

From Fraser's Magazine.

LEAVES FROM THE NOTE-BOOK OF A NATURALIST.

PART IV.

AFRICA, of all the quarters of the old world, is the country of wonders. Take up a steady-going book of travels, or the *Arabian Nights*, what region like Africa? Open a volume of natural history, the older the better, and the African marvellous forms throw all the others into shade. Did not the phoenix live there, and make its appearance among the Heliopolitans only once in five hundred years? He came on the death of his sire in shape and size like an eagle, with his glorious particolored wings of golden hue set off with red, dutifully bearing from Arabia the body of his father to his burial-place in the temple of the sun, and there piously deposited the paternal corpse in the tomb.

But how did the phoenix carry him to the grave? As the kite carried Cock Robin, I suppose.

No madam; he brought his revered, deceased parent in this manner. He first formed a large egg of myrrh, and then, having by trial ascertained that he could carry it, he hollowed out the artificial egg, put his parent into it, stopped up the hole through which he had introduced the body, with more myrrh, so that the weight was the same as the solid egg of myrrh, and performed the funeral in Egypt.*

If you would see the manner of his death, turn to the *Portraits d'Oyseaux, Animaux, Serpens, Herbes, Arbres, Hommes et Femmes d'Arabie et Egypte, observez par P. Belon du mans*;† and there you will behold "Le Phoenix selon que le vulgaire a costume de le portraire" on his fiery funeral pile, gazing at a noon-day radiant sun with as good eyes, nose, and mouth, as ever appeared over mine host's door, with the following choice morsel of poetry:—

O du phoenix la divine excellence !
Ayant vescu seul sept cens soixante ans,
Il meurt dessus des ramées d'ancens :
Et de sa cendre un autre prend naissance.

It is to be hoped, for the sake of the son, that this is the correct version. The carriage of ashes from Arabia to Egypt, wrapped up in myrrh, is a very different task from the portage of a dead body thence and thither.

Some, again, declare that the bird never died at all; but that when Age "clawed him in his clutch," and he found himself not quite so jaunty as in the vaward of his youth, he collected the choicest perfumed woods of Araby the blest, waited patiently for fire from heaven to kindle the "spicy" pile, burnt away what we have heard termed "his old particles" and came forth as if he had drunk of the renovating elixir of life.

But what right had the phoenix to such pleasant immortality?

Because he never ate the forbidden fruit.

Moreover, there is a place in Arabia, near the

city of Buto, to which Herodotus went on hearing of some winged serpents; and when he arrived there, he saw bones and spines of serpents in such quantities as it would be impossible to describe: there they were in heaps, and of all sizes. Now this place is a narrow pass between two mountains, opening into a spacious plain contiguous to that of Egypt; and it is reported, says he of Halicarnassus, that, at the commencement of spring, winged serpents fly from Arabia towards Egypt, but the ibises meet them at the pass, and kill them; for which service the ibis is held in high reverence by the Egyptians.*

The "serpent ællé" that fled near Mount Sinai, figured by Belon, was probably one of this ghastly crew of invaders.

And here a word for Herodotus, who has been accused of all sorts of Munchausenisms. It will be generally found, that whatever he says he himself saw has been corroborated by modern eye-witnesses. In the case of the phoenix he writes—"They say that he has the following contrivance, which, in my opinion, is not credible;" and then he relates the story of the egg of myrrh, and of the son's carrying the father's body into Egypt. Again, he heard of winged serpents, but says he saw the bones of serpents, which he doubtless did; and after describing the black ibis which fights with the serpents, at the conclusion of the chapter he evidently alludes to the report, when he says that the form of the serpent is like that of the water-snake, but that he has wings without feathers, and as like as may be to the wings of a bat.

When we take a glance at the map, and see what an enormous area of African territory is still an undiscovered country, even in this age of enterprise, can we wonder that romance has been busy with the vast and unknown tracts? Many of the animals which are known to us are of extraordinary shape and habits; and it was but the other day that Professor Owen described a new species of anthropoid apes, the Gorilla, more horrible in appearance than any phantom that Fuseli ever imagined. Look at the proportions of the giraffe, with its prehensile tongue and its mode of progression, by moving two legs on the same side together, so that both feet are off the ground at the same time. But we must not multiply examples which will occur to most of our readers.

A few years only have elapsed since the giraffe has been made familiar to modern Europeans, and in no country have so many been kept together as in the British islands. In the garden of the Zoological Society they have bred regularly and well, and the offspring, with one exception, have lived and thriven. Still there are three huge African forms which have never yet made their appearance in that extensive and noble vivarium—the African elephant, the hippopotamus, and the African rhinoceros, of which last there are several species. By the enterprise of the society, aided by the prudent zeal of Mr. Mitchell, we may soon

* Herodotus, *Euterpe*.

† Paris, 1557.

