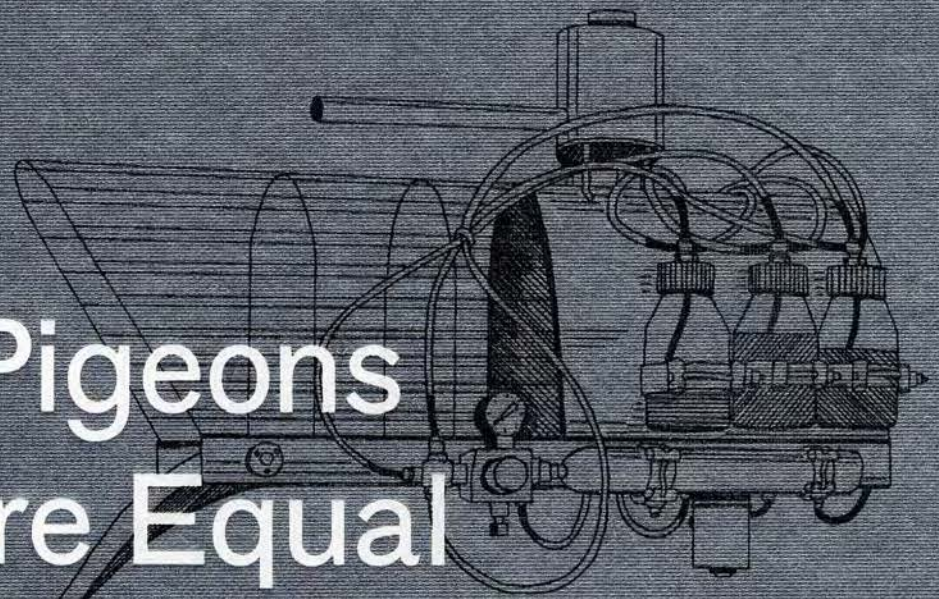


# Some Pigeons Are More Equal Than Others



Julian Charrière  
Julius von Bismarck  
Eric Ellingsen



# Pigeon Recipes

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*Proceedings*  
OF THE  
**ESTHETICAL SOCIETY**  
*for TRANSCENDENTAL and APPLIED REALIZATION*  
*(now incorporating the SOCIETY of ESTHETIC REALIZERS)*



**New Series, Part V Vol. II**

*“Periodic Reports from the Editorial Subcommittee”  
(Continues “Contributions on the ‘W’ Cache and Related Sources”)*

Documents Ostensibly Pertaining to the Origins and Development of  
“The Order of the Third Bird”

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# THE LYELL SLIP:

EVIDENCE OF BIRD PRACTICES IN THE SOCIAL CIRCLES  
OF THE PHILOPERISTERON, LONDON, CA. 1879

EIGIL ZU TAGE-RAVN  
CORRESPONDING MEMBER, EDITORIAL COMMITTEE,  
*THE PROCEEDINGS OF ESTAR(SER)*

I write to bring to the attention of your readers a document of no small interest to those who concern themselves with birds in general and pigeons (*Columbidae*, sp.) in particular. It is my intention here below to present this new find — a small sheet of paper bearing on the achievements of cosmopolitan pigeon breeders based in London in the late nineteenth century — and to make a brief claim for its larger significance. The present article should be treated as a preliminary research report, propaedeutic to a full and forthcoming treatment that will properly engage all the relevant literatures. It is to be hoped that the importance of the material justifies publication in a form that the uncharitable critic might decry as premature. I and my colleagues are resolved to steel ourselves, as often as necessary, against the perennial charge of untimeliness.

