

THE LANGSHAN'S AMAZING HISTORY

- Fowls of the Wolf Mountain that have always been here –

By Martyn Pierre Gurney, C.M.G. M.V.O.

(year unknown, ca 1930)

In the north bank of the great Yang-Tse River, about sixty miles from the Yellow Sea and a hundred miles from Shanghai, rises the solitary "wolf mountain", Lang-Shan. Entirely wooded, crescent-shaped, it runs in a north-easterly direction, facing to the north-west, the small town of Tung-Chow, buried almost among the rice fields and canals. The mountain has three tops, not two as hitherto supposed. Two at the points of the crescent and one in the centre, the latter protruding somewhat westward, crowned with its beautiful fourteenth century pagoda.

The various buildings belonging to the monastery cover the mountain side on its western face: the monastery farms surround the mountain, the temple dominates the river and the vast plain of Northern Kiang-Su, as far as the eye can see. This part of the province of Kiang-Su, between the dyke on the east, protecting it from the Yellow Sea, and the great Imperial Canal on the west, which connects the Yen-Ho River to the Yang-Tse, north to south, is very thickly populated, in striking contrast to the part of the province south of the Yang-Tse from Shanghai to Nankin. It is a continuous network of rice fields and canals, with here and there a town of minor importance (Chow), small villages and farms. How came it that this wonderful mountain and its Buddhist pagoda were almost unknown to the European inhabitants of Shanghai from 1842 to 1872? Poultry fanciers wonder that the home of the Langshan fowl should have remained almost a mystery from 1872, when visited by Major Croad's nephew, a naval officer taking soundings in the Yang-Tse River on the Langshan flats, up to the present day.

A Century of incredible Silence - An official in the Chinese Imperial Service, a traveller, a landing party from a lightship on the flats, approached the monastery, but nobody has ever given us any definite information nor any description of the mountain or of its pagoda. Even the name of the mountain was incorrectly translated. That this conspiracy of silence should have lasted nearly a century is almost incredible. Strange, indeed, is that the writer, a British consular officer, who happens to be a Langshan fancier and a personal friend of Mary Croad, a Vice-President of the English Croad Langshan Club, a President and founder of the French Croad Langshan Club, should have discovered, accidentally in the photographic album of a French consular officer stationed at Shanghai before the war, the only photographic views ever taken of the Lang-Shan mountain, its Buddhist monastery, its monks and the farms surrounding the mountain.

My friend and colleague, Monsieur Georges Soulié de Morant placed at my disposal some photographs and an excellent French map, from which I made a tracing of the Lang-Shan mountain and district, giving details that do not appear in the Admiralty Chart of the Yang-Tse river printed in 1888, and accompanying Miss Croad's book, "The Langshan Fowl". M. Soulié de Morant gave me an interesting account of his visit to Lang-Shan Pagoda and a description of the fowls he found in the court-yards of the buildings on the mountainside and in the farms around, belonging to the monastery.

A Visit to the Chinese Consul - I thought well to call on my colleague the Consul General of the Chinese Republic in Paris, who very kindly gave me, written with brush and ink in Chinese, the correct name of the Lang-Shan Pagoda. He assured me that the Buddhist monks were still in possession of the monastery. He was agreeably surprised to hear from me that his country had sent such valuable fowls to Europe, and he asked for a copy of my recent pamphlet on the history of the Langshan fowl, which he wanted to send to his son who was studying poultry rearing at a French agricultural college - an amusing coincidence.

The Langshan fowl seemed destined to remain a mystery. Like all really good things, was a long and difficult adventure. That part of the province of Xiang-Su which lies north of the Yang-Tse Kiang is thickly populated and easily reached from Shanghai. The fowls that were shipped from that port to England in 1842 were found south of the river, between Shanghai and Nan-Kin. No fowls ever came to England from north of the river until February 1872, when Major Croad's first pen of "Langshans" appeared on the scene. None even reached Shanghai before 1862, when a lightship was moored outside the Langshan crossing. Very few indeed found their way down the river in native boats to Shanghai after that date. The shipments made to England and America of the black fowls of Lang-Shan can be counted on one's fingers.

