

They would repeat my jesting—of to-day.
 "A woman's reason—and a woman's way,
 It is—because—I love you!"

There is a reason now for Life and Death,
 A reason why one's heart beats and one's breath
 Comes quicker at the light touch of a hand,
 My reason makes it summer in the land,
 Once from all pain I longed all earth to free,
 But now there is a reason Pain should be,
 Since some day I might bear it patiently
 Because—because—I love you.

And now—my hand clings closer to your breast,
 Bend your head lower while I say the rest,
 The greatest change of all is this—that I
 Who used to be so cold, so fierce, so shy,
 In the sweet moment that I feel you near,
 Forget to be ashamed, and know no fear,
 Forget that Life is sad and Death is drear,
 Because—because—I love you!

Frances Hodgson Burnett.

DESOLATION.

EACH night I at my cottage casement stay,
 To hear the moaning waters of the Deep
 Sound through the wind that doth complaining sweep
 O'er sea and land, upon its wand'ring way.
 There doth my sorrow, hidden all the day,
 Come forth to bid me look on it and weep;
 The trees near by their wailing vigil keep,
 And I, lamenting with great nature, say
 To this my heart, which throbs with bitter pain,—
 O heart, with moaning ocean make thy moan,
 And sob thy grief unto the sobbing wind!
 Mourn for lost love. How canst thou love again?
 Mourn thou thy life. How wilt thou live so lone?
 Mourn love and life, since life leaves love behind!

E. C. White.

FARMING FOR FEATHERS.

LOOKING over the primitive brush fence of a South African ostrich camp, and watching these majestic birds so long supposed to be untamable, as they come obedient to the call of the farmer and pick the grain from his hand, one cannot help thinking on what slender threads the prosperity of a nation may hang. For here is a land on which Providence has bestowed vast wealth by means of a trifle light as air, even an ostrich feather!

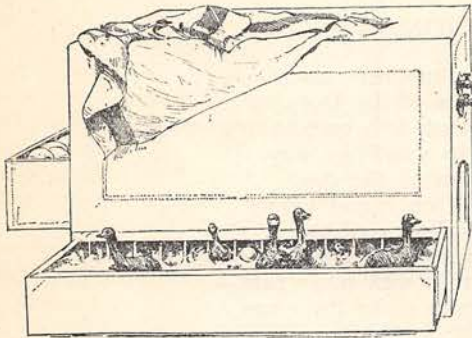
The ostrich seems to have been known and valued for its feathers from the earliest antiquity. A graphic account of the bird, with special allusion to its feathers, is found in the oldest book in the Bible, the book of Job.

Representations of it have been discovered in the ruins of Theban temples contemporary with Moses. The feathers appear as decorations for robes in the days of Nimrod. Very ancient specimens of the eggs still exist in Chinese and Persian temples, but no hint occurs anywhere that the bird was ever domesticated for purposes of trade. Some reckon the ostrich a very stupid creature, but that the bird should be known and its feathers valued all these ages, and yet no attempt be made to tame it, seems to argue commercial obtuseness, at least, on the part of man.

The first serious proposition with reference

to ostrich farming was made by the late Mr. Kinnear, of Beaufort West, in a letter to the "Cape Argus"; but although he demonstrated the profits of the trade, its practicability did not strike the Cape farmers very forcibly. It was not till about 1862 that the business reached an experimental stage, and in 1865 the government returns showed only eighty tame birds in the colony. During the succeeding ten years, however, the industry became a mania, till in 1875 there were not less than fifty thousand tame ostriches, and since then the number in the Cape has more than doubled, and the business has spread into the Free State, the Transvaal, and Natal. The export of feathers, which in 1875 was worth £400,000, has amounted for the past three years to £1,000,000 per annum.

