

MILLIONS A YEAR IN OSTRICHES

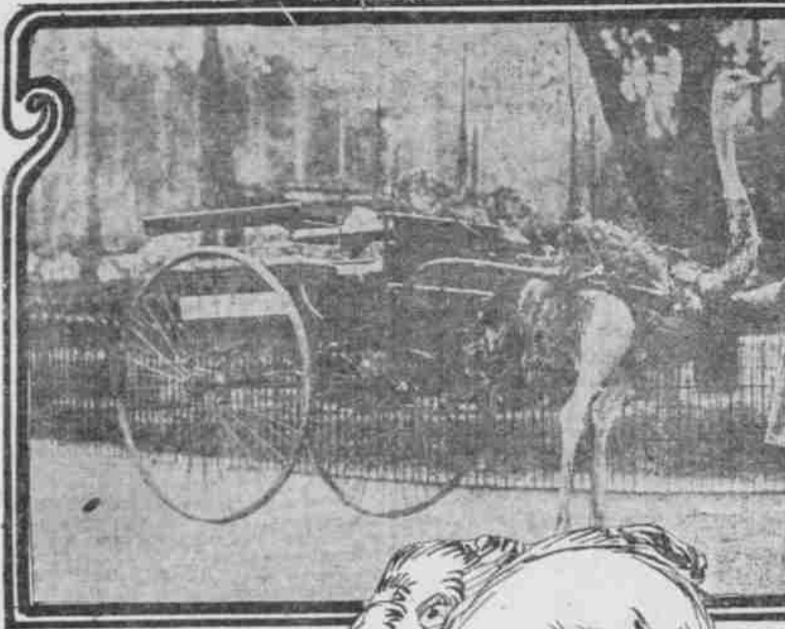
Scientific Breeding of Giant Birds and the Marketing of Tips, Feathers and Plumes

BY FRANK O. CARPENTER.
This is the chief ostrich feather port of the world. The finest plumes which decorate the hats of our American beauties are raised in Cape Colony, and more than \$400,000 worth of them were sent from Port Elizabeth to the United States last year. Most of the ostrich feathers used by man are now raised on the farms of Cape Colony. There are something like 400,000 birds engaged in the business, and they produced more than a million pounds of feathers last year. Those feathers sold for more than \$7,000,000, bringing from \$10 to \$150 per pound.

A Big Feather Market.

The chief ostrich feather market is Port Elizabeth. The feathers are sent to by the farmers and country merchants and are sold here at auctions which are held every two weeks. They are carefully packed in boxes and wooden bales, and are consigned to licensed agents who sort them and sell on a commission of 2 1/2 per cent. The sorting is done at so much per pound.

