

Ostriches at the Cape.

(Continued.)

Some travellers have said that during the day ostriches know no rest, but are ever on the move. It is true that in searching for food, of which they require a great deal, and obtain only bit by bit on the sandy and comparatively barren African plains, they have to move fast, and consequently travel a long way in the course of a day; yet, when their appetites are appeased, they may be seen rolling and tumbling in the sand, and even sitting apparently asleep. They do this for the double purpose of ridding themselves of insects and of improving the condition of their feathers, which they plume with great care and evident pride after these rollings. It is somewhat singular, that while the the sandy, parched, and treeless plains are their natural home, birds reared in the bushy and moist coast lands will become lovers of water to such an extent that they may be found bathing and swimming about like swans wherever they have a sheet of water sufficient for that purpose.

It has been repeatedly said by travellers that the ostrich is so acute that the slightest disturbance of its eggs will be noticed, and will probably drive it away from the nest. This is a mistake; while individual ostriches may be excessively acute in this respect, the majority are not. The writer has been assured by persons who have been accustomed to hunting wild birds, that their eggs may be abstracted or handled and put back apparently without their being any the wiser. If eggs are handled with greasy hands, however, even tame birds will desert their nests, or, as they sometimes do, throw out the contaminated egg.

The cunning some of them exhibit in various ways during the process of breeding is very remarkable, the more so from the excessive stupidity shown by others in the same periods. Some will tolerate only one companion in the business, others would mate with four or five hens if allowed. Some will build their nests on a high piece of ground, and while sitting will heap up a large rim and trench about them with their beak, showing evident design in precaution with regard to the weather; others will appropriate a depression already made, or scratch up a spot in the most ill-chosen site, not building the sand about it, but leaving the eggs to be swamped by the first rain that falls. Some will hunt out a nesting place in such a retired and undiscoverable spot that the "herd" and perhaps all the homestead, may be weeks in finding it, others will lay in the most open and carelessly chosen spots. Some will sit throughout with the most solicitous maternal instinct, brooking much annoyance and interference; others will resent the slightest liberties, and perhaps leave the nest half-hatched or smash up its own eggs. Some will

fight an enemy to the last in defence of its eggs; while others give up hatching on the first appearance of danger. Some are careless sitters, leaving their nests for hours; others manifest such anxiety that when the hen has been a little late in taking her morning turn upon the nest he has gone out, and, hunting her up, has kicked her to the nest in the most unmanly manner. Some are very affectionate over their young, others the reverse; thus do individuals differ even among ostriches. As a rule, the cock bird forms the nest, sits the longest, and takes the burden of the work of hatching and rearing. Contrary to what has been currently understood, and what is still stated even in recent colonial accounts, the cock birds sits at night, not the hen. In this peculiarity the hand of Providence may be seen, for the worst enemies of the nest appear at night, and the cock, being stronger and braver, is better able to resist them; moreover, the feathers of the cock being black, night sitting would not expose him to that exhaustion from the sun's rays which would ensue if he sat during the day; while at the same time the grey feathers of the female are less conspicuous while she sits during the day.

It may not be generally known that for the first three or four days after coming out of the shell the chickens eat nothing whatever, but sit on their haunches and imbibe their first impressions of nature. The first thing eaten is not food, but pebbles, sand, and bits of the shells in which they had recently been confined. They then begin to display an appreciation for insects, lizards, and grass. Their first education consists of acquiring the art of concealment. The old bird, while they are being about for food sees or fancies some approaching danger and, lifting her wings, moves them with a kind of quiver, immediately the chickens scatter and disappear. This they do by diving under a bush where possible, and lying on the ground with their bodies as flat as possible, and their necks stretched out upon the ground. Here they lie motionless as a lump of clay—and not unlike it in appearance, even to a practised eye—until the danger is over or the parent calls them by a peculiarly plaintive cry unlike any other sound they are accustomed to make; this however, is seldom uttered unless the chickens are out of sight or likely to be lost.

(To be continued.)

Reflections.—No. 1.

There seems to be unusual activity among those who are interested in the breeding and selling of poultry, and this is indicated in the steady increase of poultry literature and advertisements in the same.

We have about a dozen poultry monthlys and