

### More about the Ostrich.

By W. H. THICK.

It has occurred to me that it would not prove uninteresting to your many readers to receive a little more information about the habits and breeding of the ostrich, and probably it, may induce some enterprising American to turn his attention to the rearing of the South American Emu, a bird next in size and of similar habits to the ostrich.

In the year 1870 the breeding of ostriches at the Cape began to attract considerable attention, and many of the extensive farmers of Cape Town began rearing the birds for the purpose of exportation of the feathers, as much as twenty-five pounds sterling being realized from the sale of the feathers from one bird; but the difficulty of domesticating the birds and obtaining eggs was so great that the system of artificial incubation was mooted. The Acclimatisation Society took the matter up, and Dr. Atherston was deputed by the Governor of Cape Colony to make enquiries amongst the inventors of incubators in England and ascertain if any one would undertake to construct a machine for the purpose. Dr. Atherston's son called upon me in London, England, and altho' I was not well versed in the habits of the bird, still I did not foresee any insurmountable difficulties in the matter, especially as I had been pretty successful with my incubator for hatching domestic fowls, and I undertook the commission.

After waiting upon my friend Mr. Bartlett, the curator of the Zoological Gardens, Regent Park, and receiving many valuable hints from him, besides the loan of an ostrich egg, watching the habits of the birds in the gardens, consulting and reading up with Mr. Bartlett, I set to work and constructed a machine to hold twenty eggs. Some idea of the size of the machine may be surmised when I state that a child might easily have been put to bed in one of the egg-drawers. This machine was sent to a Mr. Douglas, of Hilton, near Graham's Town; but unfortunately, after arriving at the Cape, and whilst in transit to Graham's Town, it came to grief on the bullock-wagon, and got pretty badly smashed up. However, it was patched up and put in operation, and Mr. Douglas wrote me that he first tried it with duck eggs and found it to answer very well, then he tried the ostrich eggs, and succeeded in hatching out altogether a troop of young ostriches. (A troop I believe to be from ten to twenty and upwards—Mr. Douglas hatched out nineteen.) Mr. Douglas, however, did not act fairly towards me, for after getting the machine in perfect working order (making some alterations as he stated) he applied for and obtained a patent for the machine, in his own name, for Africa.

Dr. Atherstone, in his letter to Sir Henry Barkly, the Governor of Cape Colony, says, "The process of incubation by the natural plan injures a great many valuable feathers, and it appears, therefore, dear to me that some mode of artificial incubation must be attempted to derive all the advantage possible from this new branch of industry. I therefore wrote to my son in London, early in 1869, I think, requesting him to hunt up some maker of incubators, hoping to be able to get a machine adapted for hatching ostriches. He sent me a letter in reply, with prospectus from Mr. W. H. Thick, of Kentish Town, London, England, offering to construct one if I sent him particulars. I had great difficulty in inducing anyone to enter on the risk. My brother declined, preferring to wait till he saw if his birds would not breed in their natural state, and hatch their young. Not being a farmer myself, although perceiving at once the immense value of such an important aid to this second diamond discovery, or rather gold discovery, to the colony, (for feathers were realizing nearly their weight in gold, £45 per pound, single feathers 5 to 20 shillings each, or about £60, I could not myself carry out the idea. At last I persuaded Mr. A. Douglas, of Hilton, to send home an order for one of Mr. Thick's machines, which, on the road from Port Elizabeth, was, unfortunately, broken. However, by after construction and varying to suit the new phenomena that presented themselves during the experimental incubation, and taking advantage of the practical lessons of the birds on the nest, testing their temperature, &c., Mr. Douglas has succeeded in making a machine proving very efficient, though in some respects differing from the one originally imported. Several ostrich farmers have tried the improved incubator and have been perfectly satisfied with their success. It is astonishing what slight causes will insure the failure of the eggs; a thunder storm has been known to destroy them; even the rough opening of the drawer containing the eggs will shake and injure them, and too great or too little heat proves fatal to the chicks. By his plan one male to three females is sufficient, but in a natural state of course there must be an equal number, as both sit alternately. I saw large herds of ostriches at Colesberg, 150 in a flock at least, herded only by two men on horseback, with long whips, on the open flats. I presume mealies tempted them to the homestead, where they remained in the "hock" until the next morning. I enclose the *Farm* of Nov. 10, 1880, with Thick's letter in it.—W. G. ATHERSTONE."

(To be continued.)

Entries for the majority of our poultry shows close this month Don't forget it.