Some context is in order. Readers of the *Proceedings* will be aware that the Esthetical Society for Transcendental and Applied Realization (now incorporating the Society of Esthetical Realizers) — ESTAR(SER) — has for some time held in its possession a considerable trove of diverse documents, all of which bear in one way or another on the historicity of that fugitive body known as "The Order of the Third Bird." These materials, conventionally designated the "W-Cache," appear to have been amassed in the second half of the twentieth century by a scholar intending to write a thorough and critical history of the Order: its origins, evolution, development, tendencies, and achievements, together with its fissiparous devolutions, schisms, apostasies, and periodic collective (apparent) subductions. It will be readily appreciated that such a work, however laudable in plan, must, of necessity, outstrip the capacities of any single author, regardless how diligent. And, predictably, the (anonymous) collator of the W-Cache failed to complete (indeed, it would seem, even to begin) his *magnum opus*. Falling on his pen in the course of researches that swept him off his feet, he left the great task to others, to friends in the ways of the Order, who have since endeavored to work in a more modest and collective fashion. The purpose of the *Proceedings*, then, is to provide a forum for the dissemination of properly scholarly editions of the various documents amassed in the W-Cache — since no true and definitive history of the Order can be contemplated until there has been a thorough airing of the primary source materials.

The consortium of devoted academics and committed amateurs convoked under the wings of ESTAR(SER) has made headway on this enterprise, but it remains a demanding project. The self-sequestering character of the Order, its commitment to obliquity and evasion, the private nature of its rites and texts, its broad geographical scope and vexing antiquity — all this conspires against the historian, and obliges the

critical scholar to gird himself with the fearless courage of the Quixote, and to tilt without tiring at windmills equally majestic and unyielding.

Such is the labor of those who attach themselves to the Editorial Committee. But the rewards of such service are great. Each sheet sifted up from the archival dust of the W-Cache affords a tantalizing glimpse of the Order at its beautiful work, which the initiated call "Practical Aesthesis," and of which the uninitiated can properly know very little. That those "of the Practice" (as they call themselves *inter se*) achieve, through their Protocols, a vertiginous inwardness with made things, this can hardly be denied — or at least this cannot be denied by those who have experience of the Practice. What others say must be assessed with generosity. It is not their fault.

Enough of these matters. Let us turn to our text.



In the W-Cache, we find what would seem to be an ordinary Xerox copy of a slip of paper that (if we assume the reproduction was done at scale) measures (or "measured," for the status of the original is not known) 10.16 cm in width and 13.25 cm in height.

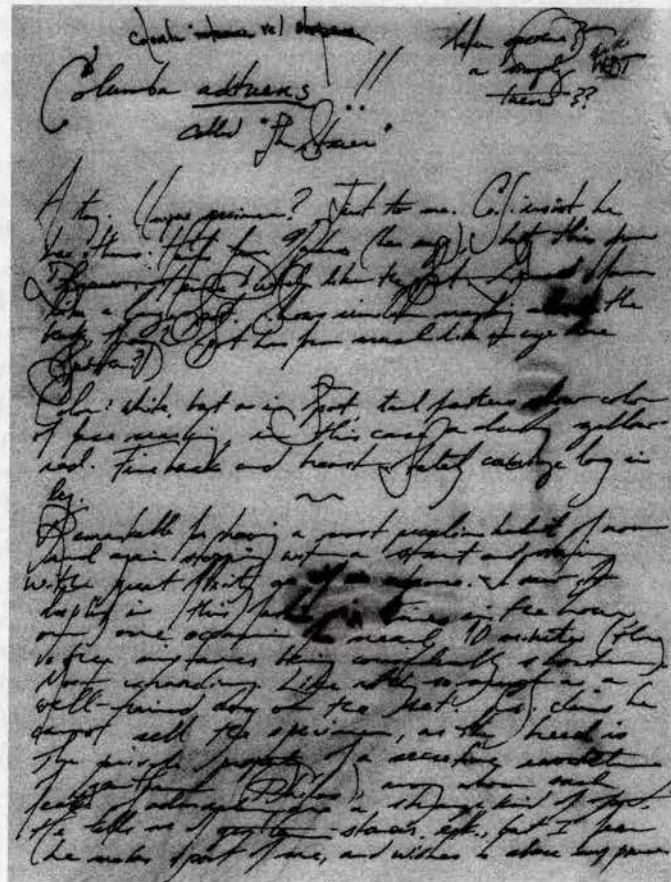


FIGURE 1: The Lyell Slip, recto.



