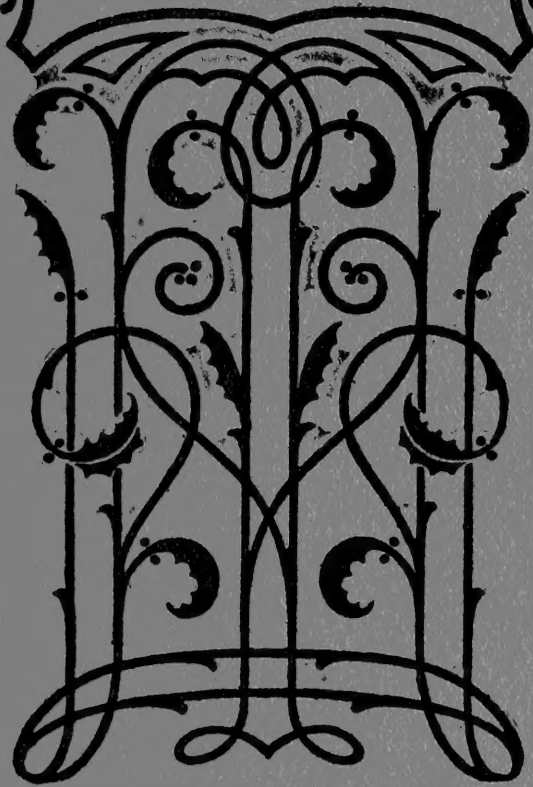


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THE WORKING HOMER.



BY J. A. WEBBER.



1877

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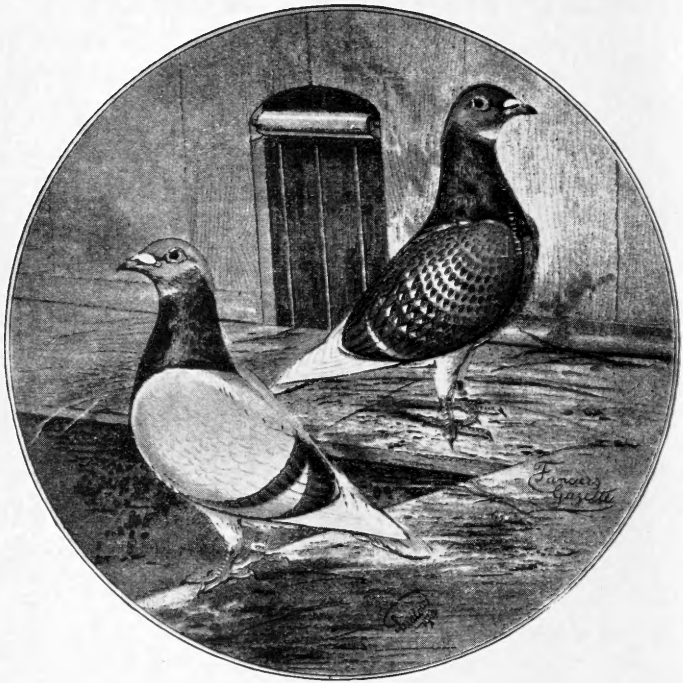
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PREFACE.

IN writing this series of articles upon the Homing pigeon, it was my intention at first to confine my remarks to the breeding and training of these wonderfully interesting "messengers of the air." On more mature consideration, however, I have been persuaded as preparatory to the subjects, to present a few facts gathered from reliable authorities and authentic sources upon the origin and make-up of the present breed of Homing pigeons, passing next to the remarkable, and as yet hidden and undiscovered "instinct on faculty," which are the characteristics of the true voyageur. I shall then take up in the order named "The Loft and its Appurtenances;" "Stocking a Loft—the type of birds;" "Mating and Breeding;" "Feeding and Handling;" "Training;" "Diseases and their Remedies;" "Some of earlier, as well as later, flights made in this country;" and lastly "A history of the National Organizations which have fostered and popularized the sport in America." Pigeon culture from the earliest times has had its attractions, not alone among those in the humbler walks of life, but among men of science, naturalists and those high in position and estate.

J. A. WEBBER.



IDEAL EXHIBITION WORKING HOMERS.

THE WORKING HOMER.



ORIGIN.

THE fancy for pigeons was in vogue among the Egyptians, the Greeks and the Romans, the uses of the messenger pigeon being well understood in those days, while pigeon breeding and rearing in our present day form a pleasant and interesting recreation among the Turks, Egyptians, Italians, Germans, French, Belgians and English. In America the sport is as yet, we may say, in its infancy, though within the past 15 years it has made such rapid strides and taken such a strong hold in many localities as to enlist the attention not only of the press, but of the public at large, while men of culture, of influence, and of position have been enlisted in the breeding and training of these wonderfully interesting feathered pets. At first, the sport in this country was confined to the cities of New York and Philadelphia, where, in 1872-73, it had its beginning with such veteran fanciers as Van Opstal, Waefelaer and the Grist Brothers as its leading spirits; to-day there is probably not a city in the Union which cannot boast of homing pigeon fanciers, while in the

larger Eastern, Western, and, to some extent, Southern cities, clubs and associations of fanciers are constantly forming for the advancement and enjoyment of the fascinating sport. Far away California, New Mexico and Canada are by no means behind in taking up the enjoyable and interesting pastime. In the former and latter localities many intelligent fanciers may be found who are giving the breeding and training of the Homing pigeons much study and thought with a view of acquiring still greater knowledge of the capabilities and usefulness of these feathered messengers. That our present breed of Homing pigeons originally sprang from Belgian soil there can be little doubt, as from writings still in existence, the favorite pastime of racing pigeons, for short distances at least, was practised in Antwerp as early as the thirteenth century. The strain of birds used in those days was known as the Cumulet (a species of Tumblers) and noted not only for their high flying qualities but for their great endurance on the wing, having been known to fly continuously for as many as fourteen and fifteen hours on a stretch.

The pure bred Cumulet has a perfect pearl white eye, surrounded by a yellow eye cere, and a small wattle upon the upper mandible, or beak; the beak is moderately long and thin, and the head well formed; its body is well proportioned, with full breast properties, long wings, which reach almost to the end of the tail, the flight feathers being wide and well shaped, the quills strong and wiry; the color of the bird is generally white, which explains the cause of so many of the Belgian birds of to-day having white feathers in their wings. Up to

about 1825 (and it was somewhere about this date that pigeon flying was first introduced into England) the breed of Cumulets thus described was kept pure in Belgium; in later years, however, in order to procure a larger type of bird, and thus combine other qualities with that of flying, the English Dragoon (or Carrier) cross was brought into play. Whether by the infusion of this new blood the much hoped for improvement in the breed has been secured is a question which I will take up later on. Another cross which has had considerable to do in the make-up of our present breed of Homing pigeons is the Smerle (a species of Owl) a type of bird bred very extensively for years in the province of Liege, Belgium. The pure Smerle is a much smaller bird than the Cumulet or the Dragoon; short beaked, often having a frill; very persistent in finding its home, and very intelligent.

The Homing pigeon of to-day then is the product of these three varieties named, and as may be imagined, by the careful and systematic crossing of the long beaked birds with the short beaked ones. The medium, or typical bird is the natural result.



INSTINCT OR FACULTY.

MUCH misconception prevails in the minds of those who are unacquainted with the the habits of our feathered pets as to just what is meant by "Homing or messenger pigeon," and many have been the absurd and altogether impossible imagining of, and impressions formed by those who have not studied the question of the "Homing of the pigeon" or, as the French express it Orientation. Now, what is this hidden, unsolved phenomenon by which these birds can discover (almost, we might say immediately) the direction of their home? for a bird which, liberated at 5 o'clock, 500 miles air line from home, is found in its loft before dark the same day has precious few moments to lose at the start. Some eminent writers attribute the power to a "remarkable instinct," others claim that while natural instinct may do much for the Homer, sight (that brilliant and powerful telescopic organ of vision) is the main, the almost sole guide by which the pigeon makes discovery of his home.

Some few ascribe it to the atmospheric impressions received by the birds while en-voyage, while others claim the predominant faculty to be their extreme and strong attachment for home coupled with a memory which aids it in the successful accomplishment of its determination, after many attempts perhaps, to reach

the object of its search. Lastly, and by far the most reasonable as well as the most natural explanation of the theory, and one which seems to be in the judgment of very many of our scientific men, as well as those who have studied the habits of these wonderful birds, the most feasible is, that by a careful and patient education of the bird, by judicious exercise or training of the natural faculties the intelligence is developed. Now, if we will add to the intellectual faculties the fact of the bird being possessed of a marvellous sight, a prodigious and marvellous memory, an innate love for home, we can readily conceive that it is this combination of natural and acquired causes, which makes it the most useful, intelligent and interesting of all the feathered world.

In order that my readers may be able to fully and intelligently grasp the conclusion thus adduced, let me quote from some of our best authorities upon this subject. Felix Robenbach says: "It is then most certainly not purely instinct that guides pigeons, as so many of the pigeon fanciers say. Instinctively speaking, animals know all that they should know, men should learn all. In fact, if it were otherwise, if the pigeon were only guided by instinct, its actions would be guided in a uniform manner, that is to say, without wish, without choice, let us say without judgment. It would never be mistaken, because instinct is, properly speaking, infallible. This point is incontestable. Let us join to the intellectual faculties, the acquired habits, the consideration that the pigeon has a marvellous sight and prodigious memory, and we can conclude with reliance

that it is by a combination of sight, memory and intelligence, instinct aiding, by which the pigeon regains its loft."

Another authority Brent, says: "Many facts may be collected to prove that sight is not the main source by which pigeons find their homes. Sight may assist them when near, and also in the manner of their flying high or low, to avoid objects and enemies, as well as in settling; otherwise I believe a pigeon might be flown blindfolded. I feel convinced and have no hesitation in saying that the power a pigeon has of returning home from a place many miles distant from where it has even been before, is a natural attraction or affinity between the bird and its home, or in other words, I consider that home is to the pigeon what the North is to the magnet."

