

Edgar A. Mearns.
ANIMAL

BIOGRAPHY;

OR,

AUTHENTIC ANECDOTES

OF THE

LIVES, MANNERS, AND ECONOMY,

OF THE

ANIMAL CREATION,

ARRANGED ACCORDING TO THE SYSTEM OF LINNÆUS.

BY THE REV. W. BINGLEY, A. M.

FELLOW OF THE LINNEAN SOCIETY,
AND LATE OF PETERHOUSE, CAMBRIDGE.

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following manner :—when he comes to an Ant-hill, he scratches it up with his long claws, and then unfolds his slender tongue, which much resembles an enormously long worm ; this being covered over with a clammy matter or saliva, the Ants get upon it in great numbers, and by drawing it into his mouth, he swallows thousands of them alive ; and he repeats the operation till no more are to be found. He also climbs trees in quest of Wood-lice and wild-honey ; but should he meet with little success in his devastations, he is able to fast for considerable time without the smallest inconvenience. His motions are in general very slow. He swims over great rivers with sufficient ease : on these occasions his tail is always thrown over his back.

It is said that these Ant-eaters are tameable, and that in a domestic state they will pick up crumbs of bread and small pieces of flesh. They are natives of Brazil and Guiana, and are sometimes eight or nine feet in length from the end of the snout to the tip of the tail*. The females bring forth one young one at a time, which does not arrive at maturity till it is four years old.

THE RHINOCEROS TRIBE †.

WE now come to a race of animals of huge size and bulk, inhabitants only of the tropical climates. They are dull and sluggish in their manners, but in

* Stedman.

† This name is derived from *ρῖς* *ρῖνος* nose, and *κερας* a horn.

their disposition sufficiently peaceable, except when attacked or provoked. They have on the nose, a solid, conical horn, not fixed in the bone; this is never shed, but remains, unless broken off by accident, during life *. Their skin is tuberculated and exceedingly hard, but on the under parts of the body sufficiently tender to be cut through with a knife.—The general internal structure of the animals of this tribe corresponds with what is observed in the Horse.

THE SINGLE-HORNED RHINOCEROS †.

The Single-horned Rhinoceros is not exceeded in size by any land animal except the Elephant, and in strength and power it gives place to none. Its length is usually about twelve feet, and this is also nearly the girth of its body.

Its nose is armed with a formidable weapon, a hard and very solid horn, sometimes above three feet in length, and eighteen inches in circumference at the base, with which it is able to defend itself against the attacks of every ferocious animal. The Tiger will rather attack the Elephant than the Rhinoceros, which it cannot face without danger of having its bowels torn out. “With this horn,” says Martial, “it will lift up a Bull like a football ‡.”

* Linn. Gmel. i. 59.

† SYNONYMS.—Rhinoceros Unicornis. Linn.—Rhinoceros. Buffon. Parsons, &c.—Shaw's Gen. Zool. pl. 60.—Bew. Quad. 156.

‡ Martial, Book i. Epig. 14.

The body and limbs of the Rhinoceros are defended by a skin so hard as to be impenetrable, except in the belly, by either a knife or spear. It is said, that even to shoot a full-grown Rhinoceros of an advanced age, it is necessary to make use of iron bullets, those of lead having been known to flatten against the skin.

The upper lip in this animal seems to answer in some measure the same purpose as the trunk of the Elephant. It protrudes over the lower one in the form of a lengthened tip; and, being extremely pliable, is used in catching hold of the shoots of vegetables, &c. and delivering them into its mouth.

The Rhinoceros is generally of a quiet and inoffensive disposition, but when attacked or provoked, he becomes very furious and dangerous; and he is even sometimes subject to paroxysms of fury, which nothing can assuage.