* *Euterpe*, 74.

have the satisfaction of beholding the two first of these gigantic pachyderms in the garden at the Regent's Park.

And here we cannot but congratulate those who delight in zoology—and who, nowadays, does not?—upon the happy change which has passed over that noble and now well-conducted establishment, since Mr. Mitchell, favorably known for his attainments in that branch of science, and gifted with the command of a ready and accurate pencil, has held the office of secretary. A healthy and comfortable air pervades the place. The habits of the animals are studied, and confinement made as little irksome as possible. Communications are opened with foreign powers, and new forms continually flow in consequent upon a wise liberality.

I am just returned from visiting the greyhounds about to be sent by the Zoological Society to Abbas Pasha, who has already caused one young hippopotamus to be taken from the White Nile. It is now under the kind care of the Hon. C. A. Murray* at Cairo, where it safely arrived on the 14th of November last, when it was flourishing, enjoying a bath of the temperature of the river, and delighting everybody by its amiable and docile qualities. This most valuable gift was accompanied by a fine lioness and a cheetah; and Mr. Murray was further informed by his highness the Viceroy of Egypt that a party of his troops remained out on the White Nile, expressly charged with the duty of securing a young female hippopotamus, destined also for the society.

If fortune be but propitious—if no casualty should arise to disappoint our hopes, it is not improbable that in the merry month of May two hippopotami may be presented to the wondering eyes of the visitors to the Regent's Park. The Romans, who saw in their day every known creature that the Old World produced, were made familiar with this uncouth form—this huge incorporation of life—at their shows and shambles of men and beasts, when both fell slaughtered as the crowning excitement of the arena. But no living hippopotamus has yet been seen on British ground.

The King of Dahomy, the steps of whose throne are formed of the skulls of his enemies, and who commands an army of plump, well-fed Amazons, had never seen a peacock. The Zoological Society, longing for an African elephant, sent over to his majesty a gift of pea-fowls, the cocks having first been shorn of their tail—or rather back-feathers; for the feathers springing from the back arrange themselves into that magnificent iridescent circle, and are supported by the caudal feathers, when Juno's bird shines out in all its splendor, and, as the nursery-maids term it, "spreads his tail."

But why dock the peacocks?

Because, if they had been sent with their trains on, they would have presented such a ragged ap-

* Zoologists owe a large debt of gratitude to Mr. Murray, for the unwearied activity, tact, skill, and care, which he has exerted to procure curious living animals for this country.

pearance to the royal eyes, after being cooped up on their voyage—to say nothing of the irritation to the system of the birds themselves from their bedraggled and begrimed plumage, or of the accidents of pitch and tar—that the king might have well questioned the faith of those who had filled his mind with the glories of this recipient of the eyes of Argus, and his blood-drinker might have been called into action. No, the train-feathers were most wisely cut, and, with the birds, a well-executed drawing of a peacock in all its glory was sent, and his majesty was informed, that when they moulted, and the new feathers came to perfection, the effect would be similar to the drawing, but very superior.

With the present, a letter—*grandis epistola*—was sent, beseeled and beribanded, together with a list of the society from which the present came. His majesty listened in silence while one name well-known to scientific Europe after another was pronounced, and the king made no sign; but when that of Lord Palmerston was enunciated, the royal voice interrupted the recitation of the bead-roll with, "Ah, I know that man!"

Then the peacocks were paraded, and, even in their curtailed state, admired, and the king gave directions to his Amazons to seek out a wild female elephant, with a young one of an age fit to be separated from the mother; and when they had found her, their orders were to kill the hapless parent and to save the offspring as a gift to the Zoological Society of London.

The lamented death of Mr. Duncan, who, take him all in all, was, perhaps, the very man of all others for keeping up our relations with this grim potentate, may possibly act unfavorably for the interests of the society, but we have so much confidence in the energy of the management, that we doubt not that this misfortune, great as it is, will not be suffered long to cloud the fair prospects which were opened to the longing eyes of naturalists and the sight-seeing public.

Just look at the announcement which the council of the Zoological Society have been enabled to make for the current year. They state that they have already received advice of collections of various importance, which are in progress of formation, or already shipped from:—

Singapore—by Capt. the Hon. H. Keppel, R. N.

Ceylon—by A. Grant, Esq., M. D., and A. Grace, Esq., Deputy Queen's Advocate.

Bombay—by Alexander Elphinston, Esq., and A. Shaw, Esq., H. E. I. C. Civ. S.

Whydah—by J. Duncan, Esq., H. B. M. Vice-Consul.

Sta. Lucia—by Lieut. Tyler, R. E.

South Carolina—by J. Davis, Esq., M. D.

As long as the president and council do their duty in this way, and consider the instruction and amusement of thousands, as they have done, by lowering the price of admission on Mondays to sixpence, they will receive the support of the public; and they deserve it.

