

THE AFRICANDER.



CHAPTER I.

THE following narrative has no pretensions to be more than a simple record of diverse aspects of life in South Africa.

It has no claim to literary style—not even to chosen terms; it is rather a plain, unvarnished setting down of facts that may prove of interest and of use to all such as either contemplate going out there in search of living or in quest of adventure, or merely taking interest in it as the “land of promise” of the immediate future.

Some time in the year 1877 I started for South Africa, a callow lad of fourteen. I had left it a mere child.

Landing at Port Elizabeth, I found a Cape cart with a Hottentot driver waiting; he had been sent to meet me from the ostrich farm to where I was bound, a distance of 250 miles. We had a hot weary drive, over hot dusty roads, fringed with mimosa and prickly pear bushes, at times we were almost deafened by the shrill persistent note of the grasshopper; now and then a steinbok or *duyker* would dash along to what he deemed a safe point of vantage, where he would stand fixedly, and gaze sideways at us until we were lost to view. The clucking of a guinea-fowl might be heard in accompaniment to the queer note of the *kook-a-vic*, and a flock of long-tailed mousebirds, called *finks*, would dash past to settle in a *rooibout* tree, erecting their crests like cockatoes, and screaming at us in indignant protest.

But it was pleasant in the sweet, cool evenings to drive through the mimosa-



A SOUTH AFRICAN DRIVE ON ROAD TO FARM.

scented air, and listen to the strange noises of the many different insects, animals, and birds. When our road happened to wind under high cliffs, we could hear the loud, hoarse “baugh—m, baugh—m, baugh—m!” of the baboons. A sentinel keeping watch and ward for his companions, busy gathering roots and succulent plants amongst the rocks, would call a warning at our approach, and, on looking up, we could see dozens of them scamper up the hill, barking “baugh—m, baugh—m,” in their insolent way. Far overhead blue cranes uttering their cracked note as they flew; and the lively *sprew*, darting amongst the bushes with dark-brown back and yellow belly, and piping song; and the ring-necked doves cooing their love in the trees—all helped to make the long drive less wearisome. The sunsets, too—the beautiful Cape sunsets—amongst the mountains were most lovely. One moment hidden by a peak we would watch the rich

play of its light and shade on the mountains rugged sides, then passing round a point we could see the blood-red globe just disappearing over the horizon, leaving the clouds behind it stained with ever-changeful hues. Sometimes our road brought us past fields of "mealies," waving their plumes over the young ears of corn, or flocks of fat-tailed sheep feeding on the rich grass pasture. Then the low thatched roof of the farm homestead would appear. the building itself surrounded by a *stoep* (verandah), with a glass door opening on to it from each room; at a little distance from the back of the house the *kraals*, made of thorn bushes, into which the stock are driven at night and counted; and still a little further off the cone-shaped huts in which the Kaffir and Hottentot servants sleep, lying like a cluster of bee-hives. In front of the house the "lands" (fields) stretch away in the distance, and the immediate foreground is

generally filled by an orange grove, or a quaint old garden rich in flowers and fruit. Although totally unlike in character, a nice Cape farm homestead is quite as attractive in its way as a typical English one. The inns we stopped at were all clean and comfortable. The few Colonials in them, drinking "Cape smoke," were quiet and gentlemanly, without any of the swagger and bluster one finds in other countries. The Cape Colonist is a gentleman born and bred of the best stock : he is generally genial and open-hearted, with plenty of sound common sense ; and, as rider and the most deadly shot, perhaps not to be matched in the world ; in other words, good all-round man and sportsman.

My driver smoked and chewed alternately strong Cape tobacco, which had for me then a most repulsive smell ; indeed he did not smell very nice himself, especially in the hotter part of the day. Later on I got

used to the tobacco of the country, and soon preferred it to any other, as is the case with most who try it. After a while "Cape smoke" (Colonial brandy) even becomes palatable, more especially in parts where liquor of any sort is scarce. Cape sherry and Pontac (port) are excellent wines when at their best. The best tobacco is grown in the Transvaal, and is more expensive than that of the Cape. Quantities of the latter is sold as low as sixpence a pound, and is largely used as sheep-dressing in cases of scab, called there *brandtsekte*; and a weekly allowance of a "span" is given to each farm hand. It is wonderful how the quality of tobacco varies from the different soil in which it is grown. Great care and a large amount of labour is needed to produce it, and no crop impoverishes the soil so much. A short description may be of interest to some readers.

