“Lost in the spaces I shall hear and bless
The splendid voice of London, like a lion
Calling its lover in the wilderness.”

Shortly before dawn on market days the irritated squealing of pigs can be heard from one end of Peking to the other. One can scarcely blame the pigs, as they are transported upside down with their trotters uncomfortably trussed to poles, and nobody has ever thought of gagging them. Heard far off, the sound is not unpleasant; really, if one did not know what it was, one might well mistake it for an army of bagpipes on the march. But even on the days which are not market days the city of Peking is full of delectable noises. At night the musical street calls of a few peddlers, not unlike the occasional calls of birds in a sleeping forest, are always to be heard, and as the wheel of day comes up bit by bit the sounds increase until at sunrise they become the most glorious din in the world.

The Chinese must really love noise passionately, for they add to all the necessary and expected sounds a great many unnecessary but diverting ones. One would expect in the life of a great city the human babel of crowded streets where traffic proceeds at a dog trot, unhampereed by lights. One would expect the rumbling of wheels, the beat of hooves, the neighing of horses, the braying of asses, the angry mumble of camels, the vocal warnings of carters and riksha boys, the constant bands which accompany wedding and funeral processions. In these bands are heard the blaring voices of the foreign brasses, the lugubrious, deep-throated groans of the gigantic horns of the Lamas, the mild singsong of the Buddhists, the lightsome tinkling bells of the Taoists (in a country tolerant to religions all varieties may appear in the same procession—and often do). This should be quite enough for the most interested ear, but the Chinese, not content with noises logical and necessary, have gone out of their way to invent others. The street cries which are few at night are myriad by day, the water carts have been built to emit the most extraordinary and tuneful squeaks to warn traffic of their approach, bells hang from every pagoda eave to catch the wind, caged birds are taught to sing songs they were never born to sing as they are carried by laborers to their places of work, and whole flocks of pigeons are turned loose with an endless variety of little whistles attached to their backs so that a flood of sound comes down from the skies.

There are also the sounds of the wild, uncaged birds which nest in large colonies or alone in the arbor vitae trees of temple courtyards and palace gardens in the Imperial City. One might almost mistake the metropolis for a bird sanctuary. Indeed, before it was named Peking it was called Yenching, the Swallow Capital. Magpies black and white (the “lucky bird”), magpies soft blue with a dab of white in their tails (mountain magpies), warblers, finches, hoopoes, crows fly freely from courtyard to courtyard. The crows, in fact are such a nuisance that the descendants of the onetime Imperial goldfish which are still nurtured in the spacious grounds of the Altar of Earth—now called Central Park with the well-inten-
tioned but surely mistaken idea that “Central
Park” is a more democratic name (let none for-
get the earth out of which all races and civi-
lizations came and to which all will return)
—must be covered with wire netting to keep
the crows from plucking out their telescopic,
exophthalmic eyes, eyes tempting to any crow.

Birds which would seem to be country birds
still more than these inhabit the Forbidden
City, its lotus-flowered moat, and the myriad
pavilioned gardens of the lake palaces of the
South, the Middle, and the North Seas. Here
are a variety of herons and wagtails, and the
elegant jacana. The jacana is a lovely bird.
Neatly armored in black and white, with a
curved scimitar tail, it greatly resembles a
small pheasant, and it is called by the Chinese
“water pheasant.” At dawn, as the earliest
white sunlight irradiates the faded red and
yellow of the Forbidden City watchtowers, the
jacanas may be seen (and heard) stepping dain-
tily from lily pad to lily pad, accompanied in
the proper season by absurd, delightful chicks.

In winter, when the summer birds have
gone, the hawks become more noticeable. In
winter the lakes and palaces, bereft of sum-
mer’s greens, are even more brilliant and beau-
tiful. This Imperial City with its palaces and
lakes has no peer in fact or fancy among the
architectural works of man. Seen from the air
as the hawks see it, it can be read almost as
the score of a symphony is read, theme and
countertheme, movement by movement.