Europeans Never Visited the District - M. Soulié de Morant assures me that the European merchants and residents at Shanghai going up the river to Nan-Kin had no occasion to land and never to his knowledge did land on the north bank of the river near the Lang-Shan mountain. Between Shanghai and Kiang-Yin the Yang-Tse Kiang is very broad. At the Langshan flats it is nearly ten miles wide, and the many sandbanks, covered at high tide or when the river is in flood, render navigation extremely difficult. The only navigable channel for steamers never gets near the north bank until the small riverside village of Chuang-Yan is reached.

The sandbanks shown on the map I have traced keep the navigable channel well to the south of the river. The Lang-Shan crossing between the two great sandbanks can only be negotiated by native flat boats, No Europeans had landed at Chuang-Yan before M. Soulié de Morant did with a view to visiting the Pagoda. From Chuang-Yan to Tung-Chow, the only town within sight of the mountains there is no road, only a canal, and tow paths run along its banks. No road of any kind exists in the district. There are pathways only, along the canals and between the rice fields, just broad enough for one man to run along, pushing a narrow plank, fastened to one wheel and having a pair of handles at one end and a small mast at the other, up which a square sail is hoisted when the wind is favorable. This is the only conveyance at the disposal of the European traveller or the well to do native.



FIG. 18.—LIGHT BRAHMA COCK (ENGLISH TYPE).

From
 'Races of Domestic
 Poultry
 - Brown -
 1906

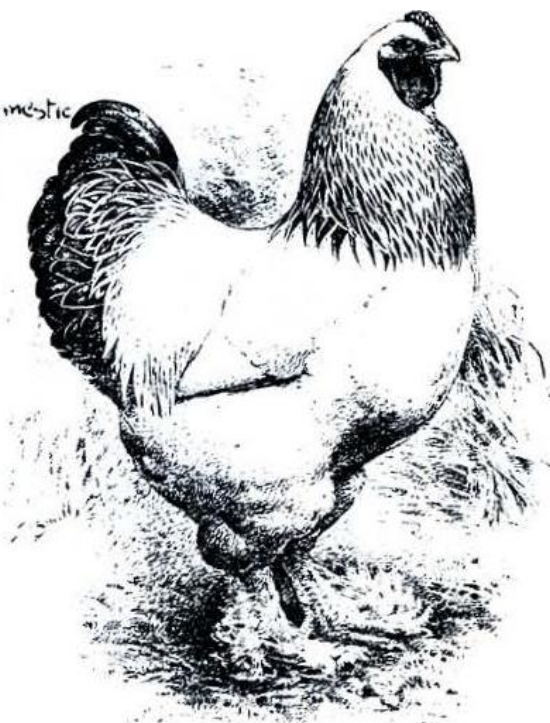
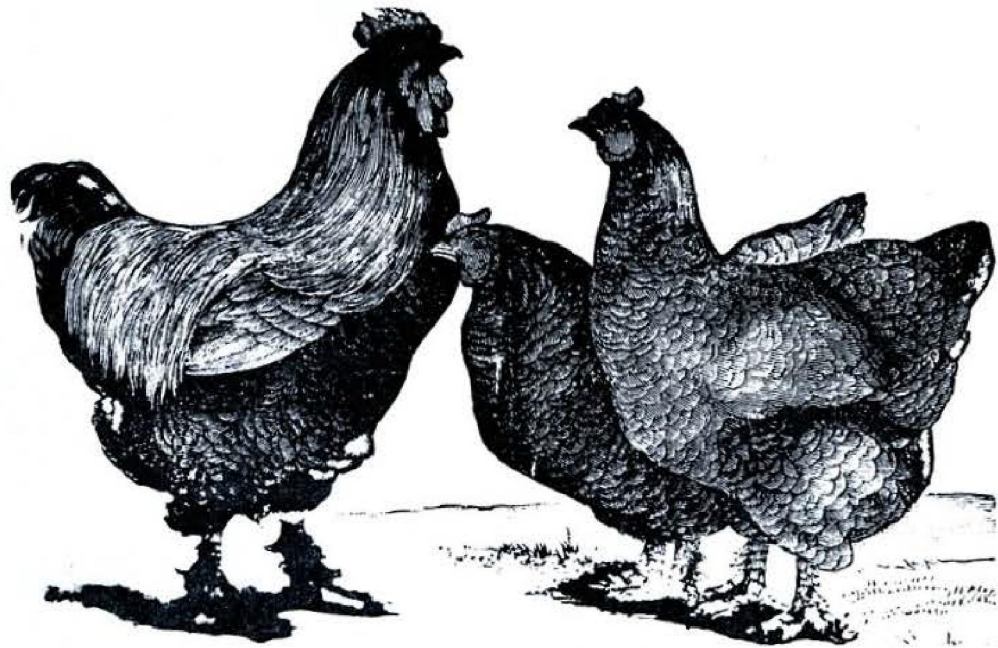
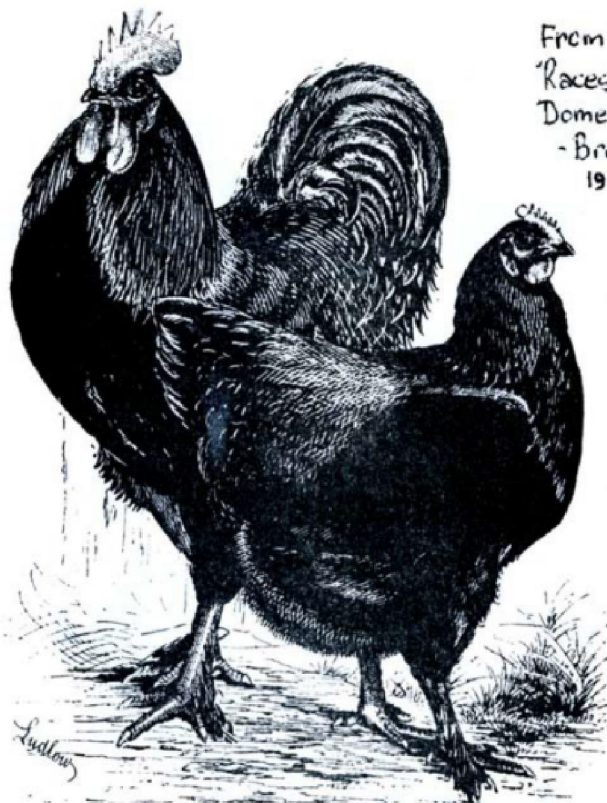


