

when covered with their masses of bloom. Here and there is a Kaffir bean, a shrub with rather handsome large red flowers, but it is not common. There are a good many colourless, insignificant-looking flowers, and some which are quite uncanny; one, especially, with pendent, succulent bells of livid green and dull red, looks worthy to be one of the ingredients of a witch's cauldron. These are all flowers of the plains; the mountains are richer, but their treasures are only to be attained by making rather long excursions up their steep sides, over the roughest and stoniest of ground, and through a tangled mass of vegetation, most of which is very thorny. But even the weariest climb is well repaid on reaching the heights where the wild geraniums grow. The immense round bushes, five or six feet in diameter, and brilliant with great bunches of pink or scarlet flowers, are indeed a lovely sight. A creeping ivy-leaved geranium, and a very pretty pelargonium, which is also a creeper, grow in these same far-off regions; the flower of the latter is of a beautiful rich maroon and cream-colour, its curiously jointed stem and tiny leaves are very succulent, salt to the taste, and strongly scented with the sweet geranium perfume. It is strange to notice how plants which in Europe are neither saline nor particularly succulent, when growing in the Karroo assume the prevailing character of its vegetation.

Large white *marguerites*, growing on a shrub with a hard, woody stem, inhabit the same heights as the geraniums and pelargoniums; all these together would

have been invaluable for the brightening of our little rooms, if we could possibly have brought them home. But they are all much too delicate to survive the long walk or ride back, and the only mountain flowers we could reasonably hope to bring home in a presentable condition were the large, bright yellow *immortelles*. The scanty little streams trickling down some of the cool shady *kloofs* between the mountains are the home of a few white arums; and their rocky beds are fringed, though not very abundantly, with maiden-hair fern.

The *spekboom*, which is a good-sized shrub, sometimes attaining the height of fifteen or twenty feet, grows plentifully a little way up the mountains; and in very protracted droughts, when the karroo and other bush of the plains begin at last to fail, it is our great resource for the ostriches, which then ascend for the purpose of feeding on it; and though they do not care for it as they do for their usual kinds of food, it is good and nourishing for them. Elephants are very fond of the *spekboom*, but though a few of these animals are still found near Port Elizabeth, there are fortunately none in our neighbourhood to make inroads on the supplies reserved for the ostriches against what certainly in South Africa cannot be called "a rainy day." The *spekboom* has a large soft stem, very thick, round, succulent leaves, and its clusters of star-shaped, wax-like flowers are white, sometimes slightly tinged with pink. There are several plants very closely resembling the *spekboom*; one with pretty, bright yellow

flowers; and one, the soft stem of which, if cut into thin slices, looks exactly like very red salt tongue.

Those unpleasant old acquaintances of childish days, the bitter aloes, are at home in the Karroo in great numbers; and most brilliantly do they light up the somewhat gloomy-looking sides of the mountains in early spring with the great spikes of their shaded scarlet and orange-coloured flowers, looking like gigantic "red-hot poker plants." This African aloe has none of the slender grace of its American relative, and it is only when flowering that it has any claim to beauty; at all other times it is simply a most untidy-looking plant, the thick, clumsy stem for about five or six feet below the crown of leaves being covered with the ragged, decaying remains of former vegetation, suggestive of numberless scorpions and centipedes.

Thorny plants abound, especially on the mountains, where indeed almost every bush which is not soft and succulent is armed with strong, sharp, often cruelly hooked spikes. The *wacht-een-beetje* (wait-a-bit) does not grow in our neighbourhood, but we have several plants which seem to me no less deserving of the name; and often, when held a prisoner on some ingenious arrangement of hooks and spikes viciously pointing in every possible direction, each effort to free myself involving me more deeply, and inflicting fresh damage on clothes and flesh, I should, but for T——'s assurance to the contrary, have quite believed I had encountered it. The constant repairing of frightful "trap-doors" and yawning rents of all shapes and sizes in T——'s

garments and in my own, took up a large proportion of time ; and often did I congratulate myself on the fact that my riding-habit at least—chosen contrary to the advice of friends at home, who all counselled coolness and lightness above everything—was of such stout, strong cloth as to defy most of the thorns. Any less substantial material would have been reduced to ribbons in some of our rides.

On foot, you are perpetually assailed by the great strong hooks of the wild asparagus, a troublesome enemy, whose long straggling branches trailing over the ground are most destructive to the skirts of dresses ; while boots have deadly foes, not only in the shape of rough ground and hard, sharp-pointed stones, but also in that of numerous prickly and scratchy kinds of small bush. At the end of one walk in the *veldt*, the surface of a kid boot is all rubbed and torn into little ragged points, and is never again fit to be seen. Fortunately, in the Karroo, no one is over-particular about such small details.

Among our troublesome plants, one of the worst and most plentiful is the prickly pear ; and farmers have indeed no reason to bless the old Dutchwoman who, by simply bringing one leaf of it from Cape Town to Graaff-Reinet, was the first introducer of what has become so great a nuisance. It spreads with astonishing rapidity, and is so tenacious of life that a leaf, or even a small portion of a leaf, if thrown on the ground, strikes out roots almost immediately, and becomes the parent of a fast-growing plant ; and it is not without great

trouble and expense that farms can be kept comparatively free from it. Sometimes a little party of Kaffirs would be encamped on some part of our land especially overgrown with prickly pears; and there for months together they would be at work, cutting in pieces and rooting out the intruders; piling the disjointed stems and leaves in neatly-arranged stacks, where they would soon ferment and decay. Labour being dear in the colony, the wages of "prickly-pear-men" form a large item in the expenditure of a farm; in many places indeed, where the plants are very numerous, it does not pay to clear the land, which consequently becomes useless, many farms being thus ruined.

Sometimes ostriches, with that equal disregard of their own health and of their possessor's pocket for which they are famous, help themselves to prickly pears, acquire a morbid taste for them, and go on indulging in them, reckless of the long, stiff spikes on the leaves, with which their poor heads and necks soon become so covered as to look like pin-cushions stuck full of pins; and of the still more cruel, almost invisible fruit-thorns which at last line the interior of their throats, besides so injuring their eyes that they become perfectly blind, and are unable to feed themselves.

Many a time has a poor unhappy ostrich, the victim of prickly pear, been brought to me in a helpless, half-dead state, to be nursed and fed at the house. Undaunted by previous experience, I perseveringly tended each case, hoping it might prove the exception to the general rule, but never were my care and

devotion rewarded by the recovery of my patient. There it would squat for a few days, the picture of misery ; its long neck lying along the ground in a limp, despondent manner, suggestive of the attitudes of sea-sick geese and ducks on the first day of a voyage. Two or three times a day I would feed it, forcing its unwilling bill open with one hand, while with the other I posted large handfuls of porridge, mealies, or chopped prickly pear leaves in the depths of its capacious letter-box of a throat. All to no purpose ; it had made up its mind to die, as every ostrich does immediately illness or accident befalls it, and most resolutely did it carry out its intention.

The prickly pear, mischievous though it is, is not altogether without its good qualities. Its juicy fruit, though rather deficient in flavour, is delightfully cool and refreshing in the dry heat of summer ; and a kind of treacle, by no means to be despised at those not infrequent times when butter is either ruinous in price or quite unattainable, is made from it. A strong, coarse spirit, equal to the *aguardiente* of Cuba in horrible taste and smell, is distilled from prickly pears ; and though to us it seemed only fit to be burned in a spirit-lamp, when nothing better could be procured, it is nectar to the Boers and Hottentots, who drink large quantities of it. Great caution is needed in peeling the prickly pear, the proper way being to impale the fruit on a fork or stick while you cut it open and remove the skin. On no account must the latter be touched with the hands, or direful con-

sequences will ensue. To the inexperienced eye the prickly pear looks innocent enough ; with its smooth, shiny skin, suggestive only of a juicy interior, and telling no tale of lurking mischief—yet each of those soft-looking little tufts, with which at regular intervals it is dotted, is a quiver filled with terrible, tiny, hair-like thorns, or rather stings ; and woe betide the fingers of the unwary “ new chum,” who, with no kind friend at hand to warn him, plucks the treacherous fruit. He will carry a lively memento of it for many days.

