

though they are well aware that their birds differ individually and that by selecting the best birds for a few generations they, can improve their stocks.

An amateur writes⁸ as follows: "The fact that poultry have until lately received but little attention at the hands of the fancier, and been entirely confined to the domains of the producer for the market, would alone suggest the improbability of that constant and unremitting attention having been observed in breeding, which is requisite to the consummating in the offspring of any two birds transmittable forms not exhibited by the parents." This at first sight appears true. But in a future chapter on Selection, abundant facts will be given showing not only that careful breeding, but that actual selection was practised during ancient periods, and by barely civilized races of man. In the case of the fowl I can adduce no direct facts showing that selection was anciently practised; but the Romans at the commencement of the Christian era kept six or seven breeds, and Columella "particularly recommends as the best, those sorts that have five toes and white ears."⁹ In the fifteenth century several breeds were known and described in Europe; and in China, at nearly the same period, seven kinds were named. A more striking case is that at present, in one of the Philippine Islands, the semi-barbarous inhabitants have distinct native names for no less than nine sub-breeds of the Game fowl.¹⁰ Azara,¹¹ who wrote towards the close of the last century, states that in the interior parts of South America, where I should not have expected that the least care would have been taken of poultry, a black-skinned and black-boned breed is kept, from being considered fertile and its flesh good for sick persons. Now every one who has kept poultry knows how impossible it is to keep several breeds distinct unless the utmost care be taken in separating the sexes. Will it then be pretended that those persons who,

⁸ Ferguson's 'Illustrated Series of Rare and Prize Poultry,' 1854, p. vi. Preface.

⁹ Rev. E. S. Dixon, in his 'Ornamental Poultry,' p. 203, gives an account of Columella's work.

¹⁰ Mr. Crawford 'On the Relation

of the Domesticated Animals to Civilization,' separately printed, p. 6; first read before the Brit. Assoc. at Oxford, 1860.

¹¹ 'Quadrupèdes du Paraguay,' tom. ii. p. 324.