

of "Potipherah, priest of On;" and the sun gave us some good pictures of that sole remaining relic of the city where he himself was formerly worshipped. We spent a long morning at Heliopolis and Matariyeh; and it was not until we had proceeded some distance along the dusty road leading back to Cairo, that we suddenly recollected there was yet one more sight on our programme. The sun was blazing down fiercely on us; we were very tired; longing visions of the Hôtel du Nil luncheon, the hour for which had already come, filled our minds; and most devoutly did we hope the donkey-boys might forget they had something more to show us, and—possibly being hungry themselves—take us straight home. But no! suddenly our reluctant donkeys were abruptly turned from the homeward course on which they were trotting so merrily; and by main force pushed into a particularly uninviting path branching off at right angles from the road. We made one desperate effort to turn them back; but our tormentors flew to their heads, and, dragging, pushing, almost lifting them along, applied the tripod's spikes with fresh energy. In vain did we expostulate; explaining piteously, with all the powers of pantomime at our command, that we were tired and hungry, and wanted to go back to the hotel; that we would come and see this interesting sight, whatever it was, tomorrow, *bookra*—that favourite word of the procrastinating Orientals, which, like the *mañana* of the Spaniards, soon becomes hatefully familiar from constant hearing, and which is second only to the terrible

baksheesh! The relentless donkey-boys, beyond chuckling over our disappointment, took no notice whatever of our appeals; and on we had to go at a rapid gallop, stirring up dense clouds of the blinding, choking, evil-smelling Egyptian dust; and realizing, as did Mark Twain when ascending the Pyramid, how powerless one is in the hands of Arabs, who surely, with such iron wills, ought to be good mesmerists. Resigning ourselves at last to our fate with the patience of despair, we tried, though with but languid interest, to find out what we were going to see; but for a long time could get nothing intelligible from the donkey-boys, who only enjoyed our mystification. At last one of them, struck by a bright idea, pointed to J——'s hat, in which was an ostrich-feather; and we guessed at once that the Khedive's ostrich farm, which we knew was somewhere in the neighbourhood of Cairo, was the object of our unwilling ride. Here was another disappointment! Not even a ruined mosque, picturesque Arab house, or other possible subject for the camera, to reward us for our fatigue and discomfort; nothing but dry, barren-looking land, ugly modern European buildings, and ungainly birds! We walked hurriedly, and with great indifference, past the rows of camps, each with its pair of breeding-birds; felt little regret on being denied entrance to the incubator-rooms, which, happening to contain young chicks, were closed to the public; and rejoiced exceedingly when, our task done, and our tyrants appeased by our complete subjugation, we were at last on our way back to Cairo.

Thus, in weariness and indifference, I viewed an ostrich farm for the first time. Could I but have had one vision of the happy home, situated among just such surroundings, which awaited me in the future, with what different eyes would I have looked on all the minutest details of a daily life destined one day to be mine! How eagerly would I have bribed the custodian of the incubators for just one peep at the little rough-coated baby ostriches, if I had known what numbers of these comical wee things were in future to be my carefully-tended nurslings! And when T——, anxious to compare notes, sometimes asks me how this or that was managed on the Khedive's farm, and I am unable to give accurate information, I still regret that lost opportunity; and blush at the remembrance of the base longing for luncheon, to which, I fear, the want of observation was chiefly due.

It is rather surprising to find how little is known in England about ostrich-farming. Any information on the subject seems quite new to the hearers; and the strangest questions are sometimes asked—as, for instance, whether ostriches fly; whether they bite; whether we ever ride or drive them, etc. It is always taken for granted that a vicious bird administers his kick backwards, like a horse; and there seems still to be a very general belief in those old popular errors of which the natural history of these creatures possesses more than the average share. If you look at the picture of an ostrich, you will be sure to find, in nine cases out of ten, that the drawing is ludicrously incorrect; the bird

being almost invariably represented with three toes instead of two ; and with a tail consisting of a large and magnificent bunch of *wing*-feathers, the finest and longest of "prime whites." Farmers would only be too thankful if their birds *had* such tails, instead of the short, stiff, scrubby tuft of inferior feathers which in reality forms the caudal appendage.

Each of my friends and relatives, when first told, at the time of our engagement, that T—— was "an ostrich-farmer," received the intelligence with an amused smile ; and the clergyman at whose church we were married seemed quite taken aback on obtaining so novel and unexpected an answer to his question, during the vestry formalities, as to T——'s vocation in life. He hesitated, pen in hand, for some time ; made T—— repeat and explain the puzzling word ; and at last only with evident reluctance inscribed it in the church books.

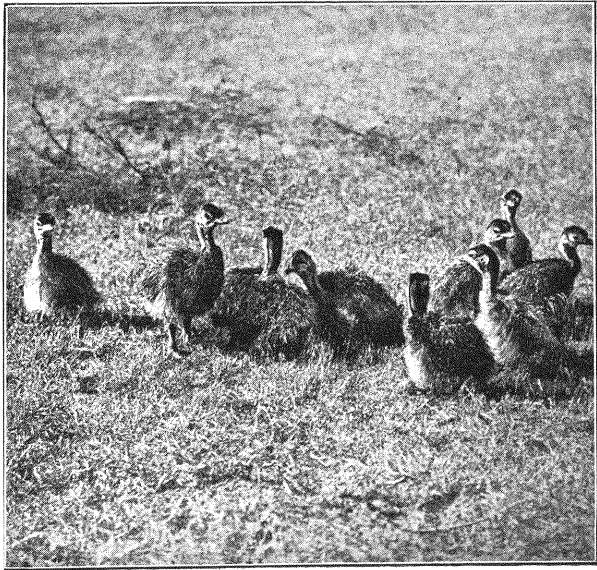
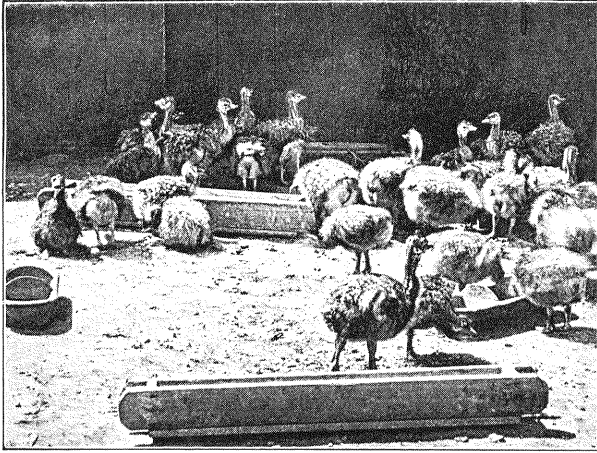
In the early days of ostrich-farming splendid fortunes were made. Then, feathers were worth £100 per lb., the plumes of one bird at a single plucking realizing on an average £25. For a good pair of breeding-birds £400, or even £500, was no uncommon price ; and little chicks, only just out of the egg, were worth £10 each. Indeed, the unhatched eggs have sometimes been valued at the same amount. But, since the supply has become so much greater than the demand, things are sadly changed for the farmers ; our best pair of ostriches would not now sell for more than £12, and experience has taught us to look for no higher sum than thirty shillings for the feathers of the handsomest

bird at one plucking. At the same time, if a lady wishes to buy a good feather in London or Paris, she has to pay nearly the same price as in former times.*

There are not many young animals prettier than a little ostrich-chick during the first few weeks of life. It has such a sweet, innocent baby-face, such large eyes, and such a plump, round little body. All its movements are comical, and there is an air of conceit and independence about the tiny creature which is most amusing. Instead of feathers, it has a little rough coat which seems all made up of narrow strips of material, of as many different shades of brown and grey as there are in a tailor's pattern-book, mixed with shreds of black; while the head and neck are apparently covered with the softest plush, striped and coloured just like a tiger's skin on a small scale. On the whole, the little fellow, on his first appearance in the world, is not unlike a hedgehog on two legs, with a long neck.

