

CECIL'S BOOKS OF NATURAL HISTORY.



ECIL'S



BOOK OF



BEASTS.

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PHILADELPHIA:

CLAXTON, REMSEN & HAPPELFINGER,

319 & 321 MARKET STREET.

1871.



THE KUDU. *Triceros kudu*.

ABOUT THE RHINOCEROS.

VERTEBRATA. MAMMALIA.

ORDER