

## STOCKING THE ZOO.

### A CHAT WITH THE DIRECTOR.

[By our Special Reporter.]

Judging from the manifold experiences undergone by Mr. R. E. Minchin, the Director of the S.A. Zoological Gardens, in search of wild animals to further stock the natural history department, the task of seeking rare specimens of the animal kingdom is a difficult and delicate one, requiring tact in dealing with natives of other climes and the exercise of much patience in the negotiation. The amateur Barnum sees strange sights and passes through peculiar experiences before he can collect together the requisite number of birds, beasts, and reptiles he is in quest of. And there the trouble does not end; in fact, it may be said to have only begun, because he has yet to bring in his prizes from village and jungle, properly cage them, get them safely on board ship, and tend them carefully on the voyage. They are susceptible to the sudden change from the life of wild freedom in the forest and plain to captivity and ocean influences. Even those that have been bought from the cage, as it were, need the greatest attention according to the treatment they have already undergone. As a rule animals obtained from Oriental menageries have not been too well fed or housed, and compare most unfavourably in constitution and health with the sleek and apparently contented denizens of our own Zoo.

Mr. Minchin left Adelaide on December 18 last year on a visit to Siam and various other places for the purpose of selecting suitable specimens of curious birds and beasts to increase the attractions of our Zoological Gardens, and he has performed his mission with excellent judgment, having brought back a fine collection, consisting of one rhinoceros (a fine healthy fellow), two curious white buffaloes, a black panther, two leopards, one sun-bear, ten tiger cats, four Siamese cats, two ourang-outangs, one red-faced monkey, two black monkeys, three monkeys of various species, one porcupine, two baboons, two squirrels, one pelican, ten crown pigeons, one crane, five pheasants, four white guineafowls, two white hawks, fifteen gorgeously

two white hawks, fifteen gorgeously plumaged parrots, five Nicobar pigeons, seven blue rails, two peacocks, four blackbirds, one white monkey with pink eyes (a lively intelligent-looking fellow, and a great favourite with the sailors), two alligators (one a rather formidable-looking young fellow, 5 feet long, the other a piccanninie), ten tortoises, six vultures (caught at a feast on human flesh), two slow loris, and a few other curious creatures. He has been very successful, having lost comparatively few from the lot by death.

The steamship Guthrie, in command of the genial Captain Green, reached the roadstead early in the afternoon, and was promptly met by Mr. Jagoe's launch with Mr. C. J. Valentine (the Inspector of Stock) and Mr. Minchin, jun., amongst the boarders. Mr. Valentine went off in his official capacity, but found a clean bill of health covering Mr. Minchin's varied collection. The Chinese crew were busy about the decks getting ready for harbour. The cages in which the animals and birds were kept were most of them on deck, and were as clean and airy as the circumstances would permit, proving the care and attention bestowed upon the captives.

#### CHAT WITH THE DIRECTOR.

To Mr. Minchin's energy and enthusiasm in natural history the success and completeness of our Zoological Gardens are due. A talk about animals was congenial to him. Amidst the characteristic bustle of a steamer preparing to go into harbour we fell into conversation about the trip. He looked as if he had been over-anxious about the safety of his charges, and it turned out that he had been up night and day with them when the weather was bad. His chief trouble, however, was with the coolies and the sailors. Jack at sea must have a pet, and he has a notion that all animals will chew tobacco and drink grog if they get the chance. The only reason they do not indulge in these luxuries when in their natural state is they cannot manufacture the stuff.

#### IN SEARCH OF THE ANIMALS.

"I arrived at Singapore," said Mr.

"I arrived at Singapore," said Mr. Minchin, "on January 4, after a most pleasant trip in the *Khaisar-i-Hind*, but I did not get anything much in the way of animals there. At Ceylon I got two white water-buffalo, fine healthy creatures and rather rare as to colour. The black buffalo are plentiful and they are used for draught, dragging those clumsy carts with great lumbering wheels over the bad roads of the country. I returned to Singapore and went a little up-country, but did not have time to go far or do much."

"Where did you get the rhinoceros?"