One would like these delightful little creatures to remain babies much longer than they do; but they grow quickly, and with their growth they soon lose all their prettiness and roundness; their bodies become angular and ill-proportioned, a crop of coarse, wiry feathers sprouts from the parti-coloured strips which formed their baby-clothes, and they enter on an ugly "hobbledehoy" stage, in which they remain for two or three years.

* Although, since these pages were written, ostriches have somewhat increased in value it cannot, of course, be expected that they will ever again command the prices of former days.



OSTRICH-CHICKS.

A young ostrich's rough, bristly, untidy-looking "chicken-feathers" are plucked for the first time when he is nine months old; they are stiff and narrow, with very pointed tips, and their ugly appearance gives no promise of future beauty. They do not look as if they could be used for anything but making feather brooms. In the second year they are rather more like what ostrich-feathers ought to be, though still very narrow and pointed; and not until their wearer is plucked for the third time have they attained their full width and softness.

During the first two years the sexes cannot be distinguished, the plumage of all being of a dingy drab mixed with black; the latter hue then begins to predominate more and more in the male bird with each successive moulting, until at length no drab feathers are left. At five years the bird has attained maturity; the plumage of the male is then of a beautiful glossy black, and that of the female of a soft grey, both having white wings and tails. In each wing there are twenty-four long white feathers, which, when the wing is spread out, hang gracefully round the bird like a lovely deep fringe—just as I have sometimes in Brazilian forests, seen fringes of large and delicate fern-fronds hanging, high overhead, from the branches of some giant tree.

The ostrich's body is literally "a bag of bones;" and the enormously-developed thighs, which are the only fleshy part of the bird, are quite bare, their coarse skin being of a peculiarly ugly blue-grey colour. The little

flat head, much too small for the huge body, is also bald, with the exception of a few stiff bristles and scanty tufts of down; such as also redeem the neck from absolute bareness. During the breeding season the bill of the male bird, and the large scales on the fore part of his legs, assume a beautiful deep rose-colour, looking just as if they were made of the finest pink coral; in some cases the skin of the head and neck also becomes red at that time.

The North African or Barbary ostriches, several of which are to be seen at the Jardin d'Essai, in Algiers, have bright red thighs, head, and neck, and are altogether far handsomer than the Cape birds; their feathers also, being larger, softer, and possessing longer filaments, command much higher prices than those of their southern brethren.

Altogether, ostriches are queer-looking creatures; they are so awkward, so out of proportion, and everything about them, with the exception of their plumage and their big, soft, dark eyes, is so quaintly ugly as to suggest the idea that they have only by some mistake survived the Deluge, and that they would be more in their right place embedded in the fossiliferous strata of the earth than running about on its surface. And how they *do* run! Only startle an ostrich; and very little is sufficient to do this, his nerves being of the feeblest, and "his heart in his mouth" at even the smallest or most imaginary danger. What a jump he gives, and what a swerve to one side! Surely it must have dislocated some of his joints. But no; off he goes,

flinging out his clumsy legs, and twisting himself about as he runs, till you almost expect to see him come to pieces, or, at any rate, fling off a leg, as a lobster casts a claw, or a frightened lizard parts from its tail. An ostrich's joints seem to be all loose, like those of a lay-figure when not properly tightened up. He rapidly disappears from view; and the last you see of him he is, as Mark Twain has it, "still running"—apparently with no intention of stopping till he has reached the very centre of Africa. But his mad scamper will most probably end a few miles off, with a tumble into a wire fence, and a broken leg.

Sometimes, however, ostriches, when they take fright, run so long and get so far away that their owner never recovers them. One we heard of, to whose tail a mischievous boy had tied a newspaper, went off at railway speed, and no tidings of it were ever received. Once, when T—— was collecting his birds for plucking, one of them was unaccountably seized with a sudden panic, and bolted; and though T—— mounted at once and rode after it, he neither saw nor heard of it again.

On a large farm, when plucking is contemplated, it is anything but an easy matter to collect the birds—the gathering together of ours was generally a work of three days. Men have to be sent out in all directions to drive the birds up, by twos and threes, from the far-off spots to which they have wandered; little troops are gradually brought together, and collected, first in a large enclosure, then in a small one,

the plucking-kraal, in which they are crowded together so closely, that the most savage bird has no room to make himself disagreeable.

Besides the gate through which the ostriches are driven into the kraal, there is an outlet at the opposite end, through the "plucking-box." This latter is a most useful invention, saving much time and trouble. It is a very solid wooden box, in which, though there is just room for an ostrich to stand, he cannot possibly turn round; nor can he kick, the sides of the box being too high. At each end there is a stout door; one opening inside, the other outside the kraal. Each bird in succession is dragged up to the first door, and, after more or less of a scuffle, is pushed in and the door slammed behind him. Then the two operators, standing one on each side of the box, have him completely in their power; and with a few rapid snips of their shears his splendid wings are soon denuded of their long white plumes. These, to prevent their tips from being spoilt, are always cut before the quills are ripe. The stumps of the latter are allowed to remain some two or three months longer, until they are so ripe that they can be pulled out—generally by the teeth of the Kaffirs—without hurting the bird. It is necessary to pull them; the feathers, which by their weight would have caused the stumps to fall out naturally at the right time, being gone. Some farmers, anxious to hurry on the next crop of feathers, are cruel enough to draw the stumps before they are ripe; but nature, as usual, resents the interference with her laws, and

the feathers of birds which have been thus treated soon deteriorate. It is best to pluck only once a year. The tails, and the glossy black feathers on the bodies of the birds, having small quills, are not cut, but pulled out; this, everyone says, does not hurt the birds, but there is an unpleasant tearing sound about the operation, and I think it must make their eyes water.

After a plucking would come several very busy days of sorting and tying up the feathers in readiness for the market; for T——, whenever he could spare the time, preferred doing this work himself to employing the professional sorters in Port Elizabeth, who charge exorbitantly. During these few days everything had to give way to feathers, large piled-up masses of which crowded the rooms, till we seemed to be over head and ears in feathers. Feathers covered the floor and invaded every article of furniture, especially monopolizing the dining-table; and when, at all sorts of irregular hours, we grudgingly allowed ourselves time for rough, impromptu meals of cold or tinned meat, we picnicked among feathers. It was useless to attempt keeping the rooms either tidy or clean while sorting was going on; and we resigned ourselves to living for those two or three days in a state at which owners of neat English homes would shudder—indeed, those only who have seen the process of sorting can form any idea of the untidiness, the dust, the fluffs, and the sneezing. But they were pleasant days; and many an interesting book will always be associated in our minds with the sorting of ostrich-feathers; for, while T—— arranged prime

whites, blacks, tails, feminas, chicken-feathers, etc., according to length, colour, and quality, I enlivened the monotony of his work by reading aloud.

Sometimes the white feathers would be dirty—for there is nothing an ostrich likes better than sitting down to cool himself in the muddiest dam he can find—then it was necessary to wash them, dip them into strong raw starch, and shake them in the hot sun, beating two bundles of them together till quite dry. The starch makes them look very pretty and fluffy; and young ladies in England who economically wash their own feathers would find it a great improvement. Ostrich-feathers are quite tabooed by ladies in South Africa; they are too common, every Kaffir or Hottentot wearing one in his dirty, battered hat.

If an ostrich-feather is held upright, its beautiful form—graceful as the frond-like branch of the coconut palm, which it somewhat resembles—is at once seen to be perfectly even and equal on both sides, its stem dividing it exactly in the centre; whereas the stems of other feathers are all more or less on one side. The ancient Egyptians, observant of this—as of everything in nature—chose the ostrich-feather as the sacred emblem of truth and justice, setting it upon the head of Thmei, goddess of truth.