My first sad experience of prickly pears was gained, not in South, but in North Africa. Landing with a friend in Algiers some time ago, our first walk led us to the fruit market, where, before a tempting pile of *figues de Barbarie*, we stopped to quench the thirst of our thirty-six hours' passage. The fruit was handed to us, politely peeled by the Arab dealer ; and thus, as we made our first acquaintance with its delightful coolness, no suspicion of its evil qualities entered our minds. And when, a few days later, adding the excitement of a little trespassing to the more legitimate pleasures of a country ramble, we came upon a well-laden group of prickly pear bushes, we could not resist the temptation to help ourselves to some of the fruit—and woeful was the result. Concentrated essence of stinging-nettle seemed all at once to be assailing hands, lips, and tongue ; and our skin, wherever it had come in contact with the ill-natured fruit, was covered with a thick crop of minute, bristly hairs, apparently growing from it, and venomous and irritating to the last

degree. Our silk gloves, transformed suddenly into miniature robes of Nessus, had to be thrown away, perfectly unwearable; and the inadvertent use of our pocket-handkerchiefs, before we had fully realized the extent of our misfortune, caused fresh agonies, in which nose as well as lips participated. For many a day did the retribution of that theft haunt us in the form of myriads of tiny stings. It was a long time indeed before we were finally rid of the last of them; and we registered a vow that whatever Algerian fruit we might dishonestly acquire in future, it should not be *figues de Barbarie*.

In dry weather at the Cape these spiteful little stings do not even wait for the newly-arrived victim; but fly about, light as thistle-down, ready to settle on any one who has not learned by experience to give the prickly pear bushes a wide berth.

The leaves of the prickly pear are good for ostriches and cattle, though the work of burning off the thorns and cutting the leaves in pieces is so tedious that it is only resorted to when other food becomes scarce. One kind, the *kahlblad*, or "bald leaf," has no thorns. It is comparatively rare, and farmers plant and cultivate it as carefully as they exterminate its troublesome relative.

Another kind of cactus, which, if the beautiful forms in Nature were utilized for artistic purposes half as much as they deserve to be, would long since have been recognized as a most perfect model for a graceful branched candlestick, is used as food for cattle during

long droughts, being burnt and cut up in the same manner as the prickly pear. When the plant is in flower, each branch of the candlestick seems tipped with a bright yellow flame.

Another of our many eccentric-looking plants, the *finger-poll*, is also used in very dry seasons to feed cattle; the men who go about the country cutting it up being followed by the animals, which are very fond of it, but which, owing to its excessive toughness, are unable to bite it off. It grows close to the ground; its perfect circle of thick, short fingers, rather like gigantic asparagus, radiating stiffly from the centre. How the cattle manage to eat it without serious consequences has always been a matter of wonder to me, for the whole plant is filled with a thick, white, milky juice, which when dry becomes like the strongest india-rubber. We often used this juice for mending china, articles of jewellery, and many things which defied coaguline, to which, indeed, we found it superior.

One of our plants always reminded me of those French sweets, threaded on a stiff straw, which often form a part of the contents of a bon-bon box. The thick, succulent leaves, shaded green and red, with a frosted, sparkling surface which increases the resemblance to the candied sweets, and all as exactly alike in shape and size as if made in one mould, are threaded like beads at equal distances along the stem, which passes through a little round hole in the very centre of each. They can all be taken off and threaded on again just as they were before.

Close to the ground, and growing from a little round root apparently belonging to the bulbous tribe, you sometimes—though only rarely—see a tiny mass of soft, curling fibres, delicate and unsubstantial-looking as a little green cloud. Even the foliage of asparagus would look coarse and heavy if placed beside this really ethereal little plant, which yet is durable, for I have now with me a specimen which, though gathered five years ago, is still quite unchanged.

The wild tobacco is a common—indeed too common—plant in the Karroo; it has clusters of long, narrow, trumpet-shaped flowers, of a light yellow, its leaves are small, and it resembles the cultivated tobacco neither in appearance nor in usefulness. Indeed it is one of our worst enemies, being poisonous to ostriches, which of course—true to their character—lose no opportunity of eating it. We made deadly war upon it, and whenever during our rides about the farm we came upon a clump of its blue-green bushes, we would make up a little bonfire at the foot of each, and burn it down to the ground. But it is tenacious of life, and its roots go down deep, so its career of evil was only cut short for a time. Besides which, our efforts to keep it under were of little avail while our neighbours, “letting things slide,” in true colonial fashion, allowed the plants to run wild on their own land; from whence the seeds were always liable to be washed down to us during “a big rain,” when the deep *sluits* which everywhere intersect the country become, in a few hours, raging torrents, dashing along at express speed.

Strangely enough, when T——, some years ago, was travelling in Australia, to which country he had brought some ostriches from the Cape, he found that wild tobacco grew nowhere throughout the length and breadth of the land, excepting just in the very region in which the birds had been established. During that trip he also found that the "salt-bush" of Australia, which is there considered the best kind of food for sheep, is almost identical with the brack-bosch of the Cape Colony, the only difference being that it grows higher. We have also seen the same bush growing in Algeria, and near Marseilles.

On the lower slopes of some of our mountains grow tall euphorbias, shooting up straight and stiff as if made of metal, and branching out in the exact form of the Jewish candlestick sculptured on the arch of Titus in Rome. Some of these euphorbias attain the height of forty feet—quite important dimensions in that comparatively treeless land. They impart an air of melancholy and desolation to the landscape; and look particularly weird and uncanny when, on a homeward ride, you pass through a grove of them at dusk.

One more queer plant in conclusion of these slight and very unscientific reminiscences of our flora, which I trust may never meet the eye of any botanist. The *kerzbosch*, or candle-bush, a stunted, thorny plant, if lighted at one end when in the green state, will burn steadily just like a wax candle, and is used as a torch for burning off the thorns of prickly pear, etc.

CHAPTER IV.

OUR LITTLE HOME.

Building operations—A plucking—Ugliness of Cape houses—Our rooms—Fountain in sitting-room a failure—Drowned pets—Decoration of rooms—Colonist must be Jack-of-all-trades—Cape waggons—Shooting expeditions—Strange tale told by Boer.

ON our first arrival in the Karroo we were unable to take up our abode at once on our own farm ; the best of the three small Dutch houses on it being little better than a hut, and consisting but of two small and badly-built rooms ; with mud floors and smoke-blackened reed ceilings, as far removed from the horizontal as the roughly-plastered walls, which bulged and retreated in all unexpected directions, were from the perpendicular—the whole architecture, if so pretentious a term may be used, being entirely innocent of any approach to a straight line or correct angle. We at once commenced building operations ; in the meanwhile renting a little house which happened to be vacant on the next farm, about an hour's rough, but pretty ride from our own. Now came a busy time for T——, and for his manager—the latter already installed, uncomfortably enough, in the old Dutch house—for besides the brick-making

and building, and the deepening of the well near the house, there was, as must always be the case on starting a new farm, much to be done, and everything required to be done at once. T—— spent most of his time at “Swaylands,” as we named our farm; and very enjoyable for me were the days when I could spare a few hours from household duties to ride over with him, to watch the progress of the new rooms, or to be initiated into some of the mysteries of ostrich-farming, all delightfully new and strange to me.

