer

The Blackbird nodded again: "You know, my dear fellow," he said, "it's a perfectly splendid idea — to think of fascinating your Hens by persuading them that you make the sun rise!"

Chanticleer drew back.

"Oh, WHAT an idea! However did you think of it? Ph — Ph —" The Blackbird whistled admiringly. "You must have been hatched in the egg of Columbus!"

"Don't," said Chanticleer in a suffocated voice.

"And the little roof that had to be gilded," went on the Blackbird. "Oh, how pretty it was! And all the little Atoms, how nice they were!"

Chanticleer shrank back. "Oh, be silent!" he cried in a voice quite hollow with pain.

But the Blackbird said with a laugh: "And the fit of humility! that was well managed if you like! Of course, the fact is, you feel the day is coming, and then you cry: 'Cock-a-doodle-doo!' Nothing easier!"

"You miserable wretch!" Chanticleer burst out furiously; and for a moment the Blackbird was surprised, and fluttered back a little; then it seemed to him that he understood; he winked and said slyly: "Ah, you know how it all comes about!"

Chanticleer looked him straight in the eyes: "You may know; I don't."

"Why, it's a system!" exclaimed the Blackbird.

Chanticleer's voice trembled: "Scoff at everything, but not at that, if you care for me in the least," he said.

"Oh, I care for you."

"Not much," said Chanticleer bitterly, watching him hop gaily to and fro. He longed to convince him, if it were only for one minute. He followed him; pleading with him,

endeavouring to prove what he so firmly believed himself; but at every word the Blackbird hopped and whistled and joked, and at last Chanticleer grew annoyed. "Let us be serious," he said, "for we have wings." At that idea the Blackbird only laughed the more, and then Chanticleer exclaimed angrily: "But at one moment surely you believed I made the sun rise; didn't you see the light on the mountains, didn't you see the sky?"

"I couldn't see the sky," said the Blackbird; "I only saw the earth through that little black hole; and while you sang I looked at your feet."

"Ah . . ." murmured Chanticleer sadly; he gave it up. "I pity you — go into the shadows, obscure Blackbird."

"Yes, celebrated Cock!"

"For my part, I run towards the sun," cried Chanticleer. "Blackbird, do you know what makes life worth living?"

"Oh, for goodness' sake, don't let's have a discussion! It's so bad for one's feathers!" cried the Blackbird, preening himself.

But Chanticleer was determined to tell him: "It's striving that makes life worth living! And because you mock at all effort, I despise you. Look at this delicate rose-coloured Snail: all alone he tries to silver that faggot: I respect him."

"And I gobble him up!" cried the Blackbird, swallowing him at a single gulp.

Chanticleer drew back with a cry of horror. "You have neither heart nor soul! I have had enough of you!" He moved away.

"Oh, but I've wit!" cried the Blackbird hopping on a faggot; "and I wash my claws of you; after all, what your enemies say is true!"

Chanticleer turned round. "Who are my enemies?"

"The Owls!"

"Idiot! It becomes easier and easier to believe in my destiny if the Owls are against me!"

"Make yourself quite happy then," returned the Blackbird spitefully, "they find the light a little too strong, and they have got someone to cut the throat of him who reckons the hours — you!"

"Whom have they got?"

"A brother of yours!"

"A Cock?"

The Blackbird was enjoying himself: "A regular Saint George! — who's waiting for you!"

"Where?"

"At the Guinea Fowl's. He's one of these birds armed for battle with spurs; he would make mince-meat of us if we were to go . . ." The

He turned the pot over on the Blackbird

cunning Blackbird was watching Chanticleer out of the corner of his eye; he saw him turn abruptly.

"Where are you going?" he cried.

"To the Guinea Fowl's!" Chanticleer's head was high.

"Ah, true! I was forgetting you think yourself a Knight!" And pretending to try to prevent Chanticleer from passing, the Blackbird cried: "Don't go!"

"Yes!"

"No!"

Chanticleer stopped in front of the flower-pot, and putting on a great air of astonishment, he exclaimed: "Dear me! You never got into this pot?"

"Indeed I did!"

"How?" Chanticleer asked, still preserving his air of surprise. The Blackbird immediately hopped into the pot, and put his beak through the hole at the bottom. "Like this, you see; through this little black hole I looked at . . ."

"The earth?" cried Chanticleer. "Well then, just take a look at the sky, through a little blue hole!" And with a powerful stroke of his wing he turned the pot over on the Blackbird, and as he walked away little smothered whistles and sounds of flapping and struggling reached his ears.

CHAPTER VI

WHEN the Golden Pheasant flew into the kitchen-garden, such loud sounds of clucking, quacking and chattering reached her that she had no difficulty in discovering the whereabouts of the currant bushes.

The reception had evidently commenced. The Guinea Fowl was hurrying to and fro, greeting her guests in her best society manner with the assistance of her son, who now and then corrected her pronunciation — for he was a student of languages.

The moment she caught sight of the Pheasant the Guinea Fowl ran to greet her, delighted that after all she had come. As they stood talking, a soft murmur of music began to fill the air. The Pheasant raised her head, and saw that it came from the Wasps, circling about the fruit trees. She listened with delight to their song and nodded as she made out the words:

"Murmuring . . . murmuring . . .
Over the walls,
With songs we're surrounding
Ripe fruit that falls,
Murmuring . . . murmuring . . ."

The Guinea Fowl, noticing that several of her guests were listening to this music, told them proudly that not

"The Duck! The Gander! The Turkey! The Blackbird!"

only had she the Wasps to sing at her party, but the Grasshoppers, and the Bees too.

No less than three bands! In fact, everything was done in the best style; there was even a Magpie, in black coat and white tie, to announce the guests. He stood beside the round hole made by the hens at the bottom of the hedge, and as each guest came through, called out his name in a loud voice: "The Duck! The Gander! The Turkey! The Blackbird!"

The Pheasant thought the Blackbird looked rather ruffled as he came over to talk to her, but when he told her the story of the flower-pot, and how by dint of flapping his wings he had at last managed to overturn it and make his escape, she laughed merrily.

By this time there were several new arrivals, and finding herself jostled by the crowd, the Pheasant suggested that they should stand for a moment behind a watering-can away from the crush. As they made their way towards it, she caught sight of Patou jumping into a wheelbarrow near at hand, and nodded to him. He looked rather wild and anxious; the end of his chain was dangling from his collar, and rattled against the barrow as he put his shaggy head over the edge. Chanticleer had told him of the plot afoot, and in a fever of alarm for his friend, he had snapped his chain, and galloped off to the currant bushes. He growled now between his teeth as he caught sight of the Blackbird behind the watering-can.

Just then the Grasshoppers broke into song; they leaped

The Grasshoppers broke into song

and danced in the sunshine, singing over and over again: "Thank you, Sun, thank you! Thank you, Sun, thank you!" For never while the sun shines, do grasshoppers weary of dancing and giving thanks. Then, above their singing, rose the Bees' song, full of the fragrance of flowers and of their sweetness, of velvet bodies plunging in iris and buzzing in lilies, of all the joys of pollen-gathering.

Perhaps the Guinea Fowl did not know what the songs were all about, but she listened with a proprietary air; it seemed to her that she had everything and everybody worthy of note at her At Home, and the idea intoxicated her so much that she could not possibly keep it to herself, but ran about telling her guests how even the flowers, the vegetables, and the fruits had come (she pointed them out proudly), as well as the lovely Golden Pheasant in her fairy dress. "And the Finch!" she exclaimed, as a little Finch chirped up in a pear-tree. "And the Tortoise!—Oh, no," she corrected herself, "he isn't here yet! But see, I've the Humble Bee! How do you do?" and she raced after him among the holly-hocks, where he buzzed to and fro.

The Cat . . . was quietly observing things

The Blackbird tapped his forehead with his wing: "She's quite mad!" he said to the Pheasant, who laughed and

The Peacock entered slowly

came out from behind the watering-can to see what she would do next.

The Guinea Fowl had given up the chase of the Humble Bee, and was pecking a cabbage leaf; when a shower of dewdrops fell she shrieked with delight: "The dew has come to my party!" Presently a breeze arose, and some cherries from the great tree overhead dropped down on a visitor's head. "Dear me!" she exclaimed, "I've the wind too!" and away she whirled to say "How do you do" to the Guinea Pig, and some Hens who had just arrived.

Who and what else COULD she say had come to her party, the Blackbird wondered, as with a sarcastic smile he watched her; then, looking round to make sure he was not noticed, he hopped towards the Cat, who, stretched out on the branch of an apple-tree, was quietly observing things.

"Cat," he whispered, looking up, "what about the plot?"

The Cat, from his branch, could see over the hedge, and

The strange Cocks

staring into the distance, whispered in reply: "It's all right; I can see the Cocks coming!"

Just then the Guinea Fowl rushed up to the Pheasant and asked her if she knew that the Chickens hatched in the incubator were at her party? On hearing that the Pheasant had not yet met them, she hastened to introduce them: "These are all from the last drawer," she was saying, when:

"P-A-O!" sounded shrilly from the other side of the hedge, and everyone hurried towards the hole.

After a moment or two, the Peacock entered slowly, his head held very stiff and high. They all crowded round him; some of the young Chickens and Ducks really believed that a word from him would make them famous, and several older

Hens and Ducks, as well as the Guinea Fowl, who might all have been expected to know better, eagerly asked his opinion of their clothes. He criticised them with great affectation, and they repeated all he said, nodding sagely at one another; for they considered him THE great authority on the fashions and the newest words. But Patou, in the wheelbarrow, thought he had never seen anyone so absurd.

Then the Magpie announced the first of the strange Cocks:

"The Cock of Braekel!"

The Guinea Fowl said she feared there must be some mistake; but when the huge white Cock, with a black frilled ruff, bowed before her, assuring her there was none, she was so surprised, and so dazzled, that she could say nothing; and immediately the Magpie announced:

"The Ramelslohe Cock!"