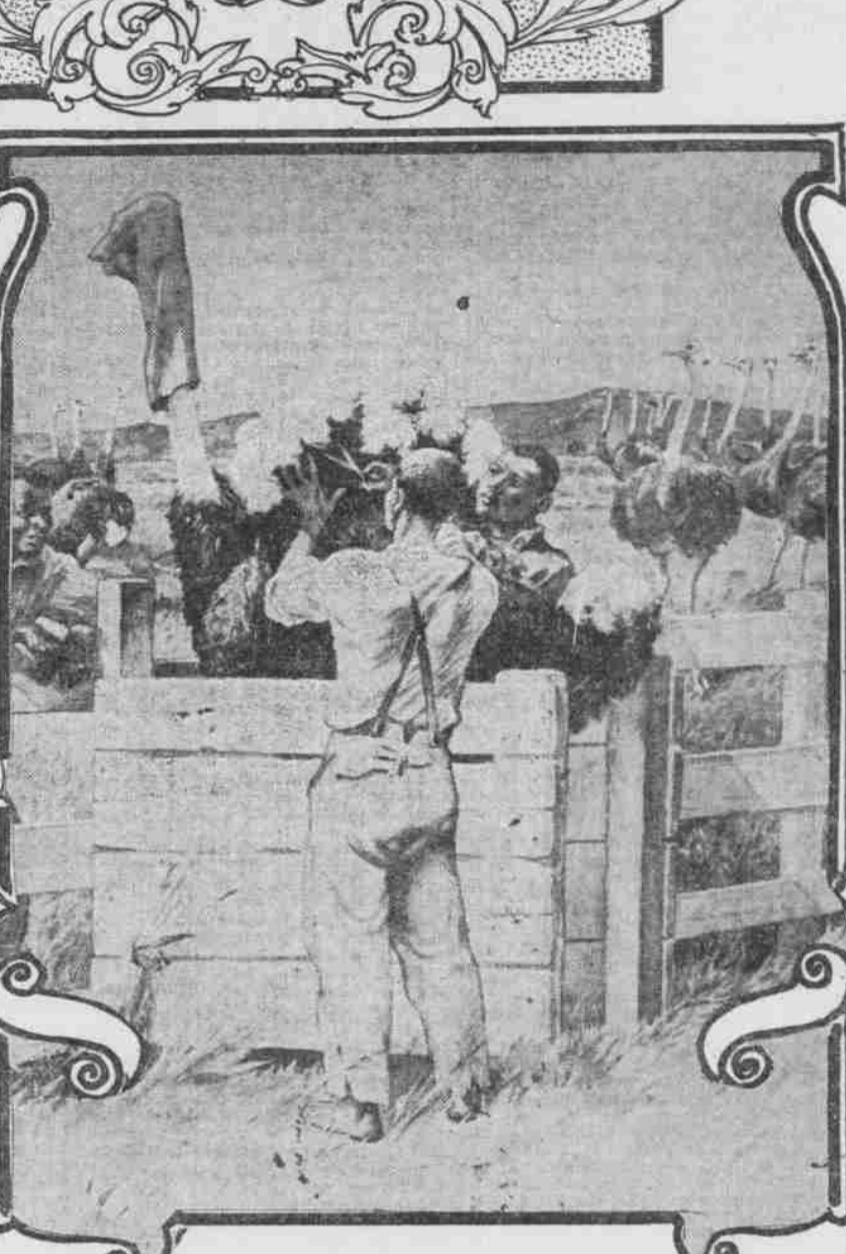
The auctions here are held in what is known as the feather warehouse. This covers more than an acre, and it consists of a great room filled with treadle-work tables. Upon these tables the feathers are laid out in lots, and the feather buyers from all parts of the world look over them and bid on each lot as it is put up for sale. Sometimes a hundred thousand dollars' worth of feathers are displayed at one time, and the yearly auctions bring in several millions. After buying the feathers are re-sorted and then shipped to New York and to London and other cities of Europe. The greater part of the product goes to London, where there are great feather auctions held several times every year. Some of the very best plumes, however, are exported direct to the United States. The resorting and finishing of them being done by our milliners and dealers at home. The poorest feathers go to Germany, where they are made up into hats and plumes for dollar hats. The London feathers are resorted before they are sold, the auctions there handling 20 or 30 lots every two months. The average price brought by the Cape Colony feathers last year was over \$12 per pound. The business of ostrich raising is fast



A SIGHT
SELDOM SEEN



A HALF-GROWN COCK



FLUCKING THE FEATHERS



OSTRICHES OF THE KAROO

becoming a science. The government here is interested in it, and it has all sorts of laws to protect the farmers. There is a government veterinary surgeon at Port Elizabeth, who spends his time studying ostrich diseases. There is an ostrich breeding association, and this has a stud book, in which the pedigrees of the most noted birds are laid down. There are certain farmers who have so improved their stock that their ostrich chicks will bring from \$500 to \$1000 apiece, and certain cock birds will sell for \$2000 or more. There is a man named Evans whose ostriches stand very high. He imported a Barbary cock some 25 years ago and bred him to a fine native hen. Since then he has steadily improved his breed. The ostrich farmers pay great attention to the study of the feathers, watching the birds which produce the best, and crossing them with others, trying to bring about a combination which will yield the finest and most valuable plumes. There are certain localities which produce better feathers than others. The Outdouron feather, for instance, reaches 2 1/2 inches in length, the Graff-Reinet measures about 2 1/2 inches, and the Middleburg is about 2 1/2. The latter feathers are a little bit better than the Outdouron as to certain points, but all are especially fine.