Firstly, a seed bed is prepared of a mix-

ture of fine mould, sand, and wood ashes, then the seeds are sown and barely covered. The land for the reception of the seedlings is heavily manured, ploughed, and repeatedly harrowed. When in a highly pulverised state it is finally ploughed into furrows two feet apart, and cross-ploughed at the same distance ; this leaves equal squares, in all two feet apart. The seedlings are then pulled and carried on litters by two men ; another man receives them, and places one on each square ; he, in turn, is followed by another hand who dibbles one into each square. After this, men are constantly kept hoeing, irrigating, and picking off caterpillars—the greatest pest of the tobacco-grower. As soon as buds have formed, the plant is immediately “topped” ; a shoot springs from the base of each leaf ; these all require to be picked off to keep the strength in the main leaves. The moment the colour begins to change, the plant is lopped and allowed to

wilt. Great experience is necessary to know the exact time to lop. When duly wilted, the plants are collected in carts or litters, and carried to the drying sheds, and spread on tables. Men are then employed in threading the butt of the plants on long thin sticks, which are then attached to the beams and sides of the building, allowing the plants to hang. When quite dry, the leaves are so brittle that it is impossible to handle them without breaking ; so a moist day is chosen, then the leaves are stripped off the stems and sorted into three qualities—tops, middles, and bottoms, or ground leaves, the latter being the inferior sort. They are then tied into “hands,” that is, a number of leaves placed on top of each other, and tied at the shanks. These “hands” are then laid in large heaps on the floor, and well covered with blankets for sweating. It needs further judgment to tell when the sweating process has gone far enough ; this is gauged by putting one’s

hand in and judging the heat. When hot enough, the heap is scattered, cooled, and re-sweated, this process being continued until all the natural moisture is absorbed, and no further sweating possible.

Of course there are many improvements on this rough and ready process on larger tobacco-growing farms since my time, but, nevertheless, this method is still pursued in many places.

Crossing the Baviaan River, we passed out of the grass country into the vast Karroo. Here the total aspect of the scene is changed. No grass whatever is to be seen, except on a close examination, when a few small scattered tufts may be discerned. Trees are less plentiful ; only a few varieties grow on the banks of the rivers, the thorny mimosa being the most numerous. The overhanging *krantz*e are covered with aloes, prickly pear, wild coffee, and *spekboem* bushes. Lizards of various size and hue lie basking

in the sun ; perhaps a black-brown tortoise will crawl slowly between the bushes and gaze at you with sleepy black eyes ; go closer, and watch how quickly he will draw in his snake-like head and little round stumpy feet. Walk to the mimosa-trees that fringe the river bank, and you will see the pear-shaped nests of the finks, with little holes for entrance as in our kitty-wrens, hanging over the water from the branches of the wild tobacco-tree. Here, too, you will find the larder of the "butcher" bird—large flies, butterflies, and beetles of many colours impaled on thorns. The brilliant-plumaged "sugar" or honey birds are darting about with their long, curved bills. Although you are picking your way carefully, you will suddenly find yourself entangled in a "wait-a-bit" bush, the sharp, curved, fish-hook-like thorns of which will coerce you to "wait a while" to free yourself. From a tree across the river a grey monkey will peer at you, but as soon as he

sees he is observed, he is off to a hiding-place with his companions. You come to some reeds growing thickly next the bank, and hear a splash ; stand a while and you will see the head of a *logavaan* or iguana rise to the surface after his dive, swim rapidly to the opposite bank, and disappear. Two storks, each standing on one leg in the shallows, gazing mournfully at the water, rise in alarm and fly off, uttering their discordant, rasping cry. Now and then you may be startled by a crash in some adjacent bushes ; there is no cause for alarm ; it is only a *duyker* disturbed from his siesta. The many birds with their strange calls are interesting, and you will not fail to note the absence of song among the South African birds.

The country we were passing through was fresh and green after the late rains. People told me that they had just had a bad drought, no rain had fallen through many months of scorching hot weather. Droughts affect the

grass country much more than the Karroo, and the farmers in the former generally *trek* away with their stock in the dry seasons to districts where pasture can be found. In the Karroo it is different. The little heath- and thyme-like bushes stand the dry weather much better. When rain does come, the change is instantaneous, almost magical. The whole country is clothed in vivid green, and the little bushes are quickly covered with sweet-scented flowers of every colour ; animal as well as vegetable life seems to assume an aspect of freshness and gaiety.