"The Wyandotte Cock!"

"Good Heavens!" cried the Guinea Fowl, in a great commotion. Her son ran to look through the hole in the hedge, and when he cried out that ever so many more Cocks were coming, she gave a shriek of excitement. The Magpie continued to announce:

"The Mesopotamian Cock, with two combs!"

"The Orpington Cock!"

"The Scotch Grey!"

"The Hamburg Cock!"

"The Burmah Cock!"

"The Bagdad Cock!"

"The Japanese Cock!"

and about twenty more! As she received them the Guinea Fowl grew so madly excited, that she no longer knew what she was doing or saying. In vain her son begged her to keep calm.

"How can I, when never in the whole world can there possibly have been so wonderful a kitchen-garden-party as mine!" thought she, as Cock after Cock entered, each stranger than the last.

All the farm-yard beasts marvelled at their extraordinary aigrettes, their dazzling plumes and feathers, their head-dresses, combs, and ruffs, which waved to and fro, filling the kitchen-garden.

There was a Cock with a tail eight yards long, and another with a huge stiff ruff; one had horns on his head, and one a kind of gold tricorn, another stiff feathers round his eyes. Some had extra claws; some double, some triple combs, and one had no comb at all!

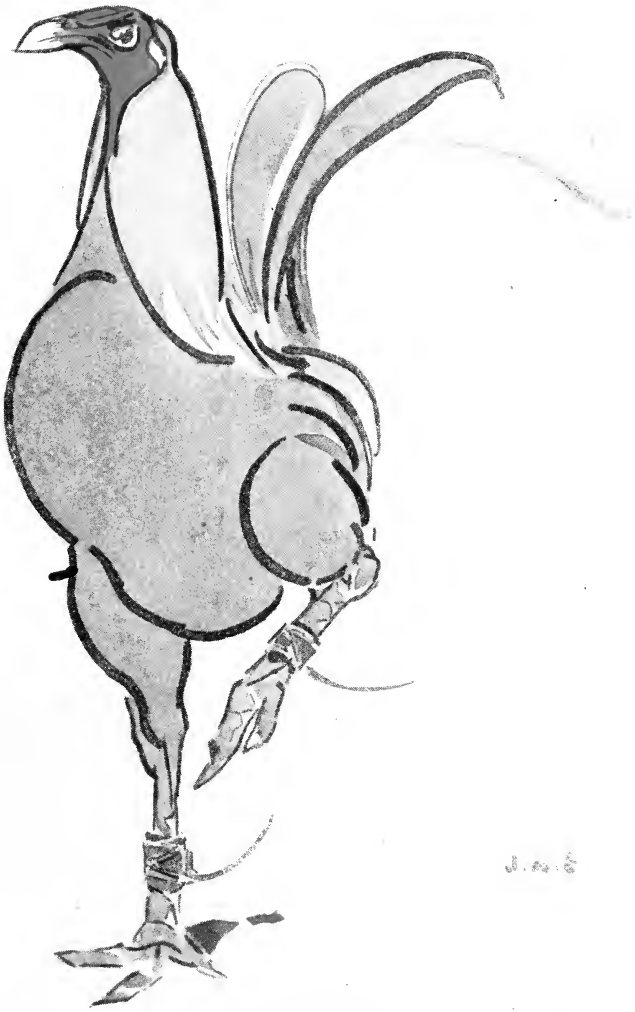
This last was the famous Fighting Cock, and before he was lost in the crowd, the Cat from his tree pointed him out to the Blackbird.

"The Cock Bans-Backin of Thuringia!"

"The American-Cochin-Plymouth-Rock!" shrieked the Magpie, who by this time, like everyone else, was in a frenzy of excitement.

When he turned again eagerly to the entrance hole he saw Chanticleer standing there.

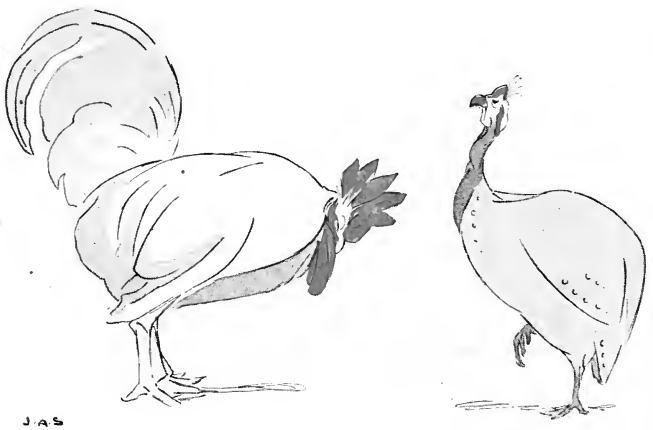
Cock after Cock entered, each stranger than the last.



This last was the famous Fighting Cock

"Announce me," said Chanticleer, "simply as: 'The Cock.'"

The Magpie looked him up and down, and then said disdainfully: "The Cock!"



Chanticleer bowed to the Guinea Fowl

Chanticleer bowed to the Guinea Fowl, begging her to excuse him: "For," said he, "I fear I have only the ordinary number of claws, and really, I don't know how to conceal it, — a scarlet comb; and for my coat, — can you forgive me for being so dull? — only the green of April, and all October's gold! I'm quite ashamed," he went on, and

smiled, "for you see I am nothing but the Cock, made like a Cock, and still to be found in the old farm-yards. The Cock whose form yet lives on church-towers, in artists' eyes, and the playthings of children!"

"Oh," said the Guinea Fowl, "of course you are excused; you are in working costume, as it were!"

"The two Pigeons!" announced the Magpie, and Chanticleer turned with relief from all the frilled and plumed Cocks, thinking to see the little Blue Pigeon and his wife, but to his astonishment, in hopped two strange Pigeons, who turned somersaults, crying: "We are Tumbler Pigeons! Hop! Hop!" and lost themselves in the crowd.

"The Swan!" announced the Magpie.

Chanticleer stepped forward. Now surely there would be something natural and pleasant to look upon; but he drew back again, for the Swan was black!

"He is but the shadow of a real Swan," said Chanticleer to himself, and he jumped upon a bench from which he could see through a gap in the hedge.

There lay the green fields where cows were grazing peacefully with their calves beside them. Chanticleer gazed contentedly at the quiet scene. Simple, natural things still existed, then; he had almost doubted it, surrounded by these strange animals, "who," said he to himself, "really ought to be in Barnum's show of monsters!"

The Pheasant had been watching him. She had guessed his feelings and had no admiration either for the Cocks. She came now to stand beside him; and after a silence:

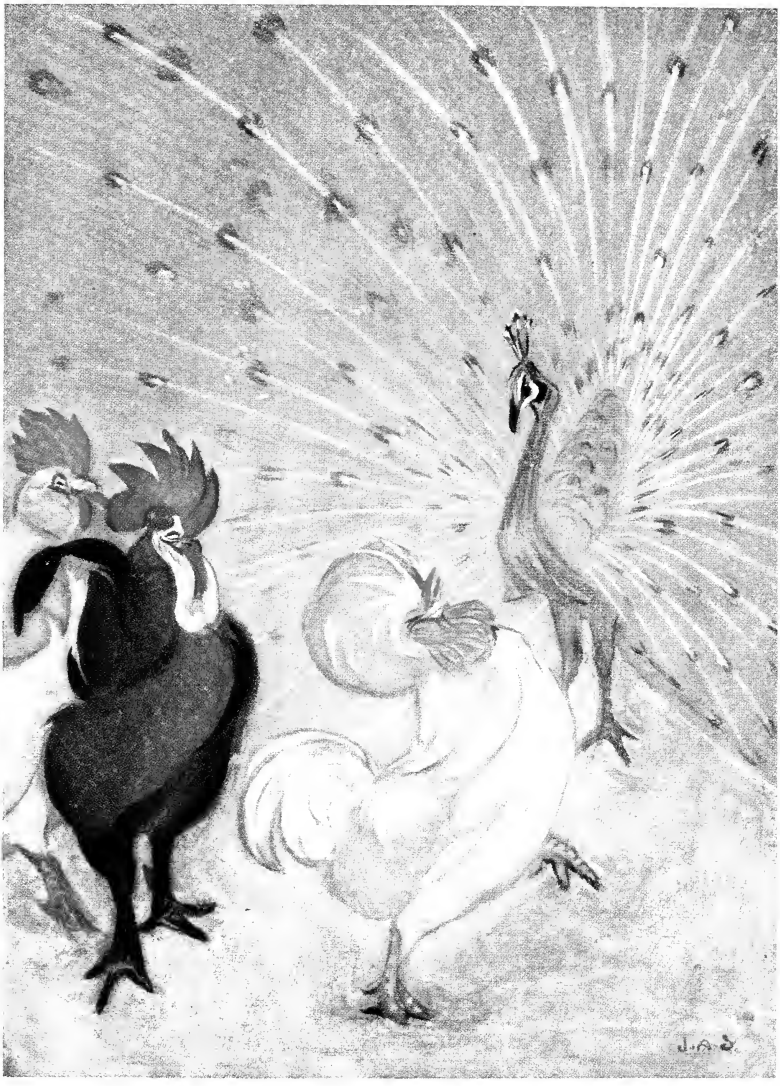
"Chanticleer," she said, "come away to the woods with me; let us live there together, and love one another."

But Chanticleer shook his head. "No," he said; "I must sing where fate has placed me. I am useful here, and they love me."

Then the Pheasant remembered what she had heard in the farm-yard during the night. "Do you believe that they all love you?" she cried, thinking how unhappy he would be when he found out the truth. "No! No! Come into the woods where we can hear two real pigeons cooing their love to one another."