Kept Like Fine Stock.

Within the past few years there has been a great change in ostrich farming. A generation or so ago nearly all our feathers came from wild birds. They were hunted with dogs and guns and were often captured in pitfalls. Then along about 50 years ago some young ostriches were tamed by a South African and ostrich breeding began. As far back as 1852 there were only 50 tame ostriches in the world. A few years later the custom of hatching the eggs in incubators began, and in 1870 the number of tame birds here had increased to over 25,000. Still later came the great ostrich boom, and in 1882 the feathers were sold at \$2 and upward a pound, and people came from everywhere to South Africa to engage in the business of producing them. At that time the average price of a pair of birds was \$275, and some sold for \$400 and more. Only about half as many ostrich feathers were then exported as now, and they sold for more than \$5,000,000.

As the business increased the farmers learned how to raise ostriches on less and less land. At the start the birds were allowed to run in camps of from 2000 to 3000 acres, and 20 acres was allowed for each. This is still the case on the great plateaus, known as the karoo, but there are now farms about Outdouron and elsewhere where two ostriches are kept on one acre, and where they are fed like fine stock, so much grass and other food being allowed to each per day.

Fed on Alfalfa.

It has been recently found that a great deal of money can be made in raising ostriches on alfalfa or lucerne, and especially so where that crop can be raised

on irrigated lands. I have estimates showing that five ostriches have been kept in this way on one acre, and that they have yielded feathers to the amount of \$25 each per ostrich per year. This means that one acre of land brings in something like \$125 or more per annum, and that from 50 acres a man can make from \$6250 to \$8000 per year.

On all such farms the ostriches are kept in small fields. The usual paddock is an acre, with a wire fence about it, and the fields are separated by paths three feet or more wide to prevent the birds fighting and kicking one another. Two birds, a cock and a hen, are kept in each paddock, and one acre of alfalfa simply suffices for their grazing the year around. Some of the farmers cut and stack the wheat and then feed it to the ostriches when other food is short, and some let the birds graze. Alfalfa-fed birds have glossier feathers than those fed upon wild grass and bristles. Their quills are heavier and they weigh more. They also break easily, and for this reason are not so much liked by the dealers as the plumes of the birds from the wild. Irrigated land suitable for ostriches is fast increasing in value; I am told that the best now bring \$5000 per acre.

Wild Ostriches.

During my stay in Africa I have seen many wild ostriches. There are some in the Sahara. They live along the borders of the desert, and one sometimes sees the ostriches, with wings outstretched, swimming through the air, over the sand. I saw a few in the Sudan, and in Omdurman was able to buy the choicest of white plumes from the wild birds at about 12 apiece. There are many ostriches in British East Africa and Somaliland. All along the Uganda Railroad, from the Indian Ocean to Lake Victoria, they may be seen feeding upon the high plains. I understand that there are some in Abyssinia and many west of Rhodesia in the Kalahari desert. The feathers of the wild birds are city, and they have long quills. They are freer from bars and other blemishes than are the plumes from the tame birds, and they bring a higher price in the market. Down here in South Africa wild birds may not be caught, hunted or shot, and the man who takes wild ostrich eggs from any of the crown lands without a license is subject to a fine of \$100. The same penalty is attached to hunting or wounding a wild bird upon private lands without the owner's consent.

Egyptian Ostriches.

During my stay in Egypt I visited a large ostrich farm near Cairo. It has something like 2000 birds, and the feathers are largely retailed to tourists. The farm lies on the edge of the desert not far from Heliopolis, where Plato taught school and near the tree under which the Virgin Mary and the Baby Jesus rested about 1900 odd years ago.

