

is accounted for on the well-known principle of "throwing back" or reversion. Why crossing should give so strong a tendency to reversion, we do not with certainty know; but abundant evidence of this fact will be given in the following chapters. It is probable that I might have bred even for a century pure black Barbs, Spots, Nuns, white Fantails, Trumpeters, &c., without obtaining a single blue or barred bird; yet by crossing these breeds I reared in the first and second generation, during the course of only three or four years, a considerable number of young birds, more or less plainly coloured blue, and with most of the characteristic marks. When black and white, or black and red birds, are crossed, it would appear that a slight tendency exists in both parents to produce blue offspring, and that this, when combined, overpowers the separate tendency in either parent to produce black, or white, or red offspring.

If we reject the belief that all the races of the pigeon are the modified descendants of *C. livia*, and suppose that they are descended from several aboriginal stocks, then we must choose between the three following assumptions: firstly, that at least eight or nine species formerly existed which were aboriginally coloured in various ways, but have since varied in exactly the same manner so as to assume the colouring of *C. livia*; but this assumption throws not the least light on the appearance of such colours and marks when the races are crossed. Or secondly, we may assume that the aboriginal species were all coloured blue, and had the wing-bars and other characteristic marks of *C. livia*,—a supposition which is highly improbable, as besides this one species no existing member of the Columbidae presents these combined characters; and it would not be possible to find any other instance of several species identical in plumage, yet as different in important points of structure as are Pouters, Fantails, Carriers, Tumblers, &c. Or lastly, we may assume that all the races, whether descended from *C. livia* or from several aboriginal species, although they have been bred with so much care and are so highly valued by fanciers, have all been crossed within a dozen or score of generations with *C. livia*, and have thus acquired their tendency to produce