Still another eminent fancier gives his views upon the subject thus: "My long experience with the Homing pigeon in its vagaries and its methods, leads me to rank its performance as the highest act of which an animal is capable, and to believe that it is not to be ascribed to the blind guidance of instinct, but that the bird is entirely dependent upon its intelligence; that its superior organization of brain permits some sort of mental direction to its actions of which others of the animal creation are not capable. It is by its keen sight and wonderful memory, directed by its intelligence and poised by perfect physical condition that it answers to the demand of the governing impulse of nature—the love of home."

As I have remarked, very much misunderstanding and ignorance is shown by some very intelligent persons as to the habits and faculties of the Homing pigeons. I remember (and no doubt others have had similar experiences) on one occasion, after having liberated a basket of birds, a gentleman stepped up and innocently inquired, "How soon will those birds return to the basket?" With a suppressed chuckle I replied, as I stepped upon the train, that it would hardly be worth his while to wait, as it might be some time. On another occasion when starting a basket of birds, I was asked whether they would bring a message back with them? I do not recall my answer. Numberless times have I been asked how the birds carry the message, whether in the beak, around the neck, on the feet, or elsewhere? This last query calls to mind an article clipped from an old magazine, and which reads like a fairy story which it no doubt is.

"Now you must know that in Turkey they make use of pigeons that are trained and accustomed to the work, and have rings or bands on their legs. These pigeons are taken from Bassora and Babylon to Aleppo and Constantinople, and vice versa; and if there is anything needful or important to advise, they make fast the letter to the wing on the bird's leg and let the pigeon fly away, so the letter comes with the pigeon to the place whence it was brought. It flies sometimes a thousand miles or more, which one would declare to be impossible." I mention these incidents to show the utter absurdity of the general idea of the characteristics of the Homing pigeon as a message bearer. In order to

Illustrate the degree of intelligence and reassuring power of which the Homer is capable, let me relate an incident which came under my own observation not long ago. On account of change of residence and consequent removal of my loft, I had occasion to resort to a little tact in order to safely settle my birds to their new localities, without loss, and this is the way I did it. I moved my loft to the new location, built a story on top of the old one with a flat roof, the old one being pitch; all this time I had the birds up in boxes and baskets. Having my loft furnished I put my birds into it, put up my old traps and the next morning left it open for my birds to get out, gave them no feed or water until all the birds were out, then I put in water and feed and on my arrival home that night I went to my loft and to my surprise I found every bird in but one. The following night every bird was on his old perch, not losing one bird. Does not this incident show most conclusively that to the natural faculties of sight, memory and instinct was added that other faculty of intelligent reasoning which proved such a valuable factor in the successful accomplishment of their purpose in the incident related.



THE LOFT.

WE now come to the loft and appurtenances, and it is here where possibly our conclusions will differ somewhat from those of a few of our older fanciers, as well as some of our best writers upon Homing pigeons, for the latter almost without exception will tell you that the best place and most suitable for a loft is on the roof, and that the higher the loft is from the ground the better; my experience has taught me that such is not a necessary requisite to success either in breeding or training. I will admit that there are certain advantages in having a lofty elevation in order that the young birds more especially may be enabled to discern the surroundings of their home, though I could cite more than one instance coming under my own observation where the youngsters have darted off from their loft on the roof and that was the last seen of them. That the birds may possibly run less risks from four-footed as well as two-legged depredators, I will admit. I know also of a loft situated like P. W. Krause's, on the roof of the topmost story of his store on New Market St., Philadelphia, from which one can follow the windings of the Delaware River for miles, both up and down. It does seem as if lofts with such an elevation would have many advantages in settling and flying birds, but they have their disadvantages and

objectionable features as well, the foremost of which is, that in almost every instance where the loft is so located I invariably noticed the birds being unaccustomed from their isolated position, to the presence of anyone except their attendant, and he only at stated intervals to feed, water, etc., become so wild as to be almost unapproachable, and if the trap is open they will dash off at the slightest intrusion or noise. Such birds, I contend are not trained in the full acceptance of the term, but of this I will speak more fully under its proper head (Handling and Training).

Again, such localities are often inconvenient of access and in many cases seriously objectionable (when located on the roof of a dwelling) to the occupants, and I do not wonder that our tidy wives and mothers oft-times seriously object to the practice which some fanciers have of making their homes a public thoroughfare for the convenience and accommodations of their fancier friends and acquaintances, who have been privileged, or rather tolerated, to tramp through the house at all hours of the day. The loft, then, need not necessarily be located on the house top, nor in the attic, but simply of sufficient height from the ground as to be out of reach of cats and rats, and with such an outlook that the birds can drop easily upon the alighting board on return from a fly. I like the loft built about two feet off the ground with an oval roof, or the upper floor of a stable or out-building. If at one's service, I would advise beginners especially, to start with a small or moderate sized loft, say not over ten feet long, by six to eight feet wide and six to seven feet



**Blue Checker Homer Cock, Imported, Record 550 Miles in the Day.
A Great Stock Bird and Winner as an Exhibition Working Homer.**

high, a loft of these dimensions will comfortably house twelve to fifteen pairs of birds, which, if of good stock can not only be successfully handled, but will tax neither the time nor the pocket of its owner to any considerable extent. I can call to mind more than one loft six by five in dimensions and occupied by but a half dozen pairs of birds, the season's work of which will compare favorably with dozens of much more pretentious lofts.

What the successful fancier must have is a loft of such size that he can look after and keep it in order himself, and wherein every bird is like its owner—a worker, such a loft will be heard from in the flying season, and with credit to its owner. Take the lofts of such successful fanciers as C. A. Mahr of Newark, N. J., A. H. Kruger of Germantown, W. S. Torkington, Philadelphia, and John D. Munro, Philadelphia, without exception moderate sized lofts, not built away up in the air (none of them being over ten feet from the ground) thoroughly equipped with all the requirements of a thorough, wide awake, progressive fancier.

In locating the loft, if possible let the traps face the South or West, a window with a sliding sash at one end and an entrance door at the other, with an inside screen door for use in warm weather. This will give sufficient light and ventilation, both of which are so essential to the comfort and health of the birds. I have often been asked what is the best trap or how should I make my trap? This all depends on the loft or rather the roof of the loft. If it is a flat roof I like the following trap best: take inch strips and make a frame, say

2 feet long, 18 inches wide and 18 to 24 inches high, then I cover three sides and the top with poultry wire, except a six inch space, all round the top, and in this space I hang bob-wires. To the three sides facing away from the loft, I have a six inch board and have it so arranged that the trap extends six inches above the roof. That gives the birds a chance to drop into the trap right from the roof or from any side of the trap; I find this the best trap for a flat roofed loft. For a pitch roof I have a large alighting board, say 18 inches and 4 feet long and in the middle I have the entrance a space of 18 inches wide by 8 inches high, with a string of bob-wires, then on the inside of the entrance I have the trap so I can catch my birds easily when they come home from a race. I find these two traps the best since we have the timing machines.

The most important inside fixtures of a loft are the nesting boxes or breeding apartments. These may be constructed in a number of ways, according to the ingenuity or preference of the owner. After much observation and experience, however, I have no hesitation in saying that for successful results in breeding strong, healthy and vigorous youngsters, as well as for general utility, the style of breeding apartments I have been using for the past ten years are built so that they can be removed when the breeding season is over. I generally have them raised off the floor eight to twelve inches. The dimensions are 12x12x24 inches long, with a frame to fit in the front, a small door is in the centre, with wire run up and down in the frame one and one-half inches apart. The frame is fastened in

its place by small buttons and can easily be removed to clean out the nests, and when not in use I close the small door to keep the other birds out. Another advantage of having open front nest boxes is, the moment you set your foot inside the loft you have everything in full view right before you, both young and eggs, and I find my birds are much tamer. I use earthen nest pans, two in a box, and while they have young on one side they will lay the second pair of eggs in the other nest pan.

The next important feature is a healthy drinking fountain, I emphasize the word healthy because of its absolute necessity. Pure, clear water at all times is as essential to the health of your birds as pure air or substantial food is to our own well being. Some fanciers use a simple galvanized or earthen dish, over which part way is placed a board or strip of wood, to prevent the birds standing in it. This receptacle is cleaned easily, and every day once or more. Others use a stone drinking fountain, holding one, two, or more quarts—such a fountain should be rinsed out thoroughly every day; others use a zinc vessel, the bottom part convex and the top cone shape which is removable, in order when taken off, the fountain may be reversed and stood upon the plane of section while being filled. Of course all these appliances are a substitute for running water in a loft, which is in most cases impracticable, but which is par excellence.

A feed hopper should only be used when a fancier can only get to see his birds once a day, otherwise it is a lazy man's appliance, and next to an impure drinking

fountain will do more to breed disease than anything I know of. More birds die yearly from being overfed than underfed, and besides such an appliance is a sure preventive from conditioning your birds for the work required of them.

The loft should be supplied with a separate roosting place for every bird in the loft, with two or three to spare, as every bird likes to occupy his own particular place, especially at night, and once having chosen its place in the loft it will fight long and hard to retain it. These perches may be made of a shape of letter A, and should be placed at least ten inches apart so that the birds cannot fight. I agree with an eminent writer who says, "Changes should not be too frequent in a loft, the Homer more than any other bird holds to its habits, and it is to keep its own loft and regular place in it that causes it to return from long distances." When one vexes this tendency, either by change of mate, nest box or in the arrangements of a loft, it weakens this tendency to preserve the same habits, and induces the instinct of change. The bird loses its fidelity to home, and is apt to go astray to neighboring lofts.

The floor of the loft should be sprinkled to the depth of an inch or more with common bar sand. In the nesting places one of the best preventatives from vermin is fine sawdust, scattered liberally in the bottom and filling up the crevices around the sides. For lining the nest nothing is better than pine sawdust and short tobacco stems which are certainly both healthy and vermin proof. Hay and straw should never be used, as it not only becomes filthy, but harbors vermin. Another

essential requisite to every well kept loft is a rake and a scraper, which should be used effectively once a week at least, to remove all the droppings, scrape the perches and clean the floor of all offensive matter, for if this be allowed to remain your loft will soon be overrun with ticks, lice and fleas, to the great discomfort of owner and occupants. Nothing, I think, is more repugnant to a true fancier than a dirty, ill-kept loft, and yet I have seen the lofts of fanciers prominent in the sport, so filthy as to make one shrink from entering them. On the contrary I have been in many lofts where the owner prided himself in keeping everything as clean and sweet as a room in his own house. I leave the reader to draw his own comparisons.