Dr. Parsons, in the year 1743, published a history of the Rhinoceros, containing a very minute description of one that was brought from Bengal into Europe*. He was only two years old, and the expence of his food and journey amounted to near 1000l. sterling. He had every day, at three meals, seven pounds of rice, mixed with three pounds of sugar; besides hay and green plants: he also drank large quantities of water. In his disposition he was very peaceable, readily suffering all parts of his

* The first that was brought into England was in the year 1684.

body to be touched. When he was hungry, or was struck by any person, he became mischievous, and nothing would appease him but food. He was not at this time taller than a young Cow.

A Rhinoceros, brought from Atcham, in the dominions of the King of Ava, was exhibited in 1748, at Paris. It was very tame, gentle, and even caressing; was fed principally on hay and corn, and was much delighted with sharp or prickly plants, and the thorny branches of trees. The attendants frequently gave him branches that had very sharp and strong thorns on them; but he bent and broke them in his mouth without seeming in the least incommoded. It is true they sometimes drew blood from the mouth and tongue, "but that," says Father Le Comte, who gives us the description, "might even render them more palatable, and those little wounds might serve only to cause a sensation similar to that excited by salt, pepper, or mustard, on ours *."

As an equivalent for a very dull sight, Dr. Parsons remarks, that this animal has an acute and most attentive ear. It will listen with a deep and long-continued attention to any kind of noise; and although it be eating, lying down, or obeying any pressing demands of nature, it will raise its head, and listen till the noise ceases.

The Rhinoceros is said to run with great swiftness, and from his strength and impenetrable cover-

* Church.

ing, is capable of rushing with resistless violence through woods and obstacles of every kind; the smaller trees bending like twigs as he passes them. In his general habits and manner of feeding he resembles the Elephant: residing in cool sequestered spots, near waters, and in shady woods. Like the hog, he delights in occasionally wallowing in the mire*.

The Asiatics sometimes tame and bring these animals into the field of battle, to strike terror into their enemies. They are, however, in general so unmanageable, that they do more harm than good; and in their fury it is not uncommon for them to turn on their masters †.

The skin, which is of a blackish colour, is disposed about the neck into large plaits or folds: a fold of the same kind passes from the shoulders to the fore legs; and another from the hind part of the back to the thighs. It is naked, rough, and covered with a kind of tubercles, or large callous granulations. Between the folds, and under the belly, the skin is soft, and of a light rose-colour. The ears are moderately large, upright, and pointed. The eyes are small, and so placed, that the animal can only see what is nearly in a direct line before him ‡.

The flesh is eaten by the inhabitants of the country. The skin, flesh, hoofs, teeth, and even the dung, are also used medicinally. The horn, when cut through the middle, is said to exhibit on each side, the rude figure of a man; the

* Shaw, i. 200.

† Church.

‡ Shaw, i. 199.

outlines being marked by small white strokes*. Many of the Indian princes drink out of cups made of this horn; imagining, that when these hold any poisonous draught, the liquor will ferment till it runs quite over the top. Goblets made of the horns of the young, are esteemed the most valuable. Professor Thunberg, when at the Cape, tried these horns, both wrought into goblets and unwrought, both old and young horns, with several sorts of poison, weak as well as strong, but did not observe the least motion or effervescence; when, however, a solution of corrosive sublimate was poured into one of them, there arose indeed a few bubbles, which were produced by the air that had been inclosed in the pores of the horn, and was now disengaged from it †. Martial informs us, that the Roman ladies of fashion used these horns in the baths, to hold their essence-bottles and oils ‡. The Javanese make shields of the skin.

The Single-horned Rhinoceros is a native of several parts of India; as well as of the islands of Ceylon, Java, and Sumatra. It is also found in Ethiopia.—The female produces only one young one at a birth.

THE TWO-HORNED RHINOCEROS §.

This species differs from the last, principally in the appearance of its skin; which, instead of vast and regularly marked armour-like folds, has merely

* Grose, i. 273. † Thunberg, i. 246. ‡ Lib. xiv. Ep. 53.