The first sight of a plucking interested me especially; and it was not without a proud feeling of ownership that I sat on the ground in one corner of the kraal, or small temporary enclosure, helping to tie up in neat bundles our own first crop of soft, white, black, or grey feathers while watching the busy scene. It all comes back to me now with the clearness of a photograph — the bright, cloudless, metallic-looking South African sky above us; and for a background the long range of rocky mountains, each stain on their rugged sides, each aloe or *spekboom* plant growing on them, sharply defined in that clear atmosphere as if seen through the large end of an opera-glass. In the foreground a forest of long necks, and a crowd of foolish, frightened faces, gaping beaks, and throats all puffed out with air — the latter ludicrous grimace, accompanied sometimes by a short, hollow sound, half grunt, half cough, being the ostrich’s mode of expressing deepest disgust and dejection. There is a constant heavy stamping of powerful two-toed feet; an occa-

sional difference of opinion between two quarrelsome birds eager to fight, craning their snake-like necks, hissing savagely, and "lifting up themselves on high," but unable, owing to the closeness with which they are packed, to do each other any injury; and the real or fancied approach of a dog causes a sudden panic and general stampede of the silly birds into one corner of the kraal, threatening to break down its not very substantial hedge of dry bush—one commotion scarcely having time to subside before another arises.

And through it all, T——, Mr. B——, and our Kaffirs are calmly going in and out among the struggling throng; all hard at work, the two former steadily and methodically operating with their shears on each bird as in its turn it is tugged along, like a victim to the sacrifice, by three men; two holding its wings, and the third dragging at its long neck till one fears that with all its kicks, plunges, tumbles, and sudden wild leaps into the air, its flat, brainless little head will be pulled off. One extra-refractory bird, when finally subdued, and helpless in the hands of the pluckers, avenges his wrongs upon the ostrich standing nearest to him in the crowd; and, for every feather pulled from his own tail, gives a savage nip to the head of his unoffending neighbour, a mild bird, who does not retaliate, but looks puzzled, his own turn not yet having come. It is amusing to watch the rapid retreat of each poor denuded creature when set free from his tormentors. He goes out at the gate looking crestfallen indeed, but apparently much relieved to find himself still alive.

How we enjoyed that day! and how delightful was our ride back to "Hume Cottage" in the evening, with the proceeds of the plucking tied up in two large white bags, and fastened to our saddles; making us look as if we were taking our clothes to the wash. My bundle, by the way, came to grief *en route*, and suddenly — somewhat to the discomposure of my horse—we found ourselves enveloped in a soft snow-storm of feathers, which went flying and whirling merrily away across the *veldt*; many of them, in spite of our prompt dismounting to rush madly hither and thither in pursuit, quite evading all our efforts to catch them.

The modern houses on Cape farms are all built entirely on utilitarian principles, with no thought of grace or beauty; indeed, the square and prosaic proportions of the ordinary packing-case seem to have been chosen as the model in the construction of nearly every room. Even if the inmates had any idea of comfort, or feeling for the picturesque—of both of which they are quite innocent—it would be impossible ever to make such rooms look either home-like or pretty. As it is, they are most often like very uncomfortable schoolrooms.

Our first plan on coming to South Africa was the ambitious one of setting our fellow-colonists a brilliant example by striking out something entirely new in farm architecture; and many times during our stay at Walmer would we talk over the white Algerian house, with the comfort and loveliness of which our ostrich-

farm, wherever it might be, was to be transformed into a little oasis in the desert. T—— covered many sheets of writing-paper with designs for the horse-shoe arches ; and with neatly-drawn plans for the long, cool Oriental rooms, surrounding the square open court ; in the centre of which was to be a fountain with bananas, ferns, blue lotus, and other water-loving plants.

Alas ! however ; when we did take a farm, we found ourselves obliged after all to sacrifice beauty to usefulness, just like our neighbours. The unlovely Dutch house, incapable as it was of adapting itself to Moorish arches, had to be utilized ; the press of other work allowing us no time for pulling down and re-building, neither for indulging in any artistic vagaries ; and the two first rooms which—to meet immediate requirements—were added as soon as bricks could be made for them, were, for greater haste, built straight and square, in the true packing-case style. They were the same size as the two old Dutch rooms ; flat-roofed like them, and built on to them in a straight line—the four, each with its alternate door and window, reminding us of the rows of little temporary rooms which form the dwellings of railway workmen when a new line is being made, and which are moved on as the work progresses.

After this unpromising beginning, it is needless to say that our idea of building an Algerian house was given up ; and though in time we improved the outward appearance of our dwelling ; breaking the straightness of its outlines by the addition of a pretty little sitting-room projecting from the front, and of a large

bedroom and store at the back; and plastering and whitewashing the dirty old bricks and the too-clean new ones; nothing can ever make it anything but an ugly house as far as the outside is concerned. With the interior, however, we have been more successful; and our sitting-room, now consisting of a T-shaped arrangement of three small rooms thrown into one, is really—considering the roughness of the materials with which we started—a very bright and cosy little nook. It is most quaint and irregular, for one end of it is a room of the crookedly-built Dutch house; and when the strong old wall, three feet thick, dividing the latter from the new part, was knocked away, the old ceiling and floor turned out to be considerably lower than the new. We dignify the deep step thus formed by the name of “the dais.”

The latest-added portion of the room—built from T——’s own design—is the prettiest of all; and the bow window at the end, always filled with banana-plants, ferns, creepers, garden and wild flowers, forms quite a little conservatory. Though disappointed of our Moorish court, we could not give up the idea of our fountain without a struggle, and attempted to establish it on a very small scale in this little room; in the cement floor of which, not far from the bow window, we made a round basin some four feet deep, which we filled with water. Then we wrote to Walmer for some roots of our favourite blue lotus; with which, and with the arums’ white cups, the surface of the water was to be studded; and by-and-by—we thought—as soon as the



OUR SITTING-ROOM.

completion of more necessary operations should allow leisure for ornamental work, how delightful it would be, on coming in out of the dust and the heat, to hear the sweet, refreshing sound of falling water; and to see the bright drops splashing on the border of maidenhair fern which was to surround the tiny basin.

But, after all, our anticipations were never realized; for we soon saw that it would be necessary to choose between our fountain and our pet animals—so numerous among the latter were cases of “Found Drowned.” Our meerkats, in their irrepressible liveliness, were always tumbling in; and, being unable to climb up the straight sides, would swim round and round calling loudly for assistance; but we were not always at hand to play the part of Humane Society, and the losses were many, including—saddest of all—that of a too-inquisitive young ostrich.

Thousands of gnats, too, as noisy and nearly as venomous as mosquitoes, were brought into existence; and, romantic as was the idea of water-plants growing in our little room, it had to be given up; and we contented ourselves with seeing our blue lotus in the form of a dado, on which we stencilled and painted them ourselves in the true Egyptian conventional style, on alternate long and short stalks. We bordered the fireplace, and decorated the tops of the doors, with a few good old tiles from Damascus, Tunis, Algiers, and the Alhambra; three beautiful hand-painted *sarongs*, brought by T— from Java, formed each as perfect and artistic a *portière* as could be wished, and hid the

ugly, ill-made doors ; and with Turkish rugs, Oriental embroideries of all kinds, Moorish and Kabyle pottery, Algerian coffee-tables and brackets, ancient Egyptian curiosities, and other trophies of travel, we produced a general effect which—especially in South Africa—was not to be despised.

I have conceitedly said “we,” as if I had had a great share in the work, but it was in reality T—— who did it all, and to whose artistic taste the prettiness of our little home is entirely due. The capacity, too, for turning his hand to anything, which makes him so perfect a colonist, was invaluable to us on that out-of-the-way farm ; for, there being, after the departure of the itinerant workmen who built our rooms, no painters, glaziers, masons, carpenters, or other such useful people anywhere nearer than Graaff-Reinet—four hours by rail from Klipplaat—all the repairs and improvements of the house devolved on him. One day he would be putting new panes of glass in the windows—the next, bringing a refractory lock into proper working order, or making and putting up bookshelves—then, perhaps, a defective portion of the roof would claim his attention, or he would enter on a long and persevering conflict with a smoky chimney. One of the latter, indeed, carelessly run up by our ignorant builder, was not cured until T—— had taken it all down and built it over again ; since which its behaviour has been blameless.

