

GEORDIE PURDIE IN LONDON;

OR THE

*Adventures of a Fifeshireman in the
Metropolis.*

BY DANIEL GORRIE,

AUTHOR OF "SUMMERS AND WINTERS IN THE ORKNEYS,"
ETC., ETC.



EDINBURGH PUBLISHING COMPANY.

LONDON: HOULSTON AND SONS.



CHAPTER XI.

THE UPPER CLASSES OF THE ZOO—"AN AWFU' BEAST"—FEEDING THE ELEPHANT—MONSIEUR OBAYSCH AND MADAME ADHELA—A RIDE ON OLD JUMBO'S BACK—ESCAPE OF THE CHIMPANZEE AND HIS CLEVER CAPTURE.

THE size and general appearance of the new block of buildings, where the elephants and rhinoceroses are housed, caused Geordie no small amount of wonderment, and he made a passable joke about its being clear that the erection was meant to be the abode of the higher and not of the lower animals. In fact, this part of the Gardens, though situated on the north side, may be considered the aristocratic West End of the Zoo, inhabited by the "upper classes" of the brute creation.

The visitor, on approaching the entrance doors, is half inclined to have his calling card in readiness, in case some liveried lacquey should announce that their Excellencies the Elephants were engaged at present; that Madame Adhela Hippopotamus was taking a bath, and could not be disturbed; or that their Highnesses the Giraffes had gone off on a tour to Kordofan.

Immediately on entering the elephant-house, the air of which felt almost as close and heavy as the "hot breath of a lion's den," we were observed by Kiffy Cairns; but

as he was engaged with a party of visitors at the time, we turned to have a look at the two rhinoceroses nearest the entrance door. One of them is the Sumatras rhinoceros, with two horns, for which the Zoological Society paid Mr Jamrach, the well-known Ratcliffe Highway dealer in wild beasts, upwards of one thousand pounds; and the other, the Indian rhinoceros—an unwieldy monster, resembling a huge iron cylinder rolling heavily about on four legs.

With his arms resting on the iron guard, which runs in front of the range of “cribs,” to keep visitors at a safe distance from the bars, Geordie made a series of those snacking sounds, produced by the rapid contact of the tongue with the roof of the mouth, which are expressive of great surprise, and then exclaimed—

“Hae a care o’ me, what an awfu’ beast! The weght o’ him, gin he was fa’n owre on ye, would mak a body as flat as ane o’ Fish Tammy’s flounders. Ye’ll mind o’ Tammy, wha used tae come stottin’ up tae Kilpirnie a’ the road frae Buckhain, wi’ a creel on his back an’ a staff in his auld trumblin’ haund.

“Look at the brute’s sides an’ hanches as he gangs hirstlin’ and hinchin’ aboot amon’ the hay there; the skin o’ them is as hard and thick-lookin’ as plates o’ eiron, an’ a ba’ fired oot o’ a cannon would just, I’m weel sure, play clink on his muckle sides, an’ no fash him ony mair than a flee. I jalouse he can be nae ither than the behemoth we read aboot in the Bible, wha’s banes were said to be like bars o’ eiron an’ strong pieces o’ brass.”

“The animal,” I said, “certainly looks old enough, George, to have lived in the days of the patriarch Job, though the hippopotamus answers better to the descrip-

tion given of behemoth. Do you observe the look of extreme age on its hard, metallic, corrugated face?"

"Ay, that dae I—ye nicht amaist think it was ane o' the beasts that cam intae existence on the sixth day o' creation. But auld as it looks, there's something no very canny in the tail o' its ee whun it rams its ugly snoot through atween the thick bars o' its prison-cell."

At this moment one of the elephants, in a cage a short distance off, blew a shrill trumpet-blast through his trunk by way of returning thanks for some apples which had been given to him by visitors, and the suddenness of the sound made Purdie start back from the bar on which he was leaning, in the belief apparently that the noise proceeded from the rhinoceros, irritated by overhearing his last remark.

On perceiving his mistake, he said—

"Od, confoond me, gin I kent at first whaur the routin' blast was comin' frae!"

The trumpeting, however, had excited his curiosity to see what was going on further up the passage, and we accordingly proceeded to join the groups of visitors who were gathered in front of the elephants' huge cages. One of the animals was being so liberally supplied with apples, which he kept his trunk incessantly swinging through the bars to pick out of eager little hands, that it seemed as though he were converting the interior of his massive frame into a fruit store.

Geordie's delight was quite as hearty and freely expressed as that of the children, when the sagacious elephant, on finding that some one of the small hands could not reach the end of his trunk, suddenly reared it aloft, rested his fore feet on the bars, and opened his

cavernous mouth in order to show that the apple might be shot in without much danger of missing the mark.