After a good rain, ostriches soon begin to make nests; the males become very savage, and their note of defiance—*brooming*, as it is called by the Dutch—is heard in all directions. The bird inflates his neck in a cobra-like fashion, and gives utterance to three deep

roars ; the two first short and *staccato*, the third very prolonged. Lion-hunters all agree in asserting that the roar of the king of beasts and that of the most foolish of birds are identical in sound ; with this difference only, that the latter, when near, resembles the former very far away. T——, when hunting in the interior, has often been deceived by the sound—expecting a lion, and finding only an ostrich.

When the birds are savage—*quei*, as the Dutch call it—they become very aggressive, and it is impossible to walk about the camps unless armed with a weapon of defence called a “tackey.” This is simply a long and stout branch of mimosa, with the thorns all left on at the end. It seems but a feeble protection against a foe who, with one stroke of his immensely powerful leg, can easily kill a man ; the kick, no less violent than that of a horse, being rendered infinitely more dangerous by the formidable claw with which the foot is armed. Those, however, who are well practised in the use of the tackey are able, with the coolness of Spanish bull-fighters, to stand and await the charge of the terrible assailant. They allow him to come to what, to the inexperienced eye, seem unpleasantly close quarters ; then, just as he prepares to strike, the tackey is boldly thrust into his face. The thorns oblige him to close his eyes, and he can only run blindly forward ; the bearer of the tackey springing on one side, and gaining time to proceed some distance on his way, before the silly bird has recovered from his bewilderment and makes a fresh charge, when the weapon is again presented.

Fortunately, you are never assailed by more than one ostrich at a time ; for in the large camps of some two thousand acres each—in which the birds are not fenced off in pairs, but live almost in the freedom of wild creatures—each one has his own domain, separated from those of others by some imaginary boundary-line of his own, visible only to himself, but as clearly marked out as the beat of a London policeman. There, in company with one or perhaps two hens, he dwells monarch of all he surveys ; any other ostrich daring to invade his territory is at once attacked ; and the human intruder is closely followed, his tackey in constant requisition, until the feathered lord of the land has seen him safely off the premises. Immediately after thus speeding the parting guest, the most savage bird is quite harmless ; he dismisses you from his thoughts, and walks quietly back, feeding as he goes. And in the distance you see the head and long neck of his neighbour, whose kingdom you have now entered, and whose sharp eyes spied you out the instant your foot crossed his frontier. *He* now advances towards you with jerky, spasmodic movements, as if he were bowing you a welcome ; this, however, is far from his thoughts, and after sitting down once or twice to give you his challenge—whereby he hopes you will be intimidated—he trots up defiantly, and the tackey's services are again required. Thus, during a morning's walk through the camps, you may be escorted in succession by four or five vicious birds, all determined to have your life if possible, yet held completely in check by a few mimosa thorns.

When an ostrich challenges he sits down ; and, flapping each broad wing alternately, inflates his neck, and throws his head back, rolling it from side to side, and with each roll striking the back of his head against his bony body with so sharp and resounding a blow that a severe headache seems likely to be the result.

A person on horseback is even more obnoxious to the ostriches than a pedestrian ; and a ride through the camps enables one to realize how true to life is the description, in the Book of Job, of a vicious bird : “ What time she lifteth up herself on high, she scorneth the horse and his rider.” The creature, when preparing for an attack, draws itself up, stands on tiptoe, stretches its neck to the full extent, and really seems to gain several feet in height. And, indeed, it does its best to knock you off your horse. T—— once saw a man riding as desperately as Tam O’Shanter, with an ostrich in close pursuit. It kept up with him, helping his horse along with an occasional well-placed kick ; while the unhappy rider, hoping to intimidate his assailant, was again and again firing off his revolver into the air, but without effect.

As the new arrival in a country subject to earthquakes begins by thinking very lightly of these disturbances, but finds his appreciation of their importance increase with every successive shock ; so the new chum in South Africa, inclined at first to look with contempt on the precautions taken against savage ostriches, learns in time to have a proper respect for the foolish, innocent-looking creatures, whose soft, dark-brown

eyes look at him so mildly (when he is on the right side of the fence) that he finds it impossible to believe the stories told him of their wickedness, and nothing but a closer acquaintance can undeceive him. On one of the farms a sturdy new-comer, six feet in height, starting for an early morning walk, was cautioned against going into a certain camp where the ostriches were dangerous. He laughed at his friends' advice, told them he was "not afraid of a dicky-bird!" and—disdaining the proffered tackey—started off straight-way in the forbidden direction. He did not return home to dinner; a search was made for him; and eventually he was found, perched up on a high ironstone boulder; just out of reach of a large ostrich, which was doing sentry, walking up and down, and keeping a vicious eye on him. There he had sat for hours, nearly roasted alive (ironstone boulders in the Karroo can get so hot in the sun that it blisters your hand to touch them); and there he would have had to sit till sundown, had not the timely appearance of his friends relieved him of the too-pressing attentions of the "dicky-bird."

Another gentleman had a theory that any creature, however savage, could be subdued—"quelled," as he said—by the human eye. One day he tried to quell one of his own ostriches; with the result that he was presently found by T— in a very pitiable predicament, lying flat on the ground; while the subject of his experiment jumped up and down on him, occasionally varying the treatment by sitting on him.

T— once bought an ostrich which had killed two men ; and which, although an unusually fine bird, was, on account of its evil reputation, sold to him for a very low price. Ostriches appear to have a strong aversion to all the negro race. They attack Kaffirs and Hottentots much more readily than they do their white masters ; and although—as has just been seen—they are very far from showing that amount of respect for the latter which is desirable, they seem—except during the breeding season—to stand in some sort of awe of a white man as compared with the “niggers,” for whom they have the deepest contempt.

They are uncertain, too, and take sudden and unaccountable dislikes. One poor Kaffir woman, coming up to work at the house, was attacked, inside the gate, by one of the tame old ostriches, which—looking out for scraps thrown from the kitchen, stealing the fowls' food, or now and then picking up and swallowing a delicious piece of soap left for an unguarded moment on the washing-machine—prowled about round the house, and of which no one had ever dreamed of being afraid. Her solitary and scanty skirt, torn from the top to the bottom, showed how narrow had been her escape ; and she looked livid under her dark skin, as she came in to ask me for needle and thread to repair the rent.

It has several times happened that one of our herds, in danger of his life, has been obliged, in self-defence, to kill a vicious ostrich ; and, the finest and most promising birds—naturally the most savage—being invariably the victims, the loss is always a serious one.

It is indeed no small trial, when, perhaps just as you are comfortably seated at the breakfast table, the black face of "April," "August," or "September"—fraught with bad news, and looking very frightened and ashamed—is suddenly thrust in at the door; and, with much rolling of white eyeballs, a tragic tale is told, in the most dismal of voices, and with many harrowing details, of how "Red Wing" or "White Neck" was *quei*, and attacked the narrator up in the big camp; with the sad consequence that you are now *minus* one of the best birds on the farm. But the poor fellow cannot be blamed or fined for defending his life; orders are given to pluck and bring down the unfortunate bird's feathers—the last he will ever yield—and somehow a dead bird's plumes *always* seem the most beautiful—

"And then to breakfast, with
What appetite you have."

Toto, although in general no coward, could never, after a severe kick he received on first coming to the farm, be brought to face a savage bird. Collies can, however, be made very useful in collecting and driving ostriches; and Mr. Evans, of Rietfontein, one of our neighbours, had several which were perfectly trained; working as well with the birds as their relatives in Scotland and Wales do with sheep.

A few of our birds were fenced off in breeding-camps; each pair having a run of about one hundred acres. One of these camps was directly opposite the house; and from the windows we could observe the regularity

with which the two birds, sitting alternately on the eggs, came on and off at their fixed times. The cock always takes his place upon the nest at sundown, and sits through the night—his dark plumage making him much less conspicuous than the light-coloured hen; with his superior strength and courage, too, he is a better defender of the nest against midnight marauders. At nine in the morning, with unfailing punctuality, the hen comes to relieve him, and take up her position for the day. At the end of the six weeks of sitting, both birds, faithfully as the task has been shared between them, are in a very enfeebled state, and miserably poor and thin.