N.B.—When a chimney wants sweeping in the Karroo, the usual mode of procedure is to send a fowl down it.

Our furniture, most of which was of that best kind of all for a hot climate, the Austrian bent wood, arrived in very good condition ; and in spite of the rough roads along which the waggon had to bring it from Klip-plaat, hardly anything was damaged.

These Cape waggons, clumsy as they look, are splendidly adapted to the abrupt ups and downs of the country over which they travel. They are very long ; and are made in such a way that, instead of jolting and jumping up and down as an English waggon, under the trying circumstances of a journey in South Africa, would certainly consider itself justified in doing, they turn and bend about in quite a snake-like manner, and the motion, even on the roughest road, is never unpleasant. They are usually drawn by a span of sixteen or eighteen oxen, sometimes by mules ; and very noisily they go along ; night—their favourite travelling-time in hot weather—being made truly hideous while a caravan of some four or five of them is coming slowly on, with wheels creaking and groaning in all possible discordant notes, and the Hottentot drivers and *voorloopers*—boys who run in front—cracking their long hide whips, and urging on their animals with more fiendish sounds than ever issued even from Neapolitan throats. One has to get accustomed to the noise ; but, apart from this drawback, the waggons are most comfortable for travelling. They are large and spacious, and roofed in by firmly-made tents which afford complete protection from sun and rain ; and for night journeys no Pullman car ever offered more luxurious

sleeping accommodation than does the *kartel*, a large, strong framework of wood, as wide as a double-bed, suspended inside the tent of the waggon. Across this framework are stretched narrow, interlacing strips of hide; mattresses and rugs are placed on it, and no more comfortable bed could be desired. The goods are all stowed underneath the *kartel*, in the bottom of the waggon.

People often make shooting expeditions to the interior, travelling in waggons and sometimes remaining away a year at a time. T—— has taken several journeys of this kind, and speaks of it as a most enjoyable life. You take a horse or two and a couple of pointers; you get plenty of shooting during the day; and come back to the waggon in the evening to find a bright fire burning near, and dinner being prepared by the servants. The latter camp at night under the waggon. The average distance travelled is twenty-five miles a day. There is no need to take provisions for the cattle, as they are always able to graze on the way; tracts of land, called public outspans, being set apart by Government at convenient distances along the road as halting-places for waggons.

A Boer once told T—— a strange story of how—during one of the numerous wars with the natives—he, his wife, and children were travelling at night, when suddenly, without any apparent cause, the waggon came to a standstill; the oxen, though beaten hard and pulling with all their might, being unable to move it, although the road at that place was perfectly level.

After some delay, the cattle were just as suddenly again able to move the waggon without difficulty ; and the Boer and his family proceeded on their way. They found afterwards that, by this strange interruption to their journey, they had been prevented from encountering an armed party of hostile natives, who just at that time were crossing their road some distance in front of them.

CHAPTER V.

CLIMATE OF THE KARROO.

Cape Colony much abused—Healthy climate—Wonderful cures of consumption—Karoo a good place for sanatorium—Rarity of illness and accidents—The young colonist—An independent infant—Long droughts—Hot winds—Dust storms—Dams—Advantage of possessing good wells—Partiality of thunderstorms—Delights of a brack roof—Washed out of bed—After the rain—Our horses—Effects of rain indoors—*Opslaag*—The Cape winter—What to wear on Karroo farms.

OF all portions of the globe, surely none has ever been so much grumbled at, abused, and despised, both justly and unjustly, as the poor Cape Colony. Hardly any one who has lived under its cloudless skies has a kind word to say for it; indeed, it is quite the usual thing to speak of one's residence in it as of an enforced and miserable exile—a kind of penal servitude—though, strangely enough, most of those who go so rejoicingly home to England, like boys released from school, manage sooner or later to find their way out again; as though impelled by a touch of some such magic as that which is supposed to draw back to the Eternal City those who have once drunk at the Trevi fountain.

One of the legion of grumblers tells you the Cape

Colony is the worst-governed country in the world, which indeed—with the exception, perhaps, of Turkey and Morocco—it undoubtedly is; the grievance of another is that the country in general, and ostrich-farming in particular, is played out, that no more fortunes are to be made, and that life on the farms offers nothing to compensate sufficiently for the numerous discomforts and privations which have to be endured; the heavy import duties and consequent ruinous prices of all the necessaries of life, with the exception of meat, depriving the colonist of even that small consolation of knowing that, though uncomfortable, he is at least economizing. Sybarites accustomed to home comforts make constant comparisons between English and colonial houses, greatly to the disparagement of the latter; epicures complain bitterly of the wearying sameness of the food, resenting most deeply the perpetual recurrence on the table, morning, noon, and night, of the ubiquitous though delicious Angora goat; while ladies are eloquent on the never-ending topics of the bad servants—certainly the worst that can be found anywhere—the difficulties of housekeeping, the rough roads, the inconvenient distance from everywhere, the trouble and delay of getting provisions, etc., sent up to the farms, and, saddest of all, the want of society and the intolerable dulness. In fact, the general opinion seems to be that of Mrs. Jellyby's daughter, that "Africa is a Beast!" You hear so much grumbling, see such bored, dissatisfied faces, and are treated to so many gloomy and desponding views of colonial life, that it is quite a

refreshing contrast when you chance to meet an American who is contemptuously jocular on the subject of the ugly scenery, eccentric plants, queer beasts, and general all-pervading look of incompleteness, and who guesses "South Africa was finished off in a hurry late on Saturday night, with a few diamonds thrown in to compensate."

Even the climate comes in for its share of abuse: its long droughts, its hot winds, its incessant sunshine—as if you *could* have too much of that!—and its general dissimilarity to the climate of England—for which surely it ought to be commended,—all are added to the long list of complaints against a land which seems, like the much-abused donkey, to have no friends. And yet that climate, with all its drawbacks and discomforts, is the healthiest in the world; and most especially is the Karroo district the place of all others for invalids suffering from chest complaints. No one need die of consumption, however advanced a stage his disease may have attained, if he can but reach the Cape Colony and *proceed at once inland*. He must not stay near the coast; it would be as well—indeed better—for him to have remained in England to die among friends; for in the moist neighbourhood of the sea the disease cannot be cured, its progress is simply retarded for a while. But a railway journey of only a few hours lands the patient in the very heart of the Karroo; and once in its dry atmosphere, he may hope—nay expect—not a mere prolongation for a few months of such a life as one too often sees sadly ebbing away in Mediterranean

winter resorts, but a return to health and strength. Among our Cape acquaintances are some whom T— knew when, years ago, they landed in the Colony— given up by their doctors at home, and so near the last stage of consumption that on arriving they could not walk on shore, but had to be carried from the vessel— and who are now as strong and well as any of their neighbours. Indeed, on my introduction to more than one of these stout and hearty colonists, I have found it quite impossible to realize that *they*, at any time, could have been consumptive invalids! Unfortunately, too many presume on the completeness of their cure; and, instead of resigning themselves to settling and finding permanent occupation in the colony, as all whose lungs have once been seriously affected ought to do, return to England; and, having grown reckless with long residence in a land where “nothing gives you cold,” soon fall victims to their treacherous native climate; the first exposure to its damp chilliness generally bringing back in full force the foe from whose attacks they would always have been safe, had they not left the dry Karroo’s protection.