On we pushed, the good roan ponies feeling none the worse for their journey, and at last we arrived at a white farmhouse, on the bank of the Great Fish River, a few miles from the pretty little town of Cradock. It was getting dusk, and I was tired, and sat down with appetite to a supper of venison and boiled green mealies, content to have arrived at my destination.

CHAPTER II.

THE next morning I went for a walk with Smith, who was the *klein-baas* of the farm. *Klein-baas* is the term used for the sub-manager, and "baas" is the manager or proprietor. Taking guns with us, we walked through some mealie fields towards the river, where he expected to get a bok of some sort. On the way we passed several paddocks where breeding pairs of ostriches were kept. On seeing us the old cock bird would stalk grandly up with tail and head erect—lashing his wings with rage, and follow us as far as his fence would permit. Then he would squat down, and fluttering his wings, rock himself from side to side, thumping his curved

neck on his back. This they always do, not only to people, but to their hens in the breeding season. Close to the river Smith shot a steinbok; the shot roused his mate, at which I fired and missed—excusable, perhaps, as it was my first shot. On the way back I practised at birds, feeling more at home after every attempt. Breakfast over, we mounted ponies and rode round the farm and saw the stock, and my duties were pointed out to me. I was allowed a week's holiday. Smith was glad of a companion, and often accompanied me on short shooting expeditions, as I was ambitious to improve. I had many shots at springbok, duyker, and steinbok, but rarely hit any. One night we arranged a porcupine hunt, with the off chance of getting an antbear. We had invited two or three neighbours to sup and go with us. We had armed ourselves with spears, and mounting our ponies, started off with half a dozen dogs. We spread out in skirmishing order, the dogs

searching ahead, and rode silently across the plain. Before long, barking, snapping, snarling, and a loud howl of pain reached our ears, and galloping forward we came upon the scene. A fine porcupine was standing at bay in the moonlight, with its quills erect, and as the dogs dashed at it, they received severe wounds from the sharp quills. Dismounting to save our horses' legs, we quickly despatched it, and went on searching for another, which we were lucky enough to find. On our way home we killed an antbear, and found it an even more difficult customer to tackle, on account of the toughness of its skin and its activity. These animals are not killed for their meat, which, by the way, is held in esteem by the natives, but because they are such destructive creatures—the porcupine destroying crops of mealies and pumpkins; the antbear burrowing holes about the veldt, which makes riding dangerous, and causes horses and ostriches running loose

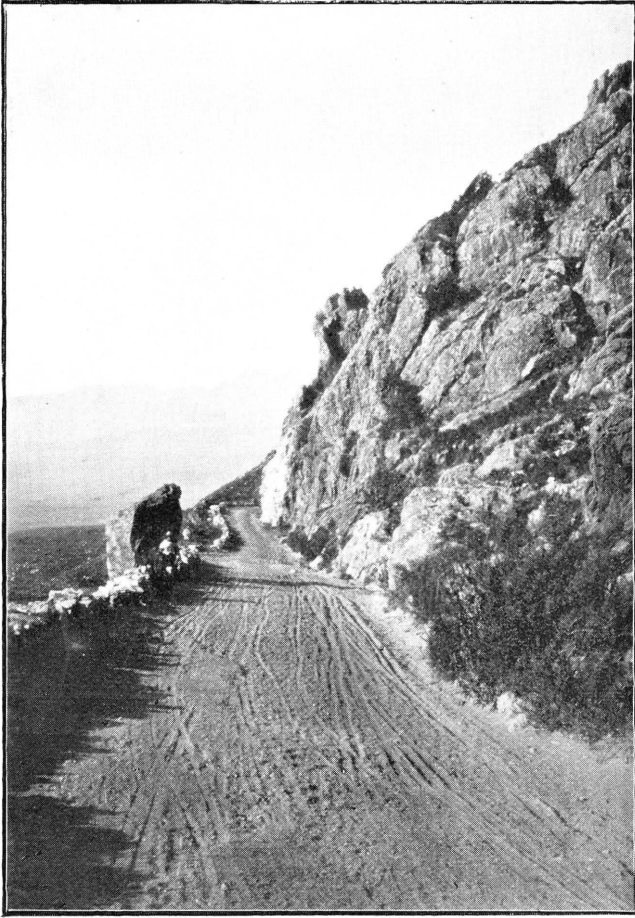
at night to get their legs broken. The monkeys are also a nuisance. They are very fond of pumpkins, and we tried several ways of catching them. One method was by constructing a large trap cage, with branches and leaves to make it look natural, and fixing it in the bush; the heavy lid of which is held open by means of a lever fastened to the top of it. One end of this lever tends a short distance behind the cage; to this end a short stick is attached, with a notch cut in the end of it, which hangs down above another short stick that is slipped through the back of the cage for the purpose of holding the bait. The cover is then opened, and the notch stick drops on to the bait stick. A piece of pumpkin is fastened to the end which is in the cage, and the trap is complete. The monkey catching hold of the pumpkin causes the notch stick to slip off the bait stick, and the cover falls to, making him a prisoner. Another more