One undutiful hen—having apparently imbibed advanced notions—absolutely refused to sit at all; and the poor husband, determined not to be disappointed of his little family, did all the work himself; sitting bravely and patiently day and night, though nearly dead with exhaustion, till the chicks were hatched out. The next time this pair of birds had a nest, the cock's mind was firmly made up that he would stand no more nonsense. He fought the hen; giving her so severe a thrashing that she was all but killed—and this Petruchio-like treatment had the desired effect, for the wife never again rebelled, but sat submissively.

Very different from this couple were the Darby and Joan in the camp opposite our windows. One unlucky morning the hen, frightened by a Kaffir's dog, ran into the wire fence, and was so terribly injured that she had to be killed. For two years poor Darby was a dis-

consolate widower, and all attempts to find him a satisfactory second wife were unavailing; several hens, which, soon after his loss, were in succession placed in his camp, being only rescued in time, and at the tackey's point, from being kicked to death. The bare idea of there being anything pathetic about an ostrich seems absurd—and indeed this is the only instance I have known of anything of the kind—but it was truly pitiful to watch this poor bird, as, day after day, and nearly all day long, he wandered up and down, up and down, the length of his camp, in the hard, beaten track worn by his restless feet along the side of the fence.

When his time of mourning at length came to an end, and poor Joan's long-vacant place was filled, we at first rejoiced. But we soon doubted whether, after all, he had not been happier as a widower. For the new wife, a magnificent hen, considerably above the average size, had him in complete subjection; his spirit seemed quite broken, probably with long fretting, and he made no attempt to hold his own, but was for the rest of his days the most hen-pecked—or ought I to say *hen-kicked?*—of husbands. Some amount of stratagem was even necessary on my part, to ensure that he had enough to eat (this pair of birds, being near the house, were under my special care, and during droughts were daily fed by me); for every time he came near the food, the greedy hen would persistently drive him away, standing on tiptoe and hissing viciously at him—and I soon saw that it was useless to attempt feeding them together. But the poor, ill-used old bird and I were

good friends, and quite understood one another; and at all sorts of odd times—watching for those golden opportunities when his tyrant was safely out of sight at the further end of the camp—he would come down to the fence and look out for me, and I would bring him a good feed of mealies.

As a father, Darby was no less devoted than he had formerly been as a husband; and to please him we allowed his chicks to remain with him, and set the whole family free to roam where they liked about the *veldt*; breaking through the usual rule, which is to take the little birds from the parents when two or three days old, and herd them near the house. For they never become as tame when brought up by the old ones as when accustomed from the first to human society. These poor little birds, I am sorry to say, did not flourish under parental guardianship; indeed, it was not long before they were all dead. For their well-meaning, but over-zealous father, apparently thinking no *veldt* good enough for them, kept them continually on the move; and, in his perpetual search for “fresh woods and pastures new,” took them such long distances that he literally walked them as well as himself to death. Not many days after the last chick’s departure, Darby’s own poor body, worn to a skeleton by these restless wanderings, following on six weeks of incubation, was found on the *veldt*.

When, as sometimes happens, one solitary chick is reared at the house, it becomes absurdly and often inconveniently tame. A friend of ours, on returning

to his farm at the end of a severe thunderstorm, found that an ostrich's nest had been washed away. Some of the eggs were rescued from the water, and—being of course deserted by the parents—were placed in an incubator, where, contrary to all expectations, one chick came out. This bird, Jackie, became the tamest and most audacious of pets; and, like many another spoilt only child, was often a terrible nuisance. All the little niggers about the place had a lively dread of him; and he requisitioned their food in the boldest manner. As they sat on the ground at meals, with plates of boiled pumpkin and rice in their laps, he would come up, and, stretching his snake-like neck over their heads, or insinuating it under their arms, would coolly help himself to the contents of one plate after another. Occasionally he would make for the unhappy youngsters in so menacing a manner as to frighten them into dropping their plates altogether; then, while his victims ran away crying, he would squat on his heels among the *débris*, and regale his enormous appetite at leisure.

But one day retribution came. Being free of the kitchen—simply because no one could keep him out—he was not long in observing that the pumpkin and rice always came out of one particular pot; and, the idea suddenly occurring to him that he could do no better than go straight to the fountain-head for his favourite dish, he walked up, full of joyful anticipation, to the fire where this pot was bubbling. The cook—who, being mother to several of the ill-used children, did not love

Jackie—offered no friendly interference to save him from his fate ; and, plunging his bill into the pot, he greedily scooped up, and, with the lightning-like rapidity of ostriches, tossed down his throat, a large mouthful of boiling rice. Poor fellow ! the next moment he was dancing round the kitchen, writhing with agony, shaking his head nearly off, and twisting his neck as if bent on tying it in a knot. Finally he dashed wildly from the house ; the cook, avenged at last for all the dinners he had devoured, called after him as he stumbled out at the door, “Serve you right, Jackie !”—and away he fled across the *veldt*, till the last that was seen of him was a little cloud of white dust vanishing on the horizon. He returned a sadder and a wiser bird ; and it was long before he again ventured inside the kitchen.

When about a year old, Jackie was sold to a farmer who had long coveted him ; and who, no doubt, soon repented of his purchase. He was now sufficiently strong to give a good hard kick ; and, being a more daring freebooter than ever, and no respecter of persons, he would march up and attack any one he saw carrying food, or what he thought might be food ; endeavouring, by a well-aimed blow, to strike it out of their hands ; his evil design generally succeeding. At length his master, tired of hearing constant complaints of his conduct, and impatient of his perpetual intrusion indoors, tried putting him into a camp. There, however, he obstinately refused to remain. As soon as he was put in, he would squat down, laying his head

and neck on the ground ; then, making himself as flat as possible, he would "squirm" out, not without some difficulty, under the lowest wire of the fence. It was impossible to keep him in ; and he was left to his own devices, calmly regarded as a necessary evil, and allowed to be as great a nuisance as he liked.

But poor Jackie soon ceased from troubling—his end, as may well be imagined, being brought about by no other cause than his own moral obliquity. One day he wandered down to the river, where some Kaffir women were washing clothes ; their children, a group of little animated nude bronzes, playing near them. One little fellow, who was eating, was of course instantly spied out by the covetous Jackie ; who rushed to kick him, but in so doing tumbled down in the rocky bed of the river, and broke his own leg. The inevitable result followed, and Jackie, like all other broken-legged ostriches, had to be killed.

The hen ostrich lays every alternate day ; and if, for each egg laid, one is taken from the nest, she will continue laying until she has produced from twenty to thirty. One, which belonged to *f*—, laid sixty eggs without intermission. If no eggs are taken away, the hen leaves off laying as soon as she has from fifteen to twenty ; the latter being the greatest number that can be satisfactorily covered by the birds. The surplus eggs are placed in incubators. It is best not to give much artificial food to the birds while sitting ; as, if overfed, they become restless, and are liable to desert the nest.

Every morning and evening the nest, or rather the

shallow indentation in the sandy ground which forms this simplest of all "homes without hands," is left uncovered for a quarter of an hour, to allow the eggs to cool. The sight of nests thus apparently deserted has probably given rise to the erroneous idea that the ostrich leaves her eggs to hatch in the sun. The passage in the book of Job: "Which leaveth her eggs in the earth, and warmeth them in the dust," is also generally supposed to point to the same conclusion, though in reality there can be no doubt that the latter part of the sentence simply applies to the warming of the eggs by the heat of the bird's body as she sits over them in her dusty nest. Stupid though she is, she has more sense than to believe in the possibility of the sun hatching her eggs; she is indeed quite aware of the fact that, if allowed to blaze down on them with untempered heat, even during the short time she is off the nest, it would be injurious to them; and therefore, on a hot morning, she does not leave them without first placing on the top of each a good pinch of sand. This she does in order that the germ—which, whatever side of the egg is uppermost, always rises to the highest point—may be shaded and protected. Having thus set her nest in order, she walks off, to fortify herself with a good meal for the duties of the day.