I will give a brief sketch of the main stages of an ostrich's life. The period of incubation is now ascertained to be forty-two days, or exactly twice that of an ordinary hen. The



THE INCUBATOR.

size and the weight of the eggs do not bear a like proportion, for an ostrich egg is from five to six inches through the long diameter, and four to five inches through the short; and the weight is between three and four pounds. An ordinary ostrich egg is alleged to contain as much meat as twenty-four hen's eggs. The shells of some eggs are about one-sixteenth of an inch thick, and very strong, while others are thin and crack easily; some are thickly pitted, others as smooth as polished ivory. In the process of artificial incubation, which is largely adopted in breeding ostriches, the young chick can be distinctly heard to breathe in its shell about the fortieth or forty-first day. Its kicking and tapping at the shell may also be heard, and its movements perceived (as in the case of hen's eggs) by placing the egg on a table. On finding its way out of the shell—in which it sometimes requires help—the chick sits down on its haunches, and stares about the earth and up

at the sky, as much as to say, "What does it all mean?" And although it soon begins to hobble about a little, at least two days must elapse before it seems to get any definite idea of the connection of things. About the third day it seems to feel the need of food, and picks up bits of its own shell, perhaps, or pebbles, or coarse sand. With this preparation for the work of its young gizzard it swallows bits of grass or tiny insects, until it is able to grapple with lizards and larger reptiles. In the course of a few days the ostrich chick appears quite as large as an ordinary hen, but it is infinitely prettier. Its lovely eyes, deep, dark, and soft; its shapely bill; its broad, intelligent crown and beautiful neck, both of a rich brown or "bay," elegantly mottled or striped with black; and its close thick coat of brownish yellow down, hid upon the back and sides with black, white, and brown spangles of porcupine-like quills, give it a unique appearance among chickens. At the end of a week or two it becomes necessary to remove it from the mother—otherwise it would become very shy and wild—and it is now given over to the care of its keeper, who is commonly called a "herd" boy. The young bird is now fed upon lucerne, or other grass, with a plentiful supply of "mealies" (Indian corn). It grows rapidly, and at the end of a month may be as big as a large turkey. The down is now beginning to grow into rudimentary feathers, which gradually turn to a more decided gray. At six months the feathers and porcupine quills on the back have nearly all disappeared; while the neck, now grown long and more slender in proportion, has nearly lost its beautiful dapples and stripes, which are replaced by an ugly gray down. Its head may now reach the height of an average man. In another six months its neck is uniformly gray, with down thin and hairy; the feathers are then perfect and fit to be clipped. If the bird be a female its plumage will have assumed a dark gray, the tips of the white feathers visible at the end of the wing, and some extending out of the gray feathers of the tail: if a male, his feathers—except the whites on the wing and tail—are black. There are a few cases in the Cape of cock ostriches being white or a light gray, but these are not cases of old age, as some have supposed, but merely an accident of birth or a freak of nature. Contrary to the idea conveyed by most pictures, only a comparatively small tip of these white plumes appears to view unless the bird throws out his wings. The birds are often adults in size at this age, but it is not till they have reached from two and a half to four years that the pairing instinct has fully developed. The male bird's body

will then stand as high as a man's head, the female's about as high, though it is not so bulky; while their heads may reach from nine to ten feet above the ground.

A year or two ago an average chicken just out of the shell was worth five pounds; at a month old seven pounds; at six months old fifteen or twenty pounds; at a year twenty-five or thirty pounds; at two years fifty pounds or more; and, by the time they had begun to prove their breeding qualities, they would bring from seventy-five to as high as one thousand pounds a pair. Now an excellent pair of breeding birds can be got for twenty-five pounds, and young birds in proportion. Pairing may begin at any time of the year, and varies in different places. Although the ostrich ordinarily breeds twice a year, yet where artificial incubation is adopted and the bird is not exhausted with the care of rearing, three or four broods can be had in a year. The grown bird's food consists chiefly of "mealies" or other grain, grass, and the great fleshy leaves of the prickly pear. The latter is a very common food, as it grows wild and only costs the trouble of gathering it, of singeing the prickles off in a fire, and of chopping it into pieces an inch or two square. The average duration of an ostrich's life is still a mystery, and it may take some years of ostrich-farming before it is solved. Some farmers, considering the period from chickenhood to full development as bearing analogy with domestic fowls, place the life of an ostrich at twenty-five years, others at fifty. The latter may prove to be nearer the mark.

During adult life a new crop of feathers would naturally develop to perfection once a year, but the farmers obtain three clippings in two years by cutting them at eight months (after the first year) and pulling out the stumps of quills when they have become dry.

