

NOAH'S ARK;

OR,

“MORNINGS IN THE ZOO.”

BEING

A CONTRIBUTION TO THE STUDY OF
UNNATURAL HISTORY.

BY

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CHAPTER VI.

THE ELEPHANTS' FELLOW-COUNTRYMEN.

THE RHINOCEROS, A VICTIM OF ILL-NATURED PERSONALITY—
IN THE GLACIAL PERIOD OF LONDON—THE HIPPOPOTAMUS—
POPULAR SYMPATHY WITH IT—BEHEMOTH A USELESS PERSON—
EXTINCT MONSTERS AND THE WORLD THEY LIVED IN—THE IMPOSSIBLE GIRAFFE—ITS INTELLIGENT USE OF ITS HEAD AS A HAMMER—THE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF SO MUCH NECK—ITS HIGH LIVING—THE ZEBRA—NATURE'S PARSIMONY IN THE MATTER OF PAINT ON THE SKINS OF ANIMALS—SOME SUGGESTIONS TOWARDS MORE GAIETY.

ELEPHANTS, there is no doubt, are favourites *The Rhinoceros.*
with the public, and they merit their popularity.

It is difficult, perhaps, to say as much for their cousins, the rhinoceroses. For some reason or another, the public resent the personal appearance of these animals, and no one compliments them. Straightforward opprobrium is bad enough, no doubt, but depreciatory innuendo is still harder to bear, just as the old writer tells us, in the matter of the patient patriarch, that "the oblique expostulations of his friends were a deeper injury to Job than the downright blows of the Devil."

The rhinoceros, therefore, when he stands at the bars with his mouth open in expectation of the donation which is seldom thrown in, hears much that must embitter his hours of solitary reflection. The remarks of visitors are never relieved by any reference to his "sagacity" or "docility," as in the case of the elephant; nor does any appreciation of usefulness to man temper the severity of their judgments upon him. That he is very ugly and looks very wicked is the burden of all criticism, and it is a wonder that under such perpetual provocation to do so, he does not grow uglier and look wickeder than he is. No ordinary man could go on being called "a hideous brute" for any great number of years without assuming a truculent and unlovable aspect; and it would not, therefore, be much matter for surprise if the rhinoceros, although such conduct were altogether foreign to his character and even distasteful to his feelings, should develope a taste for human flesh.

*Public
Disfavour
towards it.*

As it is he munches hay—not with any enthusiasm, it is true, but with a subdued satisfaction that bespeaks a philosophic and contented mind.

In the wild state, whether he be the African species or the Asiatic, the rhinoceros is a lazy, quiet-loving beast, passing his days in slumber in some secluded swamp of reed-bed, and coming out at night to browse along the wild pastures that offer themselves on forest edges or the water-side. In his caged condition his life is simply reversed, for his days are spent under the public eye, in

wakefulness and mental irritation, while his nights are given unnaturally to repose and solitude. There are no succulent expanses of grass and river herbage to tempt him abroad with his fellows as in the nights of liberty in Nubia or Assam; and let the moonlight be ever so bright he cannot now, as once, saunter away for miles along the lush banks of some Javan stream, or loiter feeding among the squashy brakes of the Nile. But captivity, if it robs him of freedom, injures the rhinoceros less than most of the beasts of the field, for he was never given to much exercise, and his life was an indolent one. Now and again, it is true, the hunters found him out, and awakened him to an unusual vivacity, and on such occasions he developed a nimbleness of limb and ferocity of temper that might hardly have been expected of so bulky and retiring an individual. Sometimes also he crossed the elephant on his jungle path, and in a sudden rush upon his noble kinsman vindicated his right of way, and expended all the stored-up energy of many months of luxurious idleness. But such sensations were few and far between. As a rule, his company were diminutive and deferential—wading birds of cautious habits and the deliberative pelicans, wild pigs and creatures of the ichneumon kind. The great carnivora never troubled their heads about such a preposterous victim, and the nations of the deer kind, couching by day in the forest depths and feeding by night in the open plain, saw nothing of the bulky rhinoceros. He lived, therefore

*On the
Banks of
the Nile.*

in virtual solitude—for water-fowl and weasels were hardly worth calling companions—and was indeed so vigilant in guarding his concealment that he remained a secret for ages.

*Obsolete
Rhino-
ceroses.*

Once upon a time, before Great Britain was an island, rhinoceroses browsed in herds along the Thames valley and rollicked where the waters of the German Ocean are now spread. Time passed—"it is a way it has." Oceans usurped the place of continents, and then our rhinoceroses found themselves obsolete, and decently became extinct. In the South, however, they held their own, and, lurking among the vegetable wildernesses of Asia and Africa, lived unsuspected until the luxurious Roman, ransacking the earth for rare animals to kill in the amphitheatre, chanced upon the bulky mammal hiding in the Nubian fens.

Great was the delight in Rome over the shield-protected stranger, and greater still the enthusiasm when it was found how willingly he charged the elephants confronted with him in the arena, and how long it took to kill him. The populace had been debauched by the easy slaughter of bears and leopards, and were almost surfeited with tigers and lions, when the hide-bound rhinoceros appeared upon the scene and rewarded sightseers with the novel spectacle of a beast that was not only formidable in offence but panoplied for defence. In time, however, this also grew stale and then the rhinoceros relapsed into its old oblivion, not being thought good enough even to kill, so

that except for some nomad tribe that met it in the African wastes, or the Assam villagers who waged war against the crop-destroyer, it was unknown to men.

The rhinoceros, therefore, figures nowhere in folk-lore, and neither fairy tale nor fable have anything to tell us of it. Art owes little to it, and commerce nothing. It points no moral and adorns no tale. Unassisted by associations, and possessing neither a literature nor a place in the fauna of fancy, the monstrous thing relies for sympathy and regard simply upon its merits, and how sadly these have failed to ingratiate it with the British public any visitor to the Zoological Gardens can easily assure himself.

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With the hippopotamus the case is somewhat different. One of them was born in the Gardens, and is a citizen of London, while all of them share alike in the traditional honours that attach to "Behemoth" and the reverend object of ancient Egypt's worship. *The Hippopotamus.*

It happens also that the apparently defenceless nature of the river-horse enlists public sympathy on his behalf, while the very absurdity of his appearance disarms ill-natured criticism. The horn of the rhinoceros is its ruin, for the popular esteem will never be extended to a creature that carries about on the tip of his nose such formidable implements of offence. The hippopotamus, fortunately for itself, is unarmed, so that a certain compassionate regard is not considered out of place. Its skin, though