The recto side of this slip (Figure I, above) appears to reproduce a set of notes taken in ink, which I transcribe as follows:

better *speciens* ? Ask WBT

or simply *tuens* ??

~~Columba *intuens* vel *stupens*~~

**Columba *adtuens* !!**  
called "The Starer"

A toy. Unique specimen? First to me. C.J. insist [sic] he has others. Hails from Madras (he says), but this from Blauuw. Hence Dutch like the Spot. General form like a large Spot. Shows similar marking above the beak, though spot has form much like an eye here (Spotter?).

Color: white, but as in Spot, tail feathers show color of face marking, in this case a dusty yellow-red. Fine back and breast. Stately carriage. Long in leg.

Remarkable for having a most peculiar habit of now and again stopping with a start and staring with great fixity as if in a trance. I saw it display in this fashion six times in the hour, on one occasion for nearly 10 minutes (the other instances being considerably shorter). Most extraordinary. Like nothing so much as a well-trained dog on the set. C.J. claims he cannot sell the specimen, as the breed is the private property of a secretive association of gentlemen (Philos), among whom such feats of admiration are a strange kind of sport. He tells me of gentlemen-starers, etc., but I fear he makes sport of me, and wishes to abuse my purse.

The verso displays the following notes in pencil in the lower left-hand corner: "J. C. Lyell, 1877? Misfiled with Lyell corresp., Edinburgh."

We must endeavor to manage the destabilizing thrills that come with the perusal of a document like this. But before I turn to an elaboration of its exhilarations, a few words on provenance. It is impossible, at present, to say with certainty where the holograph slip lies. The hand in which the notes were taken is obviously nineteenth century, and the character of the contents clearly places us among the naturalists of Victorian Britain. The pencil note on the back (almost certainly the work of the scholar who sourced the Xerox in the archive) also offers a solid clue: "Lyell corresp., Edinburgh" cannot but reference the manuscript collections of Sir Charles Lyell, the significant British geologist of the nineteenth century, whose papers are held in the Edinburgh University Library.<sup>1</sup> The allusion to a "misfile" further clarifies, since "J.C. Lyell" is certainly not "Charles" (the geologist, 1797-1875) but rather *James Carmichael* Lyell (1843-1922; no relation, as far as we have been able to discover), the author of *Fancy Pigeons: Containing Full Directions for Their Breeding and Management, with Descriptions of Every Known Variety, and All Other Information of Interest or Use to Pigeon Fanciers* (first edition 1881, second edition, 1883, third edition, 1887; see Figure II).

<sup>1</sup> I refer to: NAHSTE reference code "GB 0237 Sir Charles Lyell," thirty-seven boxes of material dated 1823-1875, Edinburgh University Library Special Collections Division.

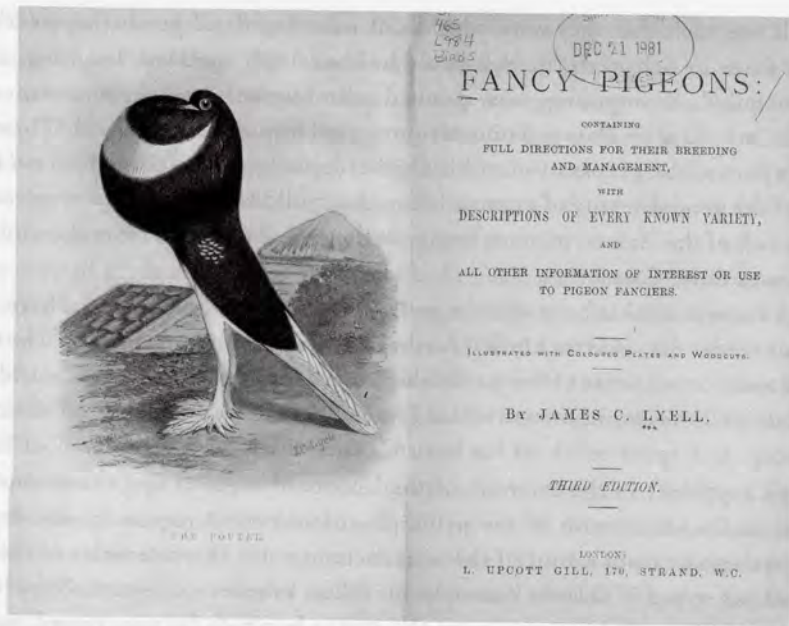


FIGURE 2: The frontispiece and title page of Lyell's *magnum opus*.