§ SYNONYMS.—Rhinoceros Bicornis. Linn.—Shaw's Gen. Zool. pl. 61.—Bew. uad. 156.

a very slight wrinkle across the shoulders and on the hinder parts, with a few fainter wrinkles on the sides; so that, in comparison with the common Rhinoceros, it appears almost smooth. What, however, constitutes the principal distinction, is the nose being furnished with two horns, one of which is smaller than the other, and situated above it. These horns are said to be loose when the animal is in a quiet state, but to become firm and immoveable when he is enraged*.

In its habits and manner of feeding, this differs but little from the Single-horned Rhinoceros. Le Vaillant says, that when these animals are at rest, they always place themselves in the direction of the wind, with their noses towards it, in order to discover by their smell the approach of any enemies. From time to time, however, they move their heads round to look behind them, and to be assured that they are safe on all sides; but they soon return to their former position †. When they are irritated they tear up the ground with their horn; throwing the earth and stones furiously, and to a vast distance, over their heads.

Mr. Bruce's description of the manners of the Two-horned Rhinoceros, is deserving of particular notice. He informs us that, "besides the trees capable of most resistance, there are, in the vast forests within the rains, trees of a softer consistence, and of a very succulent quality, which seem to be

* Shaw, i. 202.

† New Travels in Africa, iii. 42.

destined for the principal food of this animal. For the purpose of gaining the highest branches of these, his upper lip is capable of being lengthened out so as to increase his power of laying hold with it, in the same manner as the Elephant does with his trunk. With this lip, and the assistance of his tongue, he pulls down the upper branches, which have most leaves, and these he devours first. Having stripped the tree of its branches, he does not immediately abandon it; but, placing his snout as low in the trunk as he finds his horns will enter, he rips up the body of the tree, and reduces it to thin pieces like so many laths; and when he has thus prepared it, he embraces as much of it as he can in his monstrous jaws, and twists it round with as much ease as an ox would do a root of celery, or any small plant.

“ When pursued, and in fear, he possesses an astonishing degree of swiftness, considering his size, the apparent unwieldiness of his body, his great weight before, and the shortness of his legs. He has a kind of trot, which, after a few minutes, increases in a great proportion, and takes in a great distance; but this is to be understood with a degree of moderation. It is not true that in a plain he beats the Horse in swiftness. I have passed him with ease, and seen many, worse mounted, do the same; and though it is certainly true that a horse can very seldom come up with him, this is owing to his cunning, and not to his swiftness. He makes constantly from wood to wood, and forces himself into the thickest parts of them. The trees that are dead or dry, are broken down, as with a cannon shot, and

fall behind him and on his side in all directions. Others that are more pliable, greener, or fuller of sap, are bent back by his weight, and the velocity of his motions. And after he has passed, restoring themselves like a green branch to their natural position, they often sweep the incautious pursuer and his horse from the ground, and dash them in pieces against the surrounding trees.

“The eyes of the Rhinoceros are very small; he seldom turns his head, and therefore sees nothing but what is before him*. To this he owes his death, and never escapes if there is so much plain as to enable the Horse to get before him. His pride and fury then make him lay aside all thoughts of escaping, but by victory over his enemy. He stands for a moment at bay: then, at a start, runs straight forward at the Horse, like the Wild Boar, which, in his manner of action, he very much resembles. The Horse easily avoids him by turning short to one side; and this is the fatal instant: the naked man, with the sword, drops from behind the principal horseman, and, unseen by the Rhinoceros, who is seeking his enemy, the Horse, he gives him a stroke across the tendon of the heel, which renders him incapable of further flight or resistance.

“In speaking of the great quantity of food necessary to support this enormous mass, we must

* The account of Mr. Bruce differs in this particular from that of M. Vaillant, before quoted; and it is impossible for me to say which of the two is nearest the truth.

likewise consider the vast quantity of water which he needs. No country but that of Shangalla, which he possesses, deluged with six months rain, and full of large and deep basons, made in the living rock, and shaded by dark woods from evaporation, or watered by large and deep rivers which never fall low or to a state of dryness, can supply the vast draughts of this monstrous creature : but it is not for drinking alone that he frequents wet and marshy places ; large, fierce, and strong as he is, he must submit to prepare himself against the weakest of his adversaries. The great consumption he constantly makes of food and water, necessarily confines him to certain limited spaces ; for it is not every place that can maintain him ; he cannot emigrate or seek his defence among the sands of Atbara*.”