The eye-taking colony of white herons that
nest in the deep moss green of the ancient
arbor vitae grove of the Ancestral Dynastic
Temple of the Imperial City may well be
singled out for admiration, especially as the
grove is set against the rose red walls and
yellow roofs of the temple halls. To the lay
eye the herons may appear to lead an enviable
life, the perpetual cacophony of heron talk
sound reasonable. How lovely, the layman may
think, how lovely to live in surroundings noble
and restricted among a race all white and shin-
ing. Life in this seeming Paradise looks pretty,
but ornithologists know that it is in fact a
desperate battle for survival, lived, as all wild
bird and animal life is lived, with no illusion
or sentiment.

Turning from the wild bird to the tame,
from the graceful heron to the portly hen, we
discover with regret that community life among
domesticated birds is, if anything, an even
more bitter struggle. Lately the animal psychol-
ogists have produced a horrible exposé of the
community life of the common domestic hen.
Since Schjelderup-Ebbe, who first noticed the
pecking order of hens (social precedence among
the hens depends on which one can peck hard-
est), a long series of scientists, including Guhl
and Allee in their recent papers, have occupied
themselves with study of the social organiza-
tion, or hierarchy, in Gallus domesticus. Who
would have thought that hen life was so
organized that some would grow fat and sleek
and comfortable and others thin and rangy,
each taking its exact place in the hen social
scale, with the most abused ones becoming what people nowadays call neurotic? Apparently it is, and awful parallels might be made to human society. Chickens may be born equal, but they seem to make great haste to establish an unequal social scale with innocent brutality. At the thought that there are hens—red hens, for example—that turn out to be conquering peckers, perhaps we should really be frightened.

What would Karl Marx have made of hens? And what of hens in Russia?

Russia has hens I know, for I once supped in a lodging house in Siberia where they were sharing the kitchen, the chairs, and the bed with their owners. At the time my mind was not concerned with hen society; but, come to think of it, the Soviet hen as observed on that occasion was a very different fowl from the Turkestan hen and the Chinese hen I had lately visited. Is it possible that an archaeologist or anthropologist might reconstruct the varying civilizations of the world if he confined himself to a study of the hen?

Let us pause for a moment and examine the hens of different countries and their representation in art. (Even as we begin we can clearly see that the Chinese hen will come out in actuality and in painted counterfeit as the best of them all, just as everything else seems to do in the long run in China.)

Observe first the American hen; observe it on the farm, at county fairs and metropolitan poultry shows. Except at the latter, what do we see most often? The Rhode Island Red, the Leghorn, and the Plymouth Rock (Bantams, Houdans, Buff Orpingtons, and gamecocks are surely frills in American life). In general, do not these fowl somewhat reflect the people who raise them? They are well cared for in most places and seem to lead useful lives. A few are bred for county fairs, but most American hens stay quietly at home (the motor car has removed the wayward feminist hen from most roads). The American hen appears very little in art—sometimes as a detail in a farmyard scene, occasionally in advertisement (the most notable instance is the crowing cock of Pathé News), and once in a while the feathers appear in women’s hats either in their original state or cleverly dyed to look like something else. The hen in America is, like most of us, a very democratic bird.

The English hen, it would seem, stays in that state of life to which it has been called. Oh admirable English hen!

What of hens on the Continent? In pictures at least, there are not many. Among the few there are, however, those by the Dutch painter Melchoir de Hondecoeter, who made barnyard fowl a major subject, are outstanding.

French hens? In all the wonderful tapestries,
Cocks and hens as represented in the art of various countries. In origin they are, beginning at the top, Greek, third quarter of the VI century B.C. (from an Attic black-figured kylix); Egyptian, about 1425-1123 B.C. (limestone ostrakon from Thebes); English, about 1750-1760 (ornament, lead-glazed earthenware, Whieldon type); Chinese, Kang H’si period (1662-1722) (water pot, enamel on biscuit); American, 1880-1900 (covered dish, marble glass). All but the Egyptian cock may be seen on objects in the Metropolitan Museum.
full of birds and animals, that were lately exhibited at the Museum was there a single hen, unless we count domesticated pheasants as hens? The cock, long a symbol of the Republic, appeared in the later tapestries. Save in this role domestic fowl have not often turned up in the pictorial art of France. One brilliant appearance in literature, however, the cock, complete with harem of hens, has made as the magnificent hero of Rostand's *Chantecler*.