"The two Pigeons!" announced the Magpie

At that moment they were interrupted by a great noise behind them. Everyone was begging the Peacock to spread his tail; all the strange Cocks were gathered admiringly round their patron, and finally, after much persuasion and flattery, he deigned to spread his tail. The Cocks crowded round, clamouring to know



"Oh, do look at my feathers."

which among them he was going to make the fashion. The Goose looked on in open-mouthed astonishment, while one Cock, thrusting himself forward, said he was like a palm-tree; a Chinese Cock pushed him aside, and declared he himself was just like a pagoda. Others hurried forward and marched up and down, showing themselves off before the Peacock, and crying: "Oh, do look at my feathers!" "Just look at my beak!" and "Oh, do look at my feet!"

For a few minutes, Chanticleer stood silently watching this fashion parade; then his eye was caught by the scarecrow stirring in the wind.

"Look! Look!" he cried, pointing at him, "he's blessing you all!"

They looked up at the giant figure towering above them. The wind had lifted the scarecrow's arm, and it pointed shakily at them, then sank to his side; and as the breeze rose again, pointed anew; and all his rags, filled by the sudden gust, flapped and fluttered, giving him so strange an air of life, that the Cocks drew back in fear.

"Do you see," cried Chanticleer, "his trousers are dancing a jig, and what do they say? 'Once I was the fashion!' And what says the old hat a beggar wouldn't own? 'Once I was the fashion!' And the old coat? 'Once, I too was the fashion!' And look at the old arms no one mends now; they are trying to seize the passing wind, mistaking it for the fashion — now they drop down again. The wind is far away . . ."

And though the wind, as Chanticleer had said, was far

away, and the scarecrow stood motionless once more, the Cocks continued to watch him in alarm, till the Peacock said impatiently: "Don't be so stupid; it can't talk!"

"That is what Man says of us!" said Chanticleer.

The Peacock was whispering to a neighbour that he was sure that Chanticleer was annoyed with him for having brought all the Cocks, and he asked Chanticleer sarcastically what he thought of them.

"I think they are all manufactured Cocks!" said Chanticleer boldly, "made out of odds and ends — a wing from here, a ruff from there, till, as there is nothing of the Cock left in them, they look better mounting guard on the front page of a show catalogue, than at some humble farm-yard door, next to an old watch-dog." His eye travelled slowly over them. "There is no beauty, or line, or style in all these discords," he went on; "why, even their bodies have not known how to keep the lovely oval of the egg!"

"But, Sir . . ." interrupted one of the Cocks angrily; but Chanticleer went on without noticing him: "And I say, — isn't it so, Sun?" he asked, glancing upwards for a moment, "the only duty of a Cock is to be a scarlet cry, and if a Cock is not that, he is but a freak, who soon disappears, having been nothing but the variety of a variety! For the only way to be a real Cock, is to think of nothing but . . ." he paused.

"But what? What?" cried several, interested in spite of themselves.

"Cock-a-doodle-doo!"

"I think they are all manufactured Cocks," said Chanticleer.

"We DO think of it!" said one of the Cocks haughtily, and believing they knew a great deal more about singing than Chanticleer, they gathered round him, asking him what kind of voice he had: Bass? Tenor? Did he sing from his chest, or from his head?

Chanticleer was bewildered; he had never thought of such things.

A Cock asked him how he scanned his song: Cock-ado-dle-doo, or Cocka-doo-dledoo? and he beat the measure furiously with his wing, and then looked impatiently at Chanticleer, waiting for his answer.

"The only true English song is Cocorico!" cried another, pronouncing it exactly like a French Cock.

"I," remarked another, "don't sing the vowels at all, but: C . . . K . . . D . . . L . . . D . . ."

"And I," cried another, "suppress the consonants: O! . . . A! . . . OO! . . . OO! . . ."

And there was even one who had never sung in his life!

Chanticleer looked from one to the other in bewilderment. Was this a dream, a nightmare? He repeated their questions uncomprehendingly. To what school of singing did he belong? School of singing! He did not know. There were, then, schools of singing for Cocks? He told them that he knew nothing of all these things, but just sang his song as simply as a rose-tree gives its rose.

They laughed at that; the Peacock louder than all (for he was secretly jealous of the Rose's beauty). The Rose!

Such an ordinary flower! It was really pitiful to refer to a Rose!

"Ah, Peacock," said Chanticleer, "I can forgive you for speaking ill of the Rose in my presence; the struggle for beauty between you is really too unequal! But," he went on, turning to the Cocks, "I call upon all of you to defend the Roses with me, to declare here and now, that one should love them, that they always are, and always will be . . ."

"Rubbish!" interrupted a cold and cutting voice, and the crowd, scattering, disclosed the Fighting Cock, long, thin, sinister.

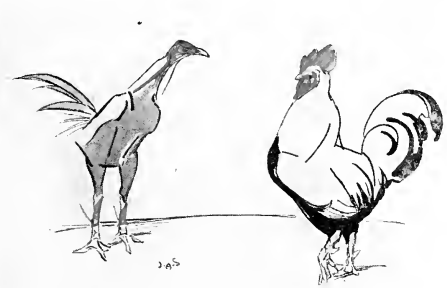
"At last!" cried Chanticleer, who had been waiting for him; and advancing slowly towards him, said he: "Sir, I would have you to know that such remarks are not permitted," and his eye wandered superciliously over the Game Cock, resting finally on his bald head, and in an insulting voice he went on: "May I inform you that you have the appearance of a Cockatoo who has had his crest cut?"

The Game Cock was stupefied by Chanticleer's insult:

"Cut-a-Cock . . . Crest-a-too . . . What! What! What!" he stammered.

Beak to beak with him Chanticleer imitated his "What? What? What?" They glared at each other furiously, their ruffs bristling, till at last the Game Cock said slowly, emphasising every word: "In America, on my great tour, I killed as many as three Clayborn Cocks in a day; I killed two Sherwoods; three Smoks; I killed . . ."

"I," Chanticleer said simply, "have killed nothing, but sometimes I have protected, defended, and helped, so perhaps in my own humble way, I too am brave. I came, knowing that you would be here, and the Rose was but to



"Rubbish!" interrupted a cold and cutting voice

furnish an opportunity for your brutality — which you did not miss! Your name?"

"Game Cock! And yours?"

"Chanticleer."

"Oh, Patou!" cried the Pheasant in alarm, rushing towards him. Patou was nearly out of the wheelbarrow. Chanticleer turned round: "You, Patou, must remain neutral," he said, in a voice which Patou, though he growled between his teeth, knew must be obeyed.

Then the Pheasant cried out to Chanticleer: "But a Cock doesn't let himself be killed for a Rose!"

"When a flower is insulted, the sun also is concerned," he replied.

She ran to the Blackbird: "You promised me that it would be all right, and I trusted you! You said that everything could be arranged!" she cried piteously.

"Everything," said he calmly, "can be arranged, — except the duels of friends!"

"Oh, dear! dear!" exclaimed the Guinea Fowl, "it's dreadful that people should kill one another at an At Home! What a misfortune . . ." (and she added to her son: "that the Tortoise isn't here!") Then she hurried here and there, placing the Hens so that they would be able to see; some jumped on pumpkins, and some on flower-pots, and a great circle was soon made round the combatants. In front, eager for the spectacle, were all the Hens, Chickens, Ducks, and Geese of the farm-yard, and behind them the strange Cocks.

"Mind you win!" cried Patou to Chanticleer. "They want to see you torn to pieces: look!"

Chanticleer looked sadly round. He saw the animals from his own farm-yard gathered there with eager faces, their necks stretched out, their eyes glittering; thinking only of the fight to come. They were hideous. It was a terrible moment for poor Chanticleer; he bent his head; he understood; — for the first time he knew them for what they were.

"Ah, the Poultry!" exclaimed the Pheasant in deep disgust. Her heart ached for Chanticleer.

But suddenly his pride came back to him; he drew himself up, and gazed slowly round at the hostile crowd. He felt that he was going to die, and an immense longing to do some brave thing first, rushed over him. What could he do? "I will confess my faith," he said to himself; and, possessed by this idea, he cried aloud: "I will tell my secret!"

At that a murmur of excitement passed through the crowd. The great secret! Could it be that they were to know it at last! The Game Cock made an impatient movement. "One moment," Chanticleer said to him, and to the crowd: "You will jeer at it! You will hiss me, but I mean to die amidst your laughter!" His eyes flashed, he scorned them now.

"Oh, no!" came passionately from the Pheasant; and Patou, whose faithful, loving old heart had guessed the secret long ago, implored him not to tell them. But Chanticleer had made up his mind, and when they saw the look upon his face, their murmurs ceased and silence fell upon the waiting crowd.

"Now, followers of the Blackbird, are you ready to roar with laughter at the joke?" He paused. The secret he had kept so long was to be a secret no more. Again he looked slowly round, then flung up his head and cried out in a ringing voice:

"It is I who light the skies for you with my song!"

There was a moment of stupefied silence, then an immense laugh shook the crowd.

"Is everyone laughing?" cried Chanticleer. "Then on guard!"

The combat commenced, and still the crowd rocked and shook under a tempest of laughter. Ha! Ha! Ha! How funny that Chanticleer should imagine that his song brought the day! How utterly ridiculous!

"Yes, it is I who bring the sun, daily!" cried Chanticleer, avoiding a stroke of the Game Cock's. A moment after he received a wound, then another. The crowd watched eagerly, applauding and encouraging the Game Cock: "Ha! on his beak! Ha! his eye that time!" and still beneath the terrible blows, Chanticleer repeated mechanically: "Yes . . . it's I . . . who bring . . . the dawn!"

"Yes! Yes!" barked Patou; and the Pheasant sobbed, but the crowd continued to jeer, and laugh, and call Chanticleer mocking names. Driven back, defending himself step by step, he seemed supported only by the insults hurled at him; his broken feathers floated round him, his throat was torn and bleeding. Then, when a terrible blow on his comb bore him to the ground, it seemed that he was lost, and that the end was near. The crowd shouted: "At him! Kill him! Tear him to pieces, Game Cock! — Cut his throat! Beat him down! Kill him!"