—His adversary is a Fly (probably of the Linnaean genus *æstrus*) which is bred in the black earth of the marshes. It persecutes him so unremittingly, that it would in a short time subdue him, but for a stratagem which he practises for his preservation. In the night when the Fly is at rest, the Rhinoceros chuses a convenient place, and there rolling in the mud, clothes himself with a kind of case, which defends him against his adversary the following day, The wrinkles and plaits of his skin serve to keep this muddy plaster firm upon him, all but about his hips shoulders, and legs, where it cracks and falls off, by motion, and leaves him exposed in those parts to the attacks of the Fly. The itching

* Travels to discover the Source of the Nile,

and pain which follow, occasion him to rub himself in those parts against the roughest trees; and this is one cause of the numerous pustules or tubercles that we see upon him.

He enjoys so much the rubbing himself, that he groans and grunts so loud during this action, as to be heard at a considerable distance. The pleasure he receives from this employment, and the darkness of the night, deprive him of his usual vigilance and attention. The hunters, guided by his noise, steal secretly upon him; and while lying on the ground, wound him with their javelins; mostly in the belly, where the wound is mortal.

It is by no means true that the skin of this Rhinoceros, as it has been often represented, is hard or impenetrable like a board. In his wild state he is slain by javelins thrown from the hand, some of which enter his body to a great depth. A musket-shot will go through him, unless interrupted by a bone; and the Shangalla, an Abyssinian tribe, kill him by the clumsiest arrows that ever were used by any people practising that weapon, and cut him to pieces afterwards with the very worst of knives.

In order to afford some idea of the enormous strength of the Rhinoceros, even after being severely wounded, I shall quote Mr. Bruce's account of the hunting of this animal in Abyssinia: "We were on horseback (says this gentleman) by the dawn of day, in search of the Rhinoceros, many of which we had heard making a very deep groan and cry as the morning approached; several of the

Agageers (hunters) then joined us : and after we had searched about an hour in the very thickest part of the wood, one of them rushed out with great violence, crossing the plain towards a wood of canes that was about two miles distant. But though he ran, or rather trotted with surprising speed, considering his bulk, he was, in a very little time, transfixcd with thirty or forty javelins ; which so confounded him, that he left his purpose of going to the wood, and ran into a deep hole, ditch, or ravine, a *cul de sac*, without outlet, breaking above a dozen of the javelins as he entered. Here we thought he was caught as in a trap, for he had scarcely room to turn ; when a servant, who had a gun, standing directly over him, fired at his head, and the animal fell immediately, to all appearance dead. All those on foot now jumped in with their knives to cut him up ; but they had scarcely begun, when the animal recovered so far as to rise upon his knees : happy then was the man that escaped first ; and had not one of the Agageers, who was himself engaged in the ravine, cut the sinew of the hind leg as he was retreating, there would have been a very sorrowful account of the foot-hunters that day.

“ After having dispatched him, I was curious to see what wound the shot had given, which had operated so violently upon so huge an animal ; and I doubted not it was in the brain. But it had struck no where but upon the point of the foremost horn, of which it had carried off above an inch : and this occasioned a concussion that had stunned

him for a minute, till the bleeding had recovered him."

It has been often asserted that the tongue of the Rhinoceros is so hard and rough, as to take away the skin and flesh wherever it licks any person that has unfortunately fallen a victim to its fury*. Dr. Sparrman says, however, that he thrust his hand into the mouth of one that had just been shot, and found the tongue perfectly soft and smooth.—The cavity which contained the brain of one of these huge animals, was only six inches long and four deep; and, being filled with pease, was found to hold barely a quart; while a human skull, measured at the same time, took above two quarts to fill it.

