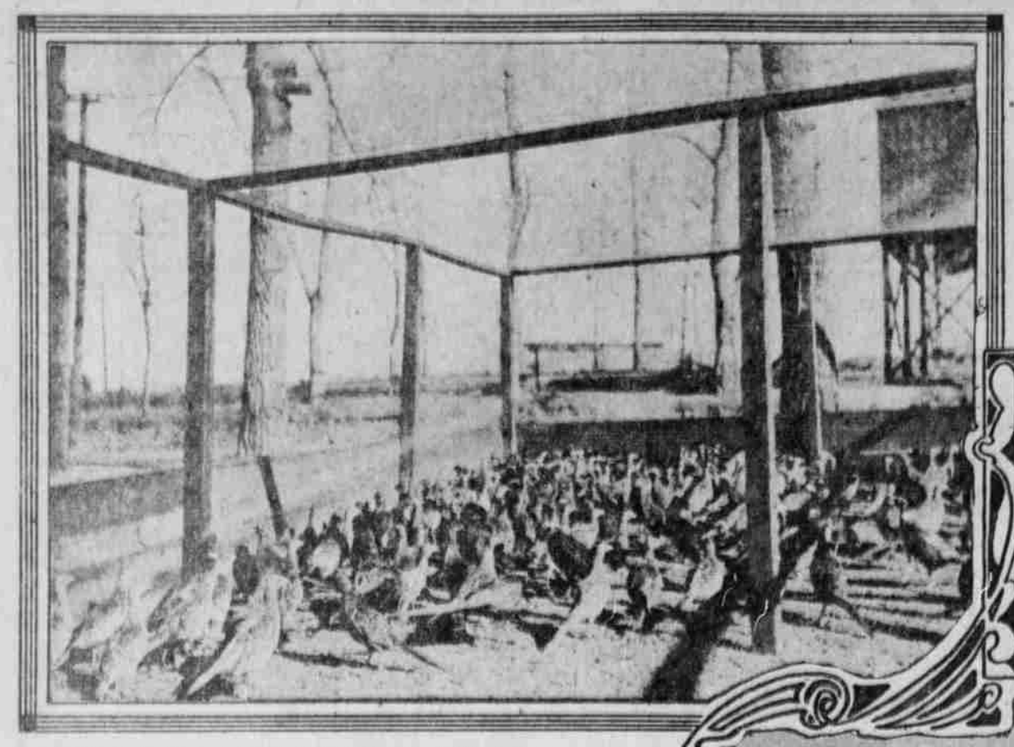
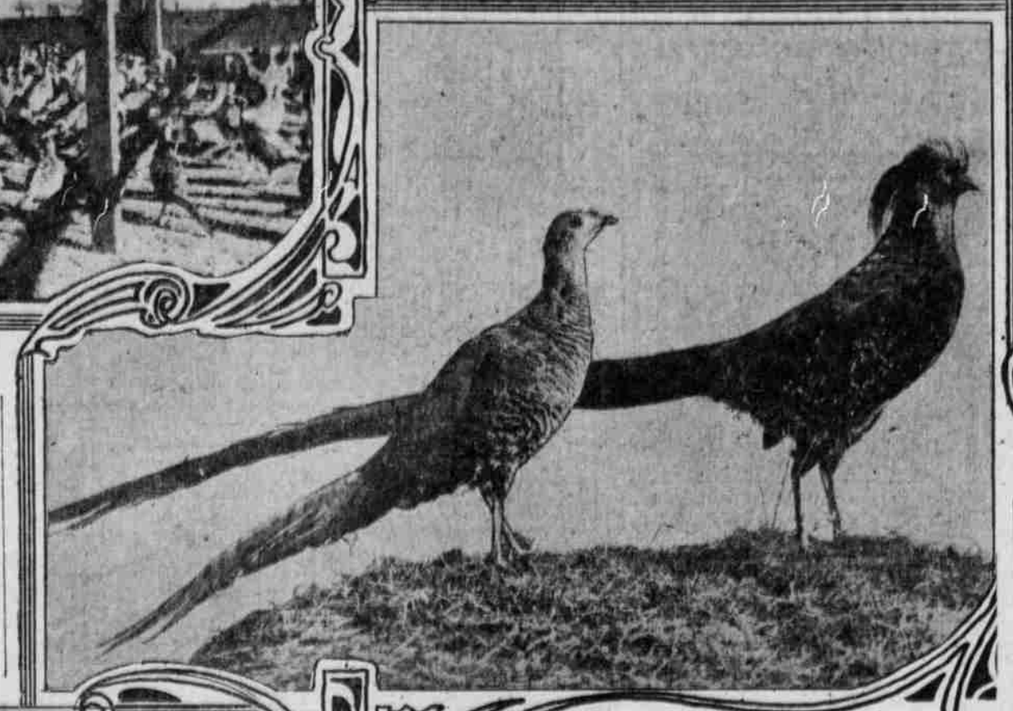
BREEDING PHEASANTS IN CAPTIVITY