It is a pity European doctors do not know more about this wonderful climate for consumptive patients; and also that so few inducements are held out for the latter to settle in the country. What a splendid plan it would be, and how many valuable lives might be saved, if some clever medical man—himself perhaps just enough of an invalid to prefer living out of England—were to take a large farm in the Karroo, and “run”

it as a sanatorium. This could be done without the expenditure of any very large amount of capital, as land can be rented from Government at the rate of a very moderate sum per annum. It would be necessary to choose a farm possessing a good fountain; thus a constant supply of vegetables could be kept up, and herds of cattle, flocks of sheep and Angoras, and plenty of fowls, turkeys, etc., be maintained to provide the establishment with meat, milk, butter, and eggs—rendering it to a great extent self-supporting. The young men could occupy themselves in superintending the farming operations, and thus would not only have plenty to do, but would at the same time be gaining health. A good troop of horses would of course be kept, so that patients might have as much riding and driving as they wished; there would be some shooting, as there are partridges, several birds of the bustard tribe, and a few antelopes; and with a house whose interior presented the comforts of a refined home, with prettily-furnished rooms, and with a good supply of books, papers, and magazines, life in that bright, sunny land might be made pleasant enough. The healthiness of the country is greatly owing, not only to its dryness, but also to the fact of its being a table-land, one thousand feet above the sea; thus the nights are always cool, and one is generally glad of two blankets, even in summer.

Nor is consumption the only enemy who has to retreat powerless before the Karroo's health-giving atmosphere; many other illnesses seem equally unable

to obtain a footing in that perfect climate. T——, for instance, who from childhood had been subject to severe attacks of asthma, was completely cured by his residence on the ostrich farms; and a troublesome remittent fever, caught in the West Indies, from which I had suffered, off and on, during seven years, left me entirely from the time we went to live at Swaylands. There seems, indeed, to be much of truth in the boastful assertion one so often hears, "No one is ever ill here!" and the wonder is, not that doctors are so sparsely distributed throughout the Karroo, but that they ever think it worth while to settle there at all. People live quite contentedly two or more days' drive from the nearest doctor — medical help from Port Elizabeth being equally, if not more, inaccessible, owing to the fact that the train does not run every day—and from year's end to year's end they not only are never ill, but seem also quite exempt from the usual accidents which in other parts of the world are apt to befall humanity. They go out shooting, and their horses buck them off—a trifling, everyday event which is taken as a matter of course; they gallop recklessly across the *veldt*, over ground so full of treacherous holes that a horse is liable at any moment to get a sudden and ugly fall—indeed, he often does, but the colonist always rises unhurt; they drive home late at night along the roughest of roads, at a furious pace—often after imbibing far more than is usually conducive to safety—and their Cape carts or American spiders very naturally tumble into sluits, run into wire fences, perform somer-

saults down steep banks, and go through other startling acrobatic feats, all with perfect impunity to the occupants. No legs, arms, or ribs, to say nothing of necks, are ever broken.

And when the young colonist makes his first appearance on this world's stage, his advent is not made the occasion for any undue display of fuss or anxiety. It is not thought worth while to summon the doctor from his distant abode; some old Dutch or Hottentot woman, who has been a grandmother so often that her experience is large, is called in, and all goes well. The young colonist himself is invariably a flourishing specimen of humanity; the childish ailments to which so many of his less robust European contemporaries succumb, cause him no trouble, and, if indeed they attack him at all, he weathers them triumphantly. He thrives in the pure fresh air, revels in the healthy out-door life, eats, of course, to an enormous and alarming extent, and grows up a young giant. He enjoys the same immunity from accident as his elders, passing safely through even more "hair-breadth 'scapes" than they; his sturdy, independent spirit makes him equal to any emergency, and enables him, in whatever circumstances of difficulty or danger he may be placed, to take very good care of himself.

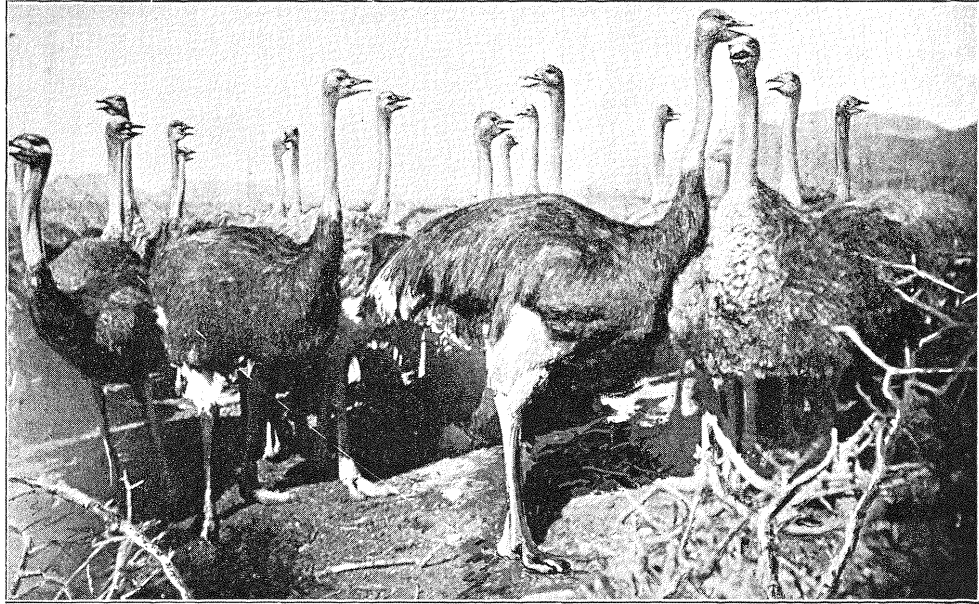
On the farm next to ours a tiny boy of three, while playing with the windlass of a deep well, and hanging on to the rope, suddenly let himself down with a run into the water. He was not much disconcerted, however; but, with wonderful presence of mind for such

a baby, managed to get his feet firmly on the bucket, and finding the length of the rope just, though *only* just, allowed his mouth to come above the surface, remained immovable, roaring steadily and lustily till assistance came.

The long droughts are certainly very trying ; indeed they could not possibly be endured by any country less wonderfully fertile than South Africa, where it is calculated that three good days' rain in the year, could we but have this regularly, would be sufficient to meet all the needs of the land. But often, for more than a year, there will be no rain worth mentioning ; the dams, or large artificial reservoirs, of which each farm usually possesses several, gradually become dry ; and the *veldt* daily loses more of its verdure, till at last all is one dull, ugly brown, and the whole plain lies parched and burnt up under a sky from which every atom of moisture seems to have departed—a hard, grey, metallic sky, as different as possible from the rich, deep-blue canopy which, far away to the north, spreads over lovely Algeria. The stock, with the pathetic tameness of thirst, come from all parts of the farm to congregate close round the house ; the inquiring ostriches tapping with their bills on the windows as they look in at you, and the cattle lowing in piteous appeal for water ; and you realize very vividly the force of such Scriptural expressions as, “the heaven was shut up,” or, “a dry and thirsty land where no water is.”

Then the hot winds sweep across the country,

making everybody tired, languid, head-achy and cross. Indeed, excessive irritability seems to be the general result of hot winds in all parts of the world ; in Egypt, for instance, there is never so much crime among the natives as while the *khamseen* is blowing ; every outbreak of the Arabs in Algiers invariably occurs during an extra bad sirocco ; and in a Spanish family I knew in Havana there obtained a very sensible rule, unani- mously adopted to avoid collisions of temper, *i.e.*, on the days of an especially venomous hot wind peculiar to Cuba an unbroken silence was maintained ; no member of the family, on any pretence whatever, speaking to another. Even our pets were sulky on a hot wind day ; and as for the ostriches, they were deplorable objects indeed as they stood gasping for breath, with pendent wings, open bills, and inflated throats, the pictures of imbecile dejection. In fact, everything human, four- footed, and feathered, in the whole Karroo, was as thoroughly unhappy as it could well be ; with the sole exception of myself. My spirits, instead of falling below zero, would always rise in proportion as the sur- rounding air became more like the breath of a furnace ; this was not owing, as may perhaps be supposed, to the possession of so rare a sweetness of temper as to render me happy under even the most adverse circumstances, but simply to a real and intense enjoyment of that weather which everyone else hated. While T—, closing every door and window as tightly as possible (which, however, is not saying much), would retire to his bath, there to spend a couple of hours in company



OSTRICHES IN A HOT WIND.

with books, papers, and numberless lemon-squashes, if lemons happened to be attainable; I would carry my chair outside, and, as I darned socks or repaired the latest trap-doors torn in our garments by the thorns, would revel in *my* bath of hot, dry air.