The general method of rearing and treating the birds may now be briefly described. If the chicks—which will average ten to fifteen to a brood—have been hatched naturally they are allowed to remain with the parents till a couple of weeks old. They are then put into a "kraal," camp, or yard, under the care of the "herd." They are allowed to roam about during the day, and in the evening are taken into a shed, or more frequently a room in the farmer's house, where they are put into a box littered with dry straw, and are covered over with a blanket. Under this operation the little things whimper and express their feelings, whether of gratitude or protestation, with a low, piping trill; but are soon off to sleep. After a couple of months' sheltering at

night the chicks may be housed, in moderate weather, in any rough building, and after a time may be allowed to range the "veldt," or unfenced field, returning at night. When a thunder-storm or a hail-storm approaches, however, the farmer will bring in even the most hardy birds; for if the big hailstones of the South African skies should "come down with the rush of the storm," he may find a dozen or more of his birds beaten to death. The herd educates the young ones to domesticity by frequently calling them with a "cool—cool—cool," and rewarding their coming with a few dainty mealies. As they grow older they learn to expect these feeds at certain hours, and respond to the native boy's plaintive call as readily as a cow to the "coboss!" of an English herd. They are thus taught to return to the homestead at night. So tame do the young birds often become that they will gather round the affectionate black boy as if he were a mother. At one house I remember the chicks used to come regularly in the evening to hover under the herd's coat, which he would hang by a string from the roof for that purpose.

Sometimes at two and a half years, but more generally at four, a change comes over the young family. Some young cock in the troop grows proud and pugnacious. He greets the once respected herd with a contemptuous hiss, and perhaps without even that warning deals him such a blow with his foot as will clear the camp effectually. Some hen of the camp, whose scaly legs and bill now bloom with a rosy tint, surpassed only by the vermilion scales and bill of the cock, approves of this valor, and the result is a match.

This couple then becoming jealous, naturally fall to quarreling with all the dear companions of their chickenhood, and after shedding some innocent feathers in fight, they camp by themselves. Sometimes a young cock is most difficult to please in the choice of a mate, and will decline the companionship of every hen in the camp. He may have to be sold to a neighbor before he will make a selection. So with females, some of whom will fight till they die rather than mate with a cock they do not like. Some, and indeed a great proportion, notwithstanding their alleged polygamy, will never take more than one mate; while others will live with three or more. Farmers, however, seldom mate a cock with more than two, and monogamy is the domestic rule. When a cock takes a fancy to a hen who refuses to reciprocate the attachment, the bully kicks her about the camp until he either disfigures her or compels her to acknowledge him lord and master. This

submission once gained, he treats her with constant kindness. A pair of ostriches, however, when separated for any length of time, frequently become estranged till no trace of the former affection remains.

When the feathers are ready to be clipped the birds are either taken singly into a small pen, or a number of them are crowded together so closely in a larger pen that they can do little damage, and the feathers are cut. In the former case the bird is made more docile by taking a small bag, or, what is found more convenient, a toeless stocking, and slipping it over his head. While he is thus blinded and bewildered his plumes are cut, one at a time, about two inches above the root of the quill; these stumps being left to become dry, from two to four months afterward, when the bird is again brought up, they are pulled out with a pair of pincers. Even with these precautions the farmer often comes out of the operation with bleeding hands and torn clothes. Formerly—and it is even yet occasionally done—it was the custom to pluck the plume by hand or with the tweezers, leaving the poor bird bleeding and in pain, vinegar and oil being afterward rubbed on them to alleviate this pain. But a strange retribution followed this cruel process; for, before long, the new feathers grew out distorted and often twisted like a corkscrew, as if every twinge of pain had stamped deformity on the future feather. Out of the cock's wing come a row of twenty-four pure white plumes, sometimes two, three, or even four rows. The first row is known in the trade as "primaries," and from this row forward the color changes by shades into gray and finally to black. The female feathers are not so large or so pure as the male's. The feathers are put away, and sprinkled with pepper or camphor, to keep off insects or moths; but this care usually devolves on the agent who may arrange the feathers for market. At the inland towns of the colony, the feathers are taken to market either by farmer or agent, and are there sold by auction. They are then shipped by rail or wagon to Capetown, or Port Elizabeth, where they are carefully sorted into a dozen or more grades and sold in large quantities in the feather market. Port Elizabeth has the largest market for feathers, and here shrewd buyers or London agents may be seen on a Tuesday or Friday afternoon watching with keen eyes the "run" of the market. The feathers are here sold by auction also, and I have known the transactions of a single afternoon to amount to over thirty-five thousand dollars. Having been packed nicely in boxes, they are then shipped to London or Paris.