Big Concern in Colorado Where the Barnyard Hen is Utilized as a Stepmother

Full Instructions On the Rearing of Game Birds Applicable to the Pacific Northwest

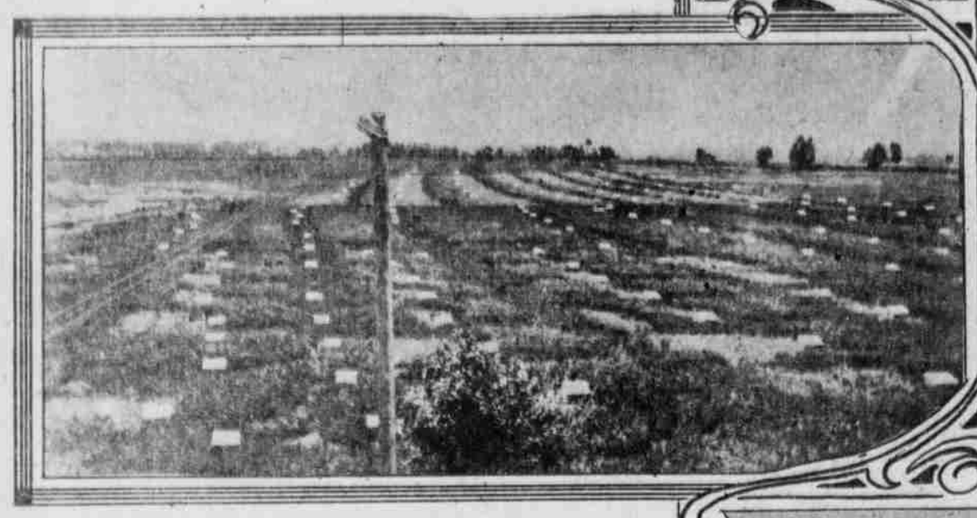


A CORNER IN AN EXHIBITION AVIARY

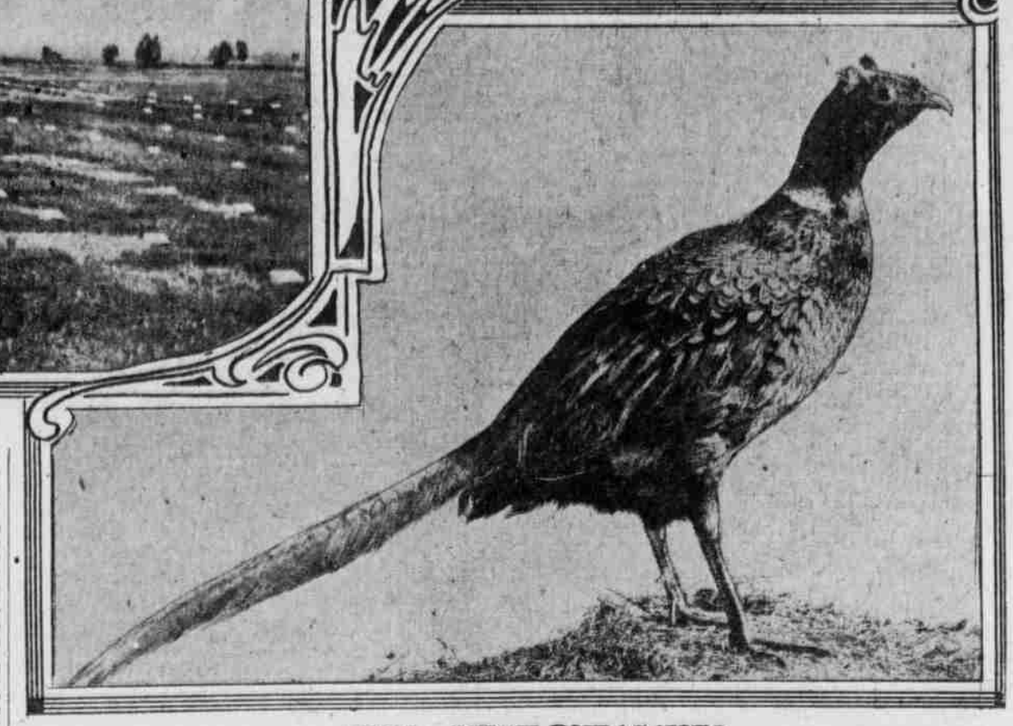


GOLDEN PHEASANT

SILVER AND CHINESE PHEASANTS ROOSTING ON A CAKE OF ICE



BREEDING GROUNDS



RING NECK PHEASANTS

BY J. ALDEN LORING.

IN AMERICA the rearing of Asiatic pheasants is practically unknown when compared to the extent to which it has for centuries been carried on in the old country. Until the last decade our native game has supplied America's wants, but cheap firearms and repeating and automatic guns have so increased the numbers of hunters and decreased the amount of game, that the prairie chicken, sharp-tailed grouse, ruffed grouse and bob-white are practically extinct, where their abundance in former years is taken into consideration.

Strange to say, most of the sportsmen and the gun clubs that have taken a serious interest in the welfare of our fauna, instead of trying to solve the problem of successfully propagating the native game birds, have spent most of their money in introducing and liberating foreign game birds.

The greatest success so far attained in this line has been in Washington and Oregon, where 18 Chinese pheasants were liberated about 1882, and at the present writing they are very abundant; although large numbers of them are annually killed by hunters.

The second English ring-neck pheasant was introduced into the Genesee Valley of New York several years ago and under present protection they are multiplying and spreading rapidly. Many owners of private game preserves have successfully stocked their lands with pheasants.

This sudden demand for game birds for restocking purposes has caused many pheasantries to be established throughout the country. The largest of these is the Kendrick Pheasantry at Denver, Colo., the owner, W. P. Kendrick, is one of those liberal-hearted citizens, who some ten years ago began raising pheasants for his own pleasure and the benefit of the citizens of his state.

Aside from maintaining a number of well-filled aviaries for exhibition purposes at City Park Zoo, Mr. Kendrick has liberated large numbers of pheasants. Last year alone he set 1500 eggs and freed about 600 birds, and this year he expects to set between 2000 and 3000 eggs, and will liberate probably two-thirds of his Summer's hatch.

