

## "THE FABLED UNICORN."

ABOUT one hundred years ago, Bruce, the Abyssinian traveller, wrote: "It seems now a point agreed upon by travellers and naturalists, that the famous animal, having one horn only upon his forehead, is the fanciful creation of the poets and painters."

He treats with contempt the assertions of other travellers, that they had seen such an animal in Africa, although he himself describes at considerable length the rhinoceros, a species of which with one horn, he said, is often found in Eastern Africa, towards Cape Guardafui. He thought the "reem" of the Bible might have been the rhinoceros, and was probably the origin of the fabled unicorn.

A great many people have supposed the same; and yet the sculptured unicorn, in the ancient ruins of Persepolis, points to a very different conclusion. Heeren, the author of "Asiatic Nations," says, that the unicorn was adopted by the ancient Persians as the emblem of speed and strength, and the figure on the sculpture has no resemblance to the rhinoceros.

Barrow, again, the famous South African traveller, reported that he had seen drawings of the unicorn made by the Bushmen, and that all the other drawings by them of animals known to him were accurate copies.

Robert Southey frankly recorded his belief in the existence of the unicorn, and said, further, that many believed with him. And Robert Southey was right, as we propose to show.

Sir Thomas Browne, it may be remembered, agreed that there are "many unicorns," for "this animal is not uniformly described, but differently set forth by those that undertake it." And because of the lack of uniformity, he repudiated the idea that there could be the medical and antidotal virtue in the unicorn's horn, which was popularly supposed. He set forth the various descriptions of the unicorn by "the Ancients," and showed that they so materially differ "that under the same name authors describe, not the same animal, so that the unicorn horn of one is not that of another, although we proclaim an equal virtue in all."

Pliny's unicorn, which, as the good doctor says, was "a fierce and terrible creature," had the head of a hart, the feet of

an elephant, the tail of a boar, and the body of a horse. Ælian describes one as the size of a horse, and with a black horn, but Paulus Venetus made it as big as an elephant. Ludovicus Romanus, the traveller, reported that he had seen two in the temple at Mecca, with heads like deer, and feet like goats.

But numerous as are the differences among the old writers, their unicorns may be divided into two broad classes—those which support the rhinoceros theory, and those which point to a distinct animal, such as that, which, by the alterations of fable, and the modifications of heraldry, comes to be regarded, as on our national coat-of-arms, as a horse-shaped animal, with a horn issuing from its forehead.

This heraldic animal undoubtedly owed its importation into Great Britain to the Crusaders. They brought home from the East wonderful stories of the mysterious animal which they had seen on Egyptian and Persian monuments, or had heard described by those who had seen them. This was, of course, before the translators of the Bible had introduced the unicorn into the Book of Job, where the reference is plainly to the rhinoceros: "Canst thou bind the unicorn with his band in the furrow? Or will he harrow the valleys after thee?"

Yet, by Shakespeare's time, the animal had become a myth and nothing more, for when the "strange shapes" appear to the shipwrecked mariners on Prospero's island, Sebastian is made to say of them:

A living drollery! Now I will believe  
That there are unicorns; that in Arabia  
There is one tree, the phoenix' throne; one phoenix  
At this hour reigning there.

This is a clear reference to the reputedly fabulous and incredible. There is another reference, in "Julius Cæsar," where Brutus says of the man he is about to slay:

He loves to hear  
That unicorns may be betrayed with trees,  
And bears with glasses, elephants with holes,  
Lions with toils, and men with flatterers.

The allusion is here to the fable upon which rests the traditional enmity of the lion and the unicorn—that the unicorn is such a combination of pride and fierce anger, that, when he is attacked, he puts down his head and rushes blindly at his foe. In doing this he was said to drive his horn so fast into a tree that he became a prisoner to his own fury, and the lion devoured him at leisure.

From the Crusaders the unicorn readily

found its way into heraldry. The familiar animal, which now joins with the lion in supporting the arms of Great Britain, was incorporated at the time of the Scottish union. Before that event the Scottish arms had two unicorns as "supporters."

As an heraldic emblem: "The unicorn is the symbol of strength of body and virtue of mind. It also denotes extreme courage, and well befits the warrior who had rather die than fall into the hand of the enemy." So says Sloane Evans in his "Grammar of British Heraldry"; while also disposing curtly of the unicorn as one of the "chimerical charges" of heraldry, and compounded of parts of the lion and the horse, with one long projecting horn in the middle of its forehead.

A careful examination of the Eastern monuments, from which the Crusaders obtained their idea of the unicorn, reveals the fact that the oryx must have been in the minds of the designers—the very animal from which, doubtless, the Bushmen made those drawings on which Barrow commented. For the oryx is a native of South Africa, and is known to the Boers as the gemsbok.

But then he is not a unicorn, for he has two horns. Yet, looked at in profile, he appears to have only one.

It is not, perhaps, generally known that the arms of the Cape of Good Hope are "supported" by two animals, both of which are now almost, if not quite, extinct in the colony, but which once abounded on the grassy plains of South Africa. One of these is the black hartebeest, or white-tailed gnu; the other is the gemsbok, or oryx—the true unicorn. The latter is still to be found in small numbers in Northern Bushmanland, and on the borders of the Kalihari desert, but is seldom or ever seen now in Cape Colony.

Strangely enough, this rare and beautiful creature frequents the most arid and uninviting regions, for it is almost independent of water, and prefers solitude to verdure. It stands at the head of the large and beautiful species of antelopes with which Africa abounds; for the gemsbok is an antelope, and not, as the Dutch settlers seem to have supposed by the name they gave it, a chamois.