It has been commonly made to appear that

ostriches are so stupid or so greedy as to be totally indiscriminate in the matter of food; but this is a mistake. When two kinds of food are placed before them they will prefer the one, and are notably fond of certain kinds, such as mealies and prickly pears. Many of them even show delicate choice. But a hungry bird will eat almost anything. His system requires food in large quantity, but he always prefers the suitable kinds. It is a fact, however, that the ostrich often dies a victim of over-indulgence. On the farms birds also die by the score from apoplexy, brought on by their keepers stuffing them constantly with all they can eat. An incredible number of pebbles are sometimes found in an ostrich's stomach, where they serve the same purpose, in triturating the food, as sand in a pigeon's gizzard. Mr. Tillbrook, a farmer of the Graaff Reinet district, once found a carcass, the gizzard of which contained some nine hundred and thirty stones of sizes varying from that of a pea to that of a walnut. Most of them were bright and hard, and all more or less rounded by constant rubbing. We may see the reason of that instinct which prompts an ostrich to stretch his neck over the fence and pick off a gold stud or a diamond pin from the breast of the unsuspecting visitor, or in default of a jewel so attractive, to attempt to pull a button off his coat.



SEIZING A MEMENTO.

It is worthy of remark that the ostrich in its wild state will seldom attack a man, even in the breeding season, when it is most savage; while on the farms almost every farmer has to be on his guard against some

particular bird, which, whether breeding or not, is liable to attack him. It seems in fact to be almost a rule that the more domesticated the bird, the more vicious and uncertain is its conduct. A farmer informed me that one of his ostriches would attack him on almost any occasion with the utmost ferocity, while his son was never in danger. Another bird on the same farm had always, as it were, a smile for the father and a kick for the son. The word "kick" is used to designate an ostrich's blow, but the word is hardly correct.

When one approaches a vicious bird's camp at the breeding season the cock exalts his head and body, and coming toward the stranger with stately and very deliberate strides, begins to hiss loudly, like a goose or serpent, at the same time erecting all his feathers and spreading his wings till he becomes twice his usual size. When perhaps twenty yards off he drops suddenly on his knees, appearing as it were in a sitting posture. Curving his neck haughtily back over his body, he swings it swaggeringly from side to side, at each movement knocking his head violently against his body. In this performance he partly fills his throat with air, so that every thud is accompanied by a peculiar gurgling sound; while, keeping time to these movements, his great wings swing alternately backward and forward in a boastful manner. This is called the "challenge." It is well named, for there is a bragging, tread-on-the-tail-o'-me-coat air about it that would be irresistibly laughable—if only it could be seen from the safe side of a tall fence, instead of over the low barrier of dried bushes of which most camps are composed. After continuing the challenge from five minutes to a quarter of an hour, the bird leaps up and comes toward you with a jaunty bound, but after a few steps drops down again to repeat the challenge. Thus reaching the fence he paces up and down angrily in his eagerness to get out, or hisses and dances in rage before you, with wings elevated like two enormous fans. He is ever threatening to leap the fence, but, happily for the nervous visitor, he never does it. A very low fence will suffice to keep them within bounds, and unless panic-struck they will seldom jump either fence or ditch. Their movements in getting over a steep ditch are very ludicrous and awkward, showing their unfitness for traversing uneven ground. When a farmer goes into a savage bird's camp he takes with him a thorn pole, with a branch or two of the thorny bush left on the end. This is called a "tuck," and when the tuck is applied to the ostrich's neck or head (his tender points) he is almost invariably subdued, and, after one or two efforts



A DUEL.

to escape, bolts furiously off to the other side of the camp, where he races up and down to vent his baffled rage. If, however, the bird gets near enough to his opponent to give the so-called kick, he lifts his bony leg as high as his body and throws it forward with demoniac grotesqueness, and brings it down with terrible force. His object is to rip the enemy down with his dangerous claw, but in most cases it is the flat bottom of his foot which strikes, and the kick is dangerous as much from its sheer power as from its lacerating effects. It is a movement of terrible velocity and power, at all events. Several instances may be mentioned of herd-boys being thus either wounded, maimed, or killed outright. One case occurred near Graaff Reinet, in which a horse had his back broken by a single blow. In this case the bird had endeavored to kill the rider, but missed him and struck the horse.