Revealing Secrets of Breeding.

If proof were really needed, Mr. Kendrick's willingness to reveal the many secrets of raising pheasants that have cost him years of experience and thousands of dollars is convincing that he is sincere in his desire to become a public benefactor.

"When I first started my pheasantry I knew no more about it than a practical experience in rearing chickens had taught me," said Mr. Kendrick. "All the literature I could gather on the subject told how delicate the little pheasants were and what close attention and extreme care in feeding they required. Wishing to begin right, I imported an English gamekeeper, who was supposed to have had wide experience in the work. He was full of all kinds of nonsensical ideas—for example, one was that if the pheasant chicks were fed the same amount of food on a warm day that they were given on a cold day, they would die.

"I had had luck for some time, and finally got disgusted with the fellow and fired him, putting in charge a perfectly green, but intelligent man, and we commenced work on a sound common-sense basis. The result is that we have come to the conclusion that most of the pheasantries molly coddle their birds too much, and that raising pheasants is not much harder than raising chickens, and not near as difficult as rearing turkeys.

"The birds upon which we rely for our Summer's hatch are during the Winter kept in City Park, hundreds of them, cocks, hens and young birds, of the season before, are grouped in each large aviary. The species which we make a specialty of raising is the pure Chinese ring-neck pheasant, but all of the species that we have, the Chinese, Lady Amherst, Reeves, golden, silver and vitrio-color, are polygamists.

"When the baked skin about the head of the cock bird begins to assume its brilliant hues, about the first of March in this locality, it is a sign of the approaching breeding season. Then we begin to group the species, placing one male and three females of the silver, golden and Reeves in an inclosure, and four females and one male each of the other species together.

"Pheasants are very prolific. A hen ring-neck will lay about 60 eggs in a season, a Lady Amherst and a golden will average 24 and a Reeves and a silver pheasant, between 30 and 40 eggs. The eggs are all about the same shape, but they can usually be distinguished by their size and color, which varies from white to dark blue.