simple method, and rather an amusing one, is this. The monkeys are very fond of pumpkin seeds, so a pumpkin with a small hole cut in it is placed near their haunt. The monkey slips his hand in easily enough, grabs a good fistful of seeds, and tries to withdraw them. The hole is not big enough for the passage of his clenched hand, and he has not sense enough to reason this out; so whilst he is struggling with the pumpkin it is easy to settle him by a rap on the head with a *knob-kerrie*.

Riding out one day with Smith to collect some ostriches, we noticed a little brown bird, which kept chirping and flitting around us. Smith at once recognised it as the honey-bird, and said that, if we were to follow it, it would lead us to a bees' nest. We reined in our horses, and the little bird took a short flight in one direction, and back to us again. After it had repeated this manœuvre several times, we proceeded to follow it; it led us

up a *kloof*, and there, sure enough in the hollow trunk of a *spekboem* tree, was a fine bees' nest. We smoked out the bees, and turning our soft felt hats inside out, put in the combs, and cantered home with them, not forgetting, however, to leave some for our little feathered guide. This little bird is known to take leopards, baboons, and other animals to bees' nests, and it is said that not only do the animals know the object of the bird, but they always leave it some honey, or allow it to eat with them!

One morning at breakfast we were disturbed by a Kaffir herd, who ran in, calling out "The baboons are stealing eggs." Up we jumped, seized our rifles from the gun-rack, and ran down towards the ostrich camps. One side of the breeding birds' paddocks was bounded by the river, and the baboons had crossed it from the rocky hill on the opposite side. So Mr Barker, the baas, who was a crack shot, crossed over



BABOON KRANTZ.

to intercept them, whilst we prepared to tackle them on our side. As usual, there was one keeping watch, and as soon as he caught sight of us, he gave the alarm, and off they scampered in the direction of Mr Barker, who was hiding in some bushes.

We fired a few shots without any effect, and paused to watch the sport on the other side. The baboons, thinking they were safe, began to "baugh—m," and their loud bark echoed down the hillside. Presently a white puff of smoke rolled out of some bushes amongst the rocks, and we saw a large baboon tumble down the hillside. Another puff, another, and the whole troop scampered up the steep hill at a wonderful pace, to disappear over the brow. Going home to finish our breakfast, we could hear their "baughing" behind us, as if in derision at our attempt to shoot them. Mr Barker soon arrived with a Kaffir carrying the dead baboon, which was skinned to make whip lashes for the stock whips.

These raids were becoming a great nuisance as well as a serious loss, for they destroyed quantities of ostrich eggs, which, at that time, were valued at five pounds each. We planned to hunt them the next day, with the assistance of our neighbours, who were also troubled by them. Messages were sent round, and next morning twelve of us breakfasted together, and started with a dozen dogs to scour the hills. They are such wary brutes that it takes considerable strategy to get near them.

Having lost one pack, we surrounded another hill, and, with the help of the dogs, succeeded in keeping them on the top. The dogs were amongst them before we arrived, and we could hear a fierce fight above us. Scrambling up as fast as we could, we came right into the thick of it. One dog lay dead, and several were bleeding badly from severe wounds. We killed most of them before they could escape; the dogs had not killed

one. It would take a very large and powerful dog to master a baboon, and, in any case, he would stand a poor chance. These fellows stand about four feet high, with powerful jaws, and arms that hang nearly to their feet. One of them would catch a small dog in its strong grip, and meeting its teeth in a fleshy part, rip the unfortunate animal to pieces, and throw it aside. A Cape dog is strong, and very game, and will nearly always kill a snake when he meets one. We had another skirmish with a small troop, with good results, and went home satisfied that we would be left in peace for a time.

