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New Books.

"The Variation of Animals and Plants under Domestication," by Charles Darwin, M.A., F.R.S., is a second edition of a very valuable work, enriched with much new matter. Although quite too technical for the general reader the book is in its fourth thousand, showing the rapid spread of a taste for science.

Mr. Darwin's minute observations have extended to fowls, ducks, geese, pigeons, peacocks, canaries, goldfish, hive-bees, and silkmoths, and he gives interesting particulars of horses, cattle, sheep, and other domestic animals. Pigeons, to which nearly 100 pages are devoted, appear to have been domesticated from a very early period, representations of them being found upon the Egyptian monuments as early as 3000 B.C. The Romans gave immense prices for these birds, and so great was the passion for them among the Persians that Christians being forbidden to keep them are said to have changed their religion to gain the privilege.

The "tumble" of the tumbler pigeon is supposed to be a mild form of epilepsy perpetuated artificially by selection. It has been produced in an ordinary pigeon by pricking the base of the brain and giving hydrocyanic acid and strychnine, but there is nothing to show how it originated in the breed.

By means of very careful examination and collection of facts Mr. Darwin appears to have completely established his case that all the varieties of pigeon are descended from one common ancestor, *Columba livia*, the blue rock pigeon. When we think of the extraordinary difference between the pouter, the carrier, and the fantail, and the marked peculiarities of each continued through generations, we must own that if they can be traced back to one common ancestor the versatility of nature is amazing, and the difficulty of accepting Mr. Darwin's theory of evolution is lessened enormously; for these variations have been produced in a comparatively short time by the clumsy agency of man.

Five thousand years are as nothing in the world's history, and the capricious changes contrived by fashion seem utterly insignificant as compared with the slow but enduring alterations which may have been brought about by the mighty effect of those glacier periods which have passed over the earth, and gradually but surely eliminated whatever was worthless, preserving life only in its fittest types.

Mr. Darwin gives some curious facts about domestic dogs, which he believes to have a multiple origin. On an Assyrian monument, supposed to be of the date 700 B. c., a large

mastiff is represented, and upon Egyptian monuments built 4,000 years ago the greyhound is found, together with a small short-legged dog resembling the turn-spit. He tells us that gold fish were first known in China about 3,000 years ago, and the Chinese have no less than eighty-nine varieties.

The passion for pets is not confined to civilized man. The Malayans and South American Indians are said to have discovered ways of altering the colours of birds by peculiar feeding, or by plucking out the feathers, and "inoculating the wound with the milky secretion from the skin of a small toad."

The feathers grow of a brilliant yellow colour, and if again plucked are said to grow again of the same colour without any fresh operation. The colours of the King Lorry are said by Mr. Wallace to have been artificially produced in *Lorries garrulus*.