

Natural History in Zoological Gardens

BEING SOME
ACCOUNT OF VERTEBRATED
ANIMALS, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO
THOSE USUALLY TO BE SEEN IN THE ZOO-
LOGICAL SOCIETY'S GARDENS IN
LONDON AND SIMILAR
INSTITUTIONS

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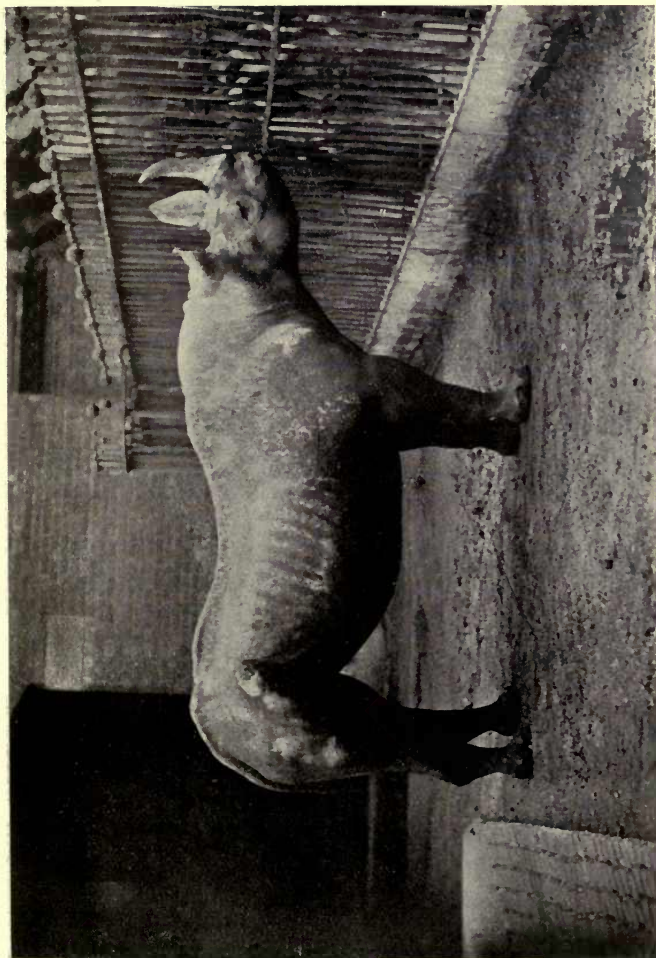
ALBERT DÜRER AND THE RHINOCEROS

hunted and hunting beasts, is negatived by the sense of sight ?

THE RHINOCEROS

This great Ungulate shows all the typical characteristics of the Perissodactyla which have been already and will be referred to. For some reason or other—probably blackness and large size—it is confounded in the popular mind with its very distant relative, the hippopotamus. It certainly occurs in Africa ; but is purely terrestrial, or, at most, marsh-frequenting. The rhinoceros is the only living Perissodactyle Ungulate which has horns on the forehead or anywhere. These horns, however, are not strictly comparable to those of goats and sheep, of deer and antelopes. They are to be looked upon as simply masses of agglutinated hairs which are borne upon a roughened, at most slightly raised, area of bone. The African rhinos have two of the horns ; some of the Asiatic forms have also two, the others have but one. Next to the presence of horns, the most salient characters of all rhinoceroses is their thick and often folded skin, covered as a rule with but scanty hair. It is truly a “Pachyderm,” and one does not wonder that Albert Dürer, in his celebrated drawing of the Indian form (*Rh. indicus*) represented it as armour-plated with indriven bolts. The strength of the rhinoceros is attested by the thick bars which hedge it in its cage at the Zoo, and its danger to human beings by the iron “refuges” for the keepers to escape into if hard pressed. But it seems doubtful whether the rhinoceros is so fierce as it has been asserted to be. It is true that the poet, ingeniously rhyming, has said—

If ever you meet a rhinoceros
Do not linger but flee
Up the very next tree :
He's a match for the gods ; he can toss Eros.



AFRICAN RHINOCEROS

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“THEODORE” OF THE ZOO

But, on the other, a naturalist in Africa related that a toy terrier put a rhinoceros to ignominious flight by its barks. The probable explanation is that the rhinoceros, when once set going, continues on in the same straight line, in obedience to the Newtonian law; under these circumstances, as with Stephenson's locomotive and the hypothetical cow, it is so much the worse for anybody who happens to come in its way. It is no more ferocious, in fact, than a cataract or an express train. It is true that "Theodore," an African rhinoceros lately on view at the Zoo, but now no more, was irritable. But we cannot argue from a captive to a freely roaming beast. Legend has encrusted the rhinoceros as thickly as Nature has. Its horns make beautiful translucent drinking vessels, which so lately as the year 1762 were reputed as test of poison. "When wine is poured therein," wrote Dr. Brookes in that year, "it will rise, ferment, and seem to boil; but when mixed with poison it cleaves in two, which experiment has been seen by thousands of people." Our second best diarist, John Evelyn, saw during his travels in Italy a fountain which was kept sweet and free from poison by a rhinoceros horn. It is held, too, that the branch cast into the waters of Marah was a horn brought with him by Moses from Egypt. As for unicorn legends, they are manifold. But it always seems to us that the rhinoceros was not the prototype of the "lufar unicorne." That fabulous beast, as every one knows, is compounded, at least in heraldry, of the body of a horse well maned and of the horn of a narwhal. To get that out of a ponderous rhinoceros is difficult even for the imaginative natural history of the ancients. No rhinoceros could slumber upon a maiden's breast, unless indeed the maiden were of the Barnum and Bailey kind. Much more likely is it that the unicorn is a small and graceful gazelle with, as rarely but occasionally happens as a

THE KING OF PORTUGAL AND THE POPE

freak, but one straight horn. The rhinoceros has been seen in Europe and even in England long before the opening of the Zoological Society's gardens. The animal which was sketched by Albert Dürer was sent over in the year 1313 to the King of Portugal. It proved so intractable, or the Portuguese king appreciated it so little, that he sent it as a present to the Pope! The head of the Church, however, was relieved from the anxiety attendant on the housing of so "fearful a wildfowl" by the actions of the rhinoceros itself, who, "in an access of fury sunk the vessel on its passage." In the year 1684 old John Evelyn "went with Sir William Godolphin to see the rhinoceros or unicorn, being the first, I suppose, that was ever brought to England. She belonged to some East India merchants, and was sold (as I remember) for above £2,000." The price of rhinoceroses did not diminish very greatly after the expiration of a century and a half. For the first specimen acquired by the Zoological Society, in 1834, cost no less than £1,050. Still later, in 1875, even more was given for a rhinoceros. The original specimen of a reputed new species, not now allowed as a species, viz., *Rh. lasiotis*, cost no less than £1,250. This animal from Assam was sent for specially, and only died the other day. Its remains repose in the Natural History Museum. The Gardens are never without more than one rhinoceros nowadays. A large Indian rhinoceros (*Rh. indicus*) was once the object of an interesting experiment in medicine. It appeared to suffer from simply a stomach-ache. The late Mr. Bartlett, daringly experimentalizing, offered it eighty drops of croton oil on a bun. The beast swallowed the dose, enough to kill ever so many men, and—recovered.



HAIRY-EARED RHINOCEROS