"Toi qui sèches les pleurs des moindres graminées,
Qui fais d'une fleur morte un vivant papillon,
Lorsqu'on voit, s'effeuillant comme des destinées,
Trembler au vent des Pyrénées
Les amandiers du Roussillon."

In Imperial Russia there was the Coq d'Or of course, but he was more puppet than bird—the sorcerer's stage property, made of papier-mâché and gilt paint. He is not to be admitted into the hen world.

The tail feathers of Italian cocks adorn the hats of the *bersaglieri*; the *bersaglieri* in turn adorn the hats—in the combined militant display it is a question which adorns the other more.

In Germany the goose seems to be preferred to the hen (even the army in its parade step imitates the goose), but neither has a notable place in painting.

The hen in ancient Egypt was a rarity. In a country where animals and combination men and animals appeared among the gods, where we must deal with cats and hippopotami and hawks, the hen was almost left out. Howard Carter has written an article about the domestic fowl, demonstrating that it probably originated from the little jungle fowl, but certainly old Egypt paid scant attention to the species.

Nor did the Greeks. To be sure, cocks were
associated with Athena, Socrates condemned asked that a cock be sacrificed to Asklepios, and in that fanciful hinterland of fauns and satyrs, of nymphs and centaurs, there existed creatures half fowl half animal—for instance, the hippalektryon, half cock half horse. Fighting cocks looking, although Greek, a good bit like the jungle fowls occur on vases. But, on the whole, hens appear very little in Greek legend or Greek art.

The jungle fowl itself is a very pretty little bird; in New York it may usually be seen both at the Natural History Museum and at the Bronx Zoo. Thoreau reminds us of its relation to our own domestic fowl, which he would have liked to turn loose in the Concord woods. "To walk in a winter morning in a wood where these birds abounded, their native woods, and hear the wild cockerels crow on the trees, clear and shrill for miles over the resounding earth, drowning the feeble notes of other birds—think of it! It would put nations on the alert." (Thoreau was quite often a trial to his neighbors.)

Leave the West for the East, then what do we find? We find our common barnyard fowl living, in legend and picture at least, a very different life. It has had a long and important history. Somewhere out of India we think the cock (a stage version of a Rhode Island Red) came three-legged, to become in China the symbol of the sun and rest on the Emperor's shoulder as one of the twelve sacrificial symbols. This symbol is recorded in the Book of Rites, which was compiled as early as the fifth century B.C. To this day a white cock rides on coffins in rural China. He is a symbol, when he appears there, of life and vitality and promise.

Cocks, hens, and chickens are a common—almost a favorite—subject with painters in both China and Japan. In China cocks and hens are a more conspicuous feature of the landscape than they are elsewhere—in New England, for instance, they keep their place as barnyard fowl; they are a small detail in any vista with a white farmhouse and a red barn. In China there are no white houses or red barns. There the countless towns and villages are each a sensible huddle of houses—sometimes built entirely of the lion-colored soil, sometimes with walls of gray brick—against a tawny ground. In such a setting the cocks and hens are as brilliant as a Bakst ballet. From one end of China to the other these common fowl shine out. Most of them are of the variety we call Rhode Island Red—an odd name to give to poultry that decorate towns and provinces with names that sound like enchantments from the Arabian Nights. Very often the plumage of the cocks is of a magnificence and brilliance seeming far to surpass that of New England fowl, and their manner is surely more lordly. Small wonder that in China they attract the painter's eye.

It is our purpose in the near future to put on an exhibition of dazzling Chinese paintings.
of birds, many of them recently acquired in the Bahr collection, but time and carpenters delay us. In the frustrated interim let us look at hens, which are likely to be forgotten when the more spectacular fěng huángs, pheasants, egrets, eagles, and the rest appear. The wonder is that with the domestic fowl we can show you them as majestic as Napoleon and Catherine the Great, as appealing as the creations of Barrie and Walt Disney. For the time being we will present you a Chinese cock as grand as Louis XIV, a hen as impressive as Maria Theresa, and also charming chicks.

