

**A PIGEON RANCH.**

BY CHARLES F. HOLDER.

Travelers from Los Angeles to Pasadena, Cal., as the train winds up the Los Angeles River to enter the picturesque Arroyo Seco, at the head of the San Gabriel Valley, are sometimes entertained by the spectacle of vast flocks of birds which come sweeping on like huge flecks of brilliant summer clouds. In their beautiful movements they call to mind the famous flocks of Modena, which a century ago were not only one of the marvels of Europe, but of the world. For centuries the inhabitants of Modena had been pigeon trainers and fliers, and the sport became an art like falconry. The men who conducted it took their positions in tall towers, and by means of flags directed the movements of their flocks, some of which were all dark birds, others white or blue. The original pigeon fliers fought their flocks; that is, a flock was trained to dart into another, knives being attached to their feet. Sanguinary contests were carried on in midair, and when the flocks came together silvery bodies and feathers dropped, telling of the slaughter done. But the fliers of later days merely strive to develop beautiful figures and evolutions and to show the perfection of training.

Nowhere in the world, in all probability, can so many tame pigeons be seen in the air at one time as in or near Los Angeles. The great flocks which sweep down the Arroyo fairly cloud the sky at times when one stands in the well-wooded portion. The birds are then returning from some feeding ground, and if followed they can be traced to possibly the only pigeon ranch in America, shown in the accompanying illustration. Looking at it the reader can see at a glance about fifteen thousand pigeons, assuming that the birds are all at home, this being the estimated number on this unique ranch, owned by Mr. T. G. Johnson, of Los Angeles.

Southern California is particularly favorable to pigeons. They have few natural enemies, hawks being very scarce, while the perpetual summer is an important factor. The ranch was started some years ago by a man who believed that the squab supply was not equal to the demand, and he continued until he had accumulated several thousand birds, upon which he sold out to the present owner, who made a study of the question, and entered into it with the same zeal that an orange grower would. As a result Los Angeles has a ranch which is a curiosity in itself, ranking with the ostrich ranch which has been described in these columns.

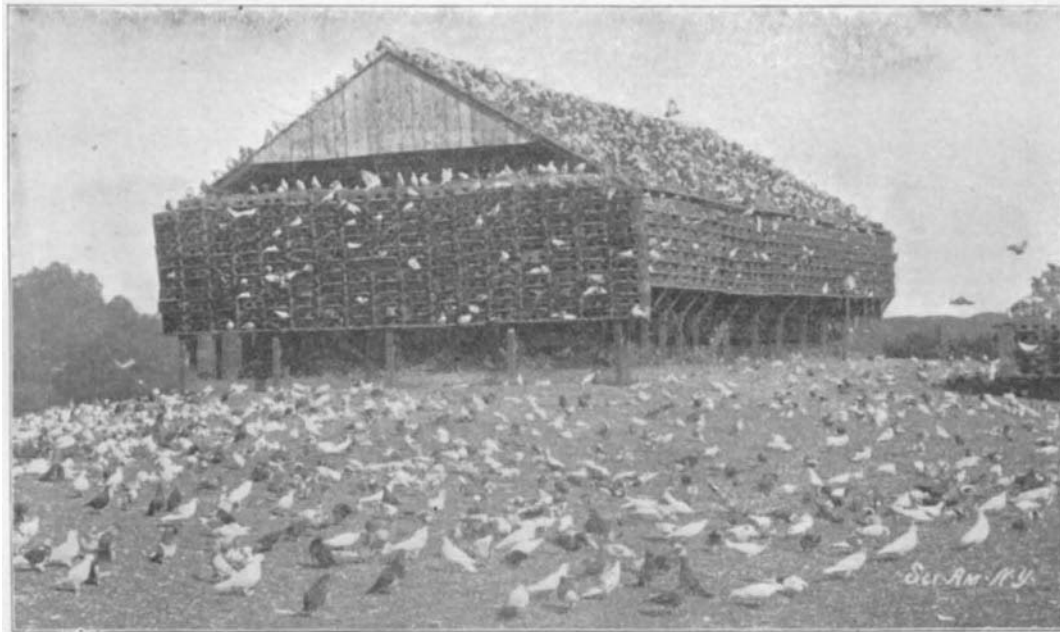
The pigeon ranch covers about eight acres of sandy, gravelly ground in the bed of the Los Angeles River, where there is an abundance of water. Here stands the enormous ark-shaped loft, or pigeon house, whose crudities of architecture are concealed by the thousands of pigeons which stand billing and cooing, upon the roof. Fifteen thousand birds fairly cover the ground and loft, so that at times from a distance it appears as though some of the snow from the neighboring Sierras had been dropped upon the roof. The increase of this gigantic flock is enormous, as may be assumed. If the market should fail, or give out, as did that for the Belgian hare, Mr. Johnson would be utterly unable to feed his birds, as in less than two years he would by calculation have a possible million birds on his hands. Fortunately, the demand is better than the supply, and the pigeon ranch sends about forty thousand squabs per year to the market.