In size, the gemsbok is that of a large ass, the adult being about three feet ten inches at the shoulder. In colour it is of a greyish buff. Its form is robust, and its carriage majestic. Its head is its chief point of beauty—of pure white, painted

with eccentric black markings, surmounted by two straight, sharp-pointed horns over three feet in length. It has a full and beautiful eye, a white breast and stomach, with a tuft of thick, black hair on the chest, an erect mane, a long, black, switch tail that touches the ground, and broad, black bands over its back and sides.

Two of its characteristics at once identify it with the fabled unicorn—its unrivalled speed, and its fierceness when turned at bay.

Another is, that of all the antelopes, the oryx alone will face the lion. It is well known in Cape Colony that the carcasses of the lion and the gemsbok have frequently been found rotting together, the body of the lion firmly impaled on the horns of the other. Old hunters have described the gemsbok's method of meeting attack. When sorely pressed, it throws itself on the ground, and keeps sweeping with its horns a deadly circle that no foe dare venture within. Although both leopards and lions do, at times, attack the gemsbok, they never do so unless very hard up indeed for a meal; and as often as not they come off second best. Gordon Cumming and other hunters have gone into raptures over the beauty, speed, grace, and courage of the gemsbok.

Now the size, colour, and shape of the gemsbok all correspond with the drawings and descriptions from which the fabled unicorn has grown. The horns, when seen in profile, appear, as we have said, as one, and "the ancients" have merely given them a forward set, and added a few other little touches, which Europeans have exaggerated, and heraldists have travestied. Let it be remembered that Aristotle spoke of the oryx as one-horned; and the subsequent Greek writers spoke of the unicorn as of the size of a horse, with one straight horn of from one and a half to two cubits in length—that is, three to three and a half feet—and it is not difficult to see how the oryx or gemsbok developed into the unicorn.

As we now see him on our national arms—"Argent, crived and unguled, or, with a coronet composed of crosses patée and fleur-de-lys, with a chain affixed between the forelegs, and reflexed over the back of the last"—he is a somewhat different creature from the shy, swift, bright-eyed embodiment of grace that lingers on the wild, desert plains of Kalihari. But, after all, the heraldic unicorn is not so very much more of a

travesty of the real unicorn, than the heraldic lion is of the real lion.

As to the medical virtues which reputedly lie in its horns, we agree with old Sir Thomas Browne in thinking that there are, and can be, none which is not to be found in all horns, from which hartshorn can be extracted.

Another thing which helps to identify the gemsbok with the Persian and Egyptian unicorn, is the fact that it has been found in North-east Africa and in Arabia. Whether it will ever return to adorn the plains of Cape Colony again is extremely doubtful, notwithstanding the immunity which both it and the hartebeest enjoy from the gunner under the Colonial Game Preservation Act now in force. It is to be feared that that law has been too long deferred, and yet there is one thing in favour of the survival of the gemsbok from the general extermination, which seems to threaten certain animal life in Africa—including the elephant—and that is, that his absolute independence of water enables him to seek sanctuary in parched regions, where the huntsman dare not follow.

It is not, perhaps, generally known that the unicorn came into our national arms only at the Scotch Union. The personal arms of the Stuarts consisted of the lion within a double tressure, supported by a unicorn on each side. When King James succeeded to the English throne, he placed the lion on the dexter side and the unicorn on the sinister side, in place of the red dragon of the Tudors. Thus do we have "the lion and the unicorn fighting for the crown."

In Nisbet's "System of Heraldry" it is stated that the unicorn was, at a very early period, one of the devices borne by the Scottish Kings, "not only for his strength, courage, and particular virtue of his horn in dispelling poison, but as the emblem of unconquerable freedom—a suitable device for Scotland, which became the supporter of its imperial design, and continues the badge of its independency."

## KESTELL OF GREYSTONE.

A SERIAL STORY.

BY ESMÈ STUART.

Author of "Muriel's Marriage," "Joan Vellacot,"  
"A Faïre Damzell," etc., etc.

CHAPTER LIV. VENGEANCE

How long Hoel stayed in the little church he could not tell. No one came to disturb him; the door remained opened,

and the sudden gusts of wind that now and then swept up through the pine plantation only blew in a few of the crushed petals of the white flowers that the bride had not trodden on again.

All the mental suffering he had experienced, added to the physical weakness which still remained, made him only able to bear his utter misery by thus resting in this perfect solitude. He did not fully realise that the wedding had been arrested voluntarily by Elva herself. He believed that she had been too much overstrained to go through with it; and that the next day, or as soon as she had sufficiently recovered, she would finish the ceremony. He now began blaming himself for having come. Again he had behaved selfishly; and what right had he even to come and beg for her forgiveness, even if it had been merely by a look?

Hoel was again thrown into a state of penitence, and recognised that unselfishness is not acquired in a day, nor even after having experienced a great shock. He began also to writhe under the idea that, by showing himself, he had but added in her eyes to his former cowardly conduct. How should he ever be able to explain to her that his intentions had been at this time, at least, good and honourable? He fancied he should be content to let her be the wife of another if only she could know that his conduct had had much excuse.

"But how can she ever know this? How can I ever tell her?"

Suddenly Hoel raised his head and recalled his resolution. After the wedding, he had promised to tell Jesse the truth. He might even now be trying to see Mr. Kestell, and— No, that must not be. Already, to spare Elva, and, therefore, himself, he had too long put off what was right. Jesse ought to know, and he, Hoel, was the only man who might influence him. On the other hand, Hoel could not make up his mind to leave this spot without first finding out whether Elva were better. He looked at his watch; it was nearly half-past four. He must find Jesse before going back to town. Poor fellow, he had been wronged by every one. "He looked to me as a friend; I have behaved as no friend should have done."

He stood up, and felt stronger and calmer. Deep down in his heart there was the thought that Elva was not yet another man's wife; but he wondered how he could draw comfort from such a poor