If the loft be of sufficient size, a wire partition should be provided, to be used after the birds are through breeding to separate the sexes during the fall and winter months. This partition can be made in two parts so as to be easily put up by means of hooks and removed when not needed. Having prepared the loft I will next give my views as to the best method of stocking the same.



STOCKING THE LOFT.

HAVING provided a comfortable loft, the next is "How shall I stock it, and what is the type of bird that I want to fly, and breed from?" As I have said, these are important questions, and require not only careful judgment but a practical knowledge of the intricate problem of successful pigeon flying. I would suggest therefore to the amateur fancier about to engage in what he will find a most fascinating and exceedingly interesting pastime, (even though its pathway to success be strewn with many hidden obstacles, and oftentimes sore and perplexing disappointments) that if possible, he enlist the services of some fancier, in whose judgment he may have not only the fullest confidence, but one who, through years of experience, coupled with a careful and critical observation, has kept himself thoroughly posted as to just which strains have been doing the successful work in the past years in the federation or association races. For, as with the old adage, "The proof of the pudding is in the eating," so in pigeon flying, while size, shape, color and appearance may attract and captivate the eye, it is after all the actual performance of the bird or its progeny which should be of paramount importance, and the keener the competition in which the bird is engaged the more valuable the record made. It is just here

where an association record (the highest honor attainable) as far surpasses that made under club management as does the record made under club rules exceed in value that made under individual management.

In the first instance the competition may engage, and probably does, a thousand birds or more, from many localities, and the management being thoroughly impartial and disinterested, the records made are of unquestioned genuineness, and in such strong competition are of paramount value. A club record engaging, as it may, a dozen, or a score or more of birds, though honestly made and protected by all the safeguards available and which may be perfectly satisfactory to its fellow club members, can never carry with it the same certification of genuineness or value as that made under the national organization. While the records made under individual management simply satisfies or not, as the outcome may be, the owner of the birds engaged, and carries no possible weight beyond that which his fellow fanciers may choose to place in his word. This may be much less than most fanciers might imagine, for how often have we heard the expression, "I'd trust his honor, or take his word at any time, except when you come to pigeon flying, and there I must draw the line." But I have wandered (not without profit I hope) from my original subject.

Having secured the services of some veteran or well-informed fancier friend, we solicit his company while we make an inspection of a half-dozen or so of prominent and successful fanciers' lofts. With his assistance secure, if possible, several pairs (as many as the size of

one's loft and pocketbook will permit) of strong, healthy and likely looking youngsters, from stock of acknowledged superiority, and which have been tested in keen competition, proving their value not only as reliable voyageurs, but as speedy birds in the races, for in these days of advancement and progress it is not sufficient that your birds have made the 200, 300, 400, 500 and 600 mile records. That question is quickly supplemented with another and equally important one, "Did they do the mile in a minute, or the distance in 3 1-2, 5, 7 or 10 hours?" This is just the kind of work that the progressive and wide awake fancier hopes in the near future, if not at the present day, to accomplish with his racers.

If it be impossible to visit the loft in person, by scanning the columns of the pigeon papers we can, without much risk of going astray, select the names and addresses of two, three or more reliable breeders, with whom, after correspondence, an order can be placed for the stock desired. But beware of the fancier that flies his birds for his own pleasure, and does not believe in joining any club or association, he will tell you he has made such and such great records, but you will not see it in any pigeon journal.

Some few beginners may perhaps prefer to purchase a half dozen or more pairs of old tried American, English or Belgian record birds, and breed the foundation of a loft of flyers from these. This would be my way of starting if I was to start anew, but for a beginner I think it best to buy a few pairs of old reliable breeders and also a few pairs of young birds, which should be

secured when about five weeks old. If procured at this age they can be settled to their new quarters with but little difficulty, provided, of course, proper precaution is used, for instance, after the birds have been placed in the new loft give them a few days to become accustomed and reconciled to their new homes, then, towards evening of some quiet day when the wind is not strong, let them pass out on the trap and look about them, and never under any circumstances urge them to leave the loft, give them plenty of time to make their observations.

If after coming out in the trap they merely look about them and return to the loft, so much the better. This will be sufficient for their first experience, let them remain inside for that day and on the morrow again give them a chance to come out, and this time they will probably become more venturesome and fly up on the roof of the loft or a near-by building. If so quietly entice them back into the loft by throwing a little hempseed inside the trap, after which they can be allowed to go out and in at will.

With regard to the type of birds, one of our most successful American breeders sums it up in this way: "My experience has brought me to the conclusion that description availeth but little." I believe the generally accepted standard for Homers is something like this: "large, bright eye, broad, high and well rounded head, very broad flight feathers, deep chest and heavy shoulders, and to this we add, wings well up on the back, feathers clinging close to body. Some even test the strength by extending the wing and noting if it be

rapidly and powerfully drawn back, and say that dark colors are better, etc. Nevertheless there are scores of worthless birds that seem to possess all these qualifications, and again very many good ones lack the requirements as outlined, but after all we value the bird not by its appearance but by the way it comes home."

An English writer says, "The principal points of a Homer are a good, well-developed head, showing plenty of room in it for brains, a bright, wild looking eye of a red color with a black pupil, and a little bit of wattle around it, the breast bone long, the vent bones well up and showing very little prominence, they should be near together and close to the end of the breast bone, the chest must be broad with plenty of muscle at the shoulder, that is, where the wing is joined to the body. A good wing is indispensable, it should have when it is stretched out, ten good, broad primary feathers with stout quills to them, which should all lay well over each other. The longer the primary feathers are the better, as the more wind a pigeon fans, the greater the speed attained; the other or secondary feathers in the wing, although not so long should be equally stout and overlaying. The body should be of a medium size and the tail about one inch longer than the wings."

A Belgian writer of prominence says: "If we take collectively the physiological properties which must be united in the Homing pigeon, they are: a small body, close plumage, a strong flight. The greatest length of flight feather must stand in the foremost because it assumes with the same weight of body a greater flight. The close plumage protects the birds from stormy

weather and supports it in its flight” Especially should the birds be caught in a rain storm when on the road. I can remember well one instance when some of my birds came home from the 500 mile station, in a very heavy rain and were hardly wet enough to speak of, and I found out afterwards that it had rained nearly for 100 miles over the course the birds had come.



MATING AND BREEDING.

THE mating, or as a Belgium fancier would term it "coupling," and the successful breeding is a science, which can only be acquired by careful observation and patient study of the natural faculties and peculiar habits of our feathered pets. A cross is an absolute necessity, especially when the birds of a loft become too closely related, new blood should under such circumstances, for the betterment of the stock, be infused by the purchase of one or more pairs of birds from sterling worth. In such cases let the fancier not stop short of getting the very best strains obtainable, birds of whose performances there cannot be any question, but whose parents and grand-parents before them have shown unmistakable proof of all that goes to make a true, gamey and speedy voyageur.

Do such birds and the product of such strains come high, did you say? May I be permitted to ask a single question? "Which would be the cheapest, a timepiece costing \$20. and which would lose and gain, according as it might have been adjusted, ten or twenty minutes a week, or the timepiece costing \$50. which would not vary two minutes the year around?" I would vastly prefer to give \$20. for a good breeder whose offspring three times out of four was represented among the diploma winners, than a dollar for one of whose good qualities there were grave doubts.

The great mistake which scores of fanciers are con-



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Sire of Many Fast Flyers in this Country.**

tinually making is, that having collected by purchase and gift a loft full of birds, they either permit them to mate at will or pair them up with more regard to choice on blending of certain colors than to the proper and careful selection of the qualities which go to make up a well mated pair of breeders. Again, some fanciers are strong in the belief that the large and powerful built bird is the more likely to stand the work and wear consequent upon successive trials in training, mate their birds with the desire to secure large and muscular youngsters. Neither male or female, in their estimation, can be too large or powerful looking. Others again take the ground that while the large, powerful looking bird may be the stronger, its avoirdupois and ungainliness handicaps it for speed and quickness, and their preference is for a smaller bird, while a third class (among which is the writer) believes, as does the noted Belgium fancier and writer, Franz Posenaer, who says, "There is one fixed rule to be obtained in mating pigeons, that is, to maintain the equilibrium of the physical qualities and even the intellectual qualities, if possible. The male should find its complement, so to speak, in the female, he should find in her the qualities in which he is wanting. For example, if the male is slender and white in body, with very strong and compact wings, give him a female with broad back and breast, even though her flight feathers should be a trifle slim; unite a male with a strong head and short and thick beak with a slender female, whose beak is fairly long and thin, and so on, always maintaining the equilibrium, with the view to uniting in one pair all that is desirable."

Color is of minor importance, and can exercise but little influence on the young. The silver or ash for example, one of the handsomest colors we have, is fairly detested, and almost banished from some lofts, while the facts will bear me out in the assertion that birds of this color have made some of the most remarkable flights of the past years. Let us look at the record, it is a silver cock, "Petroleum" who holds a record of 1093 miles which was the longest distance held for some time in the World, but has since been broken by several other birds. It is a silver cock, "Sergéant Dunne," who holds a record from 800 miles (the flight being 884 miles in four days and six hours.) It was an ash cock which was one of three to win first diploma from 200 miles in the old bird races of 1888, in the average speed of 1347 yards. It was a silver cock which won second diploma in the 300 mile old bird race, 1889, speed 1300 yards, and it was a silver cock which won third diploma in the 400 mile concourse race, of 1890. While as I admit, I have a weakness for silvers, I would strongly advise against mating two birds of this color together, simply because the offspring would in all likelihood be still paler in color than the parents, possibly a smoky white. The same may be said of blues. Neither would I advise the mating of a blue and silver, because their offspring would in all likelihood be still lighter, or in other words as soon as the color begins to grow weak or pale, it should be crossed with a stronger or darker color.