The dust which the hot wind brings with it is, however, a nuisance. There is more than enough dust at the best of times; and the difficulties—already considerable—of keeping a Karroo house neat and clean, are not lessened by the fact that, ten minutes after a careful progress round the room with that most perfect of dusters, a bunch of ostrich-feathers, you can distinctly sign your name with your finger on the little black writing-table, or make a drawing on the piano. But in a good hot wind you have far more than this average, everyday amount of “matter in the wrong place,” and you eat and breathe dust.

Sometimes the wind carries the dust high up into the air, in straight, solid-looking columns rising from the ground just as a water-spout rises from the sea. An artist wishing to depict the pillar of the cloud going before the Israelites might well take the form of one of them as a model. Occasionally you see two or three of these columns wandering about the *veldt* in different directions; and woe betide the imperfectly-built house, or tall wind-mill pump, which has the ill-luck to stand in the path of one of these erratic visitants! We, alas! can speak from experience, our own “Stover” mill having been chosen as a victim and whirled aloft to its destruction! T——, while at Kimberley, in the early

days of the diamond-fields, has often seen these dusty whirlwinds going about the camp, passing between the long rows of tents as if hesitating for a time which to attack ; then suddenly "going for" one of them, causing instantaneous collapse and confusion.

Every Karroo house has a dam near it, and on a large farm there are generally three or four more of these reservoirs in different parts of the land. The selection of a suitable site for a dam requires some experience. An embankment is thrown up across a valley, where from the rising ground on either side the water is collected. The ground must be "brack," a peculiar kind of soil which, though loose and friable, is not porous. This brack is often used to cover the flat roofs of the houses ; but unless it is well sifted and laid on thickly, dependence cannot always be placed on it, as we have several times found to our cost. Rows of willows or mimosas are generally planted along the banks of the dams ; and though the moisture which is sucked up by their thirsty roots can ill be afforded, yet, in that most treeless of lands, their bright, fresh green is of immense value ; and the poor ugly houses, standing so forlornly on the bare *veldt*, with but the narrowest and scantiest of gardens—if any—between them and the surrounding desert, seem redeemed from utter dreariness and desolation, and some slight look of home and of refinement is imparted by the dam's semicircle of trees. A good-sized dam is sometimes half a mile broad, and, when just filled after a good thunder-shower, is quite an imposing sheet of water. Occasion-

ally, in very heavy thunder-storms, the glorious supplies pour in too lavishly; the embankment, unable to resist the pressure, gives way; and the disappointed farmer, who has ridden up in the hope of feasting his eyes on watery wealth, beholds his treasure flowing uselessly and aimlessly away across the *veldt*.

Then, too, even the noblest of dams *must* dry up in a long drought; and that landowner is wise who does not depend solely on this form of water-supply, but who takes the precaution of sinking one or more good wells. This is expensive work—especially when, as in our case, the hard rock has to be blown away by dynamite; a party of navvies, encamped on the farm for weeks, progressing but slowly and laboriously at the rate of about one foot per day, for which the payment is £5 a foot; but the advantage is seen during the protracted droughts. Then, on farms which only possess dams, the ostriches and other stock are seen lying dead in all directions, a most melancholy sight. Where there is a well, however, the animals can always be kept alive. The water may go down rather low, and the supply doled out to the thirsty creatures may not be very plentiful; but with careful management no stock need be lost during the longest of droughts. But, even with our good well, we found it necessary to be very economical; and the few small eucalypti and other trees which, with great difficulty, we kept alive near the house, have often for weeks together been obliged to content themselves with the soapy water from the baths; while our poor little patch of kitchen-garden

has more than once had to be sacrificed and allowed to dry up—the water necessary for its irrigation being more than we could venture to spare.

In some parts of the country the inhabitants are occasionally in terrible straits for want of water ; and during one severe drought some passing strangers, who rested a few hours at our house, told us a horrid story of how, at one of the “cantines” (combinations of inn and general store) along their road, they had asked for water to wash their hands, and a scanty supply was brought, with the request that no soap might be used, that same water being ultimately destined to make the tea ! It sounds incredible, but I fear it is more likely to be truth than fiction, for the Dutch at the Cape are dirty enough for anything.

The partiality of the thunder-storms is surprising ; sometimes one farm will have all its dams filled, while another near it does not get a drop of rain. Often, during a whole season, the thunder-clouds will follow the same course ; one unlucky place being repeatedly left out. Swaylands was once for months passed over in this manner ; our neighbours on both sides having an abundance of water, while we, like the unhappy little pig of nursery fame, “had none,” and found it difficult to restrain envy, hatred, and malice.

Then, too, the clouds have such a deceitful and tantalizing way of collecting in magnificent masses, and coming rolling grandly up as if they really meant business at last—only to disperse quietly in a few hours, disappointing all the hopes they have raised.



A. MARTIN, del.

Some of the Best Kinds of Ostrich-Bush.

1. BRACK-BOSCH. 2. GHANNA. 3. FEI-BOSCH.

Again and again you are deluded into believing the long, weary drought is indeed nearing its end; you feel so sure there is a tremendous rain just at hand, that you prepare for action, and, doubting the trustworthiness of those portions of the roof covered with brack, are careful to remove from beneath them everything liable to be spoilt by wet; then, having set your house in order, you wait eagerly to hear the first pattering of the longed-for drops. They do not come, however; it all ends in nothing, and soon every cloud is gone, and the sun blazes out once more in pitiless splendour.

Then at last, after "Wolf!" has been cried so often that you are off your guard, and—obstinately refusing to be taken in by the promising bank of clouds you noticed in the evening—have gone off to bed, expecting your waking eyes to rest only on the usual hard, hot, grey-blue sky—suddenly, in the middle of the night, you are aroused by a deafening noise, and your first confused, half-dreaming thought is that somehow or other you have got underneath the Falls of Niagara—house and all. Then a blue flash wakes you quite up, a terrific roar of thunder shakes the house, and you realize that what for months you have been so longing for has come at last! But there are penalties to be paid for it; and an ominous sound of trickling strikes your ear. Your bedroom unfortunately has a brack roof; and through the defective places in the latter, which every moment become larger and more numerous, streams of water are pouring in, till at last the room

seems to be one large shower-bath. You think with horror of the books, writing-case, photographs, lace-trimmed hat, work-basket, boots, etc., all left in various exposed positions about the room, and—most frightful thought of all—of the coats and dresses hanging on the row of pegs in that corner where, to judge by the sound, the most substantial of all the cataracts seems to be descending; and you feel that you *must* learn at once the extent of your misfortune, and rescue what you can. You try to light a candle; but a well-directed jet of water has been steadily playing straight down into the candlestick, and a vicious sputter is the only response to your efforts. You are still struggling with the candle; trying to wipe it dry, using persuasive language to it, and as far from getting a light as ever; when your breath is suddenly taken away by a stream of ice-cold water pouring over your back, and you find that you have shipped as fine a “sea” as ever dashed through an incautiously-opened port. The flat roof, which has been collecting water till it has become like a tank, has given way under the pressure, and a wide crack has opened just above your head. Of course you are wet through, so is the bed on which you are sitting; and you make a prompt descent from the latter, only to find the floor one vast, shallow bath, in which your slippers are floating.