"The laying season here begins about the last of March and from then until the middle of August we are kept busy picking up eggs in the different inclosures, for to a setting, but when it gets warm, from 16 to 18 eggs are placed under a hen. Last year the eggs accumulated so rapidly that we did not have hens enough to handle them, so we placed them in the incubator for a few days and gave them to the hens as fast as we found birds under which to place them.

"It takes from 23 to 24 days to hatch ring-neck and golden pheasant eggs, and about 21 days for Lady Amherst eggs.

"The coops are placed about 20 feet apart and as you look over the breeding grounds it reminds you of a miniature white city. Some of the coops are surrounded by a pen 12 inches high, in which the chicks are kept prisoners for the first four days. This is necessary because experience has taught us that young pheasants, like young partridge, will run away and become lost if given their liberty as soon as hatched. They do not seem to understand the language of their foster-mother, but after the lapse of three or four days they learn her call-notes and obey, returning to her for food and to be brooded at night. We do not, as a rule, liberate the hens with their broods.

Food for the Chicks.

"During the first 24 hours we do not feed the chicks; they do not require it, as the nourishment obtained from the yolk of the egg is sufficient. For the first four days they are fed plain table custard mixed with chick food. Then we gradually break them in on a more substantial diet; eggs that have been dropped into boiling water and allowed to cool in it, then strained through a piece of common wire mosquito netting and mixed with Sprat's Pheasant Food, bread crumbs, corn meal and crumbled cornbread. After a week of such feeding we change again, this time gradually diminishing the amount of boiled egg and adding raw food, such as fine corn meal, crushed grains, and finally the best of raw Hamburg steak. We keep them on this food until they are old and strong enough to be given the regular food fed to the adult birds; buckwheat, wheat, cracked corn, kaffir corn, raw pumpkin, squash, sugar beets, mangel wurzel, cabbage, lettuce, dandelion tops and boiled potatoes and turnips. The young pheasants are very fond of dandelion leaves and people bring bag after bag of them to the park for us.

"For the first three months we feed the young birds considerable chopped meat so as to induce a rapid and hardy growth.

"Aside from the fact that when being reared they should be kept on a grassy meadow or flat, the care of pheasants should be quite like that given to chickens. Last year we experimented with a few of our birds and were so well pleased with the result that we shall adopt it on a much larger scale this season, and if we are as successful as before, the rearing of pheasants will be no more difficult than rearing chickens.

"We have tried feeding the chicks on maggots as they do in Europe, but so many of them died of ptomaine poison that we found it an utter failure in this section of the country.

"When we have old birds confined that we have decided to use for restocking the covers, we liberate them at a time when grasshoppers and insects are abundant. But we pay little attention to the young birds used for that purpose, for after they pass the stage where they require artificial food they naturally leave their foster-mother and seek their freedom.

Danger From Vermin.

"One of the greatest dangers to the successful rearing of pheasants is from lice. We begin to fight these pests from the time that the setting hens are brought to the grounds until the pheasants are able to care for themselves, after which they spend much of the time rolling in the dust and sand, which is nature's method of keeping off these insect pests.

"The coops and chicken-houses are thickly coated with whitewash and they are frequently sprinkled with other insect-preventive washes. In a season we use barrels of different washes.

"As soon as the hens are bought they are thoroughly dusted with insect powder and their feet and legs are dipped in kerosene oil. When they show a tendency to set, the hens are placed on trial nests and given a setting of china eggs. A few days later the nesting material is burned and the coop fumigated. Then the old lady receives her set of pheasant eggs and is disturbed as little as possible until the eggs hatch. This method eliminates the possibility of insects infecting the chicks. One should never put a hen on pheasant's eggs immediately after her legs have been oiled, for the oil will kill the life germ.

"Body lice are not very harmful; the head lice are the ones we dread and fight most. When the young pheasants are taken from the incubator and before they are placed in the brooding coop with their foster mother, their heads and the bare spots beneath their wings and about their thighs are well greased with vaseline and a very weak solution of carbolic acid. This operation is repeated about every week until they become difficult to catch.

"If you enjoy natural history you should come out to our brooding grounds during the height of the season, say, in July or August. You could spend a week there watching the little birds, but we could not let you inside of the wire enclosure, because you would unknowingly trample on the young birds. Even my keepers have to exert the utmost caution in this respect and stay in the well beaten paths leading from place to place.

Study of Natural History.

