

Domestic Utilization of Homing Pigeons.

Mr. Tegetmeier's communications concerning his own and Belgian homing pigeons no doubt delight many of your readers as well as myself; but, as it is not in every fancier's power to bestow the ability, time and money which he and others can, it may not, perhaps, be uninteresting to hear of the small doings of those, like my boys and myself, who for some twenty years past have, amongst other minor sports carried on that of breeding and training "homers," to our great amusement and convenience; and I often wonder how it is that fathers and sons who are very dependent upon each other for kindred recreations, and who both possess an inborn liking for birds and beasts, do not take more to pigeon flying. Ah, there I have used the fatal word. Pigeon flying! "The sure road to ruin," says one; "The certain means of encouraging a taste for low company," says another; and so on. Well I will not stay to argue this point, but content myself with saying that seven of us, sheltered by one roof during the last twenty years, have not found it so, any more than the possession of a good terrier involves the brutalities of dog fighting, or a gallop over the moor compromises us with the rascalities of the racecourse. If a lad is well "entered," as we say of a hound, you may depend upon it "he'll not run sheep." And so, as an old bird, I say to parents who want their boys to "fly straight," let them be true "homers," find real pleasure and amusement at home, and rely upon it they'll not "foul their own nest" nor frequent disreputable cotes.

With this preamble, let me now say something about our locality, our homers, their use, and our amusement. We live in a remote village which nestles under the sloping sides of one of the best moors in the North Riding; our elevation above the sea is nearly seven hundred feet, and some parts of the parish attain more than double that height; and, although we live in a beautiful and romantic country, there are no striking objects, beyond hills and woods, to act as landmarks to our birds and to this we chiefly ascribe the loss of so many young ones in training. Our pigeon cot is on the ground; that is, it is half of a large tool house, boarded off, partly for convenience sake and partly to avoid rats, which run up our hollow old walls, defy exclusion, and commit sad havoc in a loft. In order to give our pigeons plenty of room for air and exercise, when garden operations can dispense with their attentions, we have a large court wired off, adjoining the cot. Our pigeons, therefore, are not housed on the most approved plan, nor trained in the easiest country for "homing," nevertheless we breed quite enough for

use, and our birds frequently fly from York, Shelby, &c., fifty and sixty miles; we do not care to send them longer distances. Our present strains came of birds from "Johnnie," well known in Littleborough, in the neighborhood of Manchester, and though, maybe, not of the very best blood, answer all our purpose. Being six miles from a station and telegraph office, we find our pigeons of the greatest use as messengers. I scarcely ever send a carriage to meet anyone without a bird or two to convey tidings as to the arrival or not of our guest, so that we may either prepare or postpone dinner. Just as I was starting one day to meet a friend, one of my household came out in some perplexity as to Mr. Shorthorn bringing his servant, because no room was prepared for him. "I'll send you word," I said, as I got hold of the horses; "look out for a pigeon." The train shot in, my friend shot out, "Where's your man?" I asked. "I never bring one if I can help it," was the characteristic answer. Up went a pigeon already prepared. "What are you doing?" said our visitor. "Telling them of your arrival," I replied, and in less than ten minutes—an hour before we got home—our domestic's mind was at ease. Another time my wife said at breakfast. "I wish you would call as you go to Richmond, and persuade Mr. M. to come back with you to dinner, and stay all night." I found my friend at home, and willing, and in twenty minutes nine miles was flown, and the "fatted calf" preparing. And so in a hundred ways, when post or telegram are of no avail and time is valuable, our winged messengers speed home with such tidings as "Safely at York," "Got home," "Bringing soles—no salmon."

Thus it will be seen that our favorites are very useful in this remote locality; and the amusement they give in training and attending to them is very considerable. We seldom fly them except on clear days, as hazy weather always lengthens their flight, and sometimes keeps them out a day or two. Last autumn I was going to Saultburn, intending to "toss" two of our best pigeons at Stockton, some twenty miles from here. As we neared Stockton a thick, smoky haze was spreading over the town; so I threw up my birds from the window. They did not get home till the middle of next day, while other birds "tossed" a minute before got home in an hour or two, I fancy the latter got into the mist in making their circle (which they always do), and so took the wrong direction.

If these few words are likely to amuse any of your readers, or I can give them any information that first-flight men might not care to be bothered with doing, it will give me much pleasure.—LONG AGO, in *The Field*.