“That’s capital,” quoth our friend, on seeing the apple disappear in the red opening, and hearing the solitary rasping crunch that sealed its fate—“it just minds me o’ a kind o’ game I saw some folks playin’ at on the grass outside Battersea Park, no very far frae Nelly’s hoose. There was a square o’ canvas fixed on a frame, wi’ a lion’s head pented on it, an’ an open pock—big enough to let in a ba’—instead o’ the mooth! Aboon the head, at the tap o’ the canvas, the words, ‘The Lion’s Mooth,’ were prented in big red letters, an’ a callant telt me that was the name o’ the game. Weel, on payin’ a penny, an’ stamin’ back aboot fowre yairds or sae, ye gat three trials wi’ a leather ba’ tae see gin ye could fling it intae the lion’s mooth; but I only saw it dune ance, and that was by the man himsel’ that aucht the concern. I was fule enough tae try my haund at it tae, but I fand, after the first fling, there was something wrang wi’ the ba’—it was owre saft an’ wadna gang straicht. But gin I only had an apple enoo, I would let you see me send it richt intae the elephant’s mooth, though I should staund back the length o’ the wa’ there. ‘I say, my wee mannie,’ he continued, addressing a small flaxen haired boy, who was standing with an apple ready in his little hand, ‘wull you let me try a shot?’”

The tiny “curly-pow” looked up inquiringly with his large soft blue eyes, but his mother, who stood beside him, and who understood the question better, at once handed the apple to Purdie, who walked with it to the wall opposite the front of the cage, making a sign to the keeper that he was about to perform a feat.

A single shout from the keeper like "Now then!" sufficed to put the animal once more in position with his trunk uplifted and his jaws apart, and Geordie gained the plaudits of the children—who clapped their hands and cried "hurrah" in chorus—when a dexterous throw sent the apple straight into the cavity, but with much greater force than the animal appeared altogether to relish.

Kiffy Cairns, speaking through the bars of the next cage—where he was engaged in directing the march of the great African elephant Jumbo, which had a keeper, with a little boy in front of him, squatting on its back—complimented George on his dexterity, and advised him at the same time to keep well out of the animal's range if he saw a pail of water placed inside the crib. Remembering the unsolicited shower-bath administered to him by the sea-lion, he evidently, from the look he put on, made up his mind to give the elephant he had slightly irritated a wide berth, having a sort of instinctive notion that water blown violently from its trunk would be a more unpleasant affair than the "soosing" he had already received. Indeed, so suspicious was he of the powerful animal's possible length of range in discharging a volley of water, that he would hardly wait at Kiffy's invitation to see the African elephant—from whose back the big and little riders had now descended—crush an immense mangold wurzel with its foot, and lift the wrenched-off fragments in eager haste to its gaping mouth.

On learning that we now proposed to proceed to the hippopotamus-house, Kiffy at once agreed to accompany us, leaving to the other attendants, in his absence, the task of entertaining visitors, who do not pay much heed

to the regulations of the society forbidding gratuities. On the way he told us that he intended, on his return, taking out two of the tamest elephants, a male and a female, for an airing in the gardens. and he suggested that we should avail ourselves of the opportunity of "riding the high horse." Geordie shrugged his shoulders at first, but he got better reconciled to the proposal when informed that the elephant who owed him a grudge did not form one of the pair.

Passing the deer's shed, the beaver's pond, and the superintendent's office, we reached the hippopotamus mansion-house, to which quite a smart and elegant appearance is imparted by the small paved court at the entrance, the short flight of steps, the glass-door, and the oil-cloth-covered lobby leading into the interior, where the huge animals are provided with all the requisites of amphibious existence.

Unfortunately, at the time of our visit Mr Frank Buckland's special pet, Guy Fawkes (whom I have since seen) had not entered an appearance on the stage of time, and accordingly we could only pay our respects to the two elders—Monsieur Obaysch and Madame Adhela. I have regretted that the young master, who was born on Guy Fawkes' Day, when crackers were exploding in all parts of London, did not come into the world a few months sooner, in order that Purdie might have beheld the obese slate-coloured baby waddling about at the feet of his mighty mother, and slipping down on his side to rest every other minute, as if he had begun to feel too soon the burden and the mystery of existence.

Obaysch was enjoying his bath during the greater part of the time we remained in the hippopotamus-house.

