

# PIGEONS AND PETS.



## BIRDS I HAVE MET.

BY WM. BARRETT, R. N.

### *The Tumbler Pigeon.*

**D**OUTBLESS there are many fanciers of this variety of pigeons living in the Midlands of England who would have liked to have travelled in the Persian Gulf with me during the years 1881-82.

If they had, probably they would have been astonished at the wonderful specimens of this bird both in color and action which I saw there.

I had the good fortune in 1881 of being introduced to one of the best Tumbler breeders at Bushire, a town situated on the north-east coast of the Persian Gulf. He was named Mahommed, and by occupation a baker. He had the contract of supplying the British Fleet with bread.

When he heard I was a fancier like himself, and fond of the bird, he called "Hum, mum." He invited me to his house, and although I could not speak much Persian and be less English, we nevertheless soon managed to understand each other when once I had a glance at his birds, and oh! what a treat it was to see his stock.

The houses at Bushire are flat roofed, and the principal occupation of many of the inhabitants is to sit on the roofs in the afternoon when the sun has lost its fierceness and bet on the tumbling powers of their pigeons.

My friend showed me up on the roof of his house. On arrival there I was regaled with sweetmeat (called "Holvah," a mixture of sugar and butter); then I had some otto of roses sprinkled on my clothes. These ceremonies over, I was then shown the birds. My host had a total of fifty of the most even-marked pigeons I had ever seen, mostly Saddles, and all had shell crested heads; their faces were very much like our Rollers, and they also had feathers on their legs like the latter birds. I handled several, and was greatly surprised at their firmness; they were all in the pink of condition.

The loft was a stone structure built on the roof. It was about five feet high and about twelve feet square. The nest boxes were built of stone. For ventilation, small holes

were made close under the roof, which was flat. The only means of entry or exit for the birds was through the doorway.

He made me understand that he fed the birds morning and evening. The morning meal the birds did not get their fill, but after their evening fly they had as much as they could eat.

The food consisted principally of grain much resembling barley, a small amount of dari and millet being mixed with it; the two latter given mostly during the breeding season. One bird in the loft was of a rare color, each feather on it appeared to have blended together the colors of the peacock's tail. Unfortunately I could not understand by what crossings he was so successful in breeding such a handsome bird.

Each bird had a name, and really appeared to know it. You may be sure I was anxious to see his kit of birds in the air, and I can assure you, dear readers, that when I did see them I was more than surprised, for I never up to that time had seen such a grand sight.

He allowed out about thirty of the birds, and they walked out the doorway just like a company of men, going towards my host and his son, and feeding out of their hands. What real fanciers these men must have been, and it was no wonder their birds were in such splendid condition.

I was longing to see how they would start, but at last away they went at a word of command. The only way I can describe their mode of rising into space is just for you to fancy a spiral staircase leading towards the sky, having a base of 200 yards, and diminishing in circles until it was only about 25 yards at the height of about 500 yards, at which height their fun commenced, several rising above the main body and tumbling down to it as it gyrated in the air.

During the performances of the birds I had to take coffee with my host, and that beverage was, like his pigeons, perfect. After coffee, I made him understand that I would soon have to go, but said I should like to see his birds return.

Now, the baker's turn came. He clapped his hands, at the same time kept calling out the word "Beti, beti, beti," and afterwards commenced gesticulating like a sailor making a signal. Naturally, I thought he would frighten his birds; but, no—down they came, but with not the ease they ascended, as they all appeared to have gone tumbling mad. It was a miracle that some were not injured. At last, they pitched around the baker and his son, some of them swarming on their shoulders for all the world like bees.