And now comes the white-necked crow's chance; for which, ever since at earliest dawn he drew out his artful old head from under his wing, he has been patiently waiting. An ostrich-egg is to him the daintiest of all delicacies; but, nature not having be-

stowed on him a bill strong enough to break its hard shell, he is only able, by means of an ingenious device, to regale on the interior. He carefully watches till the parent's back is turned, and she is a good distance from the nest; then, flying up into the air, he drops a stone from a great height with a most accurate aim, and breaks an egg. He makes good use of his quarter of an hour; and he, no less than the hen ostrich, has had an ample meal by the time the latter returns to the nest. Perhaps to-morrow she will not wander so far away.

This crow, inveterate egg-stealer though he is, has a most respectable and clerical appearance; and with his neat suit of black and his little white tie he looks indeed "unco guid." The Boers—possibly on account of this pious exterior—have a legend to the effect that these birds are the "ravens" which fed Elijah. They say that after the birds had carried the meat, a little of the fat remained on their necks; in commemoration of which their descendants have this one conspicuous white patch on their otherwise black plumage. Numbers of tortoise-shells, some of immense size, are found about the *veldt*; which have been broken in the same manner as the ostrich-eggs, and their inmates devoured, by these crows; who thus reverse the process by which, some twenty-three centuries ago, the eagle, dropping his tortoise on what seemed to him a convenient stone for his purpose, smashed the bald head of poor Æschylus.

Among the denizens of the *veldt* the crows, unfortunately, are not the only appreciators of ostrich-eggs:

and our worst enemies are the jackals. In lonely, far-off camps they plunder many promising nests; rolling the eggs away with their paws, sometimes to great distances. Occasionally, too, little chicks fall victims. We waged deadly war against the depredators; making liberal use of strychnine pills to "take us the foxes, the little foxes," which, finding no vines to spoil in the Karroo, were instead spoilers of ostrich nests. On a large vine-farm in the Atlas Mountains, where, after leaving the Cape, we spent some months, we were able to note the accuracy of this passage of Scripture—in which, I am told, the word rendered "foxes" ought in reality to have been translated "jackals." These animals did indeed work terrible havoc among the vines, eating incredible numbers of grapes; and T— did much good by his introduction among them of the South African plan of poisoning, to which many succumbed. The pills, enclosed in pieces of fat, are dropped about the *veldt*; generally by a man on horseback, towing behind him a piece of very "high" meat, which, fastened by a *riem* (narrow strip of hide) to the horse's tail, drags along the ground. By-and-by the jackals, attracted by the odour of meat, come out; and, following along the route taken by the poisoner, find and eat the tempting pieces of fat. In the morning a good number are sure to be found dead; the survivors, apparently concluding that there is something very wrong about the place, take themselves off for a time to another neighbourhood; and the comparative silence which reigns at night is a pleasant change after the chorus of their querulous, uncanny voices.

The partiality of jackals and crows for ostrich-eggs, expensive though it is to us, reflects credit on their taste; for the eggs are certainly delicious. Those which, being useless for setting, found their way into my kitchen, were always most acceptable; and I have never had lighter cakes, nicer omelettes, custards, etc., than those made from them. And then they go so far! Two large square biscuit tins can be filled to overflowing with a noble batch of sponge finger biscuits, for which only one egg has been used. In spite of its large size — equalling twenty-four fowls' eggs — an ostrich-egg has no coarse flavour. It takes an hour to boil one hard; in which state it is a splendid article of food for baby ostriches.

Ostrich-eggs were much prized by the ancient Egyptians; and Gardiner Wilkinson tells us that they “were required for some ornamental or religious use, as with the modern Copts; and, with the plumes, formed part of the tribute imposed by the Egyptians on conquered countries.”

Not long ago, T—— and I were much amused by the discovery, among copious notes in an old Bible dated 1770, of the following passage from a quaint old writer: “The Ostrich, which the *Arabians* call *Naama*, is a wild Bird of the Shape of a Goose, but much bigger than that; it is very high upon its Legs, and has a Neck of more than four or five Spans long: The Body is very gross, and in its Wings and Tail it has large Feathers black and white (like those of the Stork) and some grey; it cannot fly, but it runs very fast; in

which it is much assisted by the Motion of its Wings and Tail: And when it runs, it wounds itself with the Spurs which it has on its Legs. It is bred in the dry Desarts, where there is no Water, and lays ten or twelve Eggs together in the Sand, some as large as a great Bowl, and some less. They say this Bird hath so little Memory that as soon as she hath made an End of laying her Eggs, she forgets the Place where she left them; so that when the Hen comes to a Place where there are Eggs, let them be her own or not, she sets abroad upon them, and hatches them; and as soon as the Chickens are hatched, they immediately run about the Country to look for Meat; and they are so nimble, when they are little, before their Feathers grow, that 'tis impossible to overtake them."

One is inclined to think that the old author, Marmol, from whose "History of Africa" the above passage is quoted, cannot have written from any very accurate acquaintance with the Dark Continent; at any rate, it is not likely that he ever saw an ostrich, or he would have known that it possesses no spurs.

It is a strange fact that the most savage ostrich, if he comes up and finds you between himself and his nest, does not, as would naturally be supposed, rush to defend his eggs, and, if possible, kick you to death, but is instantly changed into the most abjectly submissive of creatures. "'Umble" as Uriah Heep, he squats at your feet; making a peculiar rattling noise with his wings, biting the ground, snapping his bill, closing his eyes, and looking the very embodiment of imbecility

as he meekly implores you to spare his eggs. This suppliant posture is, however, not to be trusted; and, if tackey-less, you had better remain at the nest until assistance—or night—comes, for if once the positions of yourself and bird are reversed, “Richard’s himself again.” He squats, no longer in servile entreaty, but in defiance; and his challenge is promptly followed by a charge. The hen ostrich, being destitute of a voice, has but one way of calling her chicks, which is by that same rattling and rustling of the wings.

In strong contrast to the usual anxiety of the paternal ostrich for his nest was one case of which we heard. In a breeding-camp, containing a cock and two hens, troublesome complications had arisen. One hen persisted in sitting, while the other was as resolutely bent on laying; and, the struggles of the two rivals for the possession of the nest being extremely perilous to the eggs, the Boer to whom the trio belonged removed the laying hen from the enclosure. Now came the cock’s turn to be excited. The departed hen was evidently his favourite wife; and, disconsolate at her loss, he ran restlessly about the camp for some time, *brooming* repeatedly; then, as if struck by some sudden impulse—probably of spite against his master—he ran to the nest, on which he deliberately jumped till he had broken every egg.

One of our birds was a morose old bachelor. Whether he had remained single from choice, or whether his surly temper had made him so unpopular that no hen would cast in her lot with him, we knew

not ; but there he was, living in solitary grandeur on the lower slope of our big mountain. Every time we took a certain favourite walk, a portion of which he had marked out as his beat, he would dispute the right of way with us ; resenting the invasion of his solitude with more fuss than was ever made by the father of the largest family of chicks. Sometimes he would lie in ambush, and rush out at us from unexpected places, with all the artfulness of a rogue elephant. Fortunately, his domain being on the mountain-side, there was plenty of high bush, behind which it was not difficult to dodge him.

CHAPTER VII.

OSTRICHES (*continued*).

Vagaries of an incubator—Hatching the chicks—A bad egg—Human foster-mothers—Chicks difficult to rear—"Yellow-liver"—Cruel boys—Chicks herded by hen ostrich—Visit to Boer's house—A carriage full of ostriches—"The melancholy Jaques"—Ostriches at sea—A stampede—Runaway birds—Branding—Stupidity of ostriches—Accidents—Waltzing and fighting—Ostrich soup—An expensive quince—A feathered Tantalus—Strange things swallowed by ostriches—A court-martial—The ostrich, or the diamond?—A visit to the Zoo.