As he reared his huge mass of a back out of the water, one could scarcely believe that this same hippo, who now weighs four tons, was carried, when first captured, in the arms of the chief hunter of the party, who found him lying among reeds on the Island of Obaysch, in the White Nile. Adhela, who did not seem—on that day at least—to have so much fancy for the water as her loving lord, passed much of her time in opening her enormous mouth (which Mr Frank Buckland has graphically compared to a coal-scuttle) against one of the side walls of her cage, and showing a tongue which looked for all the world like a good-sized skate floundering about between her restless jaws.

The immense bulk of the animals, and the great extent of mouth, which gives such an unwieldy and heavy look to their heads, appeared to have brought a sudden fit of abstraction on George ; and just as I was expecting to hear him come out with some sage remark, he astonished me as much almost as the matter-of-fact man—who got into ecstasies over a basket of oysters—astonished Coleridge in the middle of one of his mystical monologues.

“ I was just wonderin’,” he said, “ gin the flesh o’ thae muckle monsters was gude fat pork, hoo mony ordinar’ barrels they would fill whun weel sauted, and hoo lang they micht keep a sma’ faimily like Nelly’s gaun in meat-diets. I sair misdoot if ony o’ the thoosan’s o’ Lunnou fleshers hae cleeks strong enough inside or ootside their shops tae staund the weght o’ the hams that could be made oot o’ the hippopotamus’ hurdies—haw ! haw !”

“ You laugh at the idea of eating up these monsters, George,” I replied ; “ but the truth is, that the layers of

fat next to the skin are said to make capital bacon, while even gourmands declare the flesh to be nourishing and delicate to the taste."

"Aweel; ilka ane tae his taste, be't. I wouldna niffer a porker o' my ain, weel fed on tatties and kail, an' clean bedded in fog frae the wuds, for ony twa o' thae big brutes, though they were brocht up on barley sugar, an' drank naething but coo's milk!"

There was little time left for an inspection of the giraffes, elands, and ostriches, as the keeper could not be long absent from his charge; and Geordie's interest in what he saw seemed somewhat to subside when he found Kiffy a ready listener to his extensive stock of Kilpirnie gossip.

I allowed myself to drop behind a few paces as we retraced our steps to the elephant-house, in case anything confidential might edge itself into the conversation; but certain exclamations which I overheard soon made me aware that Geordie had drifted away from the domestic annals of Kilpirnie, and was giving as concise an account as he could of his first day's misadventures in the metropolis. His fellow-Fifer was evidently much amused at the recital; and, when I rejoined them, Kiffy was just remarking that Cribbage and Ockum, from the description given, were thieves and thimble-riggers pretty well known to the police, though they appeared in various disguises, and that strangers visiting the Gardens had been often enough inveigled by them into public-houses in the neighbourhood, and fleeced like silly sheep in the hands of the shearers.

"So it seems you may have a chance of seeing your old friends again, George," I said.

“Foul fa’ them gin I dae !” he replied, waxing warm at the thought ; “ I would ken them fu’ weel again, though they were toggered up in women’s claes, like the mad Lunnon fules the haille kintra was ringin’ aboot awhile syne ; an’ if we did foregather wi’ them, it would be grund fun to ride them doon on elephant-back, especially if the beast had its trunk fu’ o’ dirty water.”

Kiffy Cairns was highly tickled at the idea of honest Geordie Purdie charging through the Gardens after thimble-riggers on the back of one of his big pets. As we had now once more reached the elephant-house, he told us to wait outside the enclosure at the back, where there is a large pond for the animals disporting themselves ; and in a short time we heard the massive doors hurling open on their great hinges, and saw two elephants—old Jumbo and a female, smaller in stature—striding ponderously out into the open air, and flapping their ears, seemingly well pleased at the prospect of enjoying a constitutional walk about the grounds. A shadow of dismay appeared suddenly to fall on Purdie’s face when he saw them approach the edge of the pond, but it soon cleared away again when the voice of the keeper, which they instantly obeyed, called them off before their trunks touched the surface of the water.

On getting outside the enclosure, Jumbo, at Kiffy’s word of command, knelt down on his fore-knees to receive his riders, who were not to be accommodated with bridle or saddle, or the box with seats and rope-ladder attached, which would have helped Purdie to understand better than the explanation I gave, when we were on the top of the tramway-car, what was meant by the conjunction of Elephant and Castle.

“Ye’ll hae to gie me a leggie on, Kiffy,” said Geordie, as he stood with his hands sprawling away up the sides of the huge animal, like a fowler trying to get hold of some jutting shelf in climbing a crag.