FIG. 19.—LIGHT BRAHMA COCK (AMERICAN TYPE).
 Bred by H. N. Rollins, Woodville, Miss.



Partridge Cochins imported by D.W. Herstine, Philadelphia
from
Burnham's New Poultry Book - 1877



From
'Races of
Domestic Poultry'
- Brown -
1906

FIG. 23. - BLACK LANGSHANS.



A Map of the Lang-Shan Mountain and District
 traced by Mr. Gurney from a French map lent him by another Consul, and giving details
 which do not appear in Miss Croad's book (now out of print).

Fishing with Tame Cormorants - The Lang-Shan district is still as untouched by modern progress as it ever was. Living on rice and fish the inhabitants can be seen fishing in the canals with tame cormorants. The small town of Tung-Chow is surrounded by a wall about 9 ft high and its inhabitants lock themselves in within the wall at night to keep out marauding bands. How easy it is therefore to understand that the beautiful black fowls of the Lang-Shan monastery did not come to Europe with the common fowls of Shanghai in the forties, fifties and sixties and that so few ever left the sacred precincts of the Buddhist Monastery and its farms after 1871.

Every Courtyard Containing Large Black Fowls - M. Soulié de Morant tells me he was greatly surprised to find all the inner courtyards of the lower Monastery buildings where the apprentice monks and the servants of the Monastery lived, and in all the farms lying around the mountain and belonging to the Monastery, "beautiful, large, full bodied black fowls with a green metallic sheen", and these only. So unlike, he says the common fowl of the Kiang-Su Province, south of the Yang-Tse which were coarse and lanky, all of uniform colour, brown red, that of the wild fowls he had found in the Chinese forests.

