



THE RHINOCEROS.

This is one of the most gigantic of existing quadrupeds, and one of the most difficult to be destroyed by the best weapons which savages or even half civilized men can fabricate. He belongs to the order of Tachidermata, or thick-skinned animals; and has a hide impenetrable by the sword or spear, as well as dart or arrow. In India these animals are distinguished from those of South Africa by the looseness of the skin, which hangs in great folds about the body. Kay gives us a lively description of an African feast on the enormous carcas of a rhinoceros.

We had not journeyed many hours before one of the Hottentots shot a rhinoceros, from which an abundant supply of meat for many days was expected. No sooner, however, did the huge animal drop, than a band of hungry warriors, like so many eagles, gathered round it. Every one threw aside his mantle; and in a state of perfect nudity began butchering for himself, conceiving that he was fully entitled to every piece he might be able to cut off; consequently very few minutes elapsed before this prodigious creature was completely dissected, and nothing but bones left upon the spot. Such a scramble I never before witnessed; all wrought, as if for life, until the very last bit had been carried off. The moment the slaughter commenced, large fires were kindled, and steak upon steak thrown upon them, while the flesh still quivered with life. In their eagerness to secure as large a portion as possible, several received severe wounds from the spears of their fellows; but for all this, the prey obtained in the scuffle seemed to be considered a sufficient compensation.

They now prepared for encampment and a feast; their companions in advance, and the object of their expedition, were alike forgotten. The meat was all hung up in trees, numbers of which were decorated with slices of no ordinary size. Some went out in search of fuel, while others cut down branches, and erected small circular enclosures, which served as their lodging-places for the night. In each of these were gathered together ten, fifteen, or twenty individuals; who, after allaying the cravings of hunger, lay down to sleep, without indulging a thought beyond the moment; their darkly shrouded figures formed the radii to a circle whose centre was the fire. And although conscious that they were surrounded by beasts of prey, to which their stores of meat would naturally form an attractive bait, no one deemed it necessary to keep watch at all: wolves howled, and the lion repeatedly roared, but all seemed to enjoy their slumbers undisturbed.