The required assistance was soon rendered, and Purdie, after a little wriggling and kicking, squatted down next Jumbo’s neck, with both of his legs depending on the right side, thus following instinctively the fashion he had been accustomed to when bringing home horses of an evening at the close of a day’s “orra-wark” on one of the farms about Kilpirmie. As the position he had taken up left me the broadest part of the elephant’s back for my throne of state, it was necessary for me to do just as he did (only facing to the left), otherwise I would have required wonderful legs, like the head of the Vokes family, to enable me to sit at ease.

On getting up from his knees—which was rather a trying moment, and made me grasp Geordie by the coat—Old Jumbo, with Kiffy at his head, and his docile spouse walking alongside, went striding off at a swinging pace, and we soon felt quite at home, though our unwonted elevation did look a little awkward in the event of a sudden spill.

There was a bevy of ladies walking leisurely in front, and no sooner did one of their number, who happened to look round, give warning of our approach in alarmed haste, than they all scampered off in seeming trepidation to the entrance of the parrot-house. The little boys and girls playing about the walks were not so easily scared, and they waxed quite merry at the somewhat odd spectacle the two raw elephant-riders must have presented facing opposite ways.

Just when we had reached within about a dozen paces of the slope leading down to the tunnel—the idea of descending which, on our high perch, made me feel rather queer by anticipation—our progress was suddenly arrested by the hasty advent of one of the monkey-house keepers, who came tearing up bare-headed and almost breathless to the top of the ridge, and called out to Kiffy, as soon as he had recovered enough of wind, that the chimpanzee had escaped, and was supposed to have crossed the public drive into the part of the Gardens where we then were.

The order from Mr Bartlett was that all hands must gather to the rescue, and so Kiffy, who liked a little sport, at once gave us our choice of keeping our seats to make trial of a sharp trot back to the elephant-house, or coming down there and then to avoid the possibility of a spill in the presence of spectators on the outlook for laughing-stocks.

We thought our wisest course was to descend ; and no sooner was this resolution formed than Jumbo got the quiet command to kneel, and we both slipped quietly to the ground.

The elephants were evidently displeased at being turned back so soon ; but there was no help for it, and we soon saw the two sable Africans safely housed again.

“Chim,” said Kiffy Cairns, referring to the chimpanzee (who is a sort of *tertium quid* between the monkey and the man), “has not crossed the drive, so far as I have seen, and the chances are that he is at this blessed moment playing pranks in front of the Mother Red Cap in High Street, Camden Town, and keeping all the policemen in the neighbourhood actively employed.”

Accompanied by the bare-headed keeper from the monkey-house we got out to the drive, but there was no appearance of Chim to east or west, and none of the passers-by or Jehus on the carriage-boxes had encountered the runaway on their travels.

We returned to the outer circle of the gardens, and were hurrying along in the direction of the tunnel when who should come leaping and screaming up the slope but Chim *in propria persona*, followed by Mr Bartlett and a lot of keepers, and the two Hebes from the neighbouring buffet, who could not resist the curiosity of running out to witness what they expected to be the capture, though stragglers might help themselves in the interval to no end of plums and cheesecakes. Chim scaled the first tree that seemed to offer him a secure refuge, and sat down on a branch about fifteen feet from the ground, with one of his arms clasping the trunk, and his head bent, as if making a friendly bow to his baffled pursuers.

Mr Bartlett, however, knew Chim better than Chim knew himself. This ingenious gentleman requested all of us, except one of the monkey-house keepers, to walk away as if nothing had happened, and get under hiding as soon as possible. This we accordingly did, but selected nooks and corners which would enable us to see everything that occurred.

Geordie was squatted behind an evergreen bush, within speaking distance of me, and it cost me an effort to smother a loud laugh when he asked "hoo they were gaun to manage to pit saut on the puggie's tail?"

The keepers resorted to a device which had been successful more than once before in recovering the chimpanzee when the animal had succeeded in making

his escape. They went up to a bush at some distance from the tree, and kept poking in it some time with a stick.

“There he is! there he is! run! run!” at last they cried, setting off in an affected fit of extreme terror in the direction of the tunnel, and looking back as though dreading pursuit.

The chimpanzee, instantaneously catching the alarm, his very hairs bristling with fright, bounded down from the tree and followed the fugitives at a fearful rate, yelling the while in his dismay. Long before the keeper had reached the monkey-house, the chimpanzee had outstripped them, and the alarmed animal did not stop until he was safe from danger in a favourite corner of the keeper’s room.

“The like o’ that!” said Geordie, getting up from his knees, when he saw the ingenious ruse and its astonishing result; “the like o’ that!—there’s mair sense in men than in puggies yet, after a’!”