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An

A C C O U N T

— of —

A V O Y A G E

to

NEW SOUTH WALES,

— by —

GEORGE BARRINGTON, ⁽¹⁾ b. 1755

Superintendent of the Convicts.

— TO —

which is prefixed a Detail of

HIS LIFE, TRIALS, SPEECHES, &c. &c.

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CHAP. XVII.

Of the rhinoceros, its formation, swiftness, manners, habits, &c.—Of the isatis, or arctic fox, so often mentioned by African travellers—its formation—its uncommon rapacity, boldness and cunning.

I HAVE already spoken in general terms of the violence and ferocity of the rhinoceros in Africa. I shall now proceed in pointing out the different species of this animal, as they have occurred to my reading and observation.

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 foot-ball."

The body and limbs of the rhinoceros are defended by a skin so hard as to be impenetrable by any weapons, except in the belly; it is said, that in order 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 seems in this animal to answer in some measure the same purposes 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, when attacked or provoked, becomes very furious and dangerous; and he is even sometimes subject to paroxysms of fury, which nothing can assuage. That which Emanuel, King of Portugal, sent to the Pope, in the year 1513, destroyed the vessel in which they were transporting it.

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."

The rhinoceros is said to run with great swiftness, and from his strength and impenetrable covering, 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 them into the field of battle, to strike terror into their enemies; but they are 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: another 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 tubercle, or large callous granulation. 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 he can only see what is nearly in a direct line before him.

The two-horned rhinoceros differs from the last principally in the appearance of its skin, which, instead of vast and regularly marked armour-liked folds, has merely 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 specific or 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 said to be in a quiet state, but to become firm and immoveable when enraged.

In its habits and manner of feeding, this animal differs but little from the single-horned rhinoceros. 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 that they may discover by their smell what enemies they have to dread. From time to time, however, they move their heads round to take a look behind them, and to be assured that they are safe on all sides ; but it is only a look, and they soon return to their former position. When they are enraged, they tear up the ground with their horn, and throw 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 highly worthy of 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 destined for his principal food. 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 therefore 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 such pot-herb or garden-stuff.

"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 is long, and 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 mo-

deration. 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 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 basins, 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 all adversaries. The great consumption he constantly makes of food and water necessarily confine 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.”

This adversary is a fly (probably of the *genus aëstrus*) 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 places to the attacks of the fly. The itching 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 which we see upon him.

He enjoys the rubbing of himself so much, and groans and grunts so loud during this action, that he is heard at a considerable distance. The pleasure he receives from this enjoyment, 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 the rhinoceros, as it has often been represented, is hard or impenetrable like a board. In his wild state he is slain by javelins thrown from different hands, some of which enter many feet into his body. A musket shot will go through him, if it meet not with the intervention of a bone; and the Shangalla, an Abyssinian tribe, kill him by the worst and most inartificial 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 shew the amazing strength of the rhinoceros, even after being very 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 surprizing speed, considering his bulk, he was in a very little time transfix'd 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 scarce 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, and they had scarce 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 him 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 often been 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 sinewy,

The arctic fox is smaller than the common fox, and of a blueish grey colour, which sometimes changes to perfect white. The hair is

very thick, long, and soft: the nose sharp, and the ears short, and almost hid in the fur: the legs are short, and the toes covered on the under parts like those of a hare. The tail is shorter, but more bushy than that of the common fox. The surprizing qualities of the isatis, or arctic fox, often mentioned by travellers to the Cape of Good Hope, are truly curious and diverting, though it must be acknowledged that this animal is only found in its greatest perfection, in regions nearest the polar circle.

“During my abode on Bergen’s island, (says a respectable writer) I had opportunities more than enough of studying the nature of this animal, which far exceeds the common fox in impudence, cunning, and roguery. The narrative of the innumerable tricks they played us, might vie with Albertus Julius’s history of the Apes on the island of Saxenburg.

“They forced themselves into our habitations by night as well as by day, stealing all that they could carry off; even things that were of no use to them, as knives, sticks, and cloaths. They were so inconceivably ingenious as to roll down our casks of provisions, and then steal the meat out of them so ably, that, at first, we could not bring ourselves to ascribe the theft to them. As we have stripped an animal of its skin, it has often happened that we could not avoid stabbing two or three foxes, from their rapacity in tearing the flesh out of our hands. If we buried it ever so

carefully, and even added stones to the weight of earth that was upon it ; they not only found it out, but with their shoulders shoved away the stones, lying under them and helping one another with all their might. If, in order to secure it, we put any animal on the top of a high post in the air, they either dug up the earth at the bottom, and thus tumbled the whole down, or one of them clambered up, and with incredible artifice and dexterity threw down what was upon it.