Many fanciers contend that the dark specks or spots often noticed in the flight feathers of the silver or ash

are indicative of strength and good Homing qualities. That these markings are the direct result of crossing with birds of dark colors, such as black or blue checkers, there is but little doubt. I cannot advise too strongly against mating pigeons which are too old together, that is, birds beyond five years of age. If you have an old and valued breeding hen, mate her to a young, vigorous male bird of one or two years, and the result of their union will be strong and healthy youngsters. An old male bird should in like manner be given a young hen.

I strongly condemn the practice or wild fancy many beginners have of purchasing eight, ten or a dozen pairs of youngsters from as many different lofts. Then indiscriminately mating these together without first testing the abilities and qualities of the several strains, at least with a few preliminary flights, up to say forty or fifty miles. By this time the discerning fancier will be able to judge of the good and indifferent, if not the bad points in his flock. What every level-headed and would-be successful fancier should strive for is, by careful study of his birds, the judicious and well considered coupling of the several types he may possess, to secure for himself and his loft a strain of birds which, by their uniform and continued good work from season to season, will compel the admiration and court the generous rivalry of his keenest competitors. Not only this, but that the offsprings of these unions may be of that type of Homer of which its owner can proudly say, "I never lost a single bird from this pair or that." When, by patience and perseverance, we can attain to such a position in the fancy, and with such a foundation for our

loft, we have indeed secured a consummation most devoutly to be wished for.

The season of mating is of course regulated to a great degree by the condition of the weather and the loft conveniences of the fancier. Most fanciers in the middle states pair their birds the beginning of January, in order to hatch February and early March youngsters, which are considered the most likely birds with which to enter the young bird races, not only because they will have developed by mid-summer to strong, vigorous birds, but being early hatched will have passed the most serious period of their moulting when the time comes, say July 15th to August 15th, for them to be put in the training basket. I speak now, of course, with reference to those fanciers who have the facilities (which every well regulated loft should have) for separating the birds during the fall and winter months. Now in the Southern states birds should be separated earlier, say, in June or at least by the 1st of July. For in the South, birds can be mated up by the middle of December so as to get early January hatched birds. These birds will be through moulting when the time comes for training. But as I have stated before, every well regulated loft should have the facilities to keep the sexes separated, as young birds should not be allowed to breed the first season. I have found by experience that they will fly better and also make better breeders the following season. I will admit there are exceptions, but nine times out of ten they do better if not allowed to breed the first season.

Taking it for granted that the birds have been separa-

ted (that is, the males kept in one department and the females in another) for the past three months or more and that the time for mating has arrived, which depends on what climate you live in, never mate up your birds until the cold snaps are past for if you do you are liable to regret it. We now embrace the opportunity to prepare for a successful breeding season by devoting a part of a day to the thorough cleaning of the loft. First, having thoroughly scraped the perches and other woodwork of dirt and old lime, and removed all feathers and dirt from the nest boxes, giving the floor a good cleaning of all dirt and filth. After the dust has subsided apply a liberal coat of Bordeaux mixture, which is made as follows: One part of blue vitriol to two parts of lime by weight; dissolve blue vitriol in a coarse cloth suspended in enough water for that purpose, using an earthen or wooden vessel. Slack the lime in enough water to make it a little thicker than is used to whitewash; mix the two, making the mixture about as thick as paint, ready for use—if necessary add more water, add to this about a pint of crude carbolic acid to every two gallons of the mixture. After this is put on, your loft will not look white as the lime alone would make it, but it will be a mixed color between white, black and blue, not so clean looking as when you use lime alone but infinitely better prepared to keep your pigeons healthy. In this mixture you have an insecticide, a disinfectant and fungicide, of the highest known efficiency. Next in order will be the sprinkling of a liberal quantity of bar sand or gravel to the depth of an inch upon the floor. After having your nest boxes

whitewashed, sprinkle a double handful of fresh pine sawdust in each nesting apartment that you intend to use, next put in your nest pan with some sawdust in it. Have a box of short tobacco stems in your loft, so when your birds are ready to nest they will carry in the stems themselves and build their nests.

We are now prepared to assign the birds to their breeding quarters. If the unions are to be the same as the preceding season little difficulty will be experienced in pairing the birds or rather in re-uniting the pairs. Where changes are desired or new stock added then the mating pen must be called into service. This may be a neatly constructed apartment with a wire front or an ordinary soap box with the lid knocked off and a few laths or strips nailed across the opening. Having placed the male bird in the pen with the female which is intended to become his mate, leave them together for several days, giving them feed and water (a little hemp seed is good at this time) until a union has been formed, after which they can be turned into the breeding loft.

Sometimes it occurs that two pairs of birds will contend for the same nesting box in which case it is well to place one of the pairs within the department and by nailing a strip or lath across the entrance, keep them in it over night and until they seem to be at home in their new quarters and able to hold it against outsiders. A prominent English fanciers says, "Never attempt to pair a bird with another should the owner notice a mutual dislike to one another, for if he succeeds in pairing them the chances are that the offspring will be quite worthless."

A noted French writer says, "It often occurs that a cock will give excellent results when coupled with a particular hen, but inferior ones when coupled with another mate. There should not be any hesitation in such a case. At once give him a new companion. At the same time these changes should not be too frequent, a bird which is constantly thwarted or disappointed either in its love affairs or in its place of abode, that is its nest, from being a good bird will degenerate into a bad one. It should be a cardinal principle with the fancier to respect the bent and habits of his birds, to inflict upon them the least possible amount of change. Our maxim should be the triple one of same loft, same nest, same mate. "When a couple yield good results it should be preserved with the end in view of perpetuation and continuity. But very frequently the cock or the hen will distinguish itself in the concourse, and the victory fascinates the fancier; he will have one more triumph, just one more, he enters it for the last time, the bird of his heart loses itself, and with it departs also the source of a member of "might-have-been-glories." After the pairs have been assigned to their respective quarters it will be well to keep a watchful eye upon their movements as it may happen that a quarrelsome male bird will often attempt to take possession of more than one nesting apartment, in which case a pitched battle will ensue. The hens being disturbed may refuse to return to their allotted apartments, with the result that if about to lay, the eggs may be deposited on the floor, in which case great diffi-

culty may be experienced in getting her to care for them if returned to the nesting box.

In the case of young hens about to lay it is also necessary to keep a close watch upon them, as it often occurs that their first egg will be laid while resting on their perch or some out-of-the-way place whither they have been driven by their over zealous mate in his endeavors to drive her to nest.

As pigeons generally lay during the afternoon hours, in case a hen is observed to be thus hard driven by her lord it is a good plan to shut her up in the nest until the first egg is laid and until the following morning, after which any risk will have been avoided.

Some fanciers, in order that the incubation of both eggs may take place simultaneously, remove the first laid egg (putting a dummy egg in its place) until the afternoon of the second day or until the second egg has been laid, when the dummy is removed. I rather do not favor this plan myself, as I think nature has provided pigeons with the same instinct as wild birds, I never remove any eggs except when I am training, I put them under other birds to keep them from getting chilled. Some fanciers advocate the plan of raising but one youngster to each nest, contending that one strong, healthy, vigorous young bird is worth two of questionable vitality and growth. No set rule can be laid down in such a case as this, as there is a vast difference in the disposition and attention to family duties on the part of the old birds, some being such excellent feeders as to leave no room for doubt as to their ability to bring up in splendid form both young, while on the other



**Black Checker Homer Cock, Bred in Philadelphia, Pa.
Record 300 Miles in the Day.**

hand, some birds are such poor feeders as to be almost worthless in rearing their young. I have had birds that would raise three and four young and raise them good and strong, then on the other hand I have had them that would not feed one properly, so no set rule can be laid down in such a case as the above.



FEEDING AND TRAINING.

THE next important point to be considered in the breeding and training of Homing pigeons, is the proper food, and in this connection I would strongly advise against three things. First. Variety is the spice of life, therefore do not confine your birds to one kind of food. Secondly. Do not feed mill feed that is, cracked corn or broken grain of any kind, nor wheat during training season, simply because they are apt to scour your birds and possibly induce diarrhœa, in which case your birds are practically handicapped for that season's flying. Thirdly. As I have remarked before, do not use a feed hopper if you ever expect to get your birds in working condition and fit to compete in long distance races, or in fact, in any distance flights, simply from the fact that, barring the height of the breeding season, Homers should be given only sufficient food for the meal. My method is to have a shallow earthen dish or box into which I put just enough food for a meal for the birds I have to feed, and I prefer (as has been advised in the case of humans) that it is better for them to go away from the dish feeling a little hungry than overfed. An English authority suggests but one good meal a day for the birds during training season, and that given in the early morning before the birds are let out. Many experienced Belgian fanciers feed their birds by hand, that is they throw them the feed either in a feeding dish or on the ground, two or

three times a day. I advise three meals a day. The first after the birds have been let out and have taken their morning exercise spin, again at noon and evening before sundown if convenient.

As a general diet nothing is better than Canada peas and small round corn, the older and harder the latter is, the better. An occasional dash of hemp, canary, rape or millet seed is much enjoyed by Homing pigeons. Hemp seed more particularly should be used with discrimination as it is not only a fat producer, but has a tendency to induce vertigo. I occasionally feed my birds a little buckwheat, as I think the husks keep their digestive organs in a healthy condition.

Salt is necessary for the health of the birds at all times. Some fanciers use rock salt, others common table salt put in a small box, while many of the older fanciers prefer what is called salt, I prefer table salt. I used to use rock salt until I lost five of my very best birds and since that I swear by table salt. I have also tried salt cat but cannot say I like it. As I have before remarked that Homing pigeons and indeed all pigeons are very fond of salt, and the eagerness with which they seek for it shows the demand their natures make for it, as an indispensable element in the work of digestion. In all well appointed lofts it is found in one or more forms, such as salt codfish nailed to the wall, and of which the birds are very fond, rock salt in great blocks, put upc the floor, common table salt in bags in which a small opening has been made by which the birds can pick at it, and salt cat. A common receipt for salt cat is: Six pounds of salt, fifty pounds of

clay, one-quarter pound of asafoetida, two pounds each of anise, cumin and caraway seeds; mix these ingredients well together, and add sufficient water to bake into bricks. There is another mixture composed as follows: Take equal parts of coarse sand and potter's clay, well dried, and old mortar, add to these a quantity of vetches, broken egg shells, broken oyster shells (crushed fine) several handfuls of anise seed, hemp seed and ground salt; mix either thoroughly, dry or with water, place in a partly covered wooden trough or box, easily accessible to the birds.