Of the African form of rhinoceros, three species—*Rhinoceros bicornis*, *Rhinoceros keitloa*, and *Rhinoceros simus*—are preserved in the well-arranged zoological collection of the British Museum, which owes so much to the energetic care of Mr. Gray; nor do we despair of seeing some, if not all, of these great pachyderms in life and health in the Regent's Park. Last year the Asiatic rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros Indicus*) died there, after a healthy existence of fifteen years in the garden. The cause of death, apparently, was inflammation of the lungs—a disease incident to the damp and foggy atmosphere arising from the undrained clay soil, which carries off so many of the animals confined there. When will the government take in hand the long-promised work of draining that park? All ye dwellers in that captivating but—during certain months, when moisture is most prevalent—dangerous locality, read the well-written and well-considered report of Mr. Donaldson. The comfortable dowagers now take their airings without fear of the dashing, well-mounted highwaymen, who formerly took toll in Marylebone Fields; but malaria still lurks there, shrouded in the mist that rises from the marshy ground and that ornamental but unblessed lake—for no stagnant water resting upon a basin of clay can ever carry healing on the wings of its evaporation.

But to return to the deceased rhinoceros. On dissection it was manifest that the animal had broken a rib, probably in throwing itself heavily down to rest in its uncouth manner. This fracture might have injured the lungs at the moment, and the subsequent ankylosis probably produced a pressure which accelerated the disease. Shortly before death the animal strained to vomit, without effect, with the exception of some froth tinged with blood at the mouth; and soon afterwards bloody matter was discharged at the nose. These are not pleasant particulars; but these lines may meet the eyes of some of those interested in the management of the animals, and may afford hints for the future.

Poor fellow, he was stupidly good-natured in the main, and would let the visitors rub his nose or his horn—which, by the way, he never permitted to grow, but kept it constantly rubbed down—or tickle him about the eye, or place their hands in the folds of his stout, mail-like, buff coat, where the skin, as we heard an honest yeoman, who was making the experiment, say, was “as soft as a lady’s!” He was very good friends with poor old Jack the elephant, now dead and gone, notwithstanding the stories of the violent antipathy which the two huge beasts bear to each other, and how the rhinoceros runs his horn at last into the elephant’s belly, and how the blood of the elephant runs into the eyes of the rhinoceros and blinds him, when the roc, or ruk, pounces upon the combatants, and carries them both off in his claws. The elephant used to tickle him with his trunk, and stroke his ears, now and then giving his tail a sly pull; upon which the rhinoceros

would cut a clumsy caper, wheel round, and nibble the elephant’s trunk with his huge flexible lips. He was fond of going into the capacious tank, which served as a bath for him and the elephant, who were alternately let out into the enclosure; the gambols before-mentioned having been played through the iron railing, when the elephant was expatiating in the great enclosure, and the rhinoceros was out in the small space before its apartment.

When the rhinoceros first took to the water, there was a marked difference between his obstinate stupidity and the sagacity of the elephant under the same circumstances. The bottom of the tank, which is surmounted by an elevated coping, gradually inclines from the entrance, till, at the opposite extremity, it is deep enough to permit an elephant of full height, and of the massive proportions of poor Jack, to submerge the whole of its gigantic body; and most gratifying it was to see Jack enjoy the cooling comforts of an entire submersion, now dipping his huge head beneath the surface, and presently raising it again, again to plunge it out of sight. The rhinoceros walked in well enough down the gradual descent, and when he got out of his depth swam boldly to the opposite extremity. Once there, however, he seemed to have no idea of the possibility of returning, but remained plunging and making fruitless efforts to get out over the raised coping while he was in the deep water, where the wall went sheer down and there was no foothold. It was rather a nervous time for those who witnessed the violent and ungainly efforts of the brute; for it was feared that he would then and there tire himself out, and sink exhausted. At last, when almost overworn by his useless toil, he was half-forced, half-coaxed round, and when his head was turned towards the entrance, he swam thither till he found footing, and then walked out.

His muscular power was prodigious. The iron railing of the enclosure was strengthened by great iron spurs at regular distances. He would insert the anterior part of his enormous head between the spur and the upright, and then give powerful lateral wrenches till he fairly prized it off. Once he got out, and, without doing further mischief, terminated his ramblings with a *pas seul* in a bed of scarlet geraniums: the condition of the *parterre* after the performance may be imagined. He was then secured, and led back to his place of confinement.

There was a tortoise-like look about him that was very striking. The curiously-formed upper lip, the testudinous look of his thick, armor-like skin, his legs and feet, all favored the notion of a huge warm-blooded creature made after the pattern of the cold-blooded *testudinata*, with improvements. For he was active in his way, and when excited his rush was terrific. The noise of the roller, when the gardeners were rolling the gravel-walk that flanks the place where he was suffered to go at large, had the most exciting effect upon him. He would be standing perfectly still at the further

end of the enclosure, and the moment he heard the noise of the roller in motion, round he would turn, and rush down towards it in a rampant state, till he was brought up by the strong iron railing, which those who saw these paroxysms began to think must go down like reeds before him.