Patou reared himself up in the wheelbarrow: "That's enough of the cries of Men!" he said furiously.

"Ha! ha! that caught his eye!" shrieked the crowd, as the Game Cock lashed out at Chanticleer's eye. "Ha! that was on his wing! And that . . ."

There was a sudden silence; the circle broke up. The Game Cock ceasing to attack, drew back against the hedge, and Chanticleer, staggering, bleeding, and exhausted, looked about him, understanding nothing. Ah, what added horror were they preparing for his death agony? Then his dim eyes discerned the crowd drawing nearer and nearer to him; silent now, no voice was raised to mock, and not a laugh was heard.

"Ah Patou! Patou!" he sobbed, "I'm happy again! See, I misjudged them!"

The dog watched them silently. They were all glancing uneasily up at the sky as they drew nearer to Chanticleer, and then, in a flash he understood.

"The Sparrow-hawk!" he cried.

Yes, there in the sky above them, circled their deadly enemy. Wheeling sharply, he dropped a little lower, and the dark shadow of his body and outspread wings, passed slowly over the motley crowd. Terrified, they huddled together, crouching down, yet instinctively creeping nearer and nearer to Chanticleer.

Then indeed Chanticleer showed of what stuff he was made. Erect, his bleeding wounds forgotten, he leaped forward and gave the word of command: "Come round me, all of you!"

And immediately, hiding their heads beneath their wings, they came precipitately, crushing themselves against him. It was plain no one looked to the strange cocks when danger was at hand, nor had they any confidence in themselves.

The Pheasant, watching with moist eyes, thought Chanticleer the bravest and gentlest being that she had ever known.

The shadow passed a second time, bigger, blacker than before; even the Game Cock by the hedge cowered down, making himself as small as possible; only Chanticleer stood upright, surrounded by a disordered heap of trembling feathers. Then the Hawk wheeled a third time, lower still, and his shadow fell upon them again, darker, more terrifying, nearer; and the frightened things shuddered and groaned.

But Chanticleer cried towards the sky in a clarion voice: "I am here!" And at that the shadow passed; then grew distant. With joyous cries they all looked up. They were delivered!

Patou watched them hurrying and jostling one another; then, to his amazement, he saw that they were taking their places to watch the end of the fight. Chanticleer saw it too, and stared dumbly. Yes, it was true! There they were as before, with outstretched necks, and glittering eyes.

The Pheasant cried out in scorn: "They all want you to be killed now, that they may be revenged for the fright they have had!"

But Chanticleer no longer felt that he was going to be killed; when the enemy of all had appeared in the sky, he had forgotten himself, and trembled for the others: his confidence had returned to him. Now he marched upon the Game Cock and attacked him vigorously.

Astounded at the sudden onslaught, the Game Cock

was driven back against the hedge. Suddenly Chanticleer saw him prepare to use his spurs.

"Yes, use your spurs!" cried the Cat eagerly; but at that, Patou, ready to spring out of the barrow, cried: "If he uses them, I'll strangle him!"

A murmur of disappointment rose from the crowd. The Game Cock was furious: "Die!" he cried savagely, striking at Chanticleer with his murderous weapon.

A terrible cry rang out.

Chanticleer had leaped aside, and the Game Cock, missing him, had struck himself with his own spur, and fallen. Cries of anger burst from the crowd, and, shouting furiously, they rushed at the Game Cock, who struggled up when he saw them coming, and limped away, while they followed him hissing and shouting.

Patou and the Pheasant ran to Chanticleer, who lay weak and still, with closed eyes; they bent over him, laughing and crying and talking all at once: "Chanticleer, we're here, Patou and the Pheasant! Speak to us, Chanticleer!" He opened his eyes, looked at them, and said softly: "The sun will rise to-morrow!"

Then the crowd, returned from chasing away the Game Cock, came pell-mell towards Chanticleer, acclaiming him: "Hurrah! Hurrah!"

Chanticleer sprang up: "Back! Get back!" he cried in a voice which frightened them. "I have seen what you are!"

The crowd receded.

"There are real animals in the woods," cried the Pheasant, "let us go there!"

"No," said Chanticleer quietly, "I shall stay."

"Knowing what they are?"

"Yes, knowing what they are," he repeated.

"Do you want to stay?" she asked in a surprised voice.

"Not for them, but for my song. Perhaps from some other soil it would not rise as clearly. And now," he went on, looking up at the sky, "to assure the day that he will come again, I am going to sing."

There was an obsequious movement on the part of the crowd, and they approached Chanticleer again.

"Go back!" he cried, motioning them away. "I have nothing now but my song." They fell back, and alone with his pride he began to sing.

"Co . . ."

"Nothing but my song left now," he said to himself. "I must sing well," and he began again:

"Co . . ." but he could not bring it out. Did he sing from his chest, or from his head? All the learned questions of the cocks rushed into his mind. How did he scan it? Where did he put the accent? He tried again: "Co . . ." but the talk he had heard confused him, and nothing but a hoarse sound came from his throat. He could not sing! — He whose only rule had been to think not how, but why he sang! And he uttered a cry of despair: "I've nothing left! They've taken all, even my song! Oh, how can I find it again?"

The Pheasant opened wide her wings, and Chanticleer threw himself into them, and burying his face in her scarlet breast, he cried: "I love you!"

"Come into the woods," she whispered, comforting him; "there the birds never grow puzzled over their songs!"

"Yes, we will go together," he murmured presently. Then he looked up; he had something to say before he left. Slowly, he turned to face the crowd.

"Why do you not leave the kitchen-garden in peace, guests of the Guinea Fowl?" he asked. "Do you not know that it has its work to do — the changing of all the flowers into fruit! And nothing is done well amidst noise; isn't it so, Bees?"

"He's right! He's right! He's right!" sang the Bees.

"And, Hens," he went on, "let me tell you that all these Cocks you admire so much would soon hurry away, if anyone threw grain and called 'Chuck, chuck-chuck-chuck! Chuck, chuck-chuck-chuck!' For they are make-believes, and in reality nothing but an appetite. As for you, Peacock," he went on looking at him scornfully (he had made up his mind to tell them all what he thought of them), "you're supposed to be brave and Dame Fashion has made you her Colonel; but look at your throat! Why, it's blue with the fear of appearing behind the times — to the eyes of your tail!"

"Pah!" exclaimed the Blackbird.

Chanticleer turned to him: "As for you, it was your misfortune to know, as you have told us you once did, a city

Sparrow: since then the fear of not being a smart bird-about-town has never left you. You walk as if upon a wood pavement — you a Blackbird of the woods! You try to imitate the town Sparrows, who underline every word they say with a telegraph wire. And you are never really gay, because you don't love anything; you are like a polished candle-snuffer: you put out light but never emit a genuine spark yourself!"

"Ah, good!" cried the Guinea Fowl applauding. She did not understand in the least, but made a point of approving everything that was said at her At Home, thinking that it made her more celebrated.

The Blackbird, disconcerted, muttered to himself that he would have his revenge — but on the Turkey. It would be safer!

Just then a voice was heard crying: "Chuck, chuck-chuck-chuck! Chuck, chuck-chuck-chuck!" and all the strange Cocks immediately rushed in the direction whence it came, pushing and tumbling over one another. The Guinea Fowl ran after them, crying: "Are you going?" In their haste they had completely forgotten to say good-bye, and not one paid the slightest attention to her now, except the last, who paused a moment to say breathlessly: "Yes . . . pardon . . ." and then dashed after the others through the hole in the hedge.

"Come, my Golden Pheasant," said Chanticleer tenderly, when the last of the Cocks had disappeared; and leaving the kitchen-garden together, they went towards the forest.

They went towards the forest

"Oh!" exclaimed the Guinea Fowl. "Everyone is going! Good-bye! Good-bye!" and she whirled about among her remaining guests as they took their leave: "Do come next Monday! Good-bye!"

"It's all over," she said regretfully to her son, as the last guest left, and then added triumphantly: "But it's the very best At Home I've ever had!"

"The Tortoise!" announced the Magpie.

"The Tortoise," announced the Magpie

CHAPTER VII

THE summer days came and went, and still Chanticleer and the Golden Pheasant lived together in the forest, wandering in its pleasant glades by day, sleeping on the branch of a tree at night.

The forest was so calm, so green, and full of shade, that its peace stole into Chanticleer's wounded heart and comforted him. He spent long thoughtful hours wandering alone beneath the trees, picking his way over the moss-grown roots of giant oaks — so old that no one knew their age; sometimes he stopped to listen to the acorns pattering down, or to look at the little toadstool villages clustering in the hollows of the woods.

Innumerable Birds lived in the forest, Squirrels leaped from branch to branch, and Rabbits skurried to and fro. The Rabbits, from the first, were greatly interested in Chanticleer and the Pheasant; indeed sometimes they stared so much that it became quite embarrassing, and then the Pheasant was obliged to flap her wings to frighten them into their burrows.

A Green Woodpecker soon became a special friend of Chanticleer's. He lived in a hole in a tree, quite close to their own favourite oak. But he hopped out so often to talk to them, that he too became embarrassing, so at last

they arranged that he should always knock three times, and wait for them to say: "Come in!" before appearing: for they felt that they really must have some privacy.

However, he was a very wise and interesting bird, and told Chanticleer a great deal about the thoughts and speech of birds in olden days, as well as in present times.

Once at sunset, Chanticleer listened with him to the Birds' Evensong. Two little Warblers took the principal parts, and all the Forest-Birds joined in.

"O God of little Birds!" sang the forest Warbler, who wore a black cap.