The value of this compound may readily be seen. The coarse sand provides the small stones necessary to digestion; the egg and oyster shells furnish the females with the calcareous or limey matter needed in the formation of the egg and its shell, and the seeds and salt are the condiments the pigeon seeks with such avidity.

Returning to the question of proper feeding, and particularly during the season of breeding, an eminent writer says, "Beginning with about the first of March, the pigeon should be given all it will eat, because the laying, hatching and rearing of the young begins about this time. While an abundance of food should be given, care should be taken that none is wasted. With a little experience the amount necessary can be easily determined. They should be fed at least twice a day, three times is better. To have healthy young, the first feed must be early, say between five and six o'clock in the morning. At this time the crops of the young are empty. If the parents can find nothing at hand wherewith to fill them they must go abroad to seek it,

and the young suffer from hunger and cold. It is difficult to make up for the loss occasioned by late feeding. The second feed should be between noon and two o'clock, third at twilight. From the first of August to the last of October, great care must be taken to provide not only a sufficiency of food, but that it shall be of the highest quality, this to pass the pigeon safely and well through the critical period of moult. After this, both quantity and quality must be restricted to the actual need to keep the bird in condition. Experimenting fanciers estimate the demand of a pigeon, under ordinary circumstances, to be a tenth of a pound daily, lessening the quantity in warm weather and increasing it in cold. Unless great care is taken, the increase will cause the female to commence laying. The eggs in such case should be taken away. If she is allowed to hatch and raise young at this time, when the breeding season arrives, she will have become exhausted and be unfit to rear healthy young. As to the males, they will begin mating together if allowed to do so."



CONDITIONING AND RACING.

NOW we come to the question, what is meant by conditioning a bird? Simply getting it into fit condition of body and feather for the work which it is expected to perform. And how best may this be done? I will try and explain so my readers will understand my method of conditioning, which is simple and within reach of all fanciers. There are other ways, but it makes a large hole in one's pocket book.

Taking it for granted that the month of January has arrived and that the birds have started to breed, we realize that we have some two months or more yet before the training season commences in which to select, and get into proper condition, the birds we contemplate putting upon the road in the coming old bird season. "But, says the inexperienced fancier or novice, "what is the use of all this? My birds are all from the best blood obtainable, and from the lofts of the most prominent fanciers in the country. Look at them! Did you ever see a finer lot? Why I can pick out ten or twenty from among them which I feel sure can do their four hundred, possibly four hundred fifty, miles in the day and I don't know but that there is one or more five-hundred-mile-one-day birds in the lot." Poor fellow, how keen will be his disappointment before the dog days have come and gone, for, as I pick up one and then another of what are no doubt blooded stock and apparently in good condition, I realize how



**Blue Checker Homer Hen, No Record but Bred from 500 Mile Parents.
A Grand Stock Hen and Winner at many Shows.**

sadly out of condition they are, for instead of bone and muscles, feathers like steel quills, and whose nervous, vigorous action is almost beyond control, I find the majority of the birds large in frame, to be sure, but soft and flabby and not much else but fat and feathers; and could much else be expected? Since the birds have not only been permitted to breed all Winter, with more than enough food to eat, but have hardly once a week been given an hour's exercise outside their loft, yet these birds are expected to fly upwards of two thousand miles within the next four months, and do their five hundred miles in the day. What an absurdity, and contrary not only to all rules of physical culture, but of common sense as well. Did Sullivan or Corbett ever enter the ring without first being subjected to a course of systematic preparatory training and conditioning? Were Star Pointer, Goldsmith's Maid, Jay-Eye-See and other noted racers ever put upon the track without first being groomed and handled by the most experienced of jockeys? And so I might refer, with equal emphasis, to dogs, game chickens and the like. I care not whether it be man, beast or bird, preparatory training, proper handling, and conditioning are the essential requisites, if success is to be looked for, if victory is to be gained.

"Blood will tell," but only when backed by a sound body and vigorous constitution. The moral and physical condition of your birds will be either good or bad according to the care and attention which you have given them during the Winter and early Spring. See then that your birds have dry and not overcrowded

quarters (a cold loft being preferable to one heated artificially.) See that while they have a sufficiency of the best food, and a variety, they are not overfed. See that your birds are not weakened by taxing them too heavily in the early breeding season.

Homing pigeons are very prolific and lay eight or ten times a year. This production weakens them greatly, the male as well as the female. This is not the aim of the true fancier, so the proper way is to limit the young to be raised to the number necessary to make good the losses in racing and training. Many Belgium and English fanciers allow their birds to raise the first pair only, then the second pair they have, one is either killed or else placed under another pair, whose eggs have failed to hatch. The reason for this is that by the time the second pair are hatched the old ones have to be put in training, and they contend, and rightly, that it weakens them too much to feed two squeakers while in training. Again, see that your birds get plenty of outdoor exercise, both in good and bad weather. I know that there are those who think it wisest to give their birds exercise only when the weather is clear and calm. My experience has proven that they should have their exercise in all weather, as they will make hardier birds, and without exception do the best work when put upon the road.

Now, the first of March having arrived, and with it our stock of patience exhausted in our eagerness to begin active work, we set about to select the birds we intend putting upon the road. Those few fanciers who, with large lofts and full purses, contemplate training on an extensive scale, select for one basket the cock

birds, and for another the hens, and ship them to the training stations on alternate days or weeks. In this way the breeding is not interfered with. The eggs or young are never left without one or the other of the old birds. In sending a number of pigeons off in a training basket, even to short distances, five, or even six inches square should be allowed for each bird. Do not under any consideration overcrowd them as they are liable to become cramped, and thus be handicapped at the start, and many a good bird has been lost just this way.

The training baskets are made in many shapes and sizes. The best I have found for shape and size for private use is an oblong basket made of wicker work, the bottom of stout rattan, and in size sufficiently large enough to accommodate the number of birds you wish to carry, the lid should cover the whole of the basket in order that every bird may be liberated at one time. A small lid should also be made within the large one for convenience in removing a single bird if so desired and for putting them in.

It is very important that the birds should be handled carefully, in their presence avoid making any quick motions which would frighten them. In catching a bird, grasp him firmly (but not so closely as to cause him pain) around the lower part of the body, clasping together his wings, tail and legs. In this position he is utterly powerless, and can be held securely without injury or even discomfort.

A great many fanciers make the mistake of neglecting their feathered pets in the early stages of life,

which is the cause of their failure to reach the top rings of the ladder of success in the ranks of the pigeon world. In the first stages of life care must be taken that the bird grows up to be strong in order to be a racer, that is, you must start in their breeding, for if speed is not bred into a bird, you cannot get any out of him. If speed is bred into a bird, then by careful handling you can develop the same to a high degree of perfection, and eventually he becomes a racer, if not injured or overworked when a youngster. You may ask what do I mean by overworked? Do not make an old bird of him before he really becomes a youngster, that is, do not fly him four, five and six hundred miles. Did you ever hear of a bird which as a youngster flew a long distance, that ever did any remarkably fast flying as an old bird? You have broken his back. Birds are not always of the same physical nature, therefore I say make a careful study of the birds so that when the time comes you know what is wanted to bring them to a certain condition so as to obtain the best results.

You cannot by looking at a Homer, tell what will better his condition for all purposes. No general rule can be applied. It can only be done by looking after the minor details, and trying different methods, and then to know when you have struck the one that is wanted, and by following the same you will attain the success you are seeking. To build up a good and well working loft of Homers, you must keep at them every day in the year. Some fanciers think that because the birds do not fly any races during the Winter they do not need to be careful with them until the training and

breeding season comes, and they let the birds go as they please without treatment, and getting into bad habits. One of the greatest mistakes. To gain success, 365 days of attention is not too much. Look after them during the Winter as well as during the racing season, and your loft will carry off the honors as mine has done, and all well earned.

To prepare for training, as stated above, you must give your whole attention to minor details. When Spring comes you must give your birds a physic, to cleanse their system, then give them a tonic to aid digestion and your birds will eat. On warm and pleasant days let your birds cleanse themselves externally by giving them bathing water. The birds must be exercised three times daily, early morning, at noon and in the afternoon late. The hours for exercising must be kept up about the same time every day. After a time the birds will get used to this. The training must be done in a systematic manner, and be continued throughout the racing season.

How to keep them flying is a question which depends upon the fancier and the position of his loft. I have heard of some who use a bean-shooter, others a shrill whistle, and still others stones and potatoes, but I place a flag on a long pole on top of my loft to keep them up, and watch the time they are supposed to fly. When the time is up I remove the flag and allow them to enter the loft. This must be continued daily until they become accustomed to fly a certain length of time, and until the races take place, when you must use your own judgment as to the length of time, by handling them

and feeling if their muscles are hard from the exercising, soft or worn down. The birds can just as easily be overtrained as a person by overtaking their muscles. But overtraining is worse than not being trained at all, it does more harm to the birds than good. When you notice that the muscles of your birds are getting too hard, you must alleviate the exercising. Here is where the skill of the fancier comes into play. How to tell when your birds are in condition, that is, trained properly. In handling, when you pick up your birds and the flesh is solid, not flabby, the quills of the feathers snap like steel springs, the breast bone showing just a trifle from underneath the flesh, then they are coming around O. K.

While out exercising the signs to tell if the birds are strong and in the best of condition, which to my knowledge never failed as yet, are as follows: Watch and you will see them going quite a distance from the loft (out of sight) and returning quickly they set their wings as if just returning from a journey, sweep over the loft and going off again. Repeating the same over and over again during the whole time you are exercising them. After each exercising hour force them to enter the loft and remain there until the next exercising time comes. Never allow them to remain lounging around outside on the roof of the loft or adjoining houses, as it will cause them to fall into very bad habits, as staying out on returning from a race, thereby losing good time. Also they may pick up and eat some things you know nothing about, and you will have no control of their conditioning, as you ought to know just what

the birds eat and how it will effect their system, otherwise give up all hopes of being among the leading fanciers. Some of our olden fanciers think and say this is not necessary, but compare their records with mine, and see if they have won as many honors in as short a space of time and with the competition as I have.