And now, as you grope about, hurriedly collecting the more perishable articles, and flinging them into the safety of the next room—which has a corrugated iron roof—you hear a dull roar; far off at first, but advancing

nearer and nearer ; till at last a grand volume of sound thunders past, and a broad, tossing river, impetuous as any mountain torrent, is suddenly at your very gates. It is the *sluit* coming down ; filling, and perhaps widely overflowing, its deep channel, which, straight and steep as a railway cutting, has stood dry so long. In all directions these *sluits* are now careering over the country ; and though occasionally their wild rush does some mischief, such as washing away ostriches' nests, drowning stock, or carrying into a dam such an accumulation of soil as to fill it up and render it useless—still, on the whole, the *sluit* is a most beneficent friend to the farmer. And now, at the first welcome sound of that friend's approach, you hear overhead the loud congratulations of the gentlemen, who, attired in ulsters, are hard at work on the roof, whither they have hastily scrambled to lessen as far as possible the deluge within. "This is worth £200 to us!" you hear in triumphant tones. "We're all right now for six months!" Then—less joyfully—comes a query as to how the great dam in the upper camp, which on a former sad occasion has "gone," will stand this time ; but the general opinion is that, with the considerable strengthening it has since received, it will weather the storm ; and in the meanwhile souls must be possessed in patience till the morning. And still the rain keeps on, steadily and noisily ; and with all the discomfort, and with all the mischief it has wrought indoors, how thankful one is for it ! And how one's heart is gladdened by that "sound of abundance of rain," and

“voice of many waters!” It means everything to the farmer; the long drought over at last, the dams full, the parched country revived, the poor thin cattle no longer in danger of starvation; healthier ostriches, a better quality of feathers, a near prospect of nests, and in fact the removal of a load of cares and anxieties.

How early we are all astir on the morning after a big rain! and with what eager excitement we look out, in the first gleam of daylight, for that most welcome sight, the newly-filled dam! A wonderful transformation has indeed been worked in the appearance of things since last night. That unsightly dry bed of light-coloured soil, baked by the hot sun to the hardness of pottery, and broken up by a thousand intersecting deep cracks and fissures, which has so long been the ugliest feature among all our unpicturesque surroundings, offends the eye no more; and in its place there now lies in the early morning light a beautiful broad sheet of water, into which the yellow *sluit*, a miniature Niagara Rapids, is still lavishly pouring its wealth—not for many hours indeed will the impetuous course of this and numerous other *sluits*, large and small, begin gradually to subside. Everywhere the water is standing in immense pools and ponds; how to feed one unlucky pair of breeding-birds—my special charges—in a low-lying camp on the other side of the *sluit* is a problem which for the present I do not attempt to solve; indeed, to walk a yard from the door, even in the thickest of boots and shabbiest of garments, requires some courage, for it is

anything but an easy matter to keep your feet, and if you fell, you would go into a perfect bath of mud. In some places lie accumulations of hailstones (accounting for the icy coldness of that impromptu shower-bath), and, though partially melted, some of them are still of the size of hazel nuts. The rain is over; and the friendly clouds to which we owe so much are already far off, and lie in white, round, solid-looking masses along the horizon. The sky, as if softened by its tempest of passion, seems of a bluer and more tender tint than it has been for a long time, and all nature appears full of joy and thanksgiving. From all sides you hear the loud chorus of myriads of rejoicing frogs, all croaking congratulations to each other, and all talking at once; they seem to have sprung suddenly into existence since last night, and their noise, discordant as it is, is not unwelcome after the long silence of the drought.

Toto, the instant he catches sight of the water, rushes out of the house, gallops wildly down to the dam, and plunges in, to swim round and round and round, barking with delight. He seems as if he could not have enough of the water; for when, after a long time, he has come out, and is on his way back to us, he suddenly changes his mind, and dashes back for another bathe. Then he seems to lose his head altogether, and vents his wild spirits in a sort of frenzied war-dance along the banks of the dam; seriously upsetting the composure, as well as the dignity, of the crow Bobby, a bird of neat and cleanly habits, who,

long debarred from any more satisfactory bath than a washing-basin, has walked down, with the air of an explorer, to this new lake he has just discovered; and is croaking softly and contentedly to himself as he splashes the bright drops again and again over his dusty black plumage. He does not like Toto; indeed, there is a mutual jealousy between these two favoured pets of ours, and they are always rather glad of an excuse for a good row, such as now ensues.

When the commotion has subsided, and Toto is at a safe distance from the dam, a troop of ostriches come down to drink. They are no doubt delighted to find such an abundant supply of water, after the somewhat scanty allowance which has been portioned out to them of late; and they stand greedily scooping up large quantities with their broad bills; then assuming comical attitudes as they stretch out their distended necks to allow the fluid to run down. In the distance, about a dozen other ostriches are spreading their white wings and waltzing along magnificently—a pretty way of expressing their satisfaction at this new and delightful change in their circumstances. But it is sometimes an expensive amusement; and we feel relieved when all have settled down, with unbroken legs, into a more sober mood.

The fowls alone do not participate in the general rejoicing; their house was even less water-tight than our room, and they all seem to have caught cold, and look draggled and miserable. Two poor sitting-hens have been washed out of their nests in the kraal hedge;

their eggs are under water, and they wander about clucking despondently. By-and-by they will all be happier, when the waters have subsided a little, and they can pick succulent insects out of the softened ground; but in the meanwhile they show plainly that they do not see the good of living in a half-drowned world.

And here come two of the horses, with "September,"* one of our Kaffir herds, who has been out on the *veldt* to find and catch them. Like most of the other colonists, we have no stables, and when our animals have done their day's work, we let them go, unless an early start has to be made in the morning; then, as they sometimes go long distances, and are not to be caught in a hurry, those that will be wanted are kept in the kraal over-night. During severe droughts the horses are fed at the house; but when there is plenty of vegetation on the *veldt*, they pick up a living for themselves. They do not get very fat, nor are they handsome to look at; and if an English coachman could see their bony frames and rough, ungroomed coats, he would no doubt be filled with the profoundest contempt. Yet, with all their uncouth appearance, they are far more serviceable than his fat, sleek, overfed animals. They can travel much longer distances; they do not have such frequent colds and other ailments—lameness especially is quite unknown among them—and their services are always at the command of their master, of any of his friends and acquaintances, or

* Many of the negroes on Cape farms are named after the months

even of perfect strangers who may happen to require a mount or a lift. For the colonist is as hospitable with his horses and his vehicles as he is with everything else that he possesses ; and the arrival of an invited guest in a hired conveyance, though no unfrequent event at English country homes, is a thing quite unheard-of on Cape farms.

Although in many parts of South Africa horses do not require shoeing at all, they need it in the Karroo, where the ground is particularly stony. When a horse's shoes are worn out, he is worked for some time unshod, until the hoof, which had grown considerably, has worn down, and the animal begins to be a little tender-footed ; then fresh shoes are put on. This plan renders it unnecessary for the blacksmith to use his knife, and ensures that the hoof is worn evenly ; thus avoiding the lameness which in England is so often caused by the hoof not being pared straight.