"O God of little Birds!" sang the other, in a little brown cloak. A thousand voices among the leaves twittered: "O God of little Birds!" and then paused, while the two leaders warbled the hymn:

"Who to assist us, put air into our bones,
And to beautify us put heaven's colours on our feathers,—
We thank thee for this lovely day,
For the water we have drunk, and the grain we have pecked;
For having given us excellent eyes, with which to see the enemies of Man
And for having provided us—little gardeners as we are—with our good pruning shears of horn.
To-morrow we will fight against the thistles and the blight,
But to-day forgive us our trespasses: forgive us for having stripped two or three currant bushes.
Lord, if unjust Man throws stones at us, in return for the songs with which we have surrounded him,
Or if he should snare our families in a net,

Sleeping on the branch of a tree at night

Teach us to remember Saint Francis of Assisi, and that we must forgive Men their trespasses,
Because once a Man loved us, and called us: 'My Brothers the Birds.'
Amen."

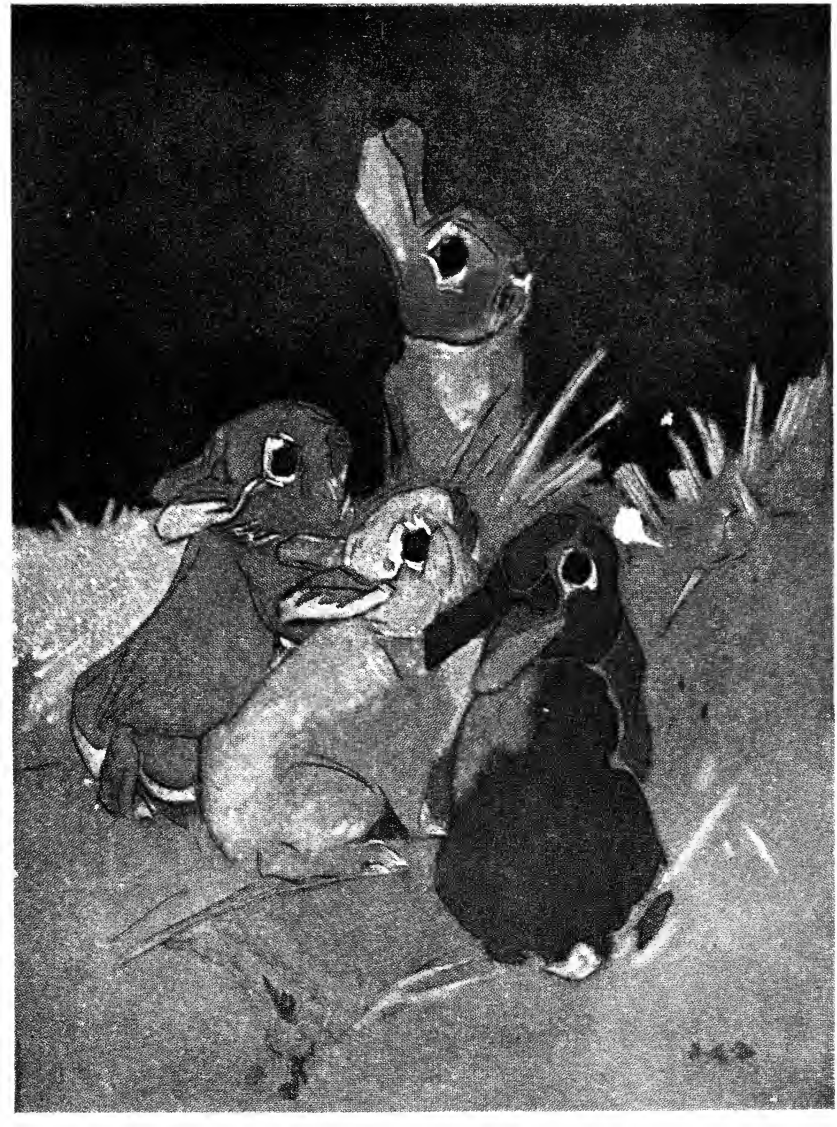
And then, from Bird to Bird, even to the end of the forest, the murmur ran: "Amen . . ."

And Chanticleer too said "Amen"; and then the Birds fell asleep among the leaves, while he watched the moonlight creeping through the forest. A quivering ray fell upon the ferns, lighted up the mosses, and shook silver powder over a spider's web. He thought a crystal Ladybird was caught there in a silver strand, and drew near to see, — but it was only a raindrop sparkling on the web.

These things, and many more in the forest, were so beautiful and so new to Chanticleer, that the days passed swiftly by: yet he could not forget his old life.

Each morning he sang — for his song had returned to him immediately he entered the forest. But the Pheasant had ordered him to sing only one song to call the sun. One, she said, was quite enough; and when the dawn-sky was glorious with colour, she would point to it triumphantly; for, truth to tell, she had grown jealous of Chanticleer's love for the light, and wanted him to care for her more than for the dawn, or anything else in the world. But this he could not do. Nor had he forgotten the morning when she too had loved the light and believed in it as he did.

But she was not alone in her jealousy. Chanticleer also



"But the Rabbits are looking."

was jealous. One day she had met another Pheasant in the forest glades, and Chanticleer, when he heard of it, was wild with fear that she would leave him, and return to the Pheasants.

Alas! though they seldom spoke of it, they felt the wide difference of race between them: he knew that the wild blood of a game-bird ran in her veins, and she, that for generations his ancestors had dwelt in farm-yards. When she saw him sad and silent, she guessed that he regretted leaving his old life and sometimes the thought angered her.

One evening, when they had lived for about a month in the forest, they stood talking beneath the oak-tree in which they often spent the night. The sun had set, and the last of the Birds' Evensong had died away; a few late Squirrels were leaping about, and in the underwoods, as far as the eye could reach, the Rabbits sat before their burrows, breathing in the freshness and the silence of the evening.

Night was coming on. The forest grew dim, and presently the moon arose, and shed her soft light over the sleeping trees.

"Kiss me good-night," said the Pheasant.

"But the Rabbits are looking!" he objected.

So she flapped her wings loudly, and the Rabbits turned tail and disappeared down their burrows; then she and Chanticleer put their beaks together and kissed.

As she drew back she almost stepped upon a net, but hearing Chanticleer's warning cry, she jumped aside in time.

It was a trap!

They had just made this startling discovery, when they heard: "Tap! Tap! Tap!"

"Come in," they cried, and the Green Woodpecker leaned half out of his round hole; high up in the tree-trunk. He was wearing his green waistcoat and red cap; and pointing with his beak in the direction of the net, he said: "Take care of the snare! It's the farmer who has set it. He says he means to catch the Golden Pheasant!"

"Let him boast!" cried the Pheasant, tossing her head.

The Woodpecker turned to her: "He says that he means to keep you alive at his farm!"

"Keep me alive at his farm!" cried the Pheasant, who, though she knew from Chanticleer that the farmer loved animals, and would treat her well, was indignant at the mere idea of being kept in captivity.

Just then a little Rabbit appeared on the threshold of his burrow; he had ventured up to warn the Pheasant about the trap, for the forest creatures always told one another of such dangers.

"You know," he said anxiously, "if you put your foot on the spring . . ."

"My dear little fellow," interrupted the Pheasant in a superior tone, "I know all about traps, and how they shut! Besides," she declared, "I'm afraid of nothing in the world but dogs!" And giving him a little tap with her wing, she told him to go down home. "And that reminds me," she went on, smiling at Chanticleer, "I really must just go and

annoy the dogs at your farm a bit! I'll just leave a footprint here and there!" and off she went.

Chanticleer followed her with his eyes till she was out of sight, then, looking up at the Woodpecker, he asked him in a low voice if she was coming back, for the Woodpecker, high in his tree, could see a long way by the light of the rising moon. He peered carefully now through the trees:

"No," he said.

"Keep watch then!" cried Chanticleer eagerly. "They are going to talk to me from the farm!"

"Who?" asked the Woodpecker, curiously.

"The Blackbird."

"The Blackbird!" exclaimed the Woodpecker, astonished. "I thought he hated you," he added, for Chanticleer had told him all that had happened at the farm.

"So he does, in a way! But you don't know the Blackbird — he adapts himself to anything and everything; besides it amuses him to tell me the news."

"Is he coming then?" inquired the Woodpecker.

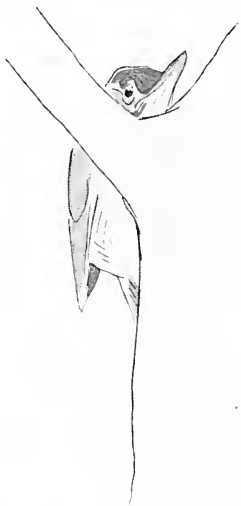
"No!" Chanticleer went towards a blue Convolvulus. "This is how we manage," he explained: "this blue Convolvulus is connected by underground root-threads with the white Convolvulus which grows at the border of the pond at the farm; so, you see, we can talk into the flowers . . ."

Telephones were not yet well known in the forest, and the Woodpecker was immensely interested as he watched Chanticleer plunge his beak into the trembling Convolvulus cup, and heard him cry: "Hallo!"

"Hallo!" cried Chanticleer again, "the Blackbird!"

"But how rash you are!" exclaimed the Woodpecker, keeping a sharp lookout in spite of his interest in what Chanticleer was doing. "Fancy choosing just this Convolvulus amongst all the others in the forest — so near your tree!"

"But it's the only one that remains open all night!" Chanticleer raised his head from the flower. "You see," he continued, going towards the Woodpecker, "when the Blackbird answers my call, the Bee who sleeps in the flower wakes up, and we . . ."



The Woodpecker, keeping a sharp lookout

"Vrrr!" said the Bee in the Convolvulus, and Chanticleer ran back to the flower and listened in the trumpet.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, after a moment, "this morning?"

"Oh, what?" cried the Woodpecker, leaning out of his tree, devoured by curiosity.

"Thirty Chickens have been born!" said Chanticleer slowly, his voice trembling with emotion.