The birds which produce this enormous output are well cared for, the conditions being all but perfect. The main building is sixty feet in length and twenty feet high; the exterior and interior being covered with mating boxes, on the outside standing in tiers of ten. In all there are between five and six thousand nests, all of which are so arranged that they can be reached by aisles or avenues from the interior, fumigated, cleaned, etc.

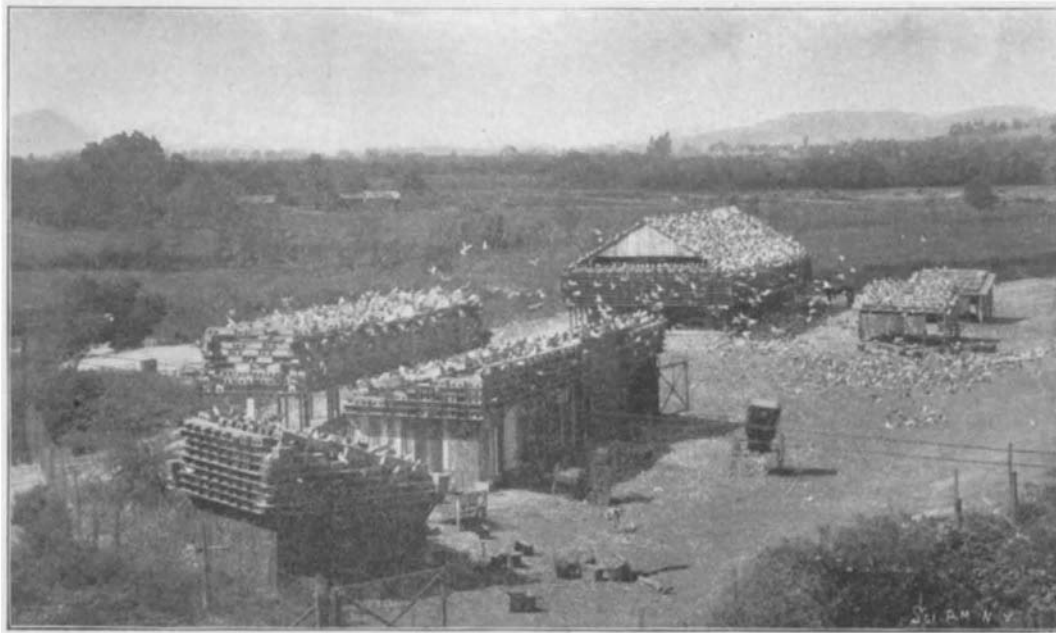
A rapid evolution is going on in the flock. Mr.

Johnson desiring white birds, is eliminating the dark ones by selling them, and as a result the flock is rapidly becoming white, when it was quite the reverse last year. This change is well shown in the illustration. The statistics of this unique ranch are interesting. The estimated output for the month is three thousand, the gross income being about nine thousand dollars per annum. The average price per dozen for the birds is about three dollars, sometimes ranging up to ten. The expense of maintaining such an enormous flock is not inconsiderable, as, contrary to what might be supposed, the pigeons do not forage and fly far afield to feed, rarely leaving their home, thus forcing their owner to keep them in good condition. To accomplish this the birds are fed three times a day, each meal costing approximately for all, five dollars, so the annual food bill is about fifty-five hundred dollars. The food consists mainly of wheat, screenings, boiled meal and stale bread. The daily consumption is about twelve sacks of screenings, eight sacks of wheat and many gallons of boiled meal. The bread is an additional fattener given during the week.