The Hottentots, and even some of the inhabitants of the Cape, set a high value on the dried blood of the Rhinoceros, to which they ascribe great virtues in the cure of many disorders of the body. The flesh is eatable, but it is very full of sinews.

THE ELEPHANT TRIBE.

THESE animals have no front teeth in either jaw; and from the upper jaw proceed two long and stout tusks, which, in a state of nature, are used in tearing up trees for food, and as weapons of defence against their enemies. They have a long, cartilaginous, prehensile trunk, which is ca-

* Kolben, ii. 103.

APPENDIX.

THE following information, respecting the manners of some of the Quadrupeds, that, within the last ten or twelve years, have been brought into England, was obtained too late to admit of its being incorporated into the body of the work. Rather, however, than it should be lost to the reader; I have inserted it here by way of Appendix. It principally relates to such as have been deposited in the Exhibition rooms at Exeter 'Change, and in the menagerie at the Tower of London.

THE SINGLE-HORNED RHINOCEROS *.

THE only two animals of this species that have been brought into England during the last half century, were both purchased for the exhibition rooms at Exeter 'Change. One of them, of which the skin is still preserved, came from Laknaor, in the East Indies, and was brought over in the Melville Castle, East Indiaman, as a present to Mr. Dundas. This gentleman, not wishing to have the trouble of keeping him, gave the animal away. Not long afterwards he was purchased by Mr. Pidcock of Exeter 'Change, for the sum of 700l. He arrived in Eng-

* See vol. i. p. 110.

land in the year 1790, and is supposed to have been at that time about five years old.

He exhibited no symptoms of a ferocious propensity, and would even allow himself to be patted on the back or sides by strangers. His docility was about equal to that of a tolerably tractable Pig: he would obey the orders of his keeper, to walk about the room, and exhibit himself to the numerous spectators who came to visit him.—This animal usually ate every day twenty-eight pounds weight of clover, besides about the same weight of ship biscuit, and a vast quantity of greens. His food was invariably seized in his long, and projecting upper lip, and by it conveyed into the mouth. He was allowed also five pails of water twice or thrice a day. This was put into a vessel that contained about three pails, which was filled up as the animal drank it; and he never ended his draught till the water was exhausted. He was very fond of sweet wines, of which he would often drink three or four bottles in the course of a few hours. His voice was not much unlike the bleating of a Calf. It was most commonly exerted when the animal observed any person with fruit or other favorite food in his hand, and in such cases it seems to have been a mark of his anxiety to have it given him. During the severe illness which preceded his death this noise, but in a more melancholy tone, was almost constantly heard, occasioned doubtless by the agonies that he underwent.

In the month of October, 1792, as this Rhinoceros was one day rising up very suddenly, he slipped the joint of one of his fore-legs. This accident

brought on an inflammation that about nine months afterwards occasioned his death. It is a singular fact that in the incisions which were made, on the first attempts to recover the animal, through his thick and tough hide, the wounds were invariably found to be healed in the course of twenty-four hours. He died in a caravan at Corsham near Portsmouth. When the carriage arrived at the latter place, the stench arising from the body was so offensive, that the Mayor was under the necessity of ordering it to be immediately buried. This was accordingly done, on South Sea Common. About a fortnight afterwards, during the night, and unknown to any of the people of Portsmouth, it was dug up for the purpose of preserving its skin, and some of the most valuable of the bones. The persons present declared, that the stench was so powerful, that it was not without the greatest difficulty they could proceed in their operations. It was plainly perceptible at the distance of more than half a mile.

The other Rhinoceros that was at Exeter 'Change was considerably smaller than this, and was likewise a male. It was brought over about the year 1799, and lived not more than twelve months afterwards. An agent of the Emperor of Germany purchased it of Mr. Pidcock for 1000*l*. It died in a stable-yard in Drury Lane, after he had been in possession of it about two months.