

life, and, though kept with other pigeons, rarely prove unfaithful to each other. Even when the male does break his marriage-vow, he does not permanently desert his mate. I have bred in the same aviaries many pigeons of different kinds, and never reared a single bird of an impure strain. Hence a fancier can with the greatest ease select and match his birds. He will also see the good results of his care; for pigeons breed with extraordinary rapidity. He may freely reject inferior birds, as they serve at an early age as excellent food.

*History of the principal Races of the Pigeon.*³⁶

Before discussing the means and steps by which the chief races have been formed, it will be advisable to give some historical details, for more is known of the history of the pigeon, little though this is, than of any other domesticated animal. Some of the cases are interesting as proving how long domestic varieties may be propagated with exactly the same or nearly the same characters; and other cases are still more interesting as showing how slowly but steadily races have been greatly modified during successive generations. In the last chapter I stated that Trumpeters and Laughers, both so remarkable for their voices, seem to have been perfectly characterised in 1735; and Laughers were apparently known in India before the year 1600. Spots in 1676, and Nuns in the time of Aldrovandi, before 1600, were coloured exactly as they now are. Common Tumblers and Ground Tumblers displayed in India, before the year 1600, the same extraordinary peculiarities of flight as at the present day, for they are well described in the 'Ayeen Akbery.' These breeds may all have existed for a much longer period; we know only that they were perfectly characterised at the dates above given. The *average* length of life of the domestic pigeon is probably about five or six years; if so, some of these races have retained their character perfectly for at least forty or fifty generations.

Pouters.—These birds, as far as a very short description serves for comparison, appear to have been well characterised in Aldrovandi's time,³⁷ before the year 1600. Length of body and length of leg are at the present time the two chief points of excellence. In 1735 Moore said (see Mr. J. M. Eaton's edition)—and Moore was a first-rate fancier—that he once saw a bird with a body 20 inches in length, "though 17 or 18 inches is reckoned a very good length;" and he has seen the legs very nearly 7 inches in length, yet a leg $6\frac{1}{2}$ or $6\frac{3}{4}$ long "must be allowed to be a very good one." Mr. Bult, the most

³⁶ As in the following discussion I often speak of the present time, I should state that this chapter was

completed in the year 1858.

³⁷ 'Ornithologie,' 1600, vol. ii. p. 360.