Baboon-killing is, to me, too unpleasant to be called sport. The resemblance to humanity, though unflattering, is too close. They are the only animals I know that meet one with a look in their eyes of positive intelligent human expression; and once when a female baboon I had shot put her little black finger in the wound and drew it out, red

with blood, showing it to me with a piteous look in her eyes, and a cry like a hurt child, it made me quite sick, and I felt a kind of pang of conscience.

Another great pest, and a curious one, is the bird we call the white-necked crow. This bird, which is much larger than the common crow, picks up a stone in its claws, and breaks the ostrich eggs by dropping it on to them from a considerable height. It then flies down and devours the egg. I have known it to drive the sitting bird off its nest by the same method, to enable it to drop a stone on the eggs. Whenever one was seen about, we used to hide in bushes near the nest, and now and then succeeded in shooting one.

An ostrich farmer is hampered by many drawbacks. The birds are continually getting their legs broken in fences and holes; sometimes, indeed, they manage to break their necks. Ostriches are said to have the

smallest quantity of brains of any known bird in proportion to their size. They are, indeed, signally stupid ; for instance, some mealies had dropped from a bag at feeding-time, outside a gate leading to a breeding paddock. The hen-bird, seeing these, thrust her head through and ate them. In pulling her neck back again, her head caught in an angle in the gate. By simply lowering it, she could have passed it through easily, but, instead of doing that, she tugged and tugged until she lay sprawling on her back minus her head. On another occasion I was trying to drive a bird across a railway line that was not fenced in, but the obstinate brute refused to go over, and gave me half an hour's hard galloping. Finally, a train dashed up, and I then endeavoured to drive the bird away from the line ; but no, he then decided to cross over. The train reached us, and the stupid thing raced alongside of the engine, trying to get round it, I galloping

with it. I shouted to the engine-driver to put steam on, as the whistle had been blown to no purpose. The side of the train was lined with passengers' heads enjoying the scene. The driver then let steam out of the lower valves; this playing upon the ostrich's legs scared him, and, with a frantic jump aside, he rolled down the embankment, fortunately not injuring himself. Though on a smart horse, I was left some distance behind, which proves how fast an ostrich can go, although I'd back a horse against one in a five-mile race.

CHAPTER III.

ONE day we shot over the mountains at the back of the farm. They ran almost in a semicircle—the side sloping up to a krantz about thirty feet high; above this a wide plateau stretched, where a few rheabok and some thirty quagga ran. We never allowed anyone to shoot the quagga, as they were said to be the only ones left south of latitude 28°; moreover, we had an idea of catching the young ones some day, and breaking them in. This is sometimes done with success. They are very similar in marking to the zebra, are of smaller build, very low in the withers, and with the endurance of the mule. The evening before, a shepherd had

run in, in a great state of alarm, to say that a large *ingwe* (leopard) had killed six sheep. It had gone off with the carcass of one. We tracked it for nearly a mile, only to find a few bones left. Thinking it would return to the others it had killed, we kept watch all night, but saw no sign of it, so we started with about a dozen beaters to shoot over the mountain, where some of these beasts had their lair. We ranged ourselves in a long line on the plateau, whilst the beaters spread out in another, down the sloping side, calling in Kaffir to the leopard "Come out! you are wanted. You are only a frightened dog!" or any other insulting remark that might occur to them. The ground they were beating was dotted thickly over with small bushes, and great numbers of a small antelope, called *grysbok*, were driven out before the beaters. We fired down upon these as they darted amongst the bushes, the heavy firing echoing down the mountain

sides. The beaters picked them up as fast as they were shot, and by six o'clock, when we had reached the other end of the mountain, twenty-two of these bok had been dropped, but not a trace of a leopard had been found. I discovered the next day I had left my silver flask on the top at luncheon time, so I rode up to get it. I saw a quagga stallion up there, and gave chase to see how fast he could go. I gained on him rapidly until we reached some stony ground, and then he got away from me. I was not, however, mounted on a very good horse.

The average Colonial horses are not handsome ; they are rather low in the withers, slightly cowhocked, and straight in the shoulder. They are, however, noted for their wonderful endurance ; they will keep up a hard gallop for many miles without tiring, and to ride one a hundred miles in a day is a common occurrence. The Colonials rarely

trot their horses ; they either canter or amble. A fast amble is called a "tripple," a word that expresses the pace admirably.