Many persons have been set upon by birds when there was no shelter, not even a tree to run to. In such a case, if the pursued were acquainted with struthious tactics, he would lie down flat on the ground, where the bird finds it impossible to strike him. But even this is no light matter, for some birds in their rage at being baffled of their kick, will roll over their prostrate enemy, bellowing with fury and trampling upon him in the most contemptuous fashion. One man who thus attempted the lying-down plan found that every time he attempted to rise the bird would return and stand sentry over him, till

at last, after creeping a distance he got out only by swimming a pond that bounded one side of the camp.

While ostriches frequently attack men during the breeding season, they more frequently fight one another. They have an instinctive pride in the rule of their own homes, and will fight with much greater energy an enemy within their own camp, than when they are themselves the invaders. To one unaccustomed to brutal contests an ostrich fight is really a spectacle of terror; and if the old Romans had only known what terrible creatures they could be made, an ostrich fight would have been a crowning sensation in the gladiatorial arena. After various challenges they come into collision with mad fury, and with their legs deal blows upon each other, first from one side and then from the other, with tremendous force and effect. Having fought a round they retire a space, and then return to the attack till one or the other bolts off beaten. Occasionally where there is no escape the victor kicks his exhausted enemy until he kills him; and often a leg is broken in the fight. Hens are seldom savage under any circumstances, and among the cocks there is an endless diversity of disposition as to viciousness and general character.

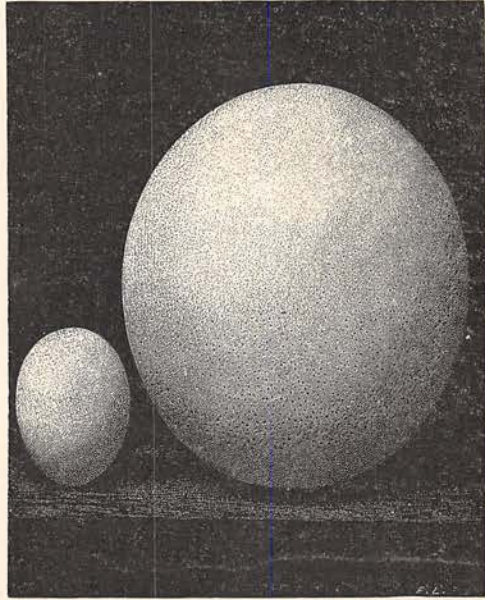
The idea which still prevails that the ostrich is invariably a negligent or heartless parent is a great error. It is quite true that the wild birds' eggs are often found in the "veldt," but in the wild state a cock often mates with two or three hens, and as one nest cannot contain all the eggs laid, many are deposited on the ground or thrown out of the nest. They may then become food for the chicks or the parents, or be eaten by wild animals. As the cock does the most important part of the sitting, only one nest can be provided to a family, and the surplus eggs are wasted only because of inability to hatch so many in their natural state. It is true that the parents sometimes neglect their nests, or break off sitting and scatter the eggs, or even eat them all; but it is not the rule. Mr. A. Mitchinson, an experienced West-Coast traveler, informed me that on one occasion he found a chicken, apparently self-hatched, in one of these scattered eggs in the veldt, but it died two or three days after coming out, and it seems certain that in South Africa, at least, none are ever hatched in the sun in that way.

In making a nest some pairs will take a natural depression in the ground or scratch a few handfuls of earth away in the most careless manner, and there do their hatching, but most of them will construct nests with care. The cock may be seen scooping and