Begin to train your birds about the first or middle of March, a little at a time at first, increasing it steadily, about five minutes every day until you have them flying an hour at each exercising, morning, noon and night. Toss them from the four points of the compass around the city. Liberate each bird separately, so that he must depend upon his own knowledge to arrive at his loft, and not follow the flock. After this ordeal has been gone through, give them a jump of five miles over the route you intend to fly from, then ten, twenty, thirty, fifty, seventy-five and one hundred mile stations respectively. Between each station allow them to rest a day or two until you get to the one hundred mile station, then allow them to rest one week. After the seventy-five mile station the birds should be shipped to the liberating station the night before to give them a chance to rest in the basket from the jolting in the train. It is far better to do this than to rush them down to the liberating station, the basket thrown out, opened, and the poor birds, shaken from the journey, are tossed. Then the fancier will say to his neighbor, "I sent so many birds to such a station and not one has shown up, I cannot account for this. It is very strange they never did it before." There it is again, inexperienced, blundering fancier. The birds are frightened, they haven't had

time to collect themselves. When the basket is opened they go up like a shot, start off in the wrong direction ten chances to one, and by the time they know they are wrong they might be many miles the other side of the liberating station. This is where your good birds go, and this is the way you can account for the birds being found many miles out of their course.

In regard to breeding during the flying season my experience has been as follows: Never have your racing team feeding youngsters during their training, as it will reduce their strength, and the youngsters will not come up as they ought to, for they will not receive the proper care when the old birds are absent at a liberating station. If not properly cared for the growth of the youngsters is bound to receive a set-back. Never try to do too much at once; one must be stopped, either flying or breeding, therefore you must have one lot of birds for breeding and another for flying to have success. Some fanciers have a great deal of trouble in flying hens. In racing never ship a hen that is about to lay, for if she is in the basket she becomes very weak and cannot defend herself very readily, and the result is the other birds almost kill her, and when liberated ten chances to one you will lose her.

The best time to fly a hen is three days after laying her eggs. She is then in the best of condition, and as the thought of her eggs is uppermost in her mind, she will make better time. If she is about to lay eggs keep her home from that station and jump her to the next, she will do better. A cock bird is in the best of condition for flying when he is driving his hen. As soon as



**Blue Checker Homer Cock, Bred in this Country.
Record 500 Miles. A Grand Stock Bird.**

he is liberated he will strive to get home and drive the hen again, and he will generally make good time and speed.

The Homing pigeon is endowed with remarkable power and precision of sight, upon which it relies mainly in its Homing efforts. Therefore clear weather should always be selected for their flights, especially so if it is desired to get rapid time from them. Before putting your birds in the basket for a fly always examine their wings to see that they are perfect, especially with young birds; examine their feet also to see that they are clean and free from any hinderance to their work. As I have remarked, the general rule in beginning the training of pigeons is to loose them a short distance from home, from points North, South, East and West. This is to render them familiar with the neighborhood of their homes. Then to begin in the direction from which they are to be loosed finally.

In young birds the training means the development of the faculties, strengthening of the muscles, education of the sight, cultivation of memory and intelligence, bringing to the highest degree all the qualities the bird may possess. With the old birds that have been trained in previous seasons, this has been done, and the new training is to awaken faculties that are dormant from disuse. These may be trained gently at first, then gradually given severer tasks, until great feats are accomplished or the bird lost, according to the quality of the bird and the luck attending it.

TRAPPING AND TIMING.

I SHALL try to make plain (to the amateur in particular) the timing of birds on their return from a race. Since we have the timing machine, it is a pleasure to race birds, as every one can time his own birds, and there is no worrying about the timer not showing up, and it is a point of advantage over the old way of timing birds. But, bear in mind, you must have your loft so arranged that you will not lose any time in catching your bird. When he arrives home, you should have a cage or trap on the outside, or on the inside of your loft, so when the bird enters the trap you can catch him without having to chase all over the loft. Let me say right here, lest I forget it, that no bird is thoroughly trained which, when he arrives at home, remains on a neighboring roof or on the surroundings of its own loft for five or ten, or even for two or three minutes, thus losing as much valuable time as if lost at the start. What would you say of a bird which invariably took five, ten or fifteen minutes to get away from the liberating stations? And yet while not quite so faulty, it is nevertheless as important in a race that the bird *at once*, on its arrival at home, pass the bob-wires into its loft, You cannot time your bird until it enters the trap or loft, so you can take the countermark and deposit it in the timing machine and start it agoing.

In the measurement of distances the air-line, or direct

measurement from point of liberation to home is taken, and the average speed is computed by multiplying this air-line distance flown, by 1760 (yards in a mile) thus reducing the distance to yards, and then dividing the sum thus obtained by the time consumed in making the flight; thus, if the distance flown was 100 miles, and the time out 125 minutes, we would have 176,000 to be divided by 125 and the result would give an average speed of 1408 yards per minute for the journey.



LIBERATING.

I NOW shall lay considerable stress upon the importance of securing reliable and intelligent persons to act as liberators for your birds. It is really astonishing what lack of common sense, much less judgment, is displayed in this respect. Many fanciers (and not all amateurs either) after paying long prices for good stock, carefully wintering them, getting them in prime condition for the season's work, giving them a few preliminary tosses around home, put them in a training basket (often of insufficient size, and with no tins for water or feed in case the birds are held over for a day or more on account of bad weather) and ship the birds to a certain liberating station, to be tossed by the employees of the railroad. The employees are inexperienced, and without so much as a postal card bearing instructions; liberates the birds on the arrival of the train, and right in the face of an approaching storm. Not only this, but, in one instance of which I was advised, a basket of birds were liberated at the 200 mile station, at 6 P. M.

The method I would advise to insure against any such disastrous mishaps as the above are as follows: Having selected the route and stations we desire to train from, we make a visit to our express office and secure from the agent the names of the station or baggage agents at the several points intended to be flown from. Two or three days before shipment I mail the following

request to the agent, enclosing an addressed postal card for reply.

“Mr. _____, Agent at _____, I will forward you by express Thursday evening, May _____, a basket of Homing pigeons for liberation at your station. Will you kindly liberate the birds on Friday morning, mark the exact time of start on tag, and return empty basket to address given? If the weather is not clear please hold until first fair morning and liberate at _____ A. M.”

If a satisfactory reply is received on the postal, the birds are shipped on the date mentioned, and we are assured not only of their care, but of an intelligent and favorable start.

I have before me a slip containing *advice to liberators*, which is mailed by the Race Secretary of the district, with other instructions, to every Association liberator which I feel will bear a reproduction here.

ADVICE TO LIBERATORS.

On arrival of the birds see to it *at once* that the basket or baskets containing the birds are transferred to safe quarters, under cover, protected from inclement weather and out of the reach of dogs and cats. In the absence of more explicit instructions the following may be followed:

1. For short distances, say under 100 miles, particularly if the birds are to be loosed the morning they arrive, no food will be necessary, *see, however, that the birds have plenty of fresh water.*

2. If the birds arrive in the afternoon, to be liberated

the following morning, give them plenty of food and fill the drinking tins with fresh water; place the basket for the night where the birds may get the first rays of the morning light in order that they may drink. Canada peas or small corn is the proper food (fanciers will see to it that sufficient feed is sent with the birds, tied in a small canvas bag on top of the baskets, also that suitable water tins accompany each basket.)

3. Never loose a bird *before* sunrise, nor when cloudy or threatening rain, nor in high winds, unless specially instructed to do so—have everything in readiness however, for as early a start as may be required after the first peep of day.

4. Take notice of the exact standard time the birds leave the basket, also the direction of wind and state of weather.

5. *Immediately*, after the starting of the birds, send a C. O. D. telegram to the person previously agreed upon to receive it, as follows:

Mr. _____, _____,
weather _____. Signed _____

6. As soon as possible after loosing the birds, the liberator will send by mail, an exact copy of the telegram, together with the number of birds liberated, and any other information he may desire to give.

To _____

Race Secretary.

CARE UPON RETURNING.

THE importance of caring for birds on their return home from a flight should be considered. When a cock has been out even one night, then perhaps another bird has taken his nest, and in his exhausted state he has to fight a hard battle in order to recover his accustomed place in the loft. I well remember an incident of this kind coming under my own observation. A gamey and reliable bird had failed to return from a 300 mile station to which he had been sent in excellent condition. I was mystified and still more so when after several days he did not turn up to claim his old perch and nest. On going to the loft at the end of the week I was surprised to see what appeared to be the form of my long expected 300 miler; but oh! how changed the once noble and intelligent looking head, now swollen to almost double its former size, and its color stained with blood and dirt. On closer inspection I found another sturdy fellow who had taken possession of the vacant nest, in exactly the same condition, which at once explained the swollen head; but what about the blood? On examination I found my unfortunate and belated traveller had been shot through the fleshy part of the wing, and though fast healing, not only the wing feathers but those on the body were literally pasted together in places, and my great wonder was how the poor fellow had managed to get home at all, and then to think of the reception that awaited him.

The birds of a flock come home scattered. A few make good time and receive applause, others are wounded or their feathers cut with shot; these are pitied and poulticed. Some do not come at all; these if mentioned at all are done with a shrug of the shoulders. "A bird which cannot make that distance in a day I am well rid of," is a common remark. Only a few will think of giving the benefit a doubt, thinking of the dangers to which by the hawk and gun they were exposed. If a bird has been away for a number of days he should be carefully attended to for a day or so, given plenty of good and well liked food and quiet. He will then all the sooner be ready for resuming the work expected of him. In fact, after each race *every bird* participating should be carefully scanned to note any possible weakness or defect, so that the same may be promptly remedied and the bird be in fit and bang-up condition, if you please, for the next flight.



NOTABLE RECORDS,

NOW I will take up and review briefly some of the most notable as well as foremost records for speed and distances made by our American fanciers. Let us glance at some of the most notable records and I will begin with the first 500 mile flight, made in June 1879, by the Grist birds, Gladiator, Napoleon and Hurricane, from Dayton, Ohio to Philadelphia, Pa. Start, June 21 at 7.05, the first two arriving at 4.15 P. M. next day. The best American record, however, for this year was awarded to Mr. J. R. Husson's Boss for its flight from Columbus, Ohio to New York, 500 miles, in about three hours less than the Grist birds, while to Mr. Waefelaer's Francisco was given credit for the best one-day performance during the year, from Steubenville, O. to Hoboken, N. J., 343 miles, in eight hours and eighteen minutes.