This farm has been carried out of the desert. It is divided up into fields, which are surrounded by high mud walls. There are alleys in some of the fields, and you can walk over the farm, seeing ostriches of all ages, sexes and sizes engaged in all the occupations of ostrich life. Some of

the birds are eight feet in height and some are no bigger than Plymouth Rock hens. The male and female ostriches are kept in pairs, and usually there is one pair or more in each field. As I went through I shook my fist at one lady ostrich, and her husband got angry. The cock always picks out the place for the nest. He then kneels down on his breast bone and kicks out a round dish-shaped hollow in the sand. When he is fixed to his satisfaction he coaxes the hen ostrich to it and gives her instructions to lay. If satisfied, she goes to work and lays one egg every other day for about 30 days. She may then take a rest, and begin to lay again, keeping on until she has laid 40 or

Hatching by Incubators.

It was on the Egyptian farm that I first saw ostriches hatched in incubators. The farmer told me that the eggs were taken from the nest every day, leaving one for a nest egg, just as we do for chickens. About 20 eggs are allowed to each pair of ostriches when setting, and the balance of the 40-odd eggs, which the hen lays, goes to the incubators. I saw several hundred incubators. Each was as big as the head of a six-months-old baby. It was of a smooth, ivory white, freckled all over with little black specks.

In the incubators the eggs are laid in padded boxes, and are kept in a room where the temperature is just about 100 degrees Fahrenheit. As the time for hatching approaches they are tested daily after day by placing them in a hole in the wall of a dark room. This hole just fits the egg, so that the light shines through and shows its condition. If the egg is not fertilized the light will be only light at the larger end, where the air chamber is.

The eggs are turned every day, and when the chicks are just about ready to hatch the shells are broken with a tack hammer. The baby ostriches are then taken out and laid away for 24 hours, in boxes of warm cotton. Before going further they have their eyes tested, and if they are lightish in color they are killed, for the light-eyed ones are albinos and are of no good for laying.

Breeding Ostriches on the Karoo.

The most of the farmers of South Africa now use incubators, but many let the birds hatch their own eggs, and on nearly all the large farms you may see these great creatures sitting on the nests which they have dug out of the sand. The breeding season begins in June and lasts until the end of September, but if the birds are well fed they will continue to breed all the year around. As the time for breeding approaches the breeders are camped off in pairs, a field of six acres or less being given to each cock and hen. The fields are often separated by double fences, as the cock ostriches are very jealous when they mistreat one another, and they will fight one another

and often break their legs in their attempts to kick through the wire fences. The cock always picks out the place for the nest. He then kneels down on his breast bone and kicks out a round dish-shaped hollow in the sand. When he is fixed to his satisfaction he coaxes the hen ostrich to it and gives her instructions to lay. If satisfied, she goes to work and lays one egg every other day for about 30 days. She may then take a rest, and begin to lay again, keeping on until she has laid 40 or

more. When she thinks she has enough she begins to set, and here the old cock comes again on the job. He sets on the eggs fully half of the time, and, as a rule, takes charge of them at night. If the hen stays off too long he grows angry and drives her back to the nest. At the end of 42 days the eggs are ready for hatching and the chicks begin to kick their way out by breaking the shells with their breast bone, and the farmers sometimes go

to the nest and gently tap or crack the shells, that the chicks may break them apart.

The chicks, when first born, are dear little things with feathers of the downy nature of a chicken just hatched. They waddle about like little ducklings and are very delicate. Here in South Africa they are often kept away from their parents at night, being placed in packing cases which are floored with dry sand and covered with baggins. After they are two or three months old they are allowed to sleep together on the floor of a warm room, and after six months they can run about and will stand almost as much cold as the old birds. They grow fast. At the age of a month they are as big as a turkey, and at seven or nine months their first plucking begins.

Plucking the Feathers.

Harvesting the ostrich feathers goes by the general name of plucking. This gives one the idea that the plumes are pulled out. This is not so. Such treatment would cause great pain and injure the birds. The process should be called clipping or cutting, for the quills are snipped off with shears; and this causes the ostriches just about as much pain as shearing does sheep. The first feathers of a chick bring but little more than \$2; but after that the plumes improve right along, and it is not uncommon for a pair of birds to yield over \$100 worth in one year.