One thing about the Chinese that Westerners are instantly sympathetic with but smile at indulgently, because most Westerners do not think about birds and animals and flowers as the Chinese do, is the way the Chinese feel about nature. East or West man is fully aware that he is one up on all other forms of life. He is right both East and West. But in their attitude towards nature there is a difference between East and West: Your Westerner knows that he is lord of the universe and rather tiresomely emphasizes it; the Chinese in all their ways are equally secure, but they have an appreciation and respect for the whole natural world that we Westerners do not.

East and West all men observe the wild goose winging and smile at the amusing antics of mice. But the Chinese, when they stop to think of nature, think something that most Westerners do not. They see, almost without thinking, what our Darwins and others try to tell us: that, while we are certainly more complicated than a mouse or hen, in our life cycle—in the natural order of things—the mouse and I, the mouse and you, the hen and I, the hen and you, have much in common experience. Man, being first of all an animal, must perforce pass through a physical life scheme similar to that of other animals (and never should man forget this); yet aeons and aeons ago the human animal began to create a world of mind and spirit, which is the one you and I live in and which we strive to perfect. All men know this, though they seem to forget it and snarl up their heritage. Both West and East will learn—indeed, have learned—to express the likeness in the life experience of animals and human beings, but they say and picture it different ways.

Your Westerner is likely to be kinder to animals than your Easterner, but he is also likely to attribute to animals and birds the complicated emotional scheme in which human beings themselves live. This comes out best in Kenneth Grahame's *Wind in the Willows* and Beatrix Potter's mice and rabbits.

Now the Chinese view the world about them quite differently. They observe and paint mice
Fletcher Fund, 1944. From the A. W. Bahr collection.
and men and mountains—and birds—with almost equal dignity and understanding. In legend and fairy lore, however, they seem to view animals much as Westerners do. In China the snake and fox appear in the guise of beautiful women to make appropriate mischief. The dragon has nine misogynous sons, who appear in architectural decoration. The monkey who was a deity in India continues in China to be at least an Immortal. In such matters East and West have likenesses. But apart from this—discarding this phase—remember that, fundamentally, the East thinks, sees, feels differently from the West about animals and birds. Westerners consider themselves either conquerors or victims of the natural world; the Chinese feel themselves a part of it.

Out of India came the idea of the transmigration of souls, the never-ending struggle of the human soul to attain perfection. To Westerners, when they play with this idea at all, it is an amusement that a human being might well live again as a weasel or an egret according to his just deserts; the monkey lover of the Spectator papers, the vindictive otter of the Saki stories, are examples. The idea of transmigration was at one time deeply believed in the East. In our day it is probably not deeply believed as a threat, and most Buddhists I think feel that they themselves are safe from such a punishment; but they believe in the possibility; certainly, they feel themselves to be part of the animal world.

Thus in the East, out of these roots, comes an attitude towards nature different from the Western attitude, and it shows in all its pictorial record. One does not have to understand the Eastern attitude to take pleasure in a Chinese landscape or flower painting or portrait of a hen, for the eye itself is satisfied; but the mind behind the eye is surely that much richer if it does.

Hens and their ways, when we discover how horribly like they are to human ways superficially, make us laugh, whereas your Chinese philosopher and painter only smiles at them. He is never sentimental about the hen, but he places it and paints it as a dignified and proper creature in the world he lives in. The Chinese are fully aware of the place of the human being in the scheme of nature, but they can understand and see that all life is part of the same scheme—and paint what they see. Man knows in China where he stands in time. He bends and smiles as he watches the life cycle of the hen or the flower; he bows in awe at his relation to the majesty of mountains and the power of the sea.

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The Egyptian cock illustrated on page 216 is reproduced from plate xx of The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology, vol. IX (1923), where it accompanies an article by Howard Carter.

The quotations, in case you do not recognize them, are from Stella Benson's “The Newer Zion,” Rostand's Chantecler, and Thoreau's Walden.