He listened again, and after a little exclaimed: "Briffaut ill? . . ."

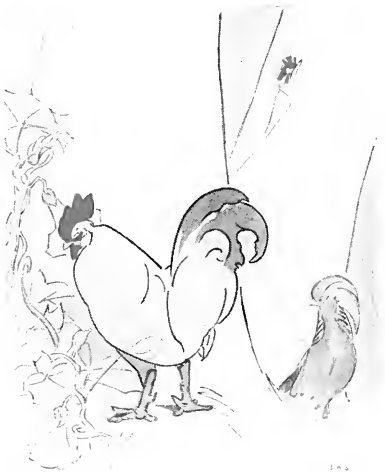
Then something prevented him from hearing: "Oh, bother the Dragon-flies-wings, they crackle so, I can't hear a word! Oh, please don't cut us off yet!" he cried, then listened again — "They are making Patou hunt!"

"Ah!" said Chanticleer, looking round for a moment at the Woodpecker, "if only you knew Patou!"

Then he plunged back again into the flower-cup. "Ah? . . . without me everything is going badly? . . . Yes," he said in a satisfied tone, as if it was exactly what he had expected: "What a mess everything must be in!"

"The Pheasant is coming!" said the Woodpecker in a low voice; but Chanticleer's head was deep in the flower-cup and he did not hear. "The ducks slept under the plough all night? . . ." he was saying.

"Stop!" cried the Woodpecker, flapping his wings to attract Chanticleer's attention. "Pst!" he cried in despair. But it was too late! The Pheasant appeared, and seeing the Woodpecker's frantic signs, she ordered him back with a men-



The Pheasant . . . stood behind Chanticleer

acing gesture, then stood behind Chanticleer, listening. His head was still in the Convolvulus, and, more and more interested, he was saying: "Ah, really? Who? all! No? . . . Oh! — Ah? . . . The Peacock out of fashion already?"

The Woodpecker had ventured timidly out again: if only he could warn his friend, he thought. "Pst!" he hissed again.

The Pheasant turned round, furious, and the Woodpecker drew back so hurriedly that he bumped his head against the tree.

"I hope the Hens? . . ." Chanticleer was saying in an anxious tone — "Oh, I'm so glad they are all right!" Then evidently answering a question — "Do I sing? . . . Yes . . . but far from here . . . near the pools!"

The Pheasant started in surprise.

"Yes," Chanticleer continued a little bitterly, "the Golden Pheasant does not altogether approve, so I work for the dawn in secret."

Behind him the Pheasant took an angry step forward, but she paused as she heard him say:

"When the eyes I love so much are closed, and she is asleep, and looking lovely . . ."

(The Pheasant smiled to herself.)

"Off I go!" said Chanticleer, and she could scarcely contain her anger.

"I go far away in the dew," continued the unconscious Cock, "to sing as many songs as are needed, and when I

feel the shadows hesitating — when I have only to sing once more, I hurry back — What do you say, Blackbird? Does not the dew betray me? Oh, no!" Chanticleer laughed gleefully, "for I brush it from my feet with my wings, then I quietly perch on the branch beside the Pheasant, and wake her with my last song!"

The Pheasant uttered a loud cry of anger, and Chanticleer, turning half round, saw her. "No!" he cried hurriedly into the Convolvulus: "Nothing! . . . later!"

The Pheasant's eyes flashed, and her voice shook with anger: "You've deceived me!"

"Vrrr!" went the Bee in the flower.

"I . . ." Chanticleer began.

"Vrrrrr!"

Chanticleer put his wing over the Convolvulus, and still a muffled "Vrrrr . . ." sounded from the persistent Bee.

"Oh!" cried the Pheasant violently. "How you have deceived me!"

"But . . ."

"Not only do you long for news of your Hens," she interrupted in jealous tones, "and of everybody else at the farmyard, but you have cheated me — you have even thought of brushing the dew from your feet!" and she began to march up and down in a fury.

Chanticleer was silent. Then she stopped in front of him. "Oh! I am not alone in your heart!" she cried.

He returned her look steadily. "It is better," he said

gently, "to meet light in a heart than to find nothing there." He went nearer to her. "I love you all the more because I love the light so much. Pheasant, there is no great love except in the shadow of some great dream. Can you not see that more love wells up in my heart, because, every day, I open it to my dream — to the light?"

But his words only angered her still more, and she broke away from him, and walked to and fro again. She could not bear this love of Chanticleer's for the light, nor could she forgive his deception. They disputed hotly, and gazed at each other with angry eyes, and at last, stamping furiously, she insisted that at least for one day he should not sing.

"Not sing!" exclaimed Chanticleer.

"For one day!" she repeated.

"But heavens! leave the valley in darkness?"

"Well, and what harm will that do the valley?" she asked contemptuously.

Chanticleer thought that surely life in the valley would cease, if it were left for a day without light. Darkness seemed to him the greatest of evils. "I must sing," he said.

"Supposing you are mistaken," cried the Pheasant, "supposing the dawn comes without you!"

"Then, at any rate I shall not know it!" he cried savagely. He could not endure to think for a moment that it might be so.

Suddenly the Pheasant's eyes filled with tears. She was

very unhappy. "If I were to weep, you would forget the hour for once?" she asked.

"No!"

"Then nothing could ever make you forget?"

"Nothing! — because I feel darkness weighing on me too much!"

Then the Pheasant grew angry again, and dashing away her tears, she cried: "You feel it weighing! Shall I tell you the truth? You sing, just that you may be admired!" Then, with scornful pity she went on: "Your miserable notes make the whole forest smile — the forest which knows the song of the Bullfinch!"

"Ah," said Chanticleer, "now you think you will get me to do what you want from pride!"

She went on in the same tone: "Do you think that when the Oriole's ardent song trembles through the underwoods, or the echo answers the Nightingale, — do you really think that then your song would win the admiration of even a mushroom?"

Chanticleer moved away.

"Have you ever heard the Nightingale?" she persisted.

"Never," he said, and perched himself on his branch for the night.

"His song," she went on thoughtfully, "is so lovely that the first time . . ." She stopped, struck with a sudden idea.

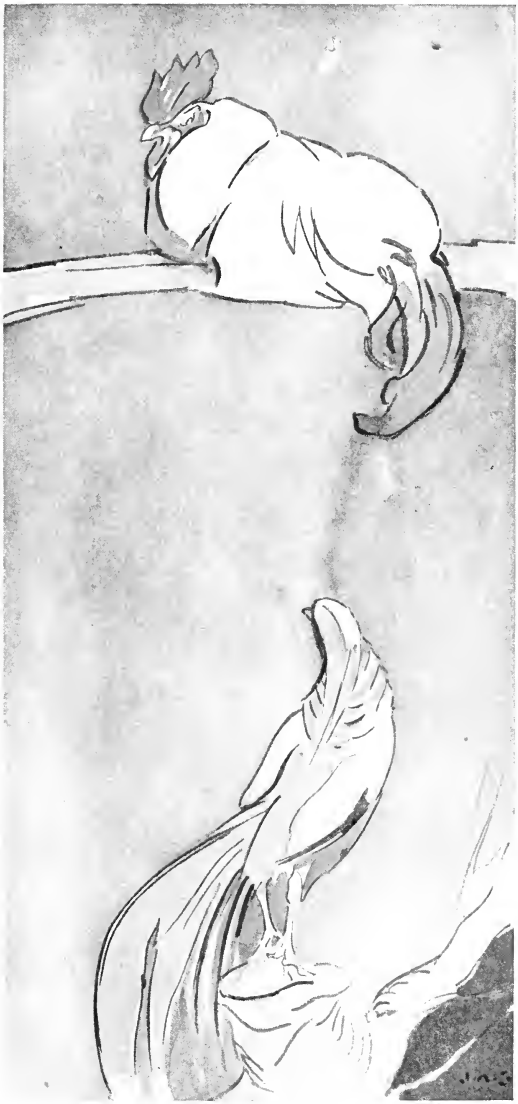
"What?" asked Chanticleer.

"Nothing!" she cried, and to herself she added: "He

does not know that when one listens to a Nightingale singing in the forest, all the long night slips by as if it were but five minutes."

"What are you saying?" asked Chanticleer, coming down to her.

She laughed in his beak. "Nothing!" she said again.



"Have you ever heard the Nightingale?" she persisted

CHAPTER VIII

THE Pheasant was still laughing and talking to herself, when she heard a voice say: "Is the illustrious Cock here?"

The sound came from the grass, and she went towards it, then drew back hastily: "Oh!" she exclaimed, in a tone of disgust, " . . . it's the . . . Oh, . . . the . . ." And without completing her sentence she sprang into a hollow tree-trunk close by.

Squatting in the grass, she had seen six enormous Toads.

The biggest Toad advanced towards Chanticleer, and bowing, said: "We are come in the name of all those in the forest who THINK, to honour the singer of many songs . . ." he put his hand where he supposed his heart to be, and bowed again: "So many new songs!"

"And such clear songs!" cried the second Toad, hopping towards Chanticleer.

"And short!" cried the third, hopping.

"And lively!" cried the fourth, hopping.

"And great!" cried the fifth, hopping.

"And pure!" cried the sixth, hopping.

Chanticleer thought them hideous; but not to be outdone in politeness, he asked them to be seated. A large mushroom grew there, so the Toads sat round it as if at a table,

The biggest Toad advanced towards Chanticleer.

and presently the biggest remarked: "Of course we are ugly."

"Well, you have nice eyes," Chanticleer said politely.

Then the big Toad, putting his hands on the table, raised himself, and looked round at his companions.

"Knights of the Round Table!" said he, "we will feast this Parsifal, who fills the world with so glorious a song!"

"And so true!" put in the second.

"And celestial!" said the big Toad, casting his eyes up.

"And earthly," murmured the third, looking down.