"You see the natural instinct of all game birds of this family to hide at the sight of danger causes the young pheasants to take shelter in the grass as soon as they get scared. But the little rascals are much brighter than you would suppose, for they soon learn the uniform of the keepers and will come for their food quite like little chickens, but the instant that a stranger appears they scud for shelter. Even when I visit the grounds I have to remain motionless for some time before they gain confidence and come out. In the meantime you see little heads appear here, there and everywhere, and finally they leave their hiding places.

"Thousands of pheasants ranging in age from a few days to birds almost ready to fly, swarm in the grass. They do not play as do young mammals, for young birds seldom frolic, but as you look over the meadow you see the grass waving here and there where the multitude is busily engaged catching grasshoppers and insects.

"People from Denver and picnic parties from adjoining villages come to my country pheasantry and visit my exhibition aviaries in City Park, where I rear just enough young birds to give one an idea of what the industry is like.

"It would be interesting to know just how many insects a pair of these birds will eat in a year. Nearly 1200 wire worms have been taken from the crop of a single pheasant, and for another bird 440 grubs of the grand-daddy-long-legs, constituted a single meal. That they are great destroyers of the seeds of noxious weeds is well known.

Pheasants Destroy Mice.

"Would you suppose that a bird like a pheasant would kill those destructive little field mice or meadow mice, as they are called? Well they do, and it would surprise you to see how quickly they do it. Pheasants are perhaps the swiftest birds afoot of all the small Gallinaceous game, and they can pick up a mouse before the race has fairly begun. Then they thrash it upon the ground and keep pecking it until it is dead, after which they eat every vestige of the body but the skin and skull. Young mice they swallow whole and cases are on record where they have been choked to death by the rodents.

"Pheasants do not scratch like chickens, their bill taking the place of their feet. They will even peck a hole through any moderate thickness of ice for water, and in the same manner they dig out buttercup bulbs and insect larvae. They do not roost on the ground until the foliage leaves the trees, but spend the night high up among the branches where they are not subject to the attacks of the predatory animals. Their most dreaded enemy is the Western horned owl.

"With the ring-neck pheasant the bright plumage of the males begins to appear about the fourth month, and in eight months they are gorgeously plumaged. The golden, silver and Lady Amherst pheasants do not get full plumaged until the second year. The difference between the sexes is first noticed when the birds are about two months old—then the tail of the male is longest. Even when adult, it is hard to distinguish the different species of hen pheasants, and only an expert can identify them. There is practically no marked difference between the female ring-necks and the vitrio-color birds, or the golden and Lady Amherst.

Hatching Wild Ducks and Geese.

"No, we don't confine our experiments to pheasants only. We consider it a great favor when sportmen send us a setting of eggs of some other game bird. In fact, at the present time we have mixed in with our pheasants, scale partridges from Southwestern United States, California mountain partridge, valley partridge and the Eastern bob-white. We have had scale partridge and bob-whites build their nest and rear their young in captivity, and we have incubated and reared large numbers of bob-whites.

"Wild ducks' eggs hatch easily and the ducklings are pretty and interesting creatures. The species that naturally feed upon grain and seeds are easy to rear, but the fish-eating kind are more difficult. We have to clip or pinion their wings or they would migrate south in the Fall with the wild water fowl.

"A friend of mine owned a flock of wild geese that he neglected to pinion, and one day in the Fall he had the pleasure of seeing them mount high in the air and head for the South. But as he had expected, they returned in the Spring, their identity being established by the holes made in their webbed feet with a chicken punch.

"Yes, pheasants, particularly the Chinese ring-neck, are very hardy birds and in their native countries some species range up into the extremely high mountain. Those that I have liberated here are multiplying by the thousand and are doing finely. I believe that they can easily be acclimatized in any suitable locality in the United States or Southern Canada. It would be difficult to find a better cover for them than is to be had in those portions of Alberta and Saskatchewan, where clumps and groves of poplar trees abound. The work, too, is clean and very fascinating, and could be made profitable for men or women."

The pheasants that have been introduced into this country have taken up their home in the brushy skirtings of the woods, fields and country roads, where there is also a rank growth of weeds and grass. They can likewise be found in and near marshes, but unlike our ruffed grouse, they do not inhabit the heavy timber, their habits resembling those of Eastern bob-white.

In sections of the country where the pheasants have been protected since their introduction, they are very tame and lie close, allowing a person to almost step on them before taking flight. In fact, the writer can recall an instance where a hen, hiding in some reeds, could easily have been caught in his hands.