AN incubator, considerably increasing as it does the number of chicks that can be hatched, is of course of the greatest value on a farm. We had one, capable of holding sixty eggs; and a "finisher," in which thirty more could be placed. Two paraffin lamps, kept constantly burning, heated the large tank of the incubator; and a thermometer, inserted in the water, had to be carefully watched in order that the temperature of the latter might neither exceed nor fall below 103°. Beneath the tank—so that the eggs, as in nature, might be heated from above—were four drawers, each with compartments for fifteen eggs. I was appointed manager of the incubator; and morning and evening—

following the example of the hen ostrich—I gave the eggs their quarter of an hour's cooling by allowing the drawers to stand open; also, as she does, I carefully turned each egg.

The regulation of the temperature was a matter of some anxiety, and enabled me—especially on first undertaking the work—to form a very good idea of the responsibilities of a vestal tending the sacred fire. Some mischievous imp seemed to be perpetually at work causing that thermometer to indulge in the wildest vagaries. Perhaps just one degree of the required temperature would be wanting; and though, for the best part of the morning, I had been coming anxiously every ten minutes or so to look at the thermometer, it refused, with all the perversity of “a watched pot,” to rise above 102°. Then at last, a little off my guard, and absorbed in one of the numerous other home duties, I might possibly forget the incubator's existence for a little while; and, on suddenly remembering and running to it, find that the treacherous mercury had jumped up two or three degrees. Then the drawers would have to be thrown open, and the contents of several jugs of cold water wildly dashed in through the opening at the top of the incubator—and when at last, by still trembling hands, the thermometer was readjusted in the said opening, it would probably register as many degrees *below* as it had just been above 103°. T—— was away for three weeks during the time the incubator was in full work; and so great was the anxiety which haunted me, lest on

his return I should present him with some sixty cooked birds, that I set an alarum every night for two o'clock, to assure myself that the temperature was playing me no tricks.

When within about eight or ten days of hatching, the chick can be felt moving about in the egg; and later on, when nearly ready to come out, he is heard squeaking, and tapping with his bill against the shell. Then at last, one day, when you come to turn the eggs in the finisher, where they are placed for the last fortnight, you find one with a hole in it—generally a three-cornered piece is knocked clean out—and in the opening a pinkish, soft-looking bill is making impatient movements, and a bright eye is peeping at you as knowingly as though already well acquainted with all the ways of a world on which its owner has yet to enter. An ostrich, by the way, seems far more intelligent as a baby than he ever is in after life.

A strong chick is generally able to free himself, by his own unaided efforts, from the shell; but if after a certain number of hours he is not out, it becomes necessary to assist him. This, however, requires extreme gentleness and caution, as there is great risk of inflicting injury; and, although I have helped many young ostriches into the world—losing but one patient in all my practice—I always preferred leaving that delicate work to nature. And yet there is something so tempting about these little half-opened parcels; one always longs to undo them and have a full view of the contents. The moment the little fellow is out of the

egg, he seems to swell out, and looks so large that you wonder how he can possibly have been packed away in such a small space ; and I am quite sure that the task of replacing him in the shell would as far surpass the powers of "all the king's horses and all the king's men," as did the reintegration of Humpty Dumpty.

Occasionally—and even at this time and distance it is hardly to be recalled without a shudder—the incubator would contain a bad egg. Imagine all the horrors of a bad hen's egg, multiplied by twenty-four ! The whole drawer would be so pervaded by the odour that it was difficult for some time to discover the actual offender ; and when at last it revealed itself by an uncanny moisture exuding through the shell, an amount of courage and caution was required for its removal and safe depositing outside, which suggested very flattering comparisons of one's own conduct with that of a soldier winning the V.C. by carrying away a live shell.

An incautious friend of T——'s was too closely investigating a doubtful ostrich-egg, when it exploded with a loud report. He was an old gentleman, with a beautiful white beard ; and his condition, as described by T——, who—luckily from a safe distance—witnessed the accident, is best left to the imagination. Suffice it to say that an immediate and prolonged bath was imperative, and that a whole suit of clothes had to be destroyed.

In the days when chicks were so valuable, people who did not possess incubators sometimes had recourse to a strange way of hatching those eggs which, during

the sitting, were either left orphaned by accident, or, as in the case of Jackie, deserted in consequence of floods. Some poor old Hottentot woman would be carefully tucked up, in company with the eggs, under numerous blankets,—where she would remain bedridden until she had hatched out the last chick. Sometimes, even, the stout, lethargic Dutch *vrouw* herself, to whose indolent nature the task was doubtless congenial enough, would perform the part of foster-mother.

When, either by natural or artificial means, the little ostriches are safely brought into the world, the farmer's next anxiety is to keep them there. They do well enough on the coast; but in the Karroo they are most difficult to rear, and our experience with them has been sad and disheartening. Numbers of them die, when about a month or five weeks old, from an epidemic which comes and goes in the strangest manner. During a whole season, for instance, one farmer will lose nearly every chick; while brood after brood will be successfully reared by another at no very great distance. Next year, perhaps, it is the turn of the latter to be the sufferer; and *vice versa*. Our unlucky year had a most promising beginning, unusually good rains having filled the country with nests; yet at the end of the season all we had to show of the rising generation of ostriches was a poor little troop of fifteen lanky, ragged-looking creatures, which through some rare toughness of constitution had survived the perils of infancy—over two hundred having succumbed.

The disappointment of losing the chicks is much in-

tensified by the fact that they always begin so well. For the first three weeks nothing can be more encouraging than the appearance of the stout, sturdy toddlers ; they eat voraciously and are full of life and spirits, waltzing, in absurd imitation of their elders, to show their joy on being first let out in the morning—the effort usually ending in a comical sprawl on the back.

Again and again comes the delusive hope that the spell is broken at last ; that the luck has turned, and that *this* little brood is really going to live. But alas !—one morning, during that fatal fourth week, you notice that one little head, instead of being held up saucily and independently, is poking forward and downward in a dejected manner with which you are only too well acquainted. You know at once that the owner of that head is doomed, and that it will not be long before most, if not all, of his brethren show the same dreaded symptom. The disease is quite incurable—indeed, I have never known of an ostrich, old or young, recovering from any illness whatever ; and though we tried all possible kinds of medicine, diet, and treatment, resolutely refusing to despair of any case while a spark of life remained, those chicks persisted in dying, sometimes at the rate of three or four a day. I was hospital nurse, and so deeply did I take to heart the loss of patient after patient that it became a joke with T—— ; and a plentiful sprinkling of grey happening just at this time to make its appearance on my head, he still attributes each silver thread to a little

dead ostrich. A post-mortem examination of chicks which have died of this disease shows the liver to be of the bright colour of orange-peel.

Internal parasites also destroy a good many chicks; and altogether the little lives are precarious, and every troop of young birds successfully reared in the Karroo is a triumph.

For the first two or three months the chicks are herded near the house by boys, whose duty it is to keep them well supplied with prickly pear leaves and other green food, cut up small. This work ought to take up the greater part of the young herd's time; but—small boys being no more satisfactory as servants in the Karroo than they are anywhere else—we found it necessary to keep a very strict watch; and often during the day, however busy I might be, I would "make time" to run down to the shady spot which was the chicks' place of encampment—generally to find the infants hungry, and their useless nurse either asleep or plunged in some absorbing business of his own with a knife and a piece of wood. Sometimes, too, the boys, getting impatient with the chicks, were rough and cruel; one budding criminal especially was several times caught making footballs of his innocent charges, kicking them up several feet into the air. And on a farm where T—— was once staying, a juvenile black fiend was found to have deliberately broken the legs of some twenty chicks under his care; and, when asked the reason of his conduct, said, "They run about, give me too much trouble."