"Beside it," declared the big Toad, in a most decided voice, "the Nightingale's song is nothing!"

"The Nightingale's song!" exclaimed Chanticleer confused. He stared at them; could it be true? "Gentlemen . . ." he began, stammering a little.

But the big Toad interrupted: "It was quite time someone else should come here to change everything!"

"Ah, am I going to change everything?" Chanticleer was gratified in spite of himself.

"Honour to the Cock!" they all cried, bowing before him, and Chanticleer thought to himself that, after all, the forest did not judge him so severely as the Pheasant had said.

The big Toad raised his head, and remarked in a loud voice: "The Nightingale is done for."

"Done for?" exclaimed Chanticleer, amazed.

"Done for!" they repeated with great satisfaction, laughing scornfully; and in a ridiculous and grotesque

manner they imitated the Nightingale: "Tio! . . . Tio! . . ." they sang in harsh, discordant voices.

And Chanticleer listened to their false songs and believed them. After all, then, he had no rivalry to fear from the

"The Nightingale is done for"

Nightingale! He drew nearer to the Toads. "Well, we'll let the Nightingale sing," he said indulgently. "Why not, if it amuses him?"

But the Toads shouted: "Down with the Nightingale!"

And they told Chanticleer how the reality of his song showed up all the artificiality of the Nightingale's. "Why, yours," they said, "will make us grow wings!" and they fluttered as if they would take flight. Chanticleer almost trembled with delight at the idea. Then a Toad suggested that they should offer a banquet to Chanticleer, and at that they all hit the mushroom in applause, crying enthusiastically: "A banquet! A banquet!"

At the noise the Pheasant peeped out. "What is it?" she inquired.

Chanticleer was really feeling rather flattered, but he tried not to show it. "A banquet," said he.

"Oh! Are you going to accept?" she asked a little ironically.

"Oh, well, one must keep abreast of new ideas, you know . . . all those in the forest who really THINK . . . They say" — Chanticleer motioned towards the Toads —"that I shall give them wings. . . ." Then trying to speak in a light, indifferent tone, though secretly he was delighted at the Toads' praise, he said: "The Night-

"One must keep abreast of new ideas, you know"

ingale is done for; he sings . . . how does he sing?" He turned to the Toads. They raised their hideous voices again: "Tio! . . . Tio! . . ."

"You hear?" said Chanticleer to the Pheasant, feeling that it was really a pity the Nightingale's voice was so ugly. "I think I need not hesitate to accept . . ."

"Oh, you Toads!" cried Chanticleer

Just then, in the tree above his head, a voice sent forth into the night a long, quivering note, most sweet and clear: "Tio . . . !"

There was silence. Chanticleer had started. "What is it?" he asked after a moment.

The big Toad was embarrassed. "Nothing!" said he, hurriedly, "only him!"

Then again the marvellous voice rang out, and between every liquid, exquisite note, there was a sound like the sighing of a soul. "Tio! Tio! Tio! . . . Tio!"

And when silence came again, "Oh, you Toads!" cried Chanticleer suddenly, and they shrank back. But the voice sang on: there were words now:

"I, all tiny as I am, lost in this dark tree, yet feel that I am becoming the great heart of the night!" Then in a stream of wondrous notes the song told of the magic moonlight in the valley, and the forest; of the trembling mists floating like veils in the air, of all the beauty of the night.

When the voice ceased again, Chanticleer turned abruptly on the Toads, and asked them indignantly how they had dared, dared to compare his harsh song with this divine voice. And, ashamed, he remembered that he had believed them. He saw now that here in the forest the Toads were jealous of the Nightingale as at the farm the animals had been jealous of him, and he could not help crying out: "I have never envied anybody, and alas, I have not understood the envy of others!"

The Nightingale answered him. "What does it matter?" he sang. "Early or late, you the strong and I the tender—in spite of Toads — shall understand one another."

"Ah, sing on," murmured Chanticleer, looking reverently up into the tree, while the Toads, suffering from the beauty of the song, joined hands about the trunk and mixed their harsh and envious voices with the Nightingale's. Chanti-

cleer thought that they would spoil his singing, but the Nightingale took their refrain and wove it into his song, till all the night was filled with the throbbing beauty of it, and the forest listened, and all the beasts came out to hear. A Hind crept close, and then a Wolf; the Squirrels leaped down, and the little Rabbits sat by their burrows pricking their ears; the Glow-worms lit their lamps and twinkled their tender green lights in the moss; the Woodpecker sat dreaming at his window; and still the Nightingale's song poured itself out, clear, and shrill, and sweet, beyond compare.

The woods lay enchanted, the moonlight trembled, a star bent down to listen, and the spider, swallowing her thread, mounted towards the Nightingale. Under the tree-trunks slipped the shadows of the charmed beasts: those who were to be eaten came and sat down beside those who would eat them; the hoarse notes of the Toads died out and they slunk away, for that wondrous song drew out all good, and sent hatred to hide itself.

The Nightingale, indeed, holds in his heart the sobs of all the world; in his eyes all lands lie; he lives, he dies for every cause, for his is the Everlasting Song.

Chanticleer stood spellbound, with lifted head, and dreaming eyes. At last he turned, and looked at the listening creatures, and asked them what it was the Nightingale's song said to each one of them, when he sang thus with no words. A little Squirrel replied that the song was about leaping and springing, and the Hare said it was of alarms

A feeling of deep discouragement . . . swept over him

and fears, and a Rabbit of the dew, and the Hind, tears. The Wolf said it told of the Moon, and the Spider of the drops of water gleaming like a gift upon her web, and the Raindrop said in a tiny voice that it was of the Glow-worm; and to the Glow-worm it told of the Star. Then Chanticleer looked up and asked the Star of what the song sang, and a voice in the sky cried: "Of the Shepherd!"

A little Woodcock was creeping farther and farther out of a thicket, listening blissfully. "And what does he say to you, Woodcock?" Chanticleer asked him. "I don't know," cried the Woodcock with shining eyes; "but, oh, how wonderful it is!"

Chanticleer murmured: "To every creature he sings of the thing he loves!"

He listened again, and then added happily: "And to me, he sings of the day my song brings!"

"Yes," said the Pheasant softly to herself, "and so beautifully that you are going to forget it!"

It was true! The night was passing; already it was less dark; but Chanticleer had not noticed. He was gazing up at the tree, thinking that never in his whole life had he heard anything so beautiful as the Nightingale's voice. He compared it sadly with his own song, and a feeling of deep discouragement, such as he had never known, swept over him. He looked up again, and said mournfully: "Ah, now that I have heard your perfect crystal notes, how can I ever again be contented with my own harsh song?"

"But you must!" sang the Nightingale tenderly.

"Alas!" murmured Chanticleer sadly, "my song will seem so red, so rough!"

"Mine perhaps has sometimes seemed too easy, and too blue!" sang the Nightingale. "I can confess this to you, for you fought for my friends the Roses; and I will tell you something else — a sad, but also a comforting thing: that no one, not the Cock of the dawn, not the Nightingale of the evening, has quite the song he dreams of!"

"Oh," cried Chanticleer passionately, "oh, to be a sound which lulls!"

"To be a duty which calls!" trilled the Nightingale.

"But I," murmured Chanticleer, "make no one weep!"

"And I wake no one!" said the Nightingale; and then in a voice fuller, richer, and more melodious still, he went on: "No matter! We must sing! — sing, even when we know there are better songs than ours, we must sing, till . . ."

The sharp report of a gun rang out; there was a flash; a silence; then a little body, all ruddy, fell from the tree at Chanticleer's feet. He bent down. "The Nightingale!" he cried with a sob. "Oh, the brutes, the brutes!" and never seeing the pale trembling seizing all the air, he went on brokenly: "Killed! and he had only sung for five minutes!" He gazed in despair at the little body which gave a last convulsive movement, and then lay quite still, while over it floated a few tiny loosened feathers.

Suddenly a crashing was heard in the undergrowth behind

Chanticleer; a sound of panting; and after a moment Patou burst through the bushes.

"You!" cried Chanticleer, and then added reproachfully: "Have you come to fetch him?"

Patou was ashamed. "Pardon . . ." he stammered, " . . . they force me . . ."

The old dog hung his head

Chanticleer, at the first sound of Patou's approach, had instinctively thrown himself in front of the tiny body to protect it; now he drew back and pointed silently.

The old dog hung his head when he saw it was a Nightingale, and after a pause he said: "Yes, the wicked race love to fire into a tree full of song." Then drawing back he added softly: "I will behave just as if I had found nothing."

Then as they both gazed at the dead Nightingale they

The Sexton Beetles come to dig his grave

saw the Sexton Beetles come to dig his grave; gently they stirred the soil around him, and he began to sink slowly into the brown earth.

Presently a whistle sounded in the distance, and telling Chanticleer that he would return as soon as he could, Patou hurried away. Meanwhile the Pheasant was anxiously watching the East; now and then she glanced at Chanticleer, then back again at the sky, wondering how she could conceal from him the coming of the dawn. He still stood bending rapt and sorrowful over the Nightingale's body. She went to him, holding her wing so that it screened the growing light from him. "Come," she said tenderly, "weep on my wing," and with a sob Chanticleer turned and laid his head against her, and she quickly closed her wing over his head. "My wing is soft, you see," she said in a caressing voice, "rest under it; it is like a heart unfurled. . . . See, it covers you like a mantle . . ." And she went on murmuring tender, comforting words, but all the while glancing behind her towards the East. The dawn was coming fast: the air grew paler every moment; now the forms of the

nearest trees were clear; now a rosy light crept softly over one; but still she rocked him in her wings, murmuring: "You see, my wing is like a kiss which turns into a roof. You see . . ." and then sharply she drew away her wings, and leaped back: "You see the day can dawn without you!"

He saw; and a great cry of sorrow burst from him and echoed quivering through the stillness of the forest dawn — the most sorrowful cry any creature had ever uttered there.

