

aristocracy of their own ancestors. In Asia, too, among the wealthy princes, pigeon-breeding was a very ancient fancy; in 1600, the court of Akber Khan possessed more than 20,000 pigeons. Thus in the course of several centuries, and in consequence of the various methods of breeding practised in the different parts of the world, there has arisen out of one single originally tamed form, an immense number of different races and varieties, which in their most divergent forms are extremely different from one another, and are often curiously characterized.

One of the most striking races of pigeons is the well-known fan-tailed pigeon, which spreads its tail like the peacock, and carries a number of (from thirty to forty) feathers placed in the form of radii, while other pigeons possess much fewer tail feathers—generally twelve. We may here mention that the number of feathers on the tails of birds is considered by naturalists of great value as a systematic distinction, so that whole orders can thereby be distinguished. For example, singing birds, almost without exception, possess twelve tail feathers; chirping birds (Strisores) ten, etc. Several races of pigeons, moreover, are characterized by a tuft of neck feathers, which form a kind of periwig; others by grotesque transformation of their beaks and feet, by peculiar and often very remarkable decorations, as, for example, skinny lappets, which develop on the head; by a large crop, which is formed by the gullet being strongly inclined forward, etc. Remarkable, also, are the strange habits which many pigeons have acquired; for example, the turtle pigeons and the trumpeters with their musical accomplishments, the carriers with their topographical instinct. The tumblers have the strange habit