Ostrich-farming at that time was paying wonderfully well , farmers were selling out sheep and other stock in order to invest in it. The high price of feathers, however, was bound not to last long It is still carried on, but not to such a great extent.

In 1877 a breeding pair of birds, five or six years old, would fetch up to £300, and best prime feathers as high as £80 per lb. In 1884 £100 was considered a good price for similar birds, and £40 per lb. for the same class of feather.

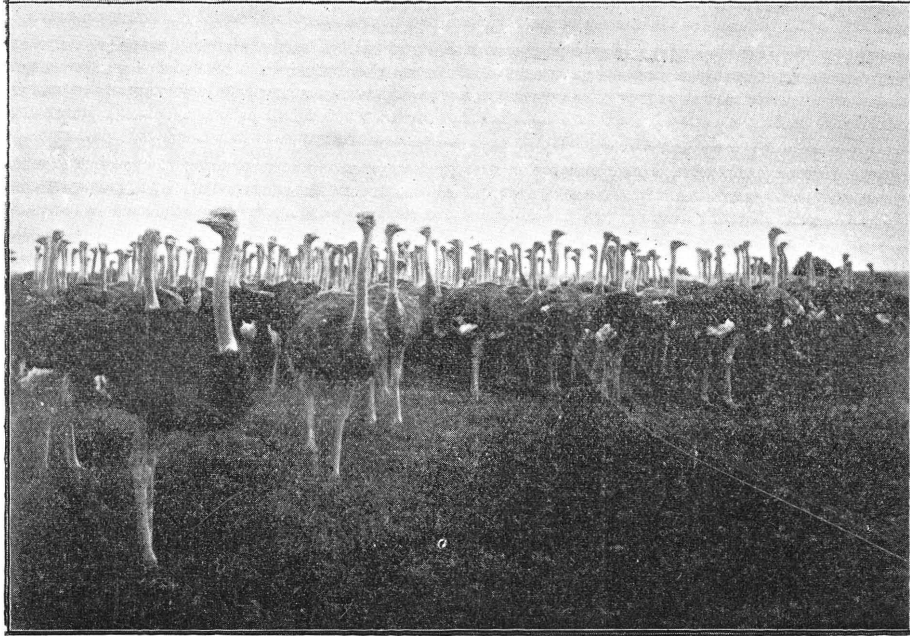
The ostrich is a bird indigenous to Africa, being found in most parts of this continent. It belongs to the same family as the emu, the rhea, or South American ostrich, and the cassowary, but differs from these in the following particulars first, by having only two toes ; secondly, by the head and neck

being bare of feathers ; thirdly, by being twice the size of any of the others, and its eggs averaging upwards of three pounds in weight ; fourthly, by the beauty of its plumage, the feathers of the others being of little commercial value ; fifthly, by the male and female differing in colour, the male ostrich being black and the female grey.

The ostrich differs from most other birds by its wings being unadapted for flight, and the barb of the feather being of equal length on each side of the quill. The age to which an ostrich can live is matter of conjecture—possibly to one hundred years ; but we never knew of one dying from old age. It was in the year 1867 that the first attempt at keeping ostriches in a state of domestication, and breeding from them, was made at the Cape. Before that period the birds ran wild, and were hunted and killed for their feathers.

The originators of ostrich-farming received but little encouragement at first. Most people

thought it was a ridiculous idea to attempt to farm a bird of so timid a nature, or to expect they would breed in confinement, or that the progeny could ever be yarded, handled, or driven in mobs like other stock. It was asserted also that the feathers from tame birds would not curl, this was even believed by feather dealers, and for some time a strong prejudice prevailed against the feathers of such. Success however attended the attempt to domesticate the birds; they laid eggs, hatched them, and it was found that the young ostriches could be reared as tamely as barn-door fowls. People began to see that a new industry was being established which was decidedly a money-making one; forthwith a rage sprang up for ostriches, and the industry spread so that in a few years there were few parts of the Cape Colony where ostriches in state of domestication were not to be seen. The value of feathers exported from the Cape in 1867 was £70,000, these being all from



OSTRICHES.

wild birds. The export for 1880, £888,632, principally tame birds' feathers ; and it was estimated at this time that a capital of £8,000,000 was invested in the industry. For a number of years ostrich-farming was confined to the Cape Colony, with the exception of an attempt of the French to establish it at Algiers , later on, people in other countries began to turn their attention to the ostrich, and a number of birds were taken to North and South America, India, and Australia. The Cape farmers became alarmed at the prospect of so much competition from other countries, and a bill was introduced and passed by the Cape Parliament imposing an export duty of £100 on each ostrich exported from the Cape Colony, and £5 on each ostrich egg. A few days after the passing of the Act, an American gentleman arrived, prepared to purchase and take away 300 birds, but the sum of £30,000 required by the Customs deterred him from carrying his project into effect.