He stood rooted to the spot, his heart seemed to beat no more, his eyes were glazed, and still the dawn drew on; shafts of light trembled through the trees, the distant trunks loomed into view.

"See!" cried the Pheasant cruelly, "the mosses will be scarlet in a moment!"

At that Chanticleer started violently. "Oh, no! no! Wait! Not without me!" he cried in a voice of agony, rushing towards them; but even before he reached them they shone like fire.

"The horizon . . ." the Pheasant went on ruthlessly, pointing.

"No! . . ." cried Chanticleer beseechingly to the

"What treachery!" he groaned

horizon, but it flashed golden as he spoke, and he staggered back.

"What treachery! What treachery!" he groaned.

"One can be everything to a heart, but nothing to an horizon," said the Pheasant, watching him.

"It's true," he faltered, and leaned unsteadily against a tree. All his world seemed to be crumbling about him.

At this moment Patou rushed joyfully up to him. "Here I am!" he cried affectionately. "I've come to tell you that at the farm they are all longing to see you again — the Cock who brings the dawn, they say!"

Chanticleer was silent, and looked with deep sadness into the old dog's eyes. "They believe it," he said at last, "now that I no longer believe it myself."

"What!" cried Patou, unable to believe his ears.

The Pheasant ran to Chanticleer, and pressing herself almost violently against him, she cried: "You see a heart which loves you, is worth more than the sky which has no need of you!"

"Yes . . . " said poor Chanticleer.

"And darkness," she went on, "is after all as good as the light, if in the shadows there are two who love each other."

"Yes . . . Yes . . ." said Chanticleer wildly. Then suddenly he sprang away from her, threw up his head, and cried in a piercing voice:

"Cock-a-doodle-doo!"

"Why do you sing?" cried the Pheasant, amazed.

"To warn myself! — for three times I have denied that which I love."

"What is that?" she asked, not understanding.

"My work!" He turned from her. "Patou," he said, "let us go away together."

"But what are you going to do?" cried the Pheasant, bewildered.

"My work!"

"But what night is left for you to vanquish?"

"Eyelids!"

"Ah, you'll wake those who sleep!" She laughed scornfully, and then pointed to the purple clouds in the eastern sky: "but don't you see the day has come without you?"

Chanticleer gazed unflinchingly at the dawn sky. "My destiny," he said slowly, "is more sure, even, than the day I see."

Then she pointed to the little Nightingale's body, half buried now: "Your faith can no more be born again than this little singer!"

She had scarcely finished speaking, when, from the tree above their heads, a long and lovely note sounded in the clear morning air: "Tio . . . Tio . . ."

Chanticleer gazed upwards, Patou's ears trembled violently, and the Pheasant, wondering, looked now up into the tree, now down at the tomb the beetles were digging so fast. " . . . Another song . . . ?" she stammered.

A voice above them sang: "In the forest there must always be a Nightingale!"

And hearing that, Chanticleer cried out in exultation: "And in the soul a faith may have dwelt for so long, that even if it is killed, it returns and lives again!"

"But how can you have faith in your song, now that the sun has risen without you?" cried the Pheasant.

"Perhaps," said Chanticleer dreamily, "some of my song of yesterday still floats in the air."

As he spoke, some Owls flew silently by, and entered their holes in the old trees, hooting softly and gleefully: "He was silent!" Chanticleer watched them, and as they disappeared he said triumphantly: "There is the proof that I served the light when I sang! All the Owls are gay today, because I was silent. Yes, Pheasant," he went on, going close to her, and speaking almost defiantly: "I do bring the dawn — and more than that! For on those grey mornings, when many a poor beast wakes and cannot believe it is day, my song takes the sun's place for him!"

The Pheasant tried to reply, but no words came; a smouldering anger filled her heart, and seemed to rise in her throat till it almost choked her. Something told her that she was going to lose him; that he was upheld by some faith she could not grasp; he had said he was going to return to his work, but could he actually have the courage to work, to sing again, after all that had happened? She found her voice at last. "And what is the good of it all," she said hoarsely, "what is the use of singing, if you do not make the sun rise?"

Chanticleer seemed to gaze through her — far beyond her;

and a look came into his eyes which she had never seen there before. He said softly, almost as if he were speaking to himself and had forgotten her presence: "Because I am the Cock of some far-distant sun. I pierce the veils of the night with my cries. I pierce those points of daylight men name stars! and I think, if I sing on always, my best, and if after me, for long and long every Cock sings in his farmyard, always, his best; I think that at last — though I shall never see it — there will shine a wondrous sky, all made of stars set close together! At last there will be no more night!"

"When?" asked the Pheasant after a pause.

"Some day!"

She was silent; then in a trembling voice she said: "You will forget our forest?"

"No! No!" he cried, "I shall never forget the lovely green forest. Here," he went on thoughtfully, "I learnt that he who sees his dream die, should die also, or rise up stronger than before!"

Then, feeling that he was slipping away from her, seeing him so great, a mad longing to insult him rushed over the Pheasant. "Go back to your hen-house, and climb up the ladder every evening!" she cried.

"Birds have taught me that one can mount with wings," he replied unmoved.

"Go and see your Old Hen in her basket!" went on the insulting voice.

"Ah, what will she say when I go to her!" Chanticleer

exclaimed, thinking of all that had happened since last he saw her.

Patou imitated her old voice so full of affection when she spoke to Chanticleer. "She will say: 'He's grown.'" And how true it would be!

"Let us go," Chanticleer said to Patou, and the Pheasant tried to pretend that she did not care, but the tears were standing in her eyes. Chanticleer saw them, and he stopped and gazed at her, troubled. How could he leave her? "Patou," he said, "stay with her for a little while." Patou readily agreed; for he had seen much sorrow in his life, and he thought that perhaps he could comfort her.

But suddenly the Pheasant leaped to Chanticleer's side and cried: "Oh, take me with you!"

He looked long into her eyes, and at last said slowly: "Will you then consent to be second to the light?"

At that she drew back. "Never!" she said vehemently.

"Then, good-bye!"

She cried wildly after him: "I hate you!"

He was already making his way through the undergrowth; at her cry he turned: "I love you," he said, and added sorrowfully: "but how ill I should do my work beside one to whom it counts for so little!"

So saying, he went slowly out of her sight among the trees.

"I hope he will die!" cried the Pheasant, mad with outraged pride and love; "I hope he will die for having so disdained me!"

Patou stood silently by, while she paced to and fro. Suddenly the Woodpecker, watching Chanticleer's departure from his window, called out in a voice of fear: "The Gamekeeper has seen him!" The Owls in the trees heard, and hooted joyfully: "The Cock is in danger!" The Rabbits ran out to see. A little one stood upon his hind legs: "The Man is breaking his gun in half!" he whispered eagerly to an older Rabbit. "No," said the other quietly, "he is loading it."

Patou and the Pheasant stared at each other in alarm. "Surely," Patou exclaimed, "they wouldn't shoot a Cock?"

"No," said the Pheasant calmly, opening her wings; "not if they see a Pheasant!"

Patou leaped in front of her. "What are you going to do?"

"My work!" said she, and flew towards the danger.

"Look out!" shrieked the Woodpecker, who saw that she would touch the spring of the snare in passing.

But, alas, he was too late! She was caught. She sank heavily in the net, flapping her wings helplessly in its meshes, and murmuring in despair: "Oh, now he will be killed!" while the tears ran down her cheeks, and lost themselves in her golden ruff. Her one thought was for Chanticleer; and, all her jealousy forgotten, she raised her voice, and sent up an ardent prayer to the light to save him. "O Dawn! touch the cartridges with your wet wings! Moisten the grass, that the foot of his enemy may swerve! He is your Cock! He chased away the shadows and the Spar-

row-hawk! O Nightingale," she pleaded, "sing something!"

The Nightingale sobbed and sang: "He fought for the Roses I love."

"Surely," thought the Pheasant, "the light that Chanticleer has loved so faithfully will help him, if only I pray earnestly enough," and aloud she said solemnly: "Save him, and I will be content to dwell in the farm-yard beside the plough."

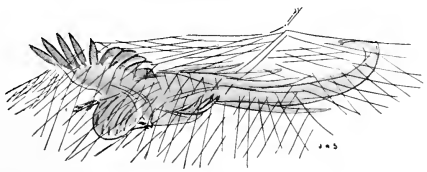
Then she held her breath and listened, while the moments of suspense crept slowly by. The light grew brighter, murmurs arose from all sides, the Birds awoke and twittered among the leaves, the air grew bluer, all the forest was awakening.

"O Sun!" she cried passionately, "forgive me! O Light, with whom I dared to dispute him, I give way to you! Only let him live!"

A gun shot rang out.

A trembling silence reigned for a moment; then, from far away they heard:

"Cock-a-doodle-doo!"



The Pheasant shut her eyes and waited

It was Chanticleer.

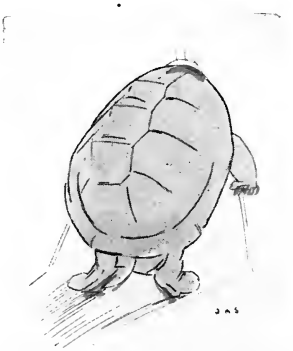
"He's safe! He's safe!" they all cried; and the little Rabbits leaped for joy, the Birds broke into their morning song, and borne on the breeze came "Cuckoo! Cuckoo!" The Woodpecker nodded and sang softly to himself, and like a flash of blue lightning a Jay flew laughing by: "Ha! Ha!"

Then, in the forest another sound was heard — the step of a MAN.

He was advancing towards the snare.

All the creatures hid themselves; and alone, crushed to the ground, her scarlet breast heaving, her wings outspread, the Pheasant shut her eyes, and waited. . . .

. . . And here the story ends: — for MAN is come.



THE END