So we would seem to have to hand, in what I will call the "Lyell Slip," a Xerox of a sheet of specimen notes taken by James C. Lyell circa 1877 (very likely part of his work on *Fancy Pigeons*), but somehow misfiled among the personal papers of Sir Charles Lyell. It is hoped that an inquiry to the staff of the Special Collections Division of Edinburgh Library will confirm all this and secure access to the original document.

Be that as it may, we have a great deal to think on in the two-hundred-and-eleven words that make up the recto contents of this sheet. To begin, then, we will want to recall the scale and importance of "The Fancy" — Pigeon Fancying — in Victorian Britain.<sup>2</sup> The term refers to that extensive community of breeders and collectors who concerned themselves with the many distinctive domestic varieties of pigeon in the British Isles from the mid eighteenth century forward. These cherished birds, in all their remarkable diversity, were traded and displayed, bought and sold, put out to stud, and treasured by a broad range of dedicated "fanciers" who arranged themselves in various clubs and associations (the Columbarium Society, the Philoperisteron, etc.) within which they practiced their gentle mania. Shared enthusiasm for these avian exotics created otherwise unlikely social juxtapositions, and a competitive *concours* for prize domestic pigeons might see distinguished and wealthy country gentlemen brushing shoulders with a tailor or publican — all for a closer look at the swelling breast of an uncommonly lovely "Pouter," or the white neck ruff of a prize "Jacobin" (both coveted varieties), or for a glimpse skyward at the antics of a small flock of well-bred "Tumblers," a breed in which healthy adults every now and again hurl themselves, in mid flight, into a set of queer somersaults.

The production of these extravagant types — none of them known in the wild — was the work of generations of breeders, whose skill in selecting and crossing chosen

2. The classic study remains: James A. Secord, "Nature's Fancy: Charles Darwin and the Breeding of Pigeons," *Isis* 72 (1981): 162-86.



individuals was such that they were capable, it was alleged, of producing nearly any feather or form or behavioral tic that could be conceived: speckled, laughing, short-faced, fan-tailed, trumpeting, cox-combed, diminutive, attired in severe nuns' habits, etc., etc. Charles Darwin famously immersed himself in this world of breeder-fanciers as part of the preparation of his *Origin of Species*, since he could find no better example of the great diversity of organic forms that could be produced through careful selection — all of the "fancy" pigeons being, in the end, descended from the wild stock common rock dove, *Columba livia*.<sup>3</sup>

Of the Fancy much has been written, so I will not rehearse that material here, since the curious reader may inform himself further at any good research library. The task at hand is to make closer sense of this particular scrap of ephemera from that world. And so we will do well to remind ourselves that James C. Lyell was a well-known chronicler of the Fancy, and spent much of his leisure (with which, as a gentleman of means, he was well supplied) in the recovery of the history of pigeons and those who cared for them, in the elucidation of the principles of successful pigeon husbandry, and in the encyclopedic elaboration of the nomenclature and characteristics of the many recognized sub-types of *Columba* known to his fellow breeder-collectors. Slips like the present one, we can safely assume, were the means by which he maintained notes on new specimens, and it seems likely that he carried a set of such cards as he perused the major annual shows or visited friends and dealers, so that he could keep abreast of new developments in the field, and prepare revisions and additions to his published work.

We evidently have to hand, then, in the Lyell Slip, a single exemplar of what must have been the author's basic paper technology for maintaining his command over the vast and endlessly elaborated world of the Fancy. That in itself is interesting, of course, affording as it does a window onto the private Fancy practices of a figure of note in the history of human-pigeon relations. But the richness of the Lyell Slip is by no means therein exhausted. On the contrary!