The cutting of the feathers is done every eight or nine months. The plumes from the wings and the tails of the full-grown male birds are the most valuable, and it makes a great difference in their value as to how the feathers are cut. There are 25 long white plumes on each wing of a cock. The rest of the feathers are black on the male and drab or gray-

ish on the female. In addition there are smaller feathers known as the ostrich tips, so that one bird will yield about 300 at a plucking. After the feathers are taken off they are carried indoors and sorted into about 20 different lengths and colors. They are then tied up in bundles, weighed and packed up for the market. The cheap tips bring something like \$5 a pound, while the plumes from the wings and tails are worth \$300 per pound and upward.

Blindfolded Ostriches.

Plucking an ostrich is no easy matter. I would rather tackle a mad bull than one of these great birds, if I had no means of defense. The only thing the cock is afraid of is a thorn bush, and this only because he fears it may put out his eyes. Without that he might run at you and kick you to death. The ostrich kicks high, and the best remedy in such cases is to throw yourself flat on the ground. Then an old cock may kneel on you and squeeze you, but he cannot kick so as to hurt.

At the time for plucking the ostriches are driven by a farmer or the native blacks into plucking boxes. These are little pens made for the purpose. They are just about large enough for one ostrich and are made of wire or brush around. After the door is shut the bird can do nothing, and he cannot kick, as the sides are too high. He is kept quiet by means of a stocking or a great cloth which is drawn over his head. His wings are now raised, and the plumes cut off with scissors, the work going on until all the feathers are taken. The ostrich roars mournfully during the process, but in reality it hurts him but little. When turned out he looks as ugly as a sheep after shearing, but within a few weeks the stumps of the quills die and fall out, and the new feathers begin to appear.

Fort Elizabeth, Cape Colony.

ing when another man vacates? Did it ever occur to you that this is a corporation, and a corporation cannot be arrested?

STEALING UNDER PROTECTION OF THE LAW

String of Fake Jewelry Stores That Systematically Rob Customers Who Have No Recourse.

A NEW thief, protected by law, who steals nothing but valuable jewelry, which his victims themselves deliver to his strong-box, has just made his appearance in Chicago, and has begun to reap an unbroken harvest. From Chicago's wealthier residents, says the Chicago Tribune.

Rich and immune from punishment the police take off their hats to these kings of crooks and declare they dare not molest them so long as they continue to operate under protection of the law. The old-time pickpocket and diamond thief has redoubled his energies, so that he, too, can secure sufficient capital to embark in a business where his talents may be exercised without fear of prosecution. The millennium has arrived, the old-time crooks declare. In the good old days when every head of a man opening a warehouse where the wealthy brought their valuables and the police prevented the owner from raising a disturbance when the keeper of the strong-box refused to return their property? It seems so now ever heard of it. But there is joy below the deadline now, for the warehouse, under the name of jewelry stores, slipped into the city unseen and unheralded and are now firmly ensconced not only on State street, but throughout the best districts of the city.

The plan is a simple one, but the law-makers are puzzling their heads to formulate one to defeat it. The legitimate jewelers are endeavoring to drive the bootleggers out of the business, but they still do business as safely as the honest man, and are making fortunes where many a jeweler who walks the straight and narrow path can see nothing before him but the open portals of bankruptcy. The originators of the plan were a number of well-to-do "con" men whose fertile brains had kept the police from getting a ray of light on their shady transactions of the past. One genius among them discovered that the law was made solely for their protection and to keep such cheap competitors as pickpockets and pocketbook snatchers out of the field. They organized a score of jewelry stores, each incorporated under a different name, and began their campaign. No man ever left a diamond ring or diamond-studded watch with them to be repaired and carried away the diamonds. Sometimes he got a near-diamond, sometimes a simple piece of glass. Their stores were small, but elaborate, and they did not want for brains, but what doesn't if you want riches and want them quickly and safely? Each company would sell the enough jewelry to pay expenses and the harvest came from the repairs.