“ They watched all our motions, and accompanied us in whatever we were about to do. If the sea threw up an animal of any kind they devoured it, before we could get up to rescue it from them : and if they could not consume the whole of it at once, they trailed it in portions to the mountains, where they buried it under stones before your eyes ; running to and fro so long as any thing remained to be conveyed away. While this was doing, others stood on guard, and watched us. If they saw any one coming at a distance, the whole troop would combine at once and begin digging altogether in the sand, till a beaver, or sea-bear would be so completely buried under the surface that not a trace of it could be seen. In the night-time, when we slept in the field, they came and pulled off our night-caps, and stole our gloves from under our heads, with the beaver-coverings, and the skins that we lay upon. In consequence of this we always slept with our clubs

in our hands, that if they awoke us we might drive them away, or knock them down.

“When we made a halt to rest by the way, they gathered around us, and played a thousand tricks in our view, and when we sat still they approached us so near that they gnawed the thongs of our shoes. If we lay down, as if intending to sleep, they came and smelt at our noses, to try whether we were dead or alive; if we held our breath, they gave us such a tug to the nose as though they would bite it off. On our first arrival, they bit off the noses, the fingers, and the toes of our dead, while we were preparing the grave, and thronged in such a manner about the infirm and sick, that it was with difficulty we could keep them off.

“Every morning we saw these audacious animals patrolling about among the sea-lions and sea-bears lying on the strand, smelling at such as were asleep, to discover whether some one of them might not be dead; if that happened to be the case they proceeded to dissect him immediately, and soon afterwards all were at work in dragging the parts away: because the sea-lions sometimes in their sleep overlay their young, they every morning examined, as if conscious of this circumstance, the whole herd of them, one by one, and immediately dragged away the dead cubs from their dams.

“As they would not suffer us to be at rest, either by night or day, we became so exasperated at them, that we killed them, young and old,

and plagued them by every means we could devise. When we awoke in the morning, there always lay two or three that had been knocked on the head in the night: and I can safely affirm, that, during my stay upon the island, I killed above two hundred of these animals with my own hands. On the third day after my arrival I knocked down with a club, within the space of three hours, upwards of seventy of them, and made a covering to my hut of their skins. They were so ravenous, that with one hand we could hold to them a piece of flesh, and with a stick or axe in the other could knock them on the head.

“ From all the circumstances that occurred during our stay, it was evident that these animals could never before have been acquainted with mankind, and that the dread of man is not innate in brutes, but must be grounded on long experience.

“ In October and November they, like the common foxes, were the most sleek and full of hair. In January and February the growth of this was too thick; in April and May they began to shed their coat; in the two following months they had only wool upon them, and appeared as if they went in waistcoats.

“ In June they dropt their cubs, nine or ten at a brood, in holes and clefts of the rocks. They are so fond of their young, that, to scare us away from them, they barked and yelled like dogs, by which they betrayed their covert:

but no sooner do they perceive that their retreat is discovered, than unless they be prevented, they drag away the young in their mouths, and endeavour to conceal them in some more secret place. On killing the young, the dam will follow the slayer, with dreadful howlings, both day and night, and will not even then cease till she has done her enemy some material injury, or is herself killed by him.

“ In storms, and heavy falls of snow, they bury themselves in the snow, where they lie as long as it lasts. They swim across the rivers with great agility. Besides what the sea casts up, or what is destroyed by other beasts, they seize the sea-fowl, by night, on the cliffs, where they have settled to sleep ; but they, on the contrary, are themselves frequently victims to the birds of prey.

“ These animals, which are now in such inexpressible numbers on the island, were probably conveyed thither (since there is no other land animal upon it,) from the continent on the drift ice ; and, being afterwards nourished by the great quantity of animal substances thrown ashore by the sea, they became thus enormously multiplied.”

We are informed by Mr. Crantz, that the arctic foxes exert an extraordinary degree of cunning in their mode of obtaining fish for prey. They go into the water, and make a splash with their feet, in order to excite their