

POULTRY AND PIGEONS.

THE SMERLE, OR ANTWERP CARRIER.

BY W. B. TOWNELEY.

IN WRITING A SHORT ARTICLE on the Homing Birds of Belgium, or, as they are there termed, "Smerles," I am not desirous of entering into any refutation of the great amount of error that has found its way into print respecting them—mistakes which even our best naturalists have not avoided. In this communication I may state that should be regularly used for conveying messages constitute breeds the birds, as distinct from those known as Carriers in England. These latter totally new bred, a fancy variety, valued only for the full and perfect development of particular properties, such as the size of wattle, length and straightness of beak, &c. &c. But the most esteemed of the high-class fancy varieties, but are never now used as homing or flying birds.

In England, the birds usually flown are either those termed Dragons, or a cross-breed race, without any particular properties, termed Skinnuns. These are, however, so inferior in rapidity and certainty of flight to the fact that they are now usually employed by those who take great interest in the flying matches of homing birds. From who take great interest in the flying matches of homing birds. From who take great interest in the flying matches of homing birds. From who take great interest in the flying matches of homing birds.

Some few years ago I became possessed of a very valuable stock of these birds, for which I was indebted to the kindness of T. Towneley Parker, Esq., who, at considerable expenditure of time, trouble, and money, obtained from the loft of the most accomplished Belgian amateurs, birds of the greatest and most rapid powers of flight. One of these birds, a cross between the celebrated strains of M. Simons (of Liège) and M. Famel (of Verrier), has been engraved to illustrate this article. The artist, Mr. L. Wells, has been very successful in delineating the exact character of the bird, as shown when a state of repose.

The Smerles are rather small birds, and look very much as if they had been originally bred from a rather coarse blue owl pigeon, crossed with a blue rock. The head, it may be observed, is encased in the skull cartilage, indicating a full development of brain, and offering a striking contrast to the flat, narrow skull of the English fancy carrier. The most striking characteristic of these birds is the firmness and great breadth of the flight feathers; and, after seeing this communication with flight which the flight is urged. The keel of the breast bone is deep and well covered with strong muscles; and there is altogether an absence of any oval or large development of any part of the flight.

In rapidity and power of flying these birds far exceed any other variety of pigeon with which I am acquainted. When I kept a large number I have often enjoyed watching the flight start off in a gale of wind; and after seeing this apparently well-matched Amberg, witness them come back in the very teeth of the gale with almost the same ease and rapidity as they would have done in a calm.

This power of flight is conjoined with an attachment to the loft, that is not by the slightest value upon this property; they match up birds without any regard to colour, and the result is that the Smerles can rarely be depended on for breeding true to the colour of the parents. Speed and endurance are the objects to be attained, and colour is altogether disregarded—another proof, and the absurdity of offering a prize for a pair of well-matched Amberg, witness them come back to a pen of birds that would never be seen again if let out fifty miles from home. There is one colour, however, that finds but little favour with the Belgian amateurs, and that is white. This dislike is not an unaccountable prejudice, but depends on the fact that white birds are more conspicuous to the hawk and sparrow-hawk, and consequently, are more apt to be destroyed by hawks and sportsmen. Setting whites, therefore, on one side, there is but little preference shown to any colour; and mealy, blues, chequers, blacks, and blue or black pigeons are all looked upon with equal favour, if they possess the requisite power of flying with equal rapidity. The bird delineated in the engraving is a blue chequer without white on the wing. Some of the flying birds seen in this country are filled very much like an owl or turbit; but I prefer birds without any such irregularity of plumage, as it cannot but interfere with their easy and rapid passage through the air.

In Belgium there is held for some years a weekly journal, *Le Pigeon*, devoted exclusively to the flying fancy. As it may interest the readers of THE FIELD to read another description of these birds, I will translate the contents of the editor of *Le Pigeon*. "Smerles," he writes, "are the short-necked pigeons of the province of Liège. They are remarkable for their speed and intelligence, and also for the size of the skull and the structure of the wings. When two prize birds are capable of returning from Bordeaux to Liège or Verrier (a distance of over 500 miles) in twelve hours, provided the sky be clear and the wind favourable, the weather they return the following or the third day. The journeys from one (330 miles), Châtellerau (365 miles), and Poitiers (380 miles) are performed in eight hours."

With regard to the value of these birds in Belgium, it is stated that a couple of young Smerles, warranted bred from birds that have been flown prizes in the long distance matches will realise even as much as 500*l.*, and in some instances as much as 1000*l.* The enthusiasm with which the flying fancy is pursued in Belgium, when the flower is stated that there are 150 societies or clubs offering prizes to the fliers, and that these include nearly 10,000 amateurs.