No valuable piece of jewelry ever went into one of the stores and out again, except when it was carried off by one of the conspirators. All business was transacted under a corporate name, so no one could be arrested for the sins of the corporation. The only chance of recovery for the value of a lost article was by a civil suit.

Unless the jewelry was of great value the owner could not afford to pay court costs and attorney fees even if he was sure to recover full value for his lost property, and any good lawyer would advise him that his chances for recovery were small, as the law says a man is not responsible for articles left with him if he uses due diligence and care in looking after them. It makes no difference whether the articles are lost or stolen. So long as they are not left in trust the thief is not liable for accidents.

To complicate the situation and allow the same crop of suckers to bite more than once, the members of the syndicate change buildings occasionally. They change the company name over the door, and the occupant, except that they bought their stock will and fixtures. They admit their predecessors may have been crooks; they have heard of such things. But if a man deals with honest men, such as are represented in this company, they will be safe.

Then their harvest begins. And they

get it. No matter how they get it, they get it. At the end of three months they move and begin to get it again. They get everything but their deserts.

When a man called for a valuable watch to be repaired and he chose one to be would be told of the press of business and requested to call again. From day to day he would be given one fairy story after another, until his patience became exhausted and he refused to wait another minute for the return of his property. Then the proprietor would tell him a clerk in the office had stolen the watch and decamped. They had been searching for him and expected to locate him in a few days.

"We don't want you to worry about it," explains the jeweler, "if we should fail to find your watch we will gladly give you another or pay you for this one."

The owner goes away, mad but placated, for a few days. When he returns the clerk has not been found. The chief crook offers a case of cheap watches and suggests that he choose one to replace the stolen timepiece. If he is foolish enough to do so he loses from \$50 to \$100, for they don't steal cheap watches.

"Everyday will be all right," he explains. "This is the first time we ever had anything lost or stolen that was left with us. I guess we have been extremely fortunate, for most jewelers with a number of clerks often have to make good losses."

The loser of the watch spends several weeks gathering the desired information, and when he returns to the store and dilly dally refuses flat-footed to pay. The matter is then taken to court. The matter is the one that got your watch. We bought their fixtures and good will a month ago. We know nothing about them."

"I'll have you arrested," threatens the victim.

"Why, certainly, that is the thing to do. Is it a crime to move into a build-

ing when another man vacates? Did it ever occur to you that this is a corporation, and a corporation cannot be arrested?"

"You stole my watch and I'm going to sue you for it," blusters the victim.

"That is a good thought. Sue us. We didn't move into the building until a month ago, and your ticket is three months old."

The victim hastens to a lawyer. The lawyer, if he is a smart one, explains the game.

"You will have to sue both the man who took your watch and the present occupant of the store," he says. "It will cost you \$24,000 costs and a minimum attorney fee of \$50. If they lose the case it will be appealed and the costs will amount to several times \$74. You will lose eventually anyway. You have no case against anyone."

"Didn't they steal my watch?" he blurts out, lighting mad.

"Oh, undoubtedly they stole your watch and a good many more, but you can't make them pay. That is one of the anomalies of the law. Your watch was not left in trust, but as a bailment, and if they can show they used ordinary care in looking after it they would not be liable if it were stolen a dozen times. Your only hope of making them pay is to go to the store when it is full of customers, make a big noise and accuse them of every crime on the calendar. Maybe they will pay to get rid of you. Maybe they will call a policeman and have you locked up or sue you for slander. You will have to take your chances."

The victim next goes to see a public attorney from one of his State street friends in the jewelry business. He explains the case. The jeweler smiles and asks if it is one of the syndicate's stores.

"When he finds it is he smiles again and says:

"There's only one thing to do—forget it. There is someone in here every day taking me the same question. Some sue and lose their suits. Others get arrested and fined for raising a disturbance. One man I know of is now fighting a \$20,000 slander suit on account of the names he called them for taking an \$85 watch.

"There is only one protection. See there is an individual's name over the door before you deposit anything of value, or be sure you know all about the corporation."

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