"Oh, I got that grand little fellow from a dealer who had just come from Borneo. He had three more, but this one was the best. He is as tame as a pig, and only 18 months old, but strong as a horse. I gave £66 for him, and was offered £200 for him in Sydney."

The rhinoceros in question is of the one-horned variety, and stands about 3 feet high on his short, stumpy legs. While we were speaking he pushed his long, ungainly head against the stout wooden bars of his cage, uttering a peculiar half-grunting, half-squeaking noise, and looking as amiable as a pig out of his small, bright, black eyes. His horn is a mere knob, and the rough folds of his hide are flexible, as yet the skin being only "platey" at the sides. He is a male, and gives every promise of growing into a fine large bulky beast. He has a plump well-fed look and stood the voyage well.

"How did you get your animals, from menageries or dealers?"

"Well, in various ways."

Mr. Minchin continued—"I had a lot given me as a present from the King of Siam. I obtained them just as chance offered. Some like that rhinoceros are brought over in proas from Borneo and other places to the nearest place for a market. I got a fine black panther in Siam, also two leopards and a pair of white water-buffalo. They are very rare in Siam, the white variety."

INTERVIEW WITH THE KING OF SIAM.

"Yes, I saw the King of Siam, but not the wives. I had some trouble to get to His Majesty, although I had a letter for him from Sir William Robinson

to get to His Majesty, although I had a letter for him from Sir William Robinson — there are such a lot of people about the Court. It was when I sent him a present of an emu egg handsomely mounted in silver that His Majesty enquired for me and ordered me to be admitted to his presence. The letter was directed through Lord Dufferin, who happened to be away, and I had to wait nine days before I got into "the presence." He is a little man, flat as a board, with an intelligent face, and would be rather nice-looking were it not for the quantity of betel-nut he chews. He was very cordial, and asked me, through an interpreter, what I required. I told him that I was in search of animals for the South Australian Zoological Gardens, and I showed him a list. He had previously given orders that I should be shown over the Royal Menagerie, and I took a list of the animals, which I showed him. The King understands English, but will not speak to any one in that language. He gave instructions that I was to have all I required, and I took all but a white monkey. While I was in Bangkok I saw several executions and punishment with the bastinado. The executions were for murder, and the bastinado was for refusing to inform. The murderer was brought forward in a kind of box, with his head and hands out. Both the victim and the executioner were drunk. The executioner walked round behind the man,

and with a peculiar swish of his sword cut his head off in the presence of a crowd of people."

CATCHING THE ANIMALS.

"Do they take much trouble with their menageries?"

"Very little indeed. They are like children with toys; the animals are a source of interest for a few days and are then neglected. I did not see them fed or watered while I was there. I saw the King's palace. He spent about £2,000 for books, and they are lying about as though they had been tumbled from a cart. He has an English History for his own son, but his studies are a mere farce. The King gave me two beautiful photos of the palace, with his and the Queen's autographs at the bottom. The King's gardens are

and the Queen's zoogeography at the bottom. The King's gardens are open to the public two hours each day. Their enclosures where they confine the animals are very large, and that is where the chief difficulty lay. I had no end of trouble to get them after they were given to me. The King's orders were transmitted through a lot of court officials, and they sent a gang of prisoners in chains to capture the animals and drive them into my cages. These fellows made such a hideous hubbub yelling and shouting that the poor brutes cowered down in the farthest corner of their cages and refused to move. They had to be lassoed at last with a slip-knot cord on a long bamboo. They strangled a fine black panther trying to get him out. The greatest bother was in getting the animals to the vessel. The purchases are made in all sorts of places from dealers and natives who bring them in, but there is no facility offered for sending them to the seaport, however near. The natives bring in the animals and you may take them or not as you please. If you take them they are put down just where they are in their rude cages, and you may get them away in the best fashion you can. I had a black man with me, but it was a lot of hard work. I would not like to go over the same experience again.

"Catching the vultures was horrible work. The people do not like to let them go; they are the natural scavengers of the place. They are to be seen roosting in trees in immense numbers, and the method of catching them is most repulsive. Dead bodies—the cholera was raging terribly and deaths were numerous—were left out for the vultures to fatten on, and the men sent to catch them used these as baits. I was taken to one of these places, where the bodies were exposed in the most callous way, and the vultures swarmed over them in hundreds. When they settled the men went amongst them and seized the birds by the neck as you would a turkey. One of the birds tore a man's face in a dreadful manner, and he died a day or two afterwards of blood-poisoning.

