

unaltered from time immemorial ; and that some toy-pigeons, which differ in little else besides colour from the dovecot-pigeon, have retained the same character for several centuries. For when one of these toy-pigeons had once become beautifully and symmetrically coloured,—when, for instance, a Spot had been produced with the crown of its head, its tail, and tail-coverts of a uniform colour, the rest of the body being snow-white,—no alteration or improvement would be desired. On the other hand, it is not surprising that during this same interval of time our highly-bred pigeons have undergone an astonishing amount of change ; for in regard to them there is no defined limit to the wish of the fancier, and there is no known limit to the variability of their characters. What is there to stop the fancier desiring to give to his Carrier a longer and longer beak, or to his Tumbler a shorter and shorter beak ? nor has the extreme limit of variability in the beak, if there be any such limit, as yet been reached. Notwithstanding the great improvement effected within recent times in the Short-faced Almond Tumbler, Mr. Eaton remarks, “ the field is still as open for fresh competitors as it was one hundred years ago ;” but this is perhaps an exaggerated assertion, for the young of all highly-improved fancy birds are extremely liable to disease and death.

I have heard it objected that the formation of the several domestic races of the pigeon throws no light on the origin of the wild species of the Columbidae, because their differences are not of the same nature. The domestic races, for instance do not differ, or differ hardly at all, in the relative lengths and shape of the primary wing-feathers, in the relative length of the hind toe, or in habits of life, as in roosting and building in trees. But the above objection shows how completely the principle of selection has been misunderstood. It is not likely that characters selected by the caprice of man should resemble differences preserved under natural conditions either from being of direct service to each species, or from standing in correlation with other modified and serviceable structures. Until man selects birds differing in the relative length of the wing-feathers or toes, &c., no sensible change in these parts should be expected. Nor could man do anything