Closer perusal of the contents of the slip makes clear that the pigeon here described is — as far as Lyell himself is concerned — hitherto *unknown to the art*. And a very remarkable pigeon it is. From Lyell's own description we learn that this idiosyncratic bird — which he notes is called "The Starer" — displays an entirely unique behavioral quirk: to wit, a propensity, now and again, to fall into a trance-like state of sustained visual fixity or, we might say, "attention" (we witness Lyell's effort to capture its behavior in the sequential cross-outs of his various tentative Latin names for the type — each term a cognate for "stare" or "look on intently," or even "stand as if enthralled."<sup>4</sup> Most mysteriously of all, the animal is said (by one "C.J" to whom the creature apparently belongs, and to whom we will return in a moment), to be an exemplar of a breed that is held as the private property/creation of "a secretive association of gentlemen" who themselves engage in practices of sustained visual attentiveness — "Starer" behavior — as a "strange kind of sport."

3. Darwin's specific use of the knowledge and labors of the breeders, see Secord, *supra*, and compare: Bert Theunissen, "Darwin and His Pigeons: The Analogy Between Artificial and Natural Selection Revisited," *Journal of the History of Biology* 45 (2012): 179–212.

4. The "WBT," alluded to on the slip as an authority in Latin nomenclature, is almost certainly the naturalist and pigeon expert William Bernhardt Tegetmeier (1816–1912), a fellow of the Zoological Society of London, and the author of *Pigeons: Their Structure, Varieties, Habits, and Management* (London: George Routledge, 1868). The standard biography remains: E.W. Richardson, *A Veteran Naturalist: Being the Life and Work of W.B. Tegetmeier* (London: Witherby, 1916). But see also: Karen Sayer, "'Let Nature Be Your Teacher': Tegetmeier's Distinctive Ornithological Studies," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 35, no. 2 (2007): 589–605. It is reasonable to wonder why Lyell did not settle on "*Spectatrix*" as the most suitable Latin specific.



Lyell himself clearly has his doubts about this tale, as he makes clear in his aside, which suggests he fears that "C.J." (evidently a dealer) is gilding his wares with a paste of romantic mystery in the hopes of extracting a larger sum from his prospective customer. Those familiar with the practices of the Order of the Third Bird, however, cannot but be struck *as if by lightning* by this allusion to ritual practices of sustained attention so very like those at the center of the work of the Birds. I will omit, at present, a review of the available evidences supporting the contention that there were working *volées* of Birds among landed Scottish, English, and Anglo-Irish aristocrats in this period, but those seeking a taste of such material are invited to consult the letter of 22 June 1874 from Achilles Larminie Fynn to "E." (probably Elizabeth Gardner) reprinted in Burnett, Mullen, and Randolph, "'Dearest E.': New Documents Relating to the Order of the Third Bird; Links between British and Parisian Activities in the 1870s (The 'Fascicle of E.')." <sup>5</sup>

Rather than engage in a tedious contretemps with incorrigible fantasists, I propose we turn to the question of the identity of "C.J.," since this will raise our sights to the brisk, cerulean skies of Olympian clarity. For "C.J." can be none other than the colorful German-born dealer in live exotics and *naturalia*, Charles Jamrach, the character notorious in London not only for his extravagant (and lucrative) menagerie, but also for his single-handed rescue of a young boy attacked by a Bengal Tiger loosed in the docklands of East London in 1857. <sup>6</sup> That the high-profile Jamrach would be associating with the elite fanciers (the gentlemen "Philos" alluded to in the slip — almost certainly members of the exclusive Philoperisteron Club) is hardly a surprise. And that he would be trading on the side in rare breeds brought from the East through Amsterdam is wholly consistent with his rakish character and business acumen. <sup>7</sup> Lyell's chariness concerning the tale of "The Starer" was certainly justified, given the reputation of his interlocutor.