The most notable record for 1880 was the (at that time) remarkable flight of Garfield, bred by Mr. D. S. Newhall of Philadelphia, and trained by Mr. Wm. Verinder, Jr., Jersey City, N. J. from Indianapolis, Ind., 630 miles air-line. Liberated 6. A. M., September 5th and arrived 7.20 A. M., September 26th. The next distance record of note was that made in 1884 by Gladiator and Blair Athol, owned by Samuel Hunt, Fall River, Mass., in a journey from Jonesboro, Tenn., 715 miles, in twenty-nine days. Later we have the record of A. P.

Baldwin's Ever Ready and Grace Ida, and of Wm. Bennert,s Little Bunnell, all from Mattoon, Ill. to Newark, N. J., 750 miles, the first named making the journey in seven days, and the last two in ten days.

In 1885 the record was still farther advanced by the flight of Red Whizzer, owned by R. L. Hayes, Philadelphia, from Pensacola, Florida, 935 miles in eleven days. The same year we have the record of 1019 miles made by the Arnoux hen, flown by A. P. Baldwin, from Pensacola, Florida to Newark, N. J., time out twenty-six days. In the following month September 1885, the pigeon world was startled by the remarkable record of the two birds, Alabama and Montgomery, owned by Samuel Hunt of Fall River, Mass.; these two birds making the journey from Montgomery, Ala., 1040 miles, air-line; the former in twenty days, and the latter in thirty-eight days. It was in 1890 that the phenomenal record of Petroleum, owned by Geo. H. Bowerman, Newark, N. J., and Waxem, the property of W. B. Garrabrandts, of the same city, was made from Mississippi City, Miss., 1093 miles; the time out of Petroleum being twenty-seven days, that of Waxem twenty-nine days.

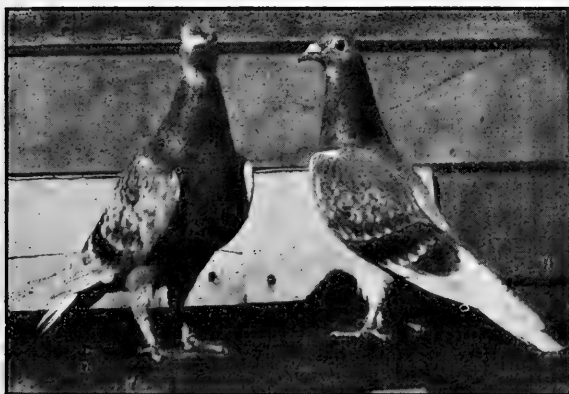
1891 witnessed a still greater break in the long distance record by the birds Darby and Joseph, owned by Fred Bowers of Fall River, Mass., who are reported to have covered the distance from Pensacola, Fla., to Fall River, Mass. 1182 miles, in fifteen days eight hours and sixteen one-half days respectively. This last record was made under the management of Mrs. E. S. Starr.

Let us now glance at the speed record, first we take the 100 mile distance, which is held by Mr. Jacob Eberle

for a flight made from Odentown, Md., and by two birds with an average speed of 1510.08 yards although I believe this speed has since been beaten. From 200 miles I find the flight of Little May from Washington, D. C., 205 miles, speed 1511 yards, May 1884. From 300 miles, I find the flight of Thos. Bowerman's Albright from Steubenville, O., to Newark, N. J. 333 miles, speed 1464 yards. I next come to the 400 mile record, and I find that the top figures from this distance are held by W. B. Garrabrandt's Dandy Jim in a flight from Rocky Mount, Va., to Newark, N. J., 402 miles, June 10th, 1889 with an average speed of 1431 9-10 yards.

Now, let us look at the much coveted 500 mile one-day record, the fond aspiration of many an enthusiastic fancier. The first attempt to cover this distance from sunrise to sunset was made in 1878 without success; again in 1879 and in each successive year. It was not, however, until June 13, 1885 that this apparently almost impossible feat was accomplished, and to Ned Damon, owned by T. F. Goldman of Brooklyn, N. Y. belongs the honor of being the first one-day 500 mile bird in America. The record reads: Start at 5.24 from Abingdon, Va., 508 miles air-line, arrived 7.49 P. M., average speed, 1033 5-8 yards.

The following year, June 26, 1886, this flight was eclipsed by the birds Queen and McGrew, owned by George Waitt of Keyport, N. J., in a journey from Springfield, O.; 502 miles. The birds were liberated at 4.22 A. M. and arrived at 5.30 P. M., speed 1121 yards. The year 1887 saw the record again broken, and by two birds, while two others succeeded in beating the record of Ned Damon. I refer to the grand flight of Jocko;



**Pair Red Checker Homers, Bred in Malden, Mass.
Both have 500 mile Records.**

owned by Thos. Brooks, Black Jim, of P. F. Bolay, Alexander the Great, owned by A. Kinzel, and Little Wonder of Chas. H. Myers, from Spartenburg, S. C. to Germantown, Pa., 510 miles. The start was at 5.31 A. M. July 2; returns Jocko at 6.31 1-2, speed 1151 3-4 yards; Black Jim at 6.32 3-4, speed 1150 yards; Alexander at 6.59 3-4, speed 1112 yards; Little Wonder at 7.02 1 4, speed 1108 yards. This flight was again eclipsed by Hanover, owned by Joseph Iverson of Brooklyn, N. Y., on June 23, 1889 from Newton, N. C. distance 517 miles to Brooklyn, N. Y. with a speed of 1217 6-7 yards.

The year 1890 failed to score a one-day flight from the 500 mile station, but 1891 fully compensated for the loss in the magnificent and unprecedented performance of the birds of the Empire City Flying Club of New York and vicinity, in their flight from Statesville, N. C. 500 miles air-line in which no less than fourteen birds covered the distance before sunset of the day of start. The winner of first Homer Saxon G, owned by T. F. Goldman, Brooklyn, N. Y. making 506 miles in ten hours and thirty-four minutes or in the average speed of 1405.09 yards per minute; W. B. Garrabrants, winning second honors, time out ten hours and fifty-two minutes. In 1892 the distance was again covered in a day, by birds owned by Messrs. Goodby, Bouttelle, Gallagan and Haden, from Franklin, Va., to Providence, R. I. 538 miles in about thirteen hours. June 31st, the same year, St. Lawrence Boy, owned by Samuel Wallace of Washington, D. C., covered the distance of 510 1-2 miles, in the average speed of 1024 yards per minute;

on July 8th, the same year, we record the very commendable flight of Moonlight, owned by G. R. Callahan, West Philadelphia, from Spartenburg, S. C., 502 miles, with an average speed of 1009 yards per minute.

For five years in succession the 500 mile, one day record has been recorded, from 1892 to 1896 inclusive. The year of '96 eclipses all previous years. Over fifty birds covering the distance in the day. The greatest journey ever accomplished was made in 1896, July 4th by birds owned by James McGauhey and A. McGinn; from Gainesville, Ga. to Philadelphia, 614 miles air-line in less than fourteen hours; and every year up to the present day 500 mile one-day records have been recorded.



DISEASES.

TO be able to cure beasts and birds of their diseases when nature is powerless to assert her rights, is a duty more humane than the tending of human beings. Creatures cannot express their feelings, but nature, by various ways, points out to the student the abnormal or diseased parts of the creature's body. By careful study and observation the student traces from nature's rude guide the foundation of the trouble, and with a brief knowledge of the anatomy of the subject and a small insight in the use of medicine and simple remedies, be able to check, and generally cure, the disease. To be successful in this, one must be thoroughly interested and take delight in watching the result of experiments, carefully noting every advantage gained or lost. I have given the subject of diseases in homing pigeons very careful research, and have collected from my own experience, and the experience of others, quite a mass of matter on the subject. For the benefit of fanciers not versed in this very important branch of the rearing and handling of birds, I propose to illustrate my modes of doctoring.

Every formula and mode of application has been fully tested and found, under favorable circumstances, to create a positive cure. So, with a feeling of absolute confidence, the following can be administered.

MOULTING.

During the shedding season, the pin feathers are very

sore, we'll wait until the quill hardens, and I trust that even then it may not be necessary to pull any crooked feathers. If your birds are stopped during their shedding, take them away from their family duties and pull out all the *old* feathers of the tail, which procedure will generally start them moulting again. During hot weather, birds are frequently troubled with sores of a cheesy appearance. To prevent this, feed on good wheat and peas, (corn being too heating) cleanse the sores and apply pulverized alum.

If troubled with vermin in your loft take away all your birds; clean out everything, fumigate with sulphur and whitewash with good lime and other ingredients given before. Corns, when not too large or dangerously located, are best removed by cutting across the top with a sharp knife, squeezing out and filling the cavity with salt or alum.

WING DISEASE.

This affects three parts of the wing: the bastard pinion, the main joint and the main arm. There are five ways of contracting the disease: first, overfeeding without sufficient exercise; second, by severe cold; third, by inheritance; fourth, by over-exertion, and fifth, by a severe blow. The most simple to cure is that which arises from overfeeding without sufficient exercise. The affected wing becomes stiff and heavy, and droops below the tail; the bird is greatly annoyed by constantly lifting the wing back in its proper place; considerable pain is evinced by the trembling of the member and the constant biting of the joint by the patient. On examination, the main arm will be found feverish, with a

slight swelling of the joint. The causes of this is the swelling of the muscles of the wing, and the member becomes "muscle-bound." This promotes congestion of the blood vessels, which produces acute rheumatism. The wing must be relieved of its weight, and the blood vessels restored to a healthy condition by the work of making new tissue and new feathers. The entire flight and primaries must be removed. They will give very little resistance to a sharp pull, and the slight pain produced will be soothing to the bird as it acts as a counter-irritant. The muscles thus relaxed must be treated with an application to drive out the rheumatic disorder. If the disease be slight, an ordinary application of tincture of iodine will be found successful. But if the swelling increases, a thorough dressing of compound iodine ointment will be found a very rigid remedy. If this fails, and the bird still evinces great pain, the following dressing must be applied: boiled oil two parts, turpentine one part, copperas piece size of a cherry; making when completed, about one gill of mixture. Apply this thoroughly twice daily to the wing, and in most cases a cure will be effected within twenty-four hours. No change of food is necessary. "Wing disease from exhaustion" arises from a bird having flown beyond its endurance, and is really a permanent stroke of paralysis. This is incurable. The preventive is not to overtax your birds on the road. "Wing disease from a blow" affects the part bruised. It is not necessary to pluck the wing, but simply to give the part an application of iodine. This will reduce the bruised wing to its normal condition.