And in the meanwhile the two horses have been saddled, and off go T—— and Mr. B—— on a tour of inspection round the farm ; first of all making a bee-line for the opposite range of hills, where lies that particular dam in the fate of which we are so deeply interested. I cannot ride with them, much as I should have liked it ; for the scenes of devastation indoors claim my attention, and with my dark-skinned handmaiden and another Kaffir woman, wife of one of the herds, whom I have pressed into the service, I go to work ; boldly attacking first the most herculean task of all, *i.e.*, the cleaning of the bedroom out of which we

were washed last night. Truly an Augean stable is this first room ; and the sight of its horrors by daylight makes me wonder how by any possibility it can ever again be fit for human habitation. The water with which the bed has been deluged was no clear crystal stream—far from it—and pillows, sheets, and counterpane are of a rich brown hue ; so are the toilet table and the once pretty window-curtains of blue-and-white Madras muslin, which now look melancholy indeed as they hang down, straight and limp, from their cornice. In fact, hardly anything in the room can boast of having remained perfectly dry and clean ; and the floor is a pool of dirty water several inches deep. It all looks hopeless ; but we refuse to be daunted, and set to work with a will ; things dry quickly in such a sun as is now shining brightly outside ; the mud is “ clean ” mud, too, and does not stain or spoil so irretrievably as that of most other places. A Falstaffian bundle is made up for the wash, which will keep a Kaffir hard at work for two good days turning the washing-machine ; a vigorous scrubbing and “ swabbing of decks ” goes on indoors ; and by the time the gentlemen return to lunch, in the best of spirits, and reporting the dam safe and splendidly full, things have already assumed a brighter aspect. T—— spends the afternoon in repairing the roof, and I walk about the house with a long broom, poking and tapping the ceilings to indicate to him the defective spots ; he does the work far better than it was originally done by the builder of the house, and never afterwards do we have so bad a deluge.

It was, however, very nearly equalled in magnitude by a previous one, which, while we were living at Hume Cottage, gave me the first experience of a big rain—and of a *brack* roof. T—— being away for a few days, I was alone in the house with my one black servant, who of course slept placidly through all the tumult of the elements. I, on the contrary—the bedroom being water-tight—was lying awake, listening and rejoicing as I thought of all the good this splendid rain would do us. Little did I suspect what it *was* doing in the sitting-room ; and I cheerfully and briskly opened the door of the latter next morning, all unprepared for the sight which met my eyes. Poor little room ! only a few days before we had taken such pride and pleasure in beautifying it—and now ! It looked like nothing but the saloon of a steamer which had gone down and been fished up again. The treacherous roof had let in floods of dirty brown water in all directions ; the Turkish rugs were half buried in mud ; the new bent-wood chairs looked like neglected old garden seats which for years had braved all weathers ; and the table-cloth, on the artistic colours of which we had prided ourselves, gave a very good idea of the probable state of Sir Walter Raleigh's cloak after serving as an impromptu carpet for his queen. But the brunt of the storm had fallen on two sets of hanging bookshelves, well filled with nicely-bound volumes, and gracefully draped with some of our pet pieces of Turkish needlework. The books all looked as if they had been boiled ; and the colour which had come out of their swollen and pulpy bindings

had run down the saturated embroideries in long streaks, showing where a red book had stood, where a blue or green one, etc. Fortunately, a good cleaning and washing restored most things to a tidy, if not perfectly fresh appearance; but those poor books never recovered.

In a few days—incredibly few—the effects of a good rain are seen in the appearance of the *veldt*, which rapidly loses its dry, burnt-up look. But, even before the perennial bush has had time to recover its succulence and verdure, all the spaces between its isolated tufts are covered with the softest and most delicate-looking vegetation, which, as if by magic, has sprung suddenly into existence. All these plants, which are of many different kinds, and some of which possess very minute and pretty flowers, are indiscriminately called by the Dutch *opslaag* (“that which comes up”); and if you happen at the time of their appearance to have a troop of infant ostriches, there is no better food for the little creatures than this tender, bright-green foliage. They are but short-lived little plants; the hot sun soon drying them up.

If the Cape Colony only possessed mountains high enough to give an abundant rainfall, what a gloriously fertile country it would be! Without droughts, what a splendid possession our farm would be to us! Often, when the coveted clouds have passed so close that it seemed as if they must be just about to break over the farm, T——, remembering how the firing of the great guns at Woolwich sometimes brings down the rain, has thought it might be a good plan to send up a

fire-balloon with a charge of dynamite, and, catching the rain on our land, prevent it from going off so disappointingly elsewhere.

The short Cape winter, corresponding in duration to the English summer, is never severe. Cold winds blow from the direction of Graaff-Reinet on the not very frequent occasions when the higher mountains round that little town are for a short time topped with snow. In June and July the evenings and early mornings are decidedly cold. There is sometimes a little frost at night, and fires are pleasant; but in the middle of the day there is always warm, bright sunshine. Altogether, our winter under the Southern Cross has nothing cheerless or depressing about it; and those to whom the heat of the long summer has been a little trying, find the change most bracing and invigorating.

For farm life in the Karroo much the same kind of clothing is required as in England; everything must of course be of good strong material, and black or very dark colours are, in that dustiest of lands, to be avoided. Ladies' washing dresses should not be too delicate, nor should they be such as to require elaborate getting up; for of all the numerous things which on our isolated farms have to be done—either well, badly, or indifferently—at home, the laundry department is the very furthest from being our *forte*. The clothes become so discoloured from being continually washed in the yellow water of the dams; and the Kaffir women—if they profess to starch and iron at all—do it so

badly, that the things are often unwearable. As for myself, I was fortunate in possessing for everyday wear strong cotton dresses of Egyptian manufacture; which required neither starching nor ironing, and, after being washed, and dried in the sun, were ready to be put on at once. For driving, and especially for the long journeys of several days, which sometimes have to be taken in Cape carts or spiders, a light dust-cloak is indispensable. Boots and shoes, more than anything else, need to be strong, and for gentlemen who live the active outdoor life of the farms, there is nothing so serviceable as the country-made *veldtschoon*.

CHAPTER VI.

OSTRICHES.

An unwilling ride—First sight of an ostrich farm—Ridiculous mistakes about ostriches—Decreased value of birds and feathers—Chicks—Plumage of ostriches—A frightened ostrich—The plucking-box—Sorting feathers—Voice of the ostrich—Savage birds—"Not afraid of a dicky-bird!"—Quelling an ostrich—Birds killed by men in self-defence—Nests—An undutiful hen—Darby and Joan—A disconsolate widower—A hen-pecked husband—Too much zeal—Jackie—Cooling the eggs—The white-necked crow—Poisoning jackals—Ostrich eggs in the kitchen—A quaint old writer on ostriches—A suppliant bird—Nest destroyed by enraged ostrich—An old bachelor.

A FEW years before my marriage, having, as usual, fled the terrors of the English winter, I was with a friend in Egypt. And one morning this friend and I stood in the court of the Hôtel du Nil in Cairo; preparing to mount donkeys and start on a photographing expedition to Heliopolis (the "On" of the Scriptures), and Matariyeh, one of the supposed resting-places of the Holy Family on their flight into Egypt. The fussy, bustling little German manager of the hotel, with his usual paternal care for his guests, was commending us, in a long and voluble Arabic speech, to the special care and attention of the donkey-boys; with numerous minute instruc-

tions, all unintelligible to us, as to our route, etc. Then, just as we had mounted, he turned to us and said, "I have told them to show you something more on the way back, something *very interesting*." "What is it?" we were about to ask; but before we could get the words out, the ubiquitous little man had hustled off to other business; and we ourselves were flying at a headlong pace down the narrow Arab street, closely pursued by our impetuous donkey-boys; who, anxious to make an imposing start, urged on our animals, not only with savage yells and blows, but also with frequent and cruel digs from the sharp points of our camera's tripod stand.

Even after we had left the town far behind us, and our tyrants, for lack of an admiring crowd before whom to exhibit us, allowed us to settle down into a peaceful trot, it was quite useless to look to them for any information concerning this promised interesting sight; for our few words of Algerian Arabic did not avail in Egypt; and as for the European vocabulary of the donkey-boys, it was, as usual, strictly limited to an accurate knowledge of all the bad words in English, French and German. N.B.—A donkey-boy is never promoted to the dignity of being called a *donkey-man*, but, however old and grey he may have grown in the service, always retains the juvenile appellation.

On arriving at Heliopolis, our ungratified curiosity was soon forgotten in the interest of seeing that venerable obelisk which once, in all probability, looked down on the wedding procession of Joseph and the daughter