Langshan enthusiasts will welcome the evidence in favour of our beautiful Croad Langshans. This should surely close for ever the old Langshan controversy. A black variety of the Shanghai fowl (misnamed Cochin), the yellow skinned, yellow legged, long shanked heavy boned, vulture hocked common brown red fowl of the Kiang-Su, from Shanghai to Nankin, never did exist save in the imagination of misguided, so-called poultry experts.

To call the pure blooded Langshan fowl a variety of the Black "Cochin" as some did in the early days of the Langshan controversy is as futile as to call the Black Valdarno of the Tuscan Valley a variety of the white fowl of the Leghorn coast.

There can be little doubt that the Buddhist monks building their pagoda in the fourteenth century on the mountain stronghold, had already then selected black as the best colour for these fowls and stock to them favourite colour through the following centuries because not only does black feathering mean pink skin and white flesh but because black was the colour the reigning dynasty in China that preceded the late Imperial dynasty whose representative colour was yellow. Black colour in China is the hallmark of perfection, majesty, honour, greatness. White is the sign of mourning. Hence white fowls, sports of the blacks, are killed or exported. We know from Miss Croad's book that a Jesuit missionary in the Kiang-Su Province sent some White Langshan sports to America in 1886 and 1888. These White Langshans were bred by several members of the American Langshan Club.

The Beautiful Black Breeds of Gaul - The Romans also appreciated the black fowl. They imported them to Gaul. Note the many beautiful original black breeds in Southern France - the Caussade of Provence, the Gasconne of Gascony, the Bresse of Burgundy. Further north in France we find the Géline of Touraine, La Flèche of the Maine, and the Crèvecoeur of Normandy, the Estaires of Flanders. Italy boasts the wonderful little Valdarno, the green legged black fowl of the Arno Valley, so superior in utility points to the yellow legged white of the Leghorn coast.

We now know for certain that the black fowl has been in sole possession of the Lang-Shan Monastery and farms from the very beginning. Miss Croad's statement that the local Chinese questioned as to the origin of the fowls replied "they had always been there" is thus fully confirmed.

Curiously enough the Chinese name of Langshan was incorrectly translated by Miss Croad in her book. She tells us that an official in the Imperial Chinese Service informed her that Lang meant "Two" and "Shan" meant "Hill". Her informant had undoubtedly in his mind the well known name of "Leang Shan", the "Two Mountains" in the Shan-Tung Province well known to Europeans in China as a stronghold of revolutionary brigands. Differences in pronunciation especially in local dialects, are in many cases very slight, and the word Leang which means two, was taken for the word Lang, which means wolf. All the works on poultry very naturally followed suit in calling Langshans the fowls of the Two Hill Pagoda. Their true name is fowls of the Wolf Mountain.

The seventy third volume of the "Great Geography of China" (comprising 500 volumes) edited in 1765 states that: For about 2000 years the mountain has been known by the one name "Lang-Shan" (wolf mountain). Before that time each of the five mountain tops was called by its distinctive name. They were the mountains of "The Tower", "The Army", "The Two Caves", "The Saddle", "The Sword Blade" The Pagoda, the Temple and the Monastery are on the middle one, "The Two Caves".

The mountain was called Lang-Shan (wolf mountain) either because it has the shape of a wolf or because at one time a white wolf lived on the mountain. In the fifth year of Cheng-ming of Leang (919 of the Christian calendar) the inhabitants of the district fought a battle there against the inhabitants of Ou (region of Shan-Hai, south of the river Yang-Tse). There is something very interesting in this Chinese description of- the ancient home of the beautiful Langshan fowl.

Happy indeed are the old friends of Mary Croad, veteran breeders of Langshans, who can, like Buddhist monks of the Pagoda that "divides the clouds", enjoy the happiness of "contemplating at the sunset of their lives the beautiful and valuable fowls dedicated to the memory of the great wise woman, the Goddess Koann-inn. One can truly say that the guiding principle of Mary Croad's life struggle for her favourite fowls was the search for truth.

This evidence I offer as a tribute to her memory. A map of the area discussed appears elsewhere. This information was supplied to me by Joe Pehringer, New Berlin, Wisconsin in the US.