



BEASTS and BIRDS



AMERICAN TRACT SOCIETY
150 NASSAU ST.
NEW YORK

BEASTS AND BIRDS

OF

AFRICA.



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Part III.

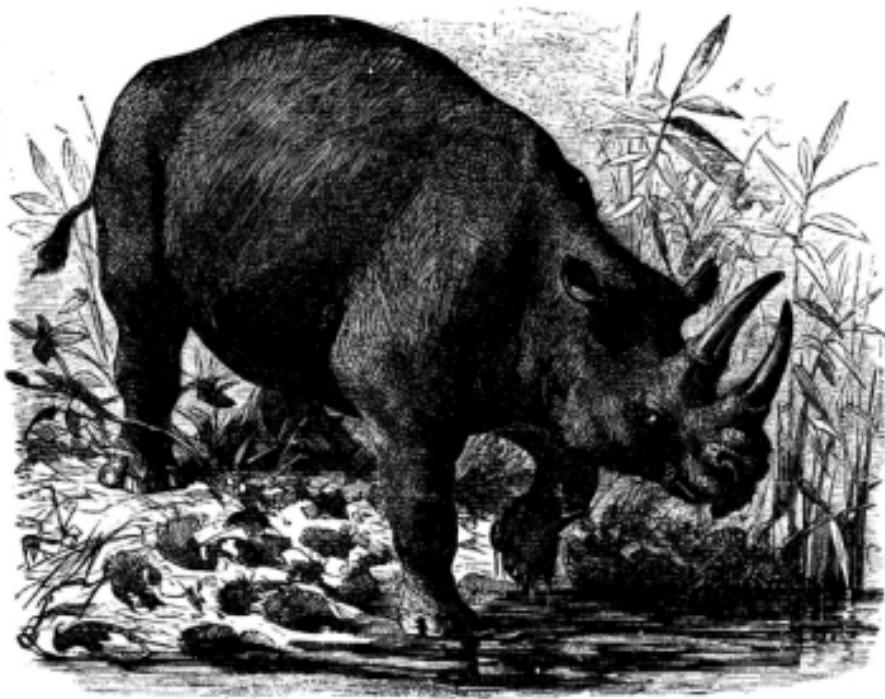
THE RHINOCEROS.



STRANGE looking animal this, with two horns on its nose—one a yard long, the other directly behind, and shorter; and stranger still, that they should grow from the skin, like the hair, without being connected with the skull or bones of the head. They are very smooth at the point, but nearer the head are rough, and could be slit up like whalebone. Underneath is a bone in the shape of an arch, with one end free, which relieves the head of any shock it might receive when the horn is struck violently. In this we see the wisdom of the Maker, who adapts his works to the uses for which they are designed.

In former times people made drinking-cups of rhinoceros horn, thinking that if poison were put into them it could not remain, but would foam and run over till all was gone, or the cup would split to pieces and fall to the ground. Eastern kings had many such cups, mounted with silver or gold and precious stones, out of which they drank, to be secure from any deadly drug their enemies might put into their wine.

Four species of rhinoceros are found in Africa; two are white, and two are black, and they differ much in their habits. The largest of these is the square-nosed white rhinoceros.



ros, which is from twelve to eighteen feet long, and about the same around its body. The skin is very thick, and hunters use a peculiar kind of hard bullet, as the common one makes little impression upon its hide. At least so it was formerly believed; but some modern travellers say that the ball does

enter the animal, but that the blood which oozes from the wound runs under the bagging skin, and does not appear on the outside.

By some drying processes, the skin is made into canes and whip-stocks, which are as hard and tough as horn ; and some persons have thought that the skin while on the animal was as hard as these. Were this the case, the poor rhinoceros would find it difficult to run, or to get up or lie down.

The rhinoceros of Asia is remarkable for the heavy folds of skin which lie over the shoulders, neck, and hips, and is so loose that it can be lifted up like heavy bags. Those of Africa are not quite as heavily laden. Their eyes are marvellously small, and are better adapted to the dark than to daylight. Their ears are long and pointed, and their hearing very acute.

The rhinoceros has the appearance of being a clumsy beast, but it is said to outrun the swiftest horse. Mr. Anderson, who has travelled extensively in Africa, says that he rode alongside of one of these animals, and shot a ball into its body, when, instead of running or dropping down dead, as he was expected to do, he turned sharply round and walked directly towards him. He tried to wheel his horse to run, but the frightened horse refused to move ; and in a moment the brute was bending low his head, and with a thrust upward he struck his horn into the ribs of the horse with such force as to penetrate to the saddle on the opposite side, pricking the rider's leg. The horse was thrown into the air, and came

down with great force upon his back. Mr. Anderson, of course, fell to the ground, and in a moment he saw the horn of the furious beast plowing the ground by his side. Then, without attempting anything further, the rhinoceros started off on a trot, much to the relief of the prostrate man.

The rhinoceros at its birth is about the size of a large dog, and is as homely a creature as ever came into the world, its face looking like an ox calf's, swollen and out of shape. But notwithstanding the repulsive looks of this little fellow, it has its good traits, and the principal one is its great love for its mother. If she dies, he clings to her, lying by her day and night till driven off by the lions, who come to eat up her body. When old enough, he fights furiously for his mother, battling with both dogs and men.

Mr. Cuvier gives an account of a very young rhinoceros, which was placed in a cage and carefully fed and tended, that its ways and habits might be studied, and to see if it could be tamed and taught. Bread and fruit was given him, which he ate greedily, and soon became, as was supposed, quite gentle and kind. But not long after he was found in the greatest rage, tearing round his cage, and threatening to bite in two the bars of iron that held him. What had happened so to provoke him nobody knew ; words did no good ; but finally bread and fruit brought him down to good behavior. After this, caution was always used in approaching him, and the idea of his ever becoming harmless was aban-

doned. It has been ascertained that these turns of rage are natural to the rhinoceros, the older ones indulging in them as well as the younger. If it is their way of expressing playfulness, as some imagine, we should not wish them on our play-ground very long.

The rhinoceros is not as great an eater as the hippopotamus, but drinks not far from twenty-four gallons a day.

The white rhinoceros, which feeds on grass, rice, and such vegetable substances, is used by the natives as food, one animal often yielding two or three thousand pounds of meat.

When not disturbed he is inclined to peace; but it is not so with the black species, which seems to delight in picking quarrels with everything that comes in its way.

Colonel Williamson says that two officers at one time went down the river to shoot and hunt. Having encamped for the night, they were awakened about daybreak by a violent uproar, and going out, found a rhinoceros savagely attacking and goring the horses, which were tied and unable to get away. The servants took to their heels, and the officers hastily climbed into a tree. As soon as the terrible beast had destroyed the horses, he turned upon the tree with all his force, trying to uproot it, or shake the men to the ground. It was not a very pleasant place to be in; but when daylight fairly came, and the neighborhood began to stir, the rhinoceros skulked back into his haunts among the reeds. If these men

had had a couple of rifles up in the tree, and plenty of powder and bullets, they would have rather enjoyed their temporary quarters.

Lions are afraid of this black rhinoceros, and the elephant is conquered by him. While following this animal, the hunter complains of a little bird, which clings by its sharp claws to the back and sides of the beast, picking off the flees and bugs very busily. It discovers the hunter at a great distance, when it flies up into the air, screaming and fluttering. The rhinoceros takes alarm and trots off in haste, the little bird either riding on its back, or flying just above.

Nothing is known of the length of the rhinoceros' life, but it is believed that it may reach a hundred years.

