

FEATHERED FREAKS OF AFRICA.

HENRY REID TAYLOR... ST. LOUIS GLOBE-DEMOCRAT.

Africa, the wonderland of science, has within her dense forests and rolling uplands more curious and interesting birds than are found in an equal area in any other part of the world. Those most ingenious feathered architects, the weaver birds, are represented in numerous varieties and are generally diffused over the southern districts of South Africa. Somewhat like the tailor bird, of Australia, the weaver bird is provided with a bill which makes it marvellously adept at constructing the hanging ball of grass which constitutes home, swinging safe out of reach of prowling animals. The nests are usually in colonies, and are hung to trees which grow over rivers or marshes. These weaver birds make very cunning, though mischievous pets. Laryard, the naturalist, kept a number of the birds in a large cage for some time. They became very tame and would answer readily to the call. When they were supplied with cotton or thread they would weave it most industriously into the bars of the cage, forming a dense mass, impossible to unravel. They perform their work entirely with their bills, clinging the while to the side of the cage with their powerful claws. In Natal the weaver birds are gregarious, and are troublesome to all cereal crops, as they live there almost entirely on grain and grass seeds. Along the coast they are exceedingly fond of sucking the nectar from the cape broom, a thorny tree which bears a bright scarlet blossom before the leaves appear.

The bee-eaters are another singular tribe of birds, including quite a number of species, which inhabit South Africa. The carmine-throated bee-eater (the *Merops nubicordes* of science) is among the most gorgeous of tropical birds; their appearance in flocks is almost dazzling. Most of the body and tail (except the tip of the latter, which is green) is of a beautiful carmine, shading to pink on the under part, while the plumage immediately about the eye is black, and the top of the head is green. The two long feathers of the tail give the bird a swallow-like appearance, and in their flight they are extremely graceful. Like the swallow, they procure their food chiefly on the wing. The birds nest in colonies in holes in river banks, the nests being about two or three feet apart, and usually six or eight feet above the water. The tunnels are excavated for about four feet, when the orifice is widened to form a nest.

The hammerkop or "rain doctor," as it is called, a member of the stork family, is one of the most remarkable of African birds. Its name—*n'jaka*, in the native dialect—has been given it on account of its peculiarity of screaming loudly before a rain sets in. It is also called the "philosopher." One can observe it for hours, walking up and down on small woody places along a river bank. During its "meditation" the hammerkop frequently shakes its head, but will not utter a sound. Often its noiseless walk will turn suddenly into a wild dance, the cause of this abrupt change of behavior being the arrival of its mate, just come from adding the finishing touches to the large and curious mud nest, which the pair have been for several weeks busily constructing near the river bank. The nests are usually in the forks of trees, are about two feet high, and measure from eight to nine feet in circumference. It is really a rain proof hut, and so well built that it lasts for years. Sticks, bones, large stones and various materials are cemented into the mud. The entrance is from six to eight inches square, the walls being from five to seven inches thick. On a number of occasions Dr. Holub found other birds occupying their deserted nests.

IT FETCHED HER.—Mrs. Jones—"Nothing to-day."

The Tramp—"Well, mum, if you don't give me sumthin' to eat, I'll report yer to the hull perfession as makin' the best mince pie in the neighbourhood an' being very liberal to strangers."—*Puck*.

A DARK SUBTERFUGE—Effie—"Jack, papa said we must not see each other any more." Jack—"Indeed! Shall I turn the gas out?"—*Harpur's Bazaar*.

The latest method of eloping is by bicycle. In such instances it is love that makes the wheels go round.—*Buffalo Express*.

When you bury an evil habit, do not visit the grave too often.—*Rani's Horn*.

Whenever you have a proposition to get something for nothing, it will pay you to walk around it by the furthest route.—*Houston Press*.

Makes an elegant jam—the street car conductor.

The hen is not a cheerful fowl—she broods a great deal.