Being conducted on scientific principles, the sanitary



**A PIGEON LOFT ACCOMMODATING THOUSANDS OF BIRDS.**



**GENERAL VIEW OF THE LOS ANGELES PIGEON RANCH.**

condition of the birds is excellent. Once a week every corner of the great building is disinfected by forcing carbolic acid and water into every crevice, while the nests are treated to a compound of sulphur and insecticide which keeps them free of parasites. Hundreds of pounds of straw are used by the birds annually for nesting purposes, which is scattered on the ground in the morning by the men and soon carried away by the nesting birds. No more interesting place in which to study the habits of pigeons could be imagined, as here every peculiarity of the bird, and all its stages from the egg to death from old age and the various diseases the pigeon is heir to, can be observed. The male birds select a single mate and are constant. Young birds begin nesting when they are between five and six months old; and when two eggs have been deposited the hatching season begins, ending in eighteen days. The pair divide their time in this duty, though the female has the greatest burden, being virtually relieved several hours a day.

The young birds are fed by the mother with the "pigeon's milk" of fancy for a while, soon eating grain, and in less than a month have passed the various grades of "peepers," "woolies," "squealers,"

given them by various owners, and become squabs and marketable. The squab belongs to the class of game birds that can be eaten continually, differing from quail and grouse and birds of more pronounced individuality; hence the public does not tire of them, and the supply is never quite up to the demand, at least in Southern California, shown by the fact that despite the enormous output squabs are still in the class of luxuries.

**Mummies of Birds Examined at Lyons Museum.**

More than a thousand mummies of birds sent from different parts of Egypt by Prof. Maspero have been opened at the Lyons Museum. A considerable number of these contained only the remains of very young birds, debris of feathers and bones, but it was possible to obtain and study the skeletons of more than 500 birds, which were well preserved. Some of these were in such a perfect state of preservation that they were recognized by a simple examination of the feathers, but most of them were determined after the skeleton. The mummies form two classes of a distinct appearance. The first includes the ibis and the second the birds of prey. The mummies come from the tombs of Sak-karah, Roda, Kom-ombo, Gizeh and others. At Kom-ombo they are of the Roman epoch and at Gizeh of the Ptolemaic. The birds of prey are mummified either singly or in masses of twenty to thirty, or even forty of all species. The single birds, eagles, hawks, or falcons have been generally plunged in a bath of liquid bitumen and then wrapped in bands of cloth. This gives them a form resembling that of human mummies. The birds of prey which are mummified in groups have the form of a cigar-shaped bundle from four to five feet long and sixteen inches wide. The birds have not all been mummified fresh, but some bear the traces of an advanced decomposition. No doubt such a great number of birds of prey could not be secured in one day nor by one person, but it is probable that they were brought one by one and at several days' interval by the inhabitants of the same village. When each had brought his offering, the package was made up with a bird of prey placed in the middle, accompanied by another kind of bird such as a cuckoo or several swallows, and sometimes a crocodile's tooth was added. The whole was then sprinkled with bitumen, then tightly wrapped in wide bands of cloth. Upon this were laid a number of long palm rods about the thickness of the finger, equally disposed all around, to give stiffness, and over this came the last wrapping of cloth. The offering thus prepared was carried in the neighborhood of the temple

whose divinity it was desired to conciliate. As to the mummies of the ibis, these were always prepared with a single bird, wrapped in cloth bands or preserved in rough vases of red terra-cotta. In the former case the mummy was covered with a network of threads which were interlaced so as to form different ornaments. In other cases the ibis was wrapped in simple bands without ornamentation, but the head, instead of being placed in its natural position, is bent down upon the breast-bone and the long curved beak reaches to the feet. Some of the mummies which have externally the form of an ibis, and especially those with thread ornaments and two colors of cloth, light and dark brown, are counterfeits, and the interior is filled with all kinds of material, rags, pieces of wood, or feathers, with two or three pieces of brick to make up the weight.

Each station on the Manhattan Elevated Railroad is to be lighted by fifty lights of 12 candle power each; 35,000 incandescent and 250 arc lights will be used on the different stations. This improvement is greatly needed, as the stations have been very badly lighted for a long time.