The pasture of South Africa is particularly well adapted for ostriches, and it is only on well-stocked farms that they require to be fed. Mealies and chopped prickly-pear leaves form the staple food.

Our farm consisted of 600 *morgen*, which is about equivalent to 1200 English acres, and we generally had 700 birds running on it. This included fourteen pairs of breeding birds, each pair in a separate paddock of two or three acres.

The ostrich reaches maturity in three or four years. The cock bird is then very savage, and a kick from him will sometimes kill a man. A long thorny branch, called a "tock," is held against the sensitive neck of a bird to prevent him attacking. Three-year-olds will sometimes breed, but it is not advisable to let them, as a weakly progeny is generally the result. In selecting ostriches for breeding, we chose those with long white feathers and good muscular development. In paddocks of

the above extent they will lay and hatch out chicks on an allowance of mealies of only a pound each a day. They generally lay from twelve to eighteen eggs in a nest, scratched in the soil by their powerful feet. Both assist at this work by scooping the earth out backwards. The hen generally sits during the day, the cock taking her place on the nest shortly before sundown, and remaining there until about nine o'clock the next morning. He then guards the nest jealously, and woe betide the man who ventures near without a "tock." I once received a kick which laid me up for a fortnight.

The incubation occupies forty-two days; the chicks are left with their parents for a fortnight, then caught, taken charge of by a herd, who chops up green food and bones for them. At five months old they are herded like cattle on the veldt.

An incubator is an article that cannot well be dispensed with by a breeder of

ostriches ; as sometimes, particularly with young breeding birds, the cock will refuse to sit, and if no incubator be at hand, the nest of eggs will be useless besides, too, during severe weather, such as hail and thunder storms, sitting birds may leave their nest and refuse to take to them again , in such a case, if the eggs are removed to the incubator before they get cold, the chicks will hatch out. By the use of this machine a larger number of chicks can be reared if the eggs are taken away as fast as they are laid, and five or six imitations are left in their place , if this is done, they will lay as many as thirty or forty eggs without stopping, whereas, if the eggs are left in the nest, they will only lay from twelve to eighteen, and then commence sitting. It is not advisable to force the birds to lay too much in this manner, or weak birds will be the result ; a far better plan is to let the birds sit on the eggs for fourteen days, and then remove them to the incubator.

This prevents the birds from being brought into low condition by long sitting, and they will soon have another nest. The proper temperature for the eggs is 100° for 36 days, then it is lowered to 98° until the chicks are hatched out. The eggs are turned in the drawers twice daily ; a day or two before the hatching the chick will be seen to fall in the shell, the air-space being thereby considerably enlarged. This can be observed by holding the egg against the light and shading the end of the egg with the hand ; it soon begins to rise again until the egg is quite full ; at this stage it should be marked, and if in twenty-four hours the chick has not yet broken through, the shell should be cracked and a piece of it chipped off at the air-space ; this done, the chick could extricate itself without further assistance. It is exceedingly interesting to watch the nicety with which the ostrich will perform this operation. Selecting an egg in which it knows there is a chick unable to

break through, it will roll it gently over with its beak until it is in the proper position under the hard horny substance of the bird's breast, where sufficient force to break the shell without injuring the chick can be applied. The chicks are fed by hand with cut lucerne, bran mashes, and any chopped vegetables, until they are four months old; after that they are herded as the older ones.

The age of birds can be determined as follows. At seven months old, the first crop of feathers are quite ripe; that is, the drab feathers can be pulled out without causing bleeding, and the long whiter quill feathers can be cut. At twelve months old the second growth of feathers will be well forward, and some of the cocks begin to get their black plumage, and show white on the front of their legs and along the edge of their beaks. At two years old the cocks will be quite black, none of the narrow, pointed chicken feathers being visible,

except where the neck joins the body ; the hens will in like manner have lost all their chicken feathers, which will be replaced by drabs.