I recollect an amusing fact, that shows the importance attached to these birds in Belgium. The fliers of Belgium are partially under the control of the State, and on one occasion the Government officials requesting them to arrange a low tariff of charges for the baskets containing the pigeons that were being practised or trained for the long matches.

The training of these birds undergoes in very severe. The young birds are taken to gradually-increasing distances at their respective periods, so that eventually they are acquainted with all the common landmarks of the long journeys. If it is attempted to train them, whereas, by or by too long stages, many of the birds are lost; are lost in short courses, and, as practised at Liège, only ten per cent. succeed. In this province they do not fly the young birds, of the year second year, but never attempt more than 200 miles at the most, and more mature birds, that have acquired full development and with regard to the faculty that these birds possess of returning home from great distances, I believe more erroneous statements have been written respecting it than on any other subject connected with pigeons. These birds possess, and to some mysterious power or instinct that enables them, or other varieties, I believe not possessed by turbit, fantails, &c. &c. to fly solely by observation; and I ground my belief on the following facts:

Any peculiar instinct—such as that of nest-building, power of migration, &c.—bestowed on any species, is equally bestowed on all the individuals of that species, and not on a few only; thus, all swallows migrate, but all pigeons do not return home from a hundred miles' distance.

Instinct is the same in all cases. All swallows fly south in autumn; but the homing pigeon can return home north, south, east, or west—a variation in action that is incompatible with the notion of an unreasoning instinct.

Pigeons must be regularly trained by stages, or the best birds will be inevitably lost. If thrown one hundred or two hundred miles, the best birds will refuse to fly in a fog; nor will I ever believe, I have tried many experiments, and lost many of my best birds in so doing. On one occasion I took a bird, that had often done fifty miles, to a distance of five miles, and threw him on a foggy day; he was at once settled at the top of a house, and remained there till the fog cleared off. On another occasion I let two of my very best birds loose after a show at the Freemasons' Hall, at four o'clock p.m. early in January. One perched over the door, and when driven up, flew on to the opposite house. Of the two only one ever returned home, the other probably falling a prey to the cat.

To any one who has ever been in the habit of flying these birds the idea of instinct is absurd. A bird thrown in a new locality flies round and round in gradually-increasing circles, until at length it descends some familiar object, and then, and then only, darts off on its homeward flight. Throw the same bird again in the same locality, and if a good intelligent bird there is no wheeling round, but, the road being known, he is off instantly.

I know I shall be met by the fact that no bird can see two hundred miles, to say nothing of five hundred. In that I perfectly agree, but no bird will return home two hundred miles, or even one hundred, without he has been trained by stages on the road. Few persons have any idea of the extent of vision from an elevated point of view. Mr. Glaisher stated some time since that at half a mile elevation in his balloon he saw the whole course of the Thames, from the Nore to Richmond, in one view. And I may remark that as the earth's surface on a deal level curves eight inches in a mile, and as the curve increases with the square of the distance, it is very easy to calculate the range of vision from any altitude. Thus, at a height of a little above four hundred feet, the



extent of vision, even if the surface were a perfect level, as that of the sea, would be twenty-five miles on every side. But in every land view there are prominent objects that can be seen at much greater distances; and no one who has ever flown his pigeons but must have observed them looking on all sides, turning the head as they wheel round and round, until they discern some familiar object. In all questions that do not offer a ready solution there is a disposition to refer the effect to some mysterious agency beyond human ken. The idiots who cannot see through the rope-tricks of a couple of charlatans, ignorantly refer them to supernatural agency; and it is so much easier to cut short the question of the homing faculty of pigeons, and call it instinct, than to investigate the facts of the phenomena.

Str.—I enclose you a photograph of three Belgian Carriers, and which are the same as they fly in Antwerp. One may red bird has returned from all parts of France to Bruges, viz., from Toulouse and Marseilles, &c. and the two blue and blue chequered from Vierzon, one hundred and twenty-six miles south of Paris. We had some return last week from Bayonne, on the borders of Spain, to Bruges. I have often watched them on their return from their long flights. Should you wish, I could give you any information respecting these wonderful birds.

JOHN B. KENNICK.  
[The portraits forwarded are those of very good Smerles, or Belgian Carriers, closely resembling in form the bird engraved above; but, taken by the camera, they show a more upright carriage than the bird here represented, which, crouched down somewhat from being confined in a cage when drawn.—Ed.]

PROPERTIES OF THE BARB.  
Str.—I was much pleased to see a capital article on the Barb in your last impression; but I do not think these articles on pigeons ought to be passed by without a word, *pro* or *con*, from some of our breeders and fanciers; and hope to see in THE FIELD some letters from the Barb. Mr. Jones says the eye should be pearl, but he does not make any difference for the colour of the bird. I am inclined to think the white Barb with a pearl eye will be rather difficult either to breed or find.