TUMORS.

These are small growths or swellings probably due to some impurity of the blood or system, or the result of an injury. They may appear on any part of the body. It is sometimes seen under the eye, and frequently near the vent. If these tumors are treated daily with tincture of iodine until the skin appears inflamed, then discontinue, they will usually disappear, but when they are located at any tender spot, for instance the eye, this tincture should not be used for it may be the means of fatally injuring the sight if any should get into that organ's ducts. When the tumor is on or near the eye I would advise the use of a mild solution of sugar of lead. Occasionally the above methods of treatment will be of no avail, and when such is the case, surgical operations must be resorted to, to effect a cure. Use a sharp knife, make an incision, care being taken not to allow a flow of blood, and remove as much of the tumor's contents as possible. The wound should then be stitched up, and an ointment of iodoform applied several times daily for a week until properly healed up.

SOUR CROP.

A form of indigestion often produced by the use of too much corn in connection with wheat. If grains of the same nature such as wheat, buckwheat, millet, canary, etc., are fed at one meal, this condition will seldom if ever arise. Most cases originate in the injudicious use of corn, probably on account of its cheapness.

Symptoms: The bird will have a rather lazy look, and appear rather uncomfortable. The breath will be rather offensive and have a sour smell. When felt, the

crop will be mushy and is somewhat distended. When the bird has eaten very heartily the crop may be greatly distended from the accumulation of gases produced by the decomposition of the food. This is frequently followed with a violent diarrhœa.

Treatment: If possible, remove some of the contents of the crop, but it is not of so much importance in this condition as in Crop Bound to remove the contents. Remove the bird so it cannot get anything more to eat and administer a capsule containing five drops of castor oil, enough to purge and carry away all undigested food. After a good discharge of the bowels has been effected, soaked bread can then be given. Next day the usual feed can be allowed.

GOING LIGHT.

The disease usually starts with diarrhœa caused by an inflammation of the lining membranes of the bowels. It will finally cause an inflammation of the lungs which gradually waste away as in consumption. The afflicted bird lays around with ruffed feathers and has a miserable appearance in general. The discharges will be watery, containing considerable slime or mucous. Diarrhœa is present throughout the whole course of the disease. They care not for food, just eating enough for mere existence and finally die, having wasted to a mere skeleton.

By far the best method to adopt is that of prevention. Keep the loft in a good sanitary condition, feed the best of food, (never rye) give fresh water, use the tonic and this disease will seldom appear. When a bird is afflicted remove it at once and feed plenty of hemp

seed. Cod liver oil is about the best medicine or nourishment that can be adopted for this disease. It keeps up the strength and helps to supply nourishment to the tissues which are rapidly being consumed. It should be given in capsules containing from three to five drops, three or four times each day, and at the same time administer a dose of hypophosphites of lime and soda, one-fourth grain at each dose. If the diarrhœa persists in a severe form, opium in some form must be given, laudanum in the right proportions can be put in the drinking water. After the bird is convalescing, the tonic should be given in the water for some time to prevent the symptoms from recurring.

CANKER.

Canker is a disease of very common occurrence. When it begins to form in the mouth, the mucous membranes soon begin to grow paler each day, finally a substance resembling cheese begins to form on either side of the throat gradually growing in size until the bird can hardly breathe. About this time, the cheesy matter, if not removed, changes and minute ulcers form which, if allowed to run, destroy the membranes, rapidly causing the bird's death. These cankered spots or ulcers change as the disease advances from a yellow to a brownish color. Sometimes these ulcers form close to the entrance to the windpipe. The bird will always have a fever, the throat is swollen and the breath very offensive.

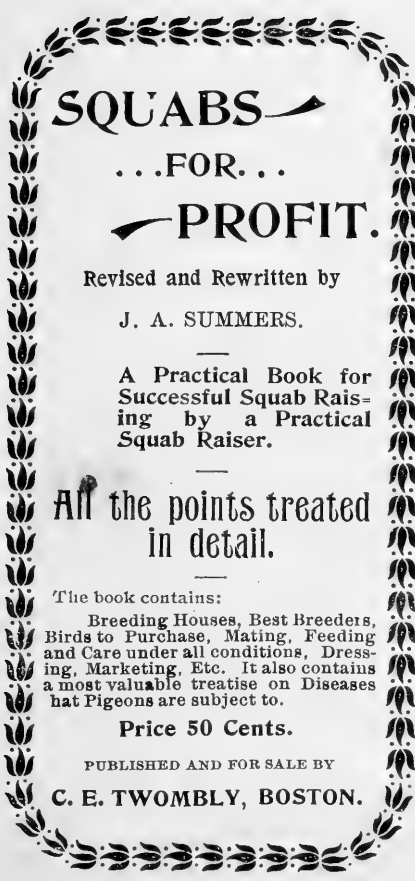
With a small pointed stick remove as much of the cheesy matter as possible without causing blood to escape, and wash out the mouth with a mild solution of

salt water first; then take a small pinch (very small at that) of burnt alum and apply to the throat. This eats away all cankered matter and encourages healing. Or the throat could be painted with a mild solution of permanganate of potassium, using eight or ten grains to the ounce of water. By the oxygen thrown out by this solution and from its powerful absorbing effects, very often the best of results can be obtained. The throat should always be moistened also with a little sweet oil or some mild healing oil at least once a day after the operation.

PIGEON TONIC.

The best tonic for pigeons, for general purposes, is made by taking copperas one-half ounce, sulphate of soda four ounces, Gentian Root (pow'd) one-half ounce phosphate of soda two ounces and pure creosote (Beechwood) one dram. The creosote must first be rubbed well, in a mortar, with about forty grains of calcined magnesia (otherwise it would not mix with water.) Add two quarts of warm water and follow with the other ingredients. Set away in a cool place, and use a tablespoonful to a gallon of the birds' drinking water.





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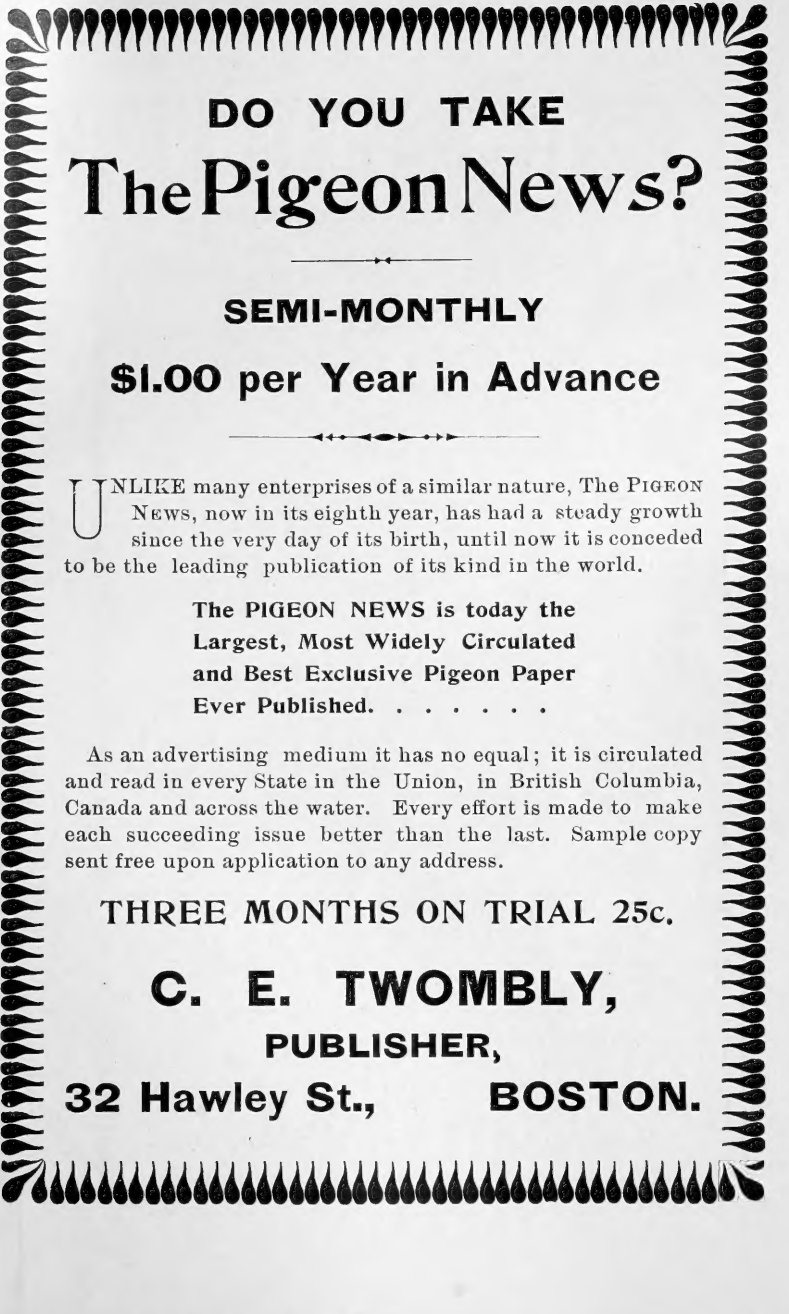
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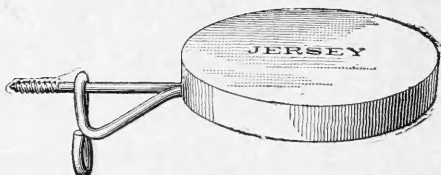
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