

CHAPTER V.

DOMESTIC PIGEONS.

ENUMERATION AND DESCRIPTION OF THE SEVERAL BREEDS—INDIVIDUAL VARIABILITY—VARIATIONS OF A REMARKABLE NATURE—OSTEOLOGICAL CHARACTERS: SKULL, LOWER JAW, NUMBER OF VERTEBRÆ—CORRELATION OF GROWTH: TONGUE WITH BEAK; EYELIDS AND NOSTRILS WITH WATTLED SKIN—NUMBER OF WING-FEATHERS, AND LENGTH OF WING—COLOUR AND DOWN—WEBBED AND FEATHERED FEET—ON THE EFFECTS OF DISUSE—LENGTH OF FEET IN CORRELATION WITH LENGTH OF BEAK—LENGTH OF STERNUM, SCAPULA, AND FURCULUM—LENGTH OF WINGS—SUMMARY ON THE POINTS OF DIFFERENCE IN THE SEVERAL BREEDS.

I HAVE been led to study domestic pigeons with particular care, because the evidence that all the domestic races are descended from one known source is far clearer than with any other anciently domesticated animal. Secondly, because many treatises in several languages, some of them old, have been written on the pigeon, so that we are enabled to trace the history of several breeds. And lastly, because, from causes which we can partly understand, the amount of variation has been extraordinarily great. The details will often be tediously minute; but no one who really wants to understand the progress of change in domestic animals, and especially no one who has kept pigeons and has marked the great difference between the breeds and the trueness with which most of them propagate their kind, will doubt that this minuteness is worth while. Notwithstanding the clear evidence that all the breeds are the descendants of a single species, I could not persuade myself until some years had passed that the whole amount of difference between them, had arisen since man first domesticated the wild rock-pigeon.

I have kept alive all the most distinct breeds, which I could procure in England or from the Continent; and have prepared skeletons of all. I have received skins from Persia, and a large number from India and other quarters of the