FRANK. BLEND.  
33, Westbourne-grove, Bayswater, W., Feb. 22.

WHITE COCHINS.  
Str.—Like your correspondent of last week, I too, like White Cochins, and I much enjoyed reading the graphic account of his favourites. Those persons who fancy Dorkings, or who say that Game are the only kind of birds fit for table, and who look upon Cochins in general as a useless correspondence, let me say, that THE FIELD is carrying on a useful correspondence. Let me therefore assure them that I am as fond of my Cochins as they are of their Dorkings or Game, and that Cochins have very many admirable qualities which their favourites have not. I do not despise other varieties, and I would most certainly keep them if, like certain favoured mortals, I could convert Knowley or Linton Park into one vast poultry-yard. As this cannot be, and as my ground is very limited, I am forced to confine my affections to birds which are easily kept within bounds; so it is that I have chosen Cochins, and White Cochins in particular.

Such being the case, I cannot but feel annoyed at the marked way in which my favourites are being written up nearly as standards of show, and more especially, because I am a more marked manner, by the committee of the Birmingham poultry show.

Your correspondent last week alluded briefly to this grievance, and as I am most anxious that some change may be made in next year's schedule, I have written a letter which I addressed to the Birmingham committee of management on the 21st December last, or rather more than two months ago.

than Buffs. For adult birds there were twelve Buff entries, five Partridge entries, and ten White entries. For chickens there were thirty-one Buff entries, fourteen Partridge entries, and twenty White entries.

I think these facts speak for themselves; and that breeders of White Cochins have a right to request that their birds be put up, at least, equal terms with Partridge Cochins.

I would also suggest that there be in future a separate class for White Cochins cock. I shall be glad to hear your opinion on the subject, and to know why Whites have hitherto been so little encouraged.

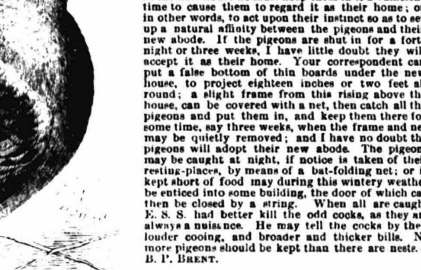
Now, what was the result of this letter, which I consider to be a very temperate and reasonable one? Why, I have never to this day received any reply at all, although I directed my envelope addressed and stamped, and it is because I think exhibitors ought not to be treated so cavalierly, even by the Birmingham secretaries, that I have troubled you with this correspondence.

White Cochins are almost unrepresented at very many shows, and are, therefore, naturally looked upon by the ignorant as rare and delicate. Delicate they most assuredly are, but the secretaries of the shows are found them harder than the Buffs; and I maintain that they will cease to be rare as soon as ever secretaries will hold out sufficient encouragement to exhibitors.

KIRK BY THE LUNE'S DELL.

NOTES AND QUESTIONS ON POULTRY.  
KEEPING EGGS FOR SITTING.—Can you inform me the best way to keep hens' eggs for sitting—whether they have to be often turned, and kept in a warm or cool place?—A. A. I have written on this subject, and as the eggs are never removed from the nest, but are laid to every day or other day. Under these circumstances they must be subject to variable temperatures, being warmed up when the hen lays, and cooled at night. A place constantly warm cannot be desirable, as it promotes the undue evaporation of the contents.—Ed.]

HENS EATING THE COCK'S COMB.—Can you inform me if there is any way to prevent a hen constantly pecking a cock's comb, and making it away with it?—The above is done by the cock, and as the comb is the pride of his life, I am very anxious to find out, if possible, a way of stopping her without parting with her.—A. F. I have written on this subject, and as the comb may be quietly removed; and I have no doubt the pigeons will adopt their new abode. The pigeons may be caught at night, if they are not already in their new abode, and then be closed by a string. When all are caught E. S. S. had better kill the old cock, as they are always a nuisance. He may put the cocks by their lower cooling, and brooder and their bills. No more pigeons should be kept than there are nests.—B. P. BRENT.



SETTING PIGEONS IN A NEW HOUSE.  
I do not think that persons who are in the convenience or good looks of their abode; that which influences them seems to be merely the love of home. If E. S. S. desires to see his pigeons live in the new house he must keep them in it a sufficient time to cause them to regard it as their home; or in other words, to accustom them to the door of which set up a natural affinity between the pigeons and their new abode. If the pigeons are shut in for a fortnight, or more, in the new house, and as the frame will accept it as their home. Your correspondent can put a false bottom of thin boards under the new house, to project eighteen inches or two feet all round a slight frame from the ring above the house, can be covered with a net, then catch all the pigeons and put them in, and keep them there for some time, say a week, when the frame and net may be quietly removed; and I have no doubt the pigeons will adopt their new abode. The pigeons may be caught at night, if they are not already in their new abode, and then be closed by a string. When all are caught E. S. S. had better kill the old cock, as they are always a nuisance. He may put the cocks by their lower cooling, and brooder and their bills. No more pigeons should be kept than there are nests.—B. P. BRENT.

