

AN
HISTORY
OF THE
EARTH,
AND
ANIMATED NATURE:

By OLIVER GOLDSMITH.

IN EIGHT VOLUMES.

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"to" is in lower case.

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The Rhinocerus

C H A P. IX.

Of the RHINOCEROS.

NEXT to the elephant, the Rhinoceros is the most powerful of animals. It is usually found twelve feet long, from the tip of the nose to the insertion of the tail; from six to seven feet high; and the circumference of its body is nearly equal to its length. It is, therefore, equal to the elephant in bulk: and if it appears much smaller to the eye, the reason is, that its legs are much shorter. Words can convey but a very confused idea of this animal's shape; and yet there are few so remarkably formed: its head is furnished with an horn, growing from the snout, sometimes three feet and an half long; and but for this, that part would have the appearance of the head of an hog; the upper lip, however, is much longer in proportion, ends in a point, is very pliable, serves to collect its food, and deliver it into the mouth: the ears are large, erect, and pointed; the eyes are small and piercing; the skin is naked, rough, knotty, and, lying upon the body in folds, after a very peculiar fashion: there are two folds very remarkable; one above

the shoulders, and another over the rump: the skin, which is of a dirty brown colour, is so thick as to turn the edge of a scymitar, and to resist a musket-ball: the belly hangs low; the legs are short, strong and thick, and the hoofs divided into three parts, each pointing forward.

Such is the general outline of an animal that appears chiefly formidable from the horn growing from its snout; and formed rather for war, than with a propensity to engage. This horn, is sometimes found from three to three feet and an half long growing from the solid bone, and so disposed, as to be managed to the greatest advantage. It is composed of the most solid substance; and pointed so as to inflict the most fatal wounds. The elephant, the boar, or the buffalo, are obliged to strike transversely with their weapons; but the rhinoceros employs all his force with every blow; so that the tiger will more willingly attack any other animal of the forest, than one whose strength is so justly employed. Indeed, there is no force which this terrible animal has to apprehend: defended, on every side, by a thick horny hide, which the claws of the lion or the tiger are unable to pierce, and armed before with a weapon that even the elephant does not chuse

to oppose. The missionaries assure us, that the elephant is often found dead in the forests, pierced with the horn of a rhinoceros; and though it looks like wisdom to doubt whatever they tell us, yet I cannot help giving credit to what they relate on this occasion, particularly when confirmed by Pliny. The combat between these two, the most formidable animals of the forest, must be very dreadful. Emanuel, king of Portugal, willing to try their strength, actually opposed them to each other; and the elephant was defeated.

But though the rhinoceros is thus formidable by nature, yet imagination has not failed to exert itself, in adding to its terrors. The scent is said to be most exquisite; and it is affirmed that it consorts with the tiger. It is reported also, that when it has overturned a man, or any other animal, it continues to lick the flesh quite from the bone with its tongue, which is said to be extremely rough. All this, however, is fabulous: the scent, if we may judge from the expansion of the olfactory nerves, is not greater than that of an hog, which we know to be indifferent; it keeps company with the tiger, only because they both frequent watery places in the burning climates where they are bred; and as to its rough

tongue, that is so far from the truth, that no animal of near its size has so soft a one. "I have often felt it myself," says Ladvocat, in his description of this animal; "it is smooth, soft, and small, like that of a dog; and to the feel it appears as if one passed the hand over velvet, I have often seen it lick a young man's face who kept it; and both seemed pleased with the action."

The rhinoceros which was shewn at London in 1739, and described by Doctor Parsons, had been sent from Bengal. Though it was very young, not being above two years old, yet the charge of his carriage and food from India, cost near a thousand pounds. It was fed with rice, sugar, and hay: it was daily supplied with seven pounds of rice, mixed with three of sugar, divided into three portions; it was given great quantities of hay and grass, which it chiefly preferred; its drink was water, which it took in great quantities. It was of a gentle disposition, and permitted itself to be touched and handled by all visitors, never attempting mischief, except when abused, or when hungry; in such a case, there was no method of appeasing its fury, but by giving it something to eat. When angry, it would jump up against the walls of its room, with great violence; and,

many efforts to escape, but seldom attempted to attack its keeper, and was always submissive to his threats. It had a peculiar cry, somewhat a mixture between the grunting of a hog, and the bellowing of a calf.

The age of these animals is not well known; it is said by some, that they bring forth at three years old, and if we may reason from analogy, it is probable they seldom live till above twenty. That which was shewn in London, was said by its keeper, to be eighteen years old, and even at that age, he pretended to consider it as a young one; however, it died shortly after, and that probably in the course of nature.

The rhinoceros is a native of the deserts of Asia and Africa, and is usually found in those extensive forests, that are frequented by the elephant and the lion. As it subsists entirely upon vegetable food, it is peaceful and harmless among its fellows of the brute creation; but, though it never provokes to combat, it equally disdains to fly. It is every way fitted for war, but rests content in the consciousness of its security. It is particularly fond of the prickly branches of trees, and is seen to feed upon such thorny shrubs as would be dangerous to other animals, either to gather, or to swallow. The prickly points of these, however, may only

serve to give a poignant relish to this animal's palate, and may answer the same grateful ends in seasoning its banquet, that spices do in heightening ours.

In some parts of the kingdom of Asia, where the natives are more desirous of appearing warlike than shewing themselves brave, these animals are tamed, and led into the field to strike terror into the enemy; but they are always an unmanageable and restive animal, and probably more dangerous to the employers, than those whom they are brought to oppose.

The method of taking them, is chiefly watching them, till they are found either in some moist or marshy place, where, like hogs, they are fond of sleeping and wallowing. They then destroy the old one with fire arms, for no weapons, that are thrown by the force of man, are capable of entering this animal's hide. If, when the old one is destroyed, there happens to be a cub, they seize and tame it: these animals are sometimes taken in pit-falls, covered with green branches, laid in those paths which the Rhinoceros makes in going from the forest to the river side.

There are some varieties in this animal, as in most others; some of them are found in Africa with a double horn, one growing above

the other; this weapon, if considered in itself, is one of the strongest, and most dangerous, that Nature furnishes to any part of the animal creation. The horn is entirely solid, formed of the hardest bony substance, growing from the upper maxillary bone, by so strong an apophyse, as seemingly to make but one part with it. Many are the medicinal virtues that are ascribed to this horn, when taken in powder; but these qualities have been attributed to it, without any real foundation, and make only a small part of the many fables which this extraordinary animal has given rise to.