raking up the earth industriously, and after he has a capacious hollow like a large saucer scraped out he will call the hen to look at it, and with their heads together they will hold some unreportable conversation over it. When the first eggs are being laid, the hen will finish the structure by scooping up a rim of earth with her bill, thus leaving a trench about it to protect it from possible rains. Having laid, say fourteen eggs, they begin sitting. The cock is the most attentive sitter, and contrary to what has been stated in some books sits always at night. He goes upon the nest at about four or five in the afternoon and remains till about eight or nine in the morning. The hen being already somewhat exhausted by laying, her short term of duty gives her a better chance to keep up her strength. Each pair, however, appear to have their own individual understanding as to the hour of changing guard, and whether it be eight or ten o'clock A. M. or three or five P. M. are usually as regular in attendance as if they knew the hour by the clock. Illustrating this, a farmer relates that one of his birds, on leaving the nest one morning did not find the hen near to take his place. Indignant at his consort's neglect, he sought her out at the other end of the camp and with vigorous kicks drove the dilatory dame down to the nest, where she submissively resumed her duty. The care which even tame birds take to conceal the whereabouts of their nests is interesting to witness. The cock on rising will slowly and gently lift his bony shanks up from among the eggs, and when they have fallen together will step clear and make a bolt away in one direction for a few feet, then suddenly sidle off at an angle, as if jostled rudely, and again swerve abruptly in another direction. These grotesque maneuvers, which make one think the bird may be intoxicated, are evidently intended to deceive a possible spectator as to the direction the bird has come from. The female, after an interval, will come to the nest with equal sleight; grazing aimlessly this way and that, till near the nest, when she swoops down, hovering over it till she disposes her legs among the eggs. After turning the eggs over one by one with her beak, she will sit perhaps for hours with her head stretched flat and snake-like on the ground, and her body as motionless as a mound of earth. Occasionally, in hot days, she may be seen with her body lifted slightly out of the nest to admit a current of air over the eggs; and sometimes she will even leave the nest for two or three hours, till instinct tells her that the lowering temperature requires her return. While sitting the birds may be heard sometimes to whim-

per their solicitude for the forthcoming brood; and when incubation is finished, they often assist the chicks out of the shell. When the young birds have begun to show appetite, the old ones teach them to eat by walking before them and picking at the grass and insects, the cock perhaps striding behind keeping a lookout.

When an enemy in the shape of a hawk or a four-footed animal appears in sight, the old bird gives a peculiar fluttering shake of her wings, and in an instant the whole brood are scattered abroad and lost to sight. Each bird throws itself flat on the ground—under a bush or grass if he can—and there they lie with their little necks flat on the ground, still as a lump of earth. And so much like both earth and grass do they look that even a person long familiar with them might walk among them without seeing them; nor will they stir even at the risk of being trod upon. When the danger has passed, the parent bird, who in the meantime may have gone far away, calls her chicks from their concealment by uttering a plaintive "Whooh! whooh! whooh!" which can be heard a long distance. The worst foes of the ostrich—next to the internal ones of tape-worms—are the wild-cat and jackal. The wild-cat and his fellow foes appear at night, and often worry the poor birds all night long. As long as a bird can keep his nest, the eggs are safe; knowing this, these thievish enemies tantalize and exasperate the bird so as to provoke him into getting off to drive them away. If he does so then one of them leaps in, and the



A HEN'S EGG AND AN OSTRICH'S EGG. [SHOWING COMPARATIVE SIZES.]

moment they are in possession the ostrich in most cases abandons the spot. Cats, wolves, and tigers have been known thus to work in conspiracy. But should they get possession they still find a difficulty, as the eggs are too big to encompass with their teeth. The cunning thieves then roll them away till they reach some rock and there dash them against the stone with their paws till they are broken. The farmer sets baits of poisoned meat in



DRIVING OSTRICHES IN A STORM.



A MALE OSTRICH.

various places around the nests, and in some localities wild-cats are thus destroyed at the rate of one or two a day. The porcupine, too, is a great sneak thief at night, but the ostrich is usually more than a match for him. The hawk is an enemy chiefly to the chicks, but the crow destroys the eggs. This is a large, white-breasted rook, and the statement made by travelers that it destroys eggs by dropping stones into them is no fiction. Mr. J. H. Featherstone, of Mount Stewart, Uitenhage, once saw a crow, which had espied the nest of one of his birds, go to a river-bed some distance off, select a stone from it, and then fly up high in the air with the stone in its claws over a vacant nest. Having secured the perpendicular by some instinctive engineering of his own, the rook let drop the stone. The aim was precise, and down he came to feast on the egg which his missile had broken.

