

SOUTH AFRICAN

SKETCHES:

ILLUSTRATIVE OF

THE WILD LIFE OF A HUNTER

ON THE

FRONTIER OF THE CAPE COLONY.

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LONDON:

PUBLISHED BY ACKERMANN AND CO., 96, STRAND.

1841.

variety of the hyæna, who loves to solace his evening rambles with most unearthly cachinnation. Sometimes a tent is pitched, but more frequently each wrapped in his carrosse, or cloak of furs, falls off into a slumber before his fire, and nothing is heard but the hoarse bark of the baboon who moralises upon the scene from the summit of a neighbouring ridge. Early in the morning the ascent is commenced, and now comes the tug of war for the waggons, which start amid the cracking of whips, the shrieking of *forelopers* or leaders, and every gutturalty of imprecation of which that most euphonic of languages, the Hottentot Dutch, is prolific. But there is a limit to all things, even to the exertions of a span of oxen. At one short steep pitch the equipage comes to a stand still; and now the wheels are blocked up, and a short respite is allowed. A dwindled looking dirt-coloured mongrel, with a form and features more libellous to humanity than those of a baboon, but notoriously cunning in his craft, is shouted for from the rear of the line, and he having arrived girt around with a soldier's old red coat, and with a huge *after-samboc* in his hand (which latter, being interpreted, signifies a heavy strip of rhinoceros hide), goes round the oxen addressing each of them by name, d—s Amsterdam, curses Antwerp, calls Englesmon a *verdamte schelm*; intreats one, implores another, kicks a third, and encourages the remainder; then begins with Amsterdam again, and having flogged them all round in succession with the aforesaid samboc, without partiality, favour, or affection, he moves off a few paces and shouts out "trek!"—immediately there is a long pull, a strong pull, and a pull all together, the

difficulty is surmounted, and the waggon is at the top of the first pitch: a succession of such exertions and the summit is gained.

The high table-land, which is now attained, commands a vast prospect of hill, valley, and plain, uninhabited by man; but the hunting-grounds are not yet reached, the waggon and bridle-paths again separate, the latter skirts the foot of a range of heights, along whose recesses are several wooded spots, traversed by delicious streams of water, adorned by the rich blossoms of the Africander, the delicate pink bells of the waving spiraxis, and the gorgeousness of a magnificent blue lily, a sickly individual of whose family is seen occasionally to pine in an English green-house, "*sed quantum mutatus ab illo.*" The broad foliage of the Palma Christi shadows the rocks, and a dwarf bamboo grows thickly along the course of each stream, while a few quaggas appear at a distance, and a rheebok bounding across the path gives the scene additional life. By descending a gentle slope the waggon road is rejoined at the ford of the Klip Plaats River, whose banks are the more eligible for an encampment, as besides the advantage of excellent water, the last firewood that is to be met with for many miles is to be picked up in this neighbourhood. Between this spot and the Windfogle River are the plains, generally known by the name of the Bontebok Flats.

The Bontebok Flats, although any thing but flat in many places, form altogether perhaps the finest galloping ground in the world. As far as ever the eye can reach, and in many places two horizons in span, is a succession of hill, valley, and plain, traversed occasionally by rocky ridges: the ant hills three or four feet high, and hog holes of greater depth, with which the surface of South Africa is in general disfigured and riding impeded, here nowhere exist. The operations of the ant appear to be confined only to turning the surface of the soil to prevent it from becoming too hard, and scarcely a burrow is to be met with, except where a wolf or a jackal prefers a dwelling in the plain to his more customary abode among the clefts in the rocks.

Along each valley and hill-side wander innumerable herds of wildebeest (gnu), blesbok,