If we have no immediate prospect of beholding the living forms of the African species of this genus, we have a very fair chance of soon seeing the two other pachyderms mentioned above; and a slight sketch of their habits and history may not come amiss to those who are not merely content with sight-seeing, but like to know something about what they see.

To begin, then, with the African elephant—*Elephas Africanus*. Notwithstanding the accounts which we read relative to the enormous stature of this species in the narratives of travellers who have come suddenly upon them, the better opinion is that it is smaller than the Asiatic elephant. The principal differences are visible in the head, ears, and nails of the feet. The contour of the head is round, and the forehead is convex instead of concave: the ears are considerably longer than those of its Asiatic congener, and on each hind-foot the African elephant has only three nails, while the Asiatic has four.

The following dimensions of a male elephant, which was killed near Bru, some ten miles from Kouka, are given by Major Denham, who arrived at the place where the huge quarry lay just as the elephant, which was not more than twenty-five years old, had breathed his last:—

Length from the proboscis to the tail,	25 ft. 6 inches.
Proboscis,	7 6
Small teeth,	2 10
Foot longitudinally,	1 7
Eye,	0 2 by 1½
From the foot to the hip-bone,	9 6
From the hip-bone to the back,	3 0
Ear,	2 2 by 2 6

But he says that he had seen much larger elephants than this alive; some, he adds, he should have guessed to be sixteen feet in height, and with tusks probably exceeding six feet in length. Major Denham, however, acknowledges that the elephant whose measurement is above given, which was the first he had seen dead, was considered of more than common bulk and stature.

This unfortunate animal was brought to the ground by hamstringing, and was eventually despatched by repeated wounds in the abdomen and proboscis: five leaden balls had struck him about the haunches, in the course of the chase, but they had merely penetrated a few inches into his flesh, and appeared to give him but little uneasiness. The whole of the next day the road leading to the spot where he lay was like a fair, from the numbers who repaired thither for the sake of bringing off a part of the flesh, which, Major Denham observes, is esteemed by all, and even eaten in secret by the first people about the sheikh. "It looks

coarse," adds the major, "but is better flavored than any beef I found in the country." Upon this occasion whole families put themselves in motion to partake of the spoil.

The manner of hunting the elephant (says Major Denham) is simply this:—From ten to twenty horsemen single out one of these ponderous animals, and, separating him from the flock by screaming and hallooing, force him to fly with all his speed; after wounding him under the tail, if they can there place a spear, the animal becomes enraged. One horseman then rides in front, whom he pursues with earnestness and fury, regardless of those who press on his rear, notwithstanding the wounds they inflict on him. He is seldom drawn from this first object of pursuit; and at last, wearied and transfixed with spears, his blood deluging the ground, he breathes his last under the knife of some more venturesome hunter than the rest, who buries his dagger in the vulnerable part near the abdomen: for this purpose he will creep between the animal's hinder legs, and apparently expose himself to the greatest danger: when this cannot be accomplished, one or two will hamstring him while he is baited in the front; and this giant of quadrupeds then becomes comparatively an easy prey to his persecutors.

In one of his hunting expeditions while at Kouka, Major Denham was shooting wild fowl, when one of the sheikh's people came galloping up with the information that three very huge elephants were grazing close to the water. When he and his party came within a few hundred yards of them, all the persons on foot, and Major Denham's servant on a mule, were ordered to halt, while the major and three others rode up "to these stupendous animals."

The sheikh's people began screeching violently; and although the beasts at first appeared to treat the approach of the cavalcade with great contempt; yet after a little they moved off, erecting their ears, which had till then hung flat on their shoulders, giving a roar that shook the ground under the horsemen.

One (says the major) was an immense fellow, I should suppose sixteen feet high; the other two were females, and moved away rather quickly, while the male kept in the rear, as if to guard their retreat. We wheeled swiftly round him; and Maramy, (a guide sent by the sheikh,) casting a spear at him, which struck him just under the tail, and seemed to give him about as much pain as when we prick our finger with a pin, the huge beast threw up his proboscis in the air with a loud roar, and from it cast such a volume of sand, that, unprepared as I was for such an event, nearly blinded me. The elephant rarely, if ever, attacks; and it is only when irritated that he is dangerous; but he will sometimes rush upon a man and horse, after choking them with dust, and destroy them in an instant.

Cut off from his companions, the elephant took the direction leading to where the mule and the footmen had been left. They quickly fled in all directions; and the man who rode the mule, which was not inclined to increase its pace, was so alarmed that he did not get the better of the