FORTECOMING POULTRY SHOWS.  
WIMBORNE.—April 4 and 5. Sec. Mr. J. Hall, King street. Poultry, Pigeons, and Eggs.  
ACCOMBRON.—April 6 and 7. Sec. Mr. J. Dugdale. Poultry, Pigeons, and Eggs.  
DUBLIN (Royal Society).—April 18 to 21. Sec. Dr. Steele. Poultry, Pigeons, and Eggs. Entries close March 17. Schedule, see FIELD Jan. 14.  
WIMBORNE.—May 15 and 16. Sec. Mrs. Jno. Dallinger and F. Whitlock, Woodbridge.  
HEARNDEN (Bath and West of England Society).—June 4 and 5. Sec. Messrs. J. and W. Taunton. Poultry and Pigeons. Entries close May 13. Schedule, see FIELD Jan. 20.

FARMING.

THE SEWAGE QUESTION is now in the ascendant; not only do I disagree recommend itself to our olfactory nerves, but every where it is thrust upon us. Committees sit to discuss its merits; members of both Houses glowingly expatiate upon it, either as a sanitary measure or as a mine of wealth; while learned lecturers, like Liebig and Lawes, grow angry because their largely diverge. If possible, we would avoid the topic, as an sailor would a lee-shore; there is no hope for us, unwillingly we are dragged into the arena of discussion—while Liebig on the one hand, in a lengthy lucubration, addressed to the Metropolitan Board of Works, assures the British public that such a valuable commodity ought no longer to be wasted as it has been; and on the other hand, Mr. Lawes, in a shorter but equally forcible and all, and is therefore only fit to be wasted. Here we have before us a huge sweltering mass of filthiness, which has been allowed to accumulate until it has now brought upon us disease and death; but the evil has grown to such enormous proportions, that a necessity has arisen to get rid of it in some way or other. As this is the first time, but science has discovered in it, as supposed value, so glowing and glittering, and apparently within such easy grasp, that no wonder committees and corporations, boards of works and sanitary boards, are all alike anxious to clutch the prize. It has its sanitary view, its economical view, and its utilitarian view; but under whatever aspect, taking one side or the other, all are ready to adopt the various views—and this is now the main point. "Let us make use of this gold mine," says the Metropolitan Board of Works; and forthwith it was handed over to Messrs Napier and Hope, to be discharged over some unprofitable area in Essex, whence a great profit is to accrue. It is thus to be made use of, and to be supplied to London, by means of the inviting process. But the sewage of the metropolis is of such gigantic proportions, that it refuses any ordinary method of disposal; hence its utility becomes a matter of question, and its value consequently a very doubtful question indeed, and the public ought well to pause ere it is committed to any means of disposal.

If utility and value are to constitute the sole points by which any subject is to be judged, who can dispute but that the stones of the great Pyramid of Cheops would, if once conveyed hither, be both useful and valuable? That such a thing is practicable would admit of no doubt in these days of engineering power—but would it pay? Anything, even St. Peter's itself, could be transported to London, if only—say by the Mathews, in "Used Up," so unctuously suggested—a company was got up and the money subscribed; and so it may be said of any other scheme. All we are concerned in at present is the practical, which of course means the pecuniary, part; and it seems almost self-evident, under the circumstances of the case, that it is not worth the trouble to have this watery excrement of wealth, and quite another to extract the wealth from it.

There is one other point connected with this sewage question, which, most important in itself, seems altogether overlooked. Of the eight great water companies with whom we supply our water, and derive their water immediately, and one of the others takes its liquid from the river. If, according to the intention of the Metropolitan Board of Works, carrying out the plan of Messrs Napier and Hope, this enormous mass is to be taken and deposited on the shores of the sea in Essex, there must evidently be a great abstraction of liquid from old Father Thames. How is this deficiency to be supplied? Is it to be supplied by the sea? The equivalent from some other source, or is it to be supplied by the Metropolitan Board of Works, nor Parliament itself, has any public right to dispose of this sewage.

THE LAW OF HYPOTHEC IN SCOTLAND, AND THE PROBABLE EFFECTS OF ITS FURTHER ABOLITION.

Str.—The Commission of the Law Officers on law sitting in Edinburgh, and many of the most eminent farmers and law agents in Scotland have been examined. The unanimity which prevails in the