Though in this case, there is every reason to believe that Jamrach was telling the simple truth, however strange his account of "gentlemen-Starers" might seem. After all, those familiar with the Order will immediately think of the familiar story from which the Order derives its name: to wit, the Ausonian gloss on the tale told by Pliny of the legendary artist Zeuxis and the painting of the child carrying grapes. <sup>8</sup> While Pliny tells a relatively simple story of Zeuxis rounding on his admirers (they marvel that birds peck at his painted grapes, whereas the painter expresses frustration that the birds are not scared off by his painting of the boy), the Ausonian elaboration of the original details Zeuxis's revision of the painting and a subsequent test of the revised image before three birds — one of which flies off (frightened by the painted boy); one of which pecks furiously at the grapes (irresistibly attracted by the painted fruit); but the third of which simply comes to an attentive state before the panel, and remains fixed there, regarding the painting in perfect stillness for a very long (unspecified)

5. Proceedings of *ESTAR(SER)*, New Series, Part IV (2012): 158–74.

6. Born in Hamburg in 1815 as Johann Christian Carl Jamrach, but known as "Charles" during his life in the UK, Jamrach navigated as successfully as anyone the perilous marches that increasingly separated professionalizing science from the emerging commercial world of popular nature-interest in the Victorian period. Which is not to say he was able to keep all his clients happy. By the end of his life (he died in 1891) the worlds of natural history had become quite different from what he knew as a young naturalist-entrepreneur. See the *Dictionary of National Biography* 1885–1900, vol. 29 (s.v.).

7. The allusion in the slip to the young Frans Ernst Blaauw (1860–1936), who would go on to become one of the leading ornithologists of the day, is striking: he and Jamrach would be awarded medals by the Amsterdam Zoological Society together in 1888. See *Nature* 38 (May 17, 1888): 62.

8. Pliny, *Natural History*, Book 35, Section 36.



duration. It is to the condition of this "Third Bird," of course, that every true Bird in the Order aspires.

It is perhaps only someone with extensive experience adopting the posture and entranced demeanor of this great Bird who can fully appreciate the pleasure that would be derived from the existence of a species of bird that would engage, spontaneously, in acts of Birdish attention. And so it is perhaps only a Bird who can see how likely it is that a cohort of intimates in the Order — having the means at their disposal, and access to the necessary breederly expertise in the Fancy — would indeed endeavor (as a private pleasure, to be sure, but as something more than an inside joke) to create a line of Starers that would breed true, and thereby periodically and exquisitely reenact that foundational moment in the history of the Order.

All of which is to say, we think it very likely that the pigeon James C. Lyell christened *Columba adtuens* (the latter term is a felicitous neologism, meaning something like "the toward-looking") was indeed the product of a group of as-yet-unknown associates of the Order, and that the creature was for them something more than a mascot — if perhaps less than a totem. Unless and until additional documents come to light, it will be difficult to say more, although it is to be hoped that further work in the rolls of the Philoperisteron Club in these years may yet shed light on the possible identities of some of the individuals in question.



And the birds themselves? Do descendants of this small breeding stock of Starers endure? It seems unlikely. Lyell's dismissive opening remark in his descriptive notes — "A toy" — makes use of the fancier's term for a sub-breed of perhaps some showiness, but not a variety that the speaker believes should be encouraged or developed. Working from this comment, it stands to reason that Starers were eventually subjected to the crosses that precipitate a reversion to wild type, since this was ultimately the general fate of the minor breeds in the Fancy. But who can say for sure? It is entirely possible that the lineage has in fact been privately (or even surreptitiously) maintained by a community not known to the author or his associates. On the other hand, it is perhaps equally plausible (and maybe still more affecting to consider) that when one comes upon a common pigeon seemingly lingering longer than one might expect upon some quotidian visual stimulus, or apparently falling for a moment into a fleeting catatonia — it is at least *possible* that what one is in fact seeing is a tender genetic scintillation, the transitory phenotypic manifestation of genetic proclivities once concentrated in the ephemeral race of *Columba adtuens*.

More research is needed.