The chicks are often attacked by old birds—always spiteful to little ones which are not their own—and we have had several kicked to death by their vindictive elders. On a neighbouring farm, however, dwelt the usual exception to the rule, in the shape of an old hen, which—although herself not a mother—showed such a strong affection for chicks, and took such devoted care of them, that at last, much to her delight, she was appointed to the post of herd, *vice* the small boy, dismissed as incorrigible. She filled the place of the latter far better than he had ever done; leading the little creatures, with the greatest care, wherever the tenderest *veldt* was to be found; never losing her temper with them, or failing to bring the full number home to bed at sundown; and altogether acquitting herself in a wonderfully sedate and business-like manner for so scatter-brained a creature as an ostrich.

Her history ought of course to have ended here; but truth compels me to state that at last, after she had successfully brought up many families of chicks, and had come to be respected and trusted as the steadiest and most useful of farm-servants, one day the idiotic ostrich-nature asserted itself; she took a sudden and senseless fright—probably at nothing—lost her wits, bolted right away, leaving the chicks to get dispersed about the *veldt*, where only a few were found; and was herself never heard of again.

I think our friends at home would have been rather amused if they could have seen us one day, driving home from Mount Stewart with *twelve ostriches* in our

extremely small American spider. On our way to a farm where T—— had business we happened to pass a Dutchman's house, round the door of which we noticed a lively little brood of chicks running about. T—— of course no sooner saw them than he coveted them (he frankly confesses himself quite unable to keep the tenth commandment as far as ostriches are concerned); and we pulled up, accepted the hospitable invitation of the Boer, who doubtless read in our eyes the chance of "doing a deal," and went into the house, where, first of all, a solemn, silent, and apparently endless course of hand-shaking had to be gone through. The Cape Dutch living in very patriarchal fashion, there were not only a wife and many sons and daughters, but a well-preserved parental couple, a mother-in-law, several sons and daughters-in-law, and—needless to say—a crowd of children of all sizes, including two babies. All but the two last came forward one after another and gravely took our hands; then we all sat round the room, solemnly looking at each other, and T—— and I felt as if we were at a funeral. We would have been thankful to have fled; but—our own birds not having begun laying—we did so want those chicks, and we felt that it was worth while to endure something for their sakes.

Presently coffee was handed round in huge cups, evidently more than half filled with sugar. The more highly the good *vrouw* wishes to honour you, the more horribly and sickeningly she over-sweetens your cup of tea or coffee; and the syrup we had to drink on this

occasion left no doubt as to the kindly feeling of our hosts towards us. The entrance of the tray was the signal for conversation to commence ; and, once set free, it flowed abundantly. As we sat drinking our coffee and talking of everything *but* the business on which we were bent, our thoughts flashed back to Oriental *bazaars*, where these identical preliminaries are necessary to every bargain. The relationship of everybody present to everybody else was accurately explained to us, with much pointing, or clapping on the back, as the case might be ; and we in our turn were minutely questioned as to our names, ages, number of brothers and sisters and other relatives, etc. ; the women again bringing back Eastern recollections by their resemblance to the inquisitive, chattering inmates of harems. Then T—— ventured to lead the conversation round to the coveted chicks ; but it was a little too soon, the subject was abruptly dropped, and we again waded through all manner of irrelevant talk until, a becoming time having elapsed, and the requirements of etiquette being satisfied, the business was allowed to commence.

After such an inauguration, it may well be imagined that the bargain was not concluded in a hurry ; and we had paid a tediously long visit before we were at last the happy possessors of the chicks for which we had suffered so much ; and, putting them loose into the spider at our feet, where—being about as large as ducks—they made rather a tight fit, drove off with them.

A little further on, at another Dutchman's house,

and with more bargaining, we bought a young *paauw* (pronounced "pow"). This game bird (the great bustard) grows to an immense size, some being occasionally shot which measure nine feet across the outspread wings; but fortunately—considering the number of passengers already on board—the present specimen, being but a chick, was no larger than a fine fowl.

When we arrived at last at our original destination, the young ladies of the house presented us with a pretty little baby hare, which had just been caught; and with this wee creature nestling in my lap, and the *paauw* and the ostriches all scrambling about among our legs and apparently not on the best of terms, we drove the twenty miles home. The poor *paauw* was very unhappy, and kept bewailing his fate in a long, weird cry, like the moaning of the wind; whence he immediately acquired his name of "the melancholy Jaques." We had an amusing though rather anxious journey; for the spider—consisting simply of a kind of magnified Japanese tea-tray, supporting the lightest of seats, and mounted on four wheels, almost bicycle-like in their slenderness—was hardly the safest thing in which to convey restless live stock which was not fastened or secured in any way. The road, too, was terrible; indeed, in one place it resembled a steep, rocky staircase, and after every bad jolt I looked anxiously back to see if any of our creatures were lying on the ground. Thanks to T——'s careful driving, however, we brought the whole collection safely home, none the worse for their long journey.

Jaques, I may as well mention here, soon grew very tame ; but, being—we never knew why—persistently snubbed by all the other pets, was driven to the companionship of the fowls, with which he struck up a close friendship ; spending most of his time among them, and always coming with them to be fed. He would also forage about in the kitchen for scraps ; and, if disappointed in his search, would utter his desponding cry, and seem quite heart-broken. He was a handsome bird ; with delicately-pencilled plumage of different shades of grey and brown, a little neat crest on his head, and absurdly small feet, which looked as if they could not possibly support so large a body. Unfortunately, poor Jaques did not live to attain his full size, but poisoned himself with pumpkin seeds ; which had been carelessly dropped on the kitchen floor, in spite of repeated orders that these seeds—being a deadly poison to turkeys—should always be instantly burnt as soon as a pumpkin was cut open. We lost several of our turkeys through the neglect of this rule by the stupid Hottentot girls.

Although little ostriches are such good travellers, it is anything but easy to transport full-grown ones about the world. They are wretched sailors, as T—— has found to his cost ; for when, some time ago, he took several pairs of birds to Sydney, about half of them died at sea. The day before they were shipped from Port Elizabeth they were placed in a store where there was a large quantity of tobacco, on which some of them regaled, with the consequence that before they

had been at sea a week three were dead from nicotine poisoning. T—— does not mind a story told against himself, so I may mention that a plan adopted by him with a view to ensuring the comfort and cleanliness of the birds during the voyage did not—as regards the former advantage—turn out quite a success. He carpeted the pens with cocoa-nut matting; and when the vessel began to roll, and the birds sat down, their legs were terribly chafed and rubbed by the roughness of the matting. And although T——, to procure rag wherewith to bind up their sores, recklessly sacrificed shirts, pocket-handkerchiefs, and whatever other linen came to hand, several succumbed. The survivors did so well in Australia that arrangements were made to carry on ostrich-farming in that country on a large scale; and T—— was about to export two hundred birds when the Cape Government, hearing of the project, imposed an export duty of £100 on every ostrich, and £5 on each egg.

Ostriches are very bad railway travellers; and avail themselves of every possible opportunity of coming to grief in the cattle-trucks; in which they often seem to be too closely packed. And as for their behaviour when travelling on foot, T—— has had some experience of the infinity of trouble they can give to those in charge of them. Having once bought a troop of ninety birds on the West Coast, he accompanied them himself on the long journey to Port Elizabeth. One night there was a stampede; and when daylight broke over the vast plain not one ostrich was in sight. Of course

“there was mounting in hot haste ;” and poor T—— had to ride about the country after the runaways, which were so dispersed that they could only be collected by twos and threes. He had two days of very hard work before he succeeded in getting them all together again.

When T—— first started ostrich-farming, a good many years ago, he and his partners—little knowing the “kittle cattle” with which they had to deal—thought they would do without fencing. They soon found all their birds gone ; and had to scour the country for hundreds of miles in pursuit of their erratic stock, riding all their horses to death.