"I left Bangkok and returned to Singapore, where I obtained a splendid pair of

pore, where I obtained a splendid pair of elephant's tusks for Sir Thomas Elder, our President. I saw the tusks at the place of H.R.H. Prince Dewan, who gave them to me for Sir Thomas.

"I had some fine owls, which died on the voyage. In coming down the China Seas I lost some of the animals; they could not stand the weather.

"I went to Jahore and got some musk cats or tiger cats, beautiful creatures. The great thing is to drop upon a dealer who has just arrived with animals. The animals they have are in good condition; if they have them long they neglect them cruelly. If the Sultan of Jahore wants them they give them to him, and they will exchange with purchasers, but they do not know the value of our money much, and they do not care for money. They feel that if it becomes known that they have any it is sure to be taken from them. Give a native a sovereign and he will be suspected of having stolen it. They know better in Colombo; they would run you round the place there for a shilling.

"I left Singapore on March 10, and saw a lot of places, but there is no country to my mind like Australia. I obtained some magnificent Victoria Crown pigeons at Batavia. When I had collected my animals and birds I had a lot of trouble shipping them; in one case the vessel was 5 miles out. On the whole the animals were cheap. When we got the black panther we have now in the Zoo we gave £60 for him. The one I have just bought cost £12, and a very nice young animal he is. I could have got a boa constrictor in Singapore for £2."

#### THE VOYAGE HOME.

"I went on to the Northern Territory, and tried to get an alligator, but could not. I saw the Government Resident (Mr. Parsons), who treated me most courteously. He appears to be very much liked in the Territory; every one I met spoke well of him. My stay was so short that I had no time to make enquiries about the prospects or condition of the place. The voyage across the Gulf of Carpentaria was very rough, and I found it very hot at Thursday Island. I had to look after my animals night and day. We had a very large

night and day. We had a very large number of coolies from Batavia on board going to Cooktown to the sugar plantations, instead of Kanakas, who prove too troublesome to get now. Captain Green was most anxious about these people, they wanted so much looking after. It was a time of great anxiety for him. They were perpetually smoking on deck, and I had to watch lest they gave the animals deleterious things. They would stuff them with biscuits, and I was afraid they would give the rhinoceros tobacco. The sailors made great pets of the animals. I fed the rhino on biscuits, bran, and fruit, and I had to ship tame sheep for the carnivora; also hay for the buffaloes. On the voyage here I lost several parrots from cold. I was offered £500 for my collection in Sydney; they cost about £400. Siam is about one of the worst places to go to, it is so dirty; dead bodies are continually seen floating about the river, and the streets of the town I visited have not been cleaned for twenty years—they leave the scavenging to the vultures. Oh no, not much of a Board of Health there. In the streets you walk upon an accumulation of rotten vegetable matter. When I first went to Singapore I thought it a dirty place, but when I returned to it from Siam I thought it very clean in comparison. In Siam I saw some children suffering from smallpox in a boat in the river, and a woman was pouring water over them from the stream, while only two or three yards away people were in the river actually drinking the water. The King does nothing with the revenue it seems. They make no roads, and never attempt anything to improve the condition of the people. In going to these places to purchase animals as I did you want to give presents. Money is little use."

Having finished my chat with Mr. Minchin I had a look at his collection. The white buffalo are in splendid condition, about the same size as the Zebu or Brahmin cattle in the Zoo, but heavily built, stout, and short-legged, and much let down in the quarters. They have awkward-looking heads, with immense horns, massive, wrinkled, very broad at the

base, sharp-pointed, and sloping backwards. One of the orang-outangs is a great pet, and was carried about the deck like a two-year-old child, munching a jam roll. The tiger cats and other carnivora are very interesting, but could not be seen to best advantage. At the Port Mr. Edwards, the head keeper, was in waiting to convey the collection to their quarters in the Gardens, and as soon as the steamer came alongside she was invaded by a crowd eager to see the stock of strange animals.