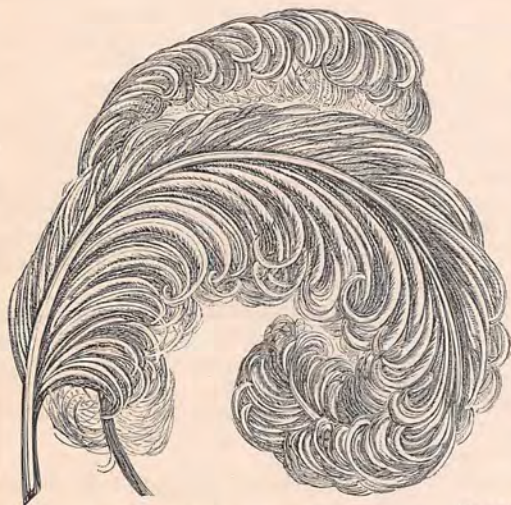


Peach-Blossoms.

BY GRACE BAYLOR.

Down in the orchards the wild birds are singing,
 "Peach-blossom time."
 Timid, white "spring beauties," nodding and smiling,
 "Peach-blossom time."
 South winds are blowing, and bear on their pinions
 Fragrance sublime,
 Stolen from groves of magnolia and orange,
 In far sunny clime.
 Beautiful Gulf-States, how sweet is your memory,
 Oh, for a day
 Of fragrance and peace, in old "Indolence Castle"
 Down by the Bay.
 Peach-blossom time, with its wondrous elixir
 Bounding along
 From heart up to temple, and oh! how the heart-strings
 Vibrate with the song.
 Open, oh! shell-tinted delicate petals,
 Soft as the light;
 Yield up th' aroma, wrapt up in your bosoms,
 Of rose-tint and white!

Hearts are rejoicing, and nature o'erflowing—
 'Tis Peach-blossom time.
 Birdies are mating, and building, and cooing,
 "Peach-blossom time."
 Music and melody ring in the woodlands
 From morning till night,
 Bubbling from dear little throats, in a rapture
 Of joyous delight.
 Strange does it seem, that these orchards of blossoms,
 A few months ago
 Stood facing the blasts, with their bare arms extended
 Laden with snow.
 But warm rains and sunshine, and God's wondrous power
 And loving design
 Hath clothed them in garments surpassing all textures
 Of hands not divine.
 Then open your dainty hearts, pour forth their treasures
 An offering sublime,
 That angels may smile, and sing out up in Heaven,
 "'Tis Peach-blossom time."



An Ostrich Feather.

BY CADMUS.

ONLY a feather! And yet, like that trifle of trifles, a pin, how many hands are engaged in its production! Within the past decade there has been developed in South Africa an industry that, employing a large capital, and requiring not a little energy and enterprise, is, like many another, sustained almost entirely by the demands of fashion.

One has no cause for surprise at the mention of a sheep farm, a horse farm, or even a chicken farm, but an ostrich farm sounds rather fabulous. But the energy and business enterprise of a Scotchman, a Mr. Douglas, has resulted in the establishment of a large "herd" of 1,200 ostriches, which are bred entirely for their feathers.

Like many another goodly venture, it was

entirely by accident that the practicality of raising these wild birds in large flocks was demonstrated; for it had always been supposed that the well-known shyness of the ostrich would militate against the successful rearing of the young birds. But an Algerian, having in his possession a number of ostrich eggs—more, in fact, than he could make immediate use of—deposited some of them in a warm place near a baker's oven, and forgot all about them. A few months after, however, he was greatly amazed, on going to the place, to find the skeletons of several young birds. This proved, beyond a doubt, that the eggs could be artificially hatched, and disposed of a hitherto difficult part of the successful domestication of the

birds themselves. One of his superior officers heard of the matter, and after many unsuccessful experiments, and many disappointments, he proved that the eggs might be hatched by artificial means with greater prospect of success than when left to the not always tender mercies of the parent birds. The Mr. Douglas referred to, was, however, the first to turn the idea into practical shape. Starting with only three birds, his flock rapidly increased, and it now numbers upwards of a thousand, and, of course, is steadily increasing. A large tract of land was secured, with plenty of running water, and it was found that the birds, being regularly fed, showed very little disposition to roam far away.

The herd gives employment to several horsemen, who search for the eggs, which often proves more difficult than one would suppose at first sight, as the old birds take particular pains to hide the eggs; and it is often a dangerous matter to approach a nest when either of the parent birds is near.

When the eggs are gathered they are placed in the incubator, where they remain from five to seven weeks; during this period they are turned several times every day, and the utmost care is taken that the heat may be exactly right—a variation of a very few degrees on either side of a given point being sufficient to cause failure. When the young birds do appear, the care is not diminished in the least; they have to be fed by hand, and tenderly protected from cold and wet. Finally, at the age of one year, they are turned out to shift for themselves with the flock.

It is an open question as to when an ostrich ceases to bear feathers. Some have been plucked as early as one year old, and in the herd of Mr. Douglas are birds that must be nearly twenty years old, who still produce feathers of the finest kind.

When it is desired to pluck the birds, they are enticed or driven by mounted men into an inclosure, where they are packed so closely that there is no room for them to show fight. Men then go among them on foot and either pull or cut the feathers, though the former way is considered to produce the finest feathers. It is safe to affirm that this gives no pain to the birds, as the new feathers commence to grow again immediately. Twice every year is this done, and the average worth of the feathers from each bird is about \$100 a year. The feathers from the under part of the wings, the long black ones, are worth at wholesale \$400 a pound; those from the tail and the upper wing feathers, the white ones, are worth a little less, say, on an average, about \$4 apiece. And although the supply has been so constantly increasing for the past few years, there has been no perceptible decrease in the price. But so long as the wearing of ostrich feathers is only a fashion, it would be hard to say if this state of things is likely to continue.