Profiting by this sad experience, T—— has carefully fenced Swaylands in all directions except where the steepness of the mountain forms a natural barrier. Yet in spite of all the trouble and money spent—and enclosing is one of the heaviest of all expenses incurred in starting a new farm—our birds were continually getting away. We have unfortunately the great disadvantage of a high-road running straight through the farm ; and often a lazy Boer, thinking it too much trouble to kick away the stone with which he had propped the gate open while his waggons passed through—though T—— had carefully adjusted that gate to fall to and close itself—would cause the loss of several of our birds ; which of course might or might not be heard of again. On one occasion over twenty birds seem to have gone out in a body, owing to the gate being left open ; and only a few were eventually recovered.

Some birds—artful old rovers who have been away before and have tasted the joys of freedom—will spend days running up and down along the side of the fence; keeping the gate well in sight, and watching for the chance of its being left open.

The family of one of our herds, living close to a gate, were supposed to act as lodge-keepers; but—like most of the coloured race—they could never be induced to attend steadily and systematically to their duty, and we often found the gate wide open, inviting an exodus of birds. A fine of five shillings was imposed for each offence; but the hardened sinners knew that T——'s kind heart made him reluctant to enforce the penalty.

Ostriches, when very firmly bent on escaping, and finding no gate open, will sometimes charge the fence; and, though occasionally one will succeed in tumbling safely over and getting away, the clumsy performance most frequently results in broken legs.

Runaway birds are far from being the least among the many trials of an ostrich-farmer's life; and the annual losses caused by them even exceed in number those resulting from accident. Then they involve such endless waste of time and trouble. T—— was continually riding about, searching and making inquiries, often in vain, for lost ostriches. When he was fortunate enough to find one, or hear of its whereabouts; or perhaps see, from the advertised description of its brand, that it was an inmate of some distant pound, two of the herds—never spared without difficulty from other

work—would be sent, often a long journey of three or more days, to bring it back.

A returning runaway, always a joyful sight to us, was also rather a laughable one. As he was marched along between the two men, each with a tight grip on his shoulder, he looked just like a pickpocket in the hands of the police, going to prison; and a large piece of sacking, roughly sewn round his body to give his captors a firmer hold, made him appear as though already in convict dress. Then, to prevent his giving trouble on the road, his head would be in a bag. As often as not this bag would be one of my pillow-cases, surreptitiously abstracted by T— from the linen-drawer before sending off the men.

The very necessary operation of branding is performed on the ostrich's large, bare thigh, which seems just made for the purpose. Sometimes a considerable number of our young or newly-purchased birds would be branded at once. The irons with our brand, the Turkish crescent, were heated in a little portable forge placed in one corner of the plucking-kraal; and each poor bird in turn received the mark of our ownership with an agonized start on one side; the smell, and the hissing sound of the frizzling flesh always reminding me unpleasantly of the horrible performances of the *Aïssaoua*, which (because every one else went) I was once foolish enough to go and see in Algiers. Old birds, which have frequently changed hands, sometimes display a fine collection of initials and different designs, covering both thighs.

Unfortunately, branding is not always the safeguard against theft which it is intended to be; for there are quite as many dishonest people in the Cape Colony as elsewhere (if not rather more), and it is no uncommon trick to obliterate the brand of a bird which has come astray by applying over it a much larger one—a “frying-pan” brand, as one hears it occasionally called by victims.

As regards the stupidity of ostriches, although indeed they are falsely accused on one point; that of hiding their small heads in the sand and imagining therefore that their large bodies are quite invisible to the foe, they do many other things quite as foolish, and—to revert again to the Book of Job—their character could not possibly have been more perfectly summed up than it is in the words: “Because God hath deprived her of wisdom, neither hath He imparted to her understanding.” And, indeed, no one looking at the ostrich’s ridiculous little head, so flat immediately above the eyes as to leave no room for any brain, can wonder that he is an imbecile; possessing even less intelligence than a common fowl, and not recognizing the man who has fed him every day for years, if the latter comes to the camp in a coat or hat to which he is unaccustomed. A friend of T——’s was attacked and knocked down by one of his own ostriches, an old bird which had been constantly fed by him, but which, on seeing him for the first time in a black hat, took him for a stranger. Fortunately T—— was with him, and, having brought a tackey—in spite of assurances that none would be needed—came promptly to the rescue.

Ostriches are long-lived creatures ; indeed, it is impossible to say what venerable age they may be capable of attaining, for, however old they become, they never show any signs of decrepitude, nor do their feathers deteriorate ; while, as for an ostrich dying of old age, I do not believe any one has ever heard of such a thing. But it is accident which, sooner or later, ends the career of nearly every ostrich ; and in about ninety-nine cases out of a hundred the disaster is, in one way or another, the result of the bird's own stupidity. There surely does not exist a creature—past earliest infancy—more utterly incapable of taking care of itself than an ostrich ; yet he is full of conceit, and resents the idea of being looked after by his human friends ; and when, in spite of all their precautions for his safety, he has succeeded in coming to grief, he quietly opposes every attempt to cure his injuries, and at once makes up his mind to die. If his hurt is not sufficiently severe to kill him, he will attain his object by moping and refusing to eat—anyhow, he dies—often apparently for no other reason than because his master, against whom he has always had a grudge, wishes him to live. He seems to die out of spite ; just as a Hindoo servant will starve himself, waste rapidly away, and finally come and expire at the gate of the employer with whom he is offended.

The worst and most frequent accidents by which ostriches contrive to make away with themselves are broken legs ; these—even were the patients tractable—it would be impossible to cure, owing to the strange

fragility of that limb which, as we have seen, is capable of inflicting so deadly a kick,—and any poor bird which breaks a leg has to be instantly killed. The bone seems almost as brittle as porcelain; and a comparatively slight blow is enough to splinter it into just such jagged and pointed fragments as result from breaking the spout of a china teapot.

One very fruitful source of broken legs is the dervish-like habit ostriches have of waltzing when in particularly good spirits, and especially when first turned out of the kraal in the morning. They go sailing along so prettily in the bright sunshine; their beautiful wings, spread and erect, giving them at a little distance the appearance of white balloons; but they have a sad tendency to become giddy and tumble down, and, knowing the frailty of their legs, we do not look with unmixed pleasure on the graceful performance. Some birds, indeed, have the sense to save themselves by “reversing,” which they do as cleverly as practised human dancers; but the accomplishment seems rare among them, and we calculate that waltzing costs us eight or ten per cent. per annum.

Then they often fight savagely; and the terrific “thud” of the blows they deal upon each other’s bodies makes one tremble lest the next kick should fall on one of the brittle legs; as indeed frequently happens. One day (a long drought having brought our birds round the house), two splendid young cocks began fighting close to the windows. In an instant one of them was down; with his leg snapped across, and all

but knocked off, by a frightful blow. T—— being from home, I had to go and inspect the poor bird's injuries—a sickening sight—and do him the only kindness possible, that of ordering his immediate execution. A couple of hours later, some of the flesh from one massive thigh was simmering in my stock-pot, sending forth a most delicious odour; while both legs, joints from which indeed to “cut and come again,” dwarfed the proportions of the Angora meat as they hung beside it, high out of reach of dog or jackal, in our open-air larder. For when by some untoward accident, such as that just described, our birds came suddenly by their death, we had the very small and melancholy consolation of eating them. That is to say, following the example of French frog-eaters, we ate the legs only; there being no meat whatever on any other part of the creature's body. Instead of having a nice plump breast, like that of a fowl, turkey, or any other of the Carinatæ or keel-breasted birds, the ostrich has a flat breast-bone and large ribs shaped wonderfully like those of a human being. His body is always bony; and, however well you may feed him, the nourishment all seems to go to his legs. An unpleasant stringiness prevents ostrich-steaks from being quite nice, but the soup is perfection. I never tasted any quite equal to it; although some, made from the enormous tortoises found occasionally on the *veldt*, came very near it in goodness. The best beef-stock is not to be compared with ostrich-soup; and I imagine the latter would be a most nourishing food for invalids. An ostrich which