Three years old—at this age the plumage has reached perfection ; the cocks show pink on the front of their legs and beak, and no trace of chicken feathers is discernible. At four years they have reached maturity, and no further guide to their age is possible.

They are marked in various ways. Some owners file notches in their long toes, others paint a patch of paint on their necks or legs, but most farmers brand their initials on the bird's thigh.

In the early days of ostrich farming at the Cape, it was usual to pluck the feathers every six months ; but it was soon found that by this practice the birds were rendered of little value in a few years, the feathers at each succeeding plucking becoming shorter and stiffer until useless. The feathers are at

their best after six months' growth, and in the case of quill feathers or long white ones, if left on the birds for even a week longer, begin to deteriorate ; the tips become worn, and this, of course, detracts much from the value of the feather. After six months' growth, the blood vein in the quill has dried up to the point where it enters the wing, and the feather can be cut close to the wing without drawing blood or giving pain to the bird. It is this plan of cutting the quill feathers which is now generally adopted. The short feathers—the blacks of the male and drabs of the female—are pulled after having eight months' growth, and are consequently quite dry ; pulling them does not injure the bird in any way, and they are not damaged as are the quill feathers by being left so much longer. When the quill feathers are cut, the blacks or drabs, as the case may be, are pulled out ; the stumps of the quill feathers are extracted in two months' time,

and in six months another plucking of feathers is ready. The short feathers have now eight months' growth, and the quills six; a full plucking being thus obtained from each bird every eight months. A strong pair of pruning shears is the best implement for cutting the feathers; a pair of small pincers is used for extracting the quill stumps.

A plucking yard is required for the taking of the feathers. This must be erected in such a way that access can be had to it from all the paddocks where the birds are running. The best kind of yard is constructed as follows:—Fence in an enclosure of about half an acre with a strong five-wire fence, the wires being interlaced with branches, and a wide gateway made for entrance of birds. At one corner of the enclosure put up a small yard about 12 + 18 feet, made of posts, with strong planks nailed across them, boarding it up to a height of five feet; at one end leave

a wide gateway to admit the birds being driven in from the larger enclosure, and at the other end a door opening outwards, for passing the birds out after the plucking. Opposite this door erect inside the yard a box two feet wide, three deep, and four long, for the bird to stand in during the operation. The above arrangement gives the persons taking the feathers a better chance of doing their work properly, as the bird has no room to move about and struggle. It is quite necessary to have a long narrow bag to pull over the bird's head ; with this on, the wildest bird will generally stand perfectly still. When the time for plucking arrives, the mob are driven into the large enclosure, and from there into the smaller yard, where the bird is seized, blindfolded by the cap, and pushed into the box, plucked, entered on the tally-sheet, and let out to meditate on the wonderful change in his appearance, which has been effected in a few minutes.

There is no fixed time of the year for taking the feathers, and where a large number of birds are kept, and young ones are constantly being hatched, there will be feathers ready to be taken almost every month through the year. After the plucking of the birds is completed, the next operation will be sorting the feathers into the different classes and qualities, and packing for the London market. The sorter sits at a long table and sorts into heaps—"primes," "firsts," "seconds," "thirds," and "damaged."

CHAPTER IV

I HAD worked hard for two years and learned every branch of Cape farming. Smith had left, and I had become *Khen-baas*, but I had not received any pay for my services. Beginners do not as a rule get any salary for the first year, they are taught farming, and sometimes have to pay as much as £120 a year for the privilege of learning. I was determined to try elsewhere, and sent many applications to other farmers, but did not succeed in getting a post. I was not contented, and had no interest in the welfare of the farm, as whatever happened I lost nothing and gained nothing. Besides, too, I had, with the rash impetuosity of youth, become engaged, and was anxious to make a

definite position for myself. My *fiancé* lived in an old-fashioned house, surrounded with fig-trees, in the principal street of Cradock. This was, as in many other South African towns, lined on each side with fine mulberry-trees, the shedding of the soft ripe fruit of which is no little source of trouble to ladies in white gowns who may happen to walk under them.

Making up my mind to set out and look for work, I told Mr Barker of my intention. He was very angry, and we unfortunately had words. The next day I sold out all I possessed except a horse, saddle, and bridle, and started up country, stopping a week at a farm fifty miles away, belonging to a brother of Mr Barker. There the country was almost treeless; vast plains of Karroo stretching as far as the eye could reach, vanishing at the horizon, and giving an impression of intense solitude. Here and there the red brick farmhouse of some Dutchman might be