In Oregon they offer to the sportsman a form of hunting entirely different from that afforded by any American game bird. They do not lie before a dog, but run with remarkable swiftness. In tall grass and weeds the hunter can often mark the course of a vanishing bird by the wake it leaves behind, and after it has outdistanced the dog 300 yards or more, it takes flight and if it is an old cock, it cackles and swears at you as it wings its way over the thickets and disappears in the dense brush.

During a day's hunt indulged in by a friend and myself near Albany, Or., we bagged 12 birds and must have flushed at least 100, two-thirds of which got up far out of gunshot. I was astonished at the amount of shot a cock bird could carry away. Many times, judging from the cloud of feathers, we literally filled the bird with lead, yet he would continue his course until out of sight.

The cock pheasants are armed with long spurs like those of a rooster. They are aggressive birds, constantly fighting with one another, especially in the Spring, and they will even enter a barn-yard and whip a rooster before he can gather his surprised senses.

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Epsom Salts as an Anesthetic

New York American.

ANNOUNCEMENT of the discovery of a new anesthetic—safer, cheaper and simpler than any hitherto known is about to be made by the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research. Plans are under way for the spreading of the important tidings to the medical and surgical world.

The new anesthetic is nothing else than plain, common Epsom salts, or, to give it its scientific name, sulphate of magnesia. It was discovered by Dr. Samuel J. Meltzer, one of the Rockefeller experimenters. Its greatest value is that it permits any sort of an operation without any danger to the heart of the patient.

Either local or general anesthesia, it is said, may be produced by the injection of a 30 per cent solution of the familiar drug into the nerve tract governing the sensations of the part to be operated upon.

The beneficial effects of the discovery—the number of lives that may be saved through its use—will more than repay the $5,000,000 with which John D. Rockefeller has endowed the institute.

It will prevent deaths from the powerful reactionary influence of ether and chloroform, the institute workers believe. And it will give a chance of life to those whose fragile hearts will not stand the stress of the administration of those drugs.

Dr. Meltzer's experiments have been going on quietly for a long time. But such success has crowned his efforts that it will not be long before he makes public the result of his many tests.

The present discovery came about almost entirely by accident, the director explained. Dr. Meltzer was experimenting about two years ago with various simple drugs to find out "what place they had in the economy of the body." He injected for that purpose a solution of sulphate of magnesia into a dog.

It was noticeable after a few minutes that the animal grew quiet and listless. Its respiration grew slower and fainter. Finally the breathing apparently ceased.

That was a new bit of knowledge—that magnesium sulphate affected the respiratory system. Dr. Meltzer pondered over it. Then he got a bellows, and, with a tube, produced artifical respiration in the dog's lungs. The animal revived, scampered away and still lives.

Further tests proved that with a weaker solution the dog's respiration returned naturally, and that it was completely insensible to pain during the period of anesthesia. While the dog was senseless, Dr. Meltzer found that its temperature neither rose nor fell. Temperature rises with ether or chloroform. He found, too, what was more important, that his heart beat with absolute, unwavering regularity. Irregular pulsation follows ether and chloroform.

Suspended animation was caused in this case by suspended respiration—in plain words, a practical stoppage of the breath.

Tests followed with other animals, among them a monkey. This latter experiment was performed before many members of the Academy of Medicine. The beast, ill-tempered and vicious, was calmed first by a small injection. Then it was anesthetized.

This suggested that the injection might be valuable in the treatment of insane persons. So experiments were performed—for the first time upon human beings—at a local institution for the insane. Several persons were rendered quiet and tractable without being made unconscious or without apparently losing any of their faculties.

The Pokerbromide.

Ted Robinson, in Cleveland Leader.

There never is a poker game
In which he does not shine.
The Pokerbromide—he of lame
And rubberstamp wit.

Of pots he never says "I can
Not open it" for he's
The funny—he's the little man
Who answers "Not with these."

He never holds a flush—not he;
He seems to it is true,
But call him and he merrily
Makes answer, "They're all blue!"

A white chip by the kitty's brim,
When "breathes" this beauty here,
Is no chip, but a "bean" to him.
And it is nothing more.

He does not win—he just "goes South,"
This prince of poker wags;
He opens "at the cannon's mouth,"
He does not "stay"—he "drags."

Some day I'll kill him, if he dares
One infamy, I'll strike
Him down, if he calls fours "Two pairs—
And both of 'em alike."