A peculiarity of young ostriches, not the least interesting and amusing, is their waltzing proclivities. On being let out in the morning the young troop dart off, one after another; then, stopping suddenly, they give themselves a whirl about, and proceeding on a few paces, repeat the revolution, each time slightly ducking their heads, a gesture which gives a certain grotesque grace to the movement. When a troop are performing it together their move-

ments are frequently synchronous, and their noddings in perfect time,—a comical caricature on the movements of the human dance. Sometimes a bird will make five or six gyrations in succession, but others only swerve fantastically from side to side, with wings flaunting as they go, like a romping girl's dress. So engrossed do they appear to become and so reckless that they have been known to break a leg in "the giddy whirl." Their weight, and the awkward suddenness with which they halt and swing about, render such an accident quite possible. They sometimes keep the dance up for an hour or more, careering first to one side of the field and then to the other—but they do not go quite to human excesses in the diversion.

There is plenty of evidence to show that the ostrich is not really dull of hearing, as is said; and he is certainly acute of smell and taste as well as of sight. They hear their owner's call or the crack of a whip a long way off, and it is often difficult to get them to take certain kinds of physic, even though it may be carefully concealed in their food. The old notion that the ostrich buries his head in the sand in case of danger proves to be another of the numerous natural history "facts" which are utterly mythical. I am sorry to disturb so venerable a proverb, especially as it points so true and good a moral, but recent observations do not confirm the saying. The ostrich may be very stupid, but he has never attained such achievements of folly. It is true, however, that the wild birds, when run down, are known to tumble to the earth and thrust their necks under a bush, and this may have given rise to the proverb.

But the ostrich is a wonderful paradox, and many proverbs equally useful, with the advantage of being true, may be constructed by the student of the domestic camp. He is capable of scanning the whole horizon and yet falling easily into some hole under his feet; he is both a gourmand and an epicure; he may be kept in bounds by a fence of a single wire, yet when panic-stricken, he will risk a collision with a stone wall, and dash himself to death; he is both blood-thirsty and gentle; bolder than a lion and more timid than a springbok; a polygamist and a celibate; capable of extreme parental tenderness yet sometimes eating his own offspring; at once the stupidest and the most cunning of birds.

As already said, South Africa supplies the great bulk of the ostrich feathers of the world. It sends out feathers to the value of a million pounds sterling, while Egypt exports to the value of only £250,000, and the Barbary states to the value of only about £20,000. The latter classes justly command a higher price, but

not one-twentieth of the feathers sold as Egyptian or Barbary plumes are anything else than Cape feathers, for there are plenty of tricks in the feather trade. The Barbary feathers are shipped chiefly from Tripoli (whence they frequently take that name) through Marseilles or Leghorn to Paris or London; and the Egyptian feathers find the same destination, having come to Cairo by caravan. In each case the feathers before shipment are

care of the birds is becoming so well understood that ostriches of the high and dry regions of the Cape now produce feathers undistinguishable from the best wild ones.

The South African plume in its raw state is characterized by its breadth of barb, and each individual barb has a richer floss, but the barbs not being so close set as those of the North African birds, the plume has a thinner appearance. The shaft, though full as long,



A TROOP OF YOUNG OSTRICHES.

“roped” for the market; which means that in sorting them into grades the choicest are picked out and sold privately at high prices to speculators and others, who retail them to wealthy European ladies at fabulous figures; the poorer qualities are made up in parcels, and classed as the best. The same thing is done with Cape feathers, and thus it is that a really first-class feather can seldom be got from the dealers. One of the arts is to dress up a “barred” feather so that it can be sold for as much as a perfect plume. As the young feather grows out it is covered at the roots with a thin sheathing of skin, which as it develops the bird picks off. If the bird should become unhealthy and listless it may neglect to remove this sheathing, and little rings or bars are formed across the plume. Such feathers bring a poor price among the dealers, but form a feature of the dresser’s profits. There is much nonsense, also, in the talk about specialties in “wild” feathers, for the

is straighter and less graceful than a Barbary bird’s; but it has a compensating advantage in bleaching to a far purer white. Prime white Cape feathers are at first whiter than any bleaching could make them, and often the bleaching is only necessary because of careless handling and exposure. The great point of natural beauty in a feather, in addition to its richness of plumage, is the graceful curve taken by the quill toward the tip. The local influences of climate and soil in producing fine feathers are now becoming better understood. The reputation and value of the dry Karoo lands, which used to be put down on the maps as hopeless deserts, have of late increased. What is of more importance to the Cape farmers is that when the pure Barbary ostrich has become acclimatized, South Africa will export not only the largest quantity, but the finest quality of feathers in the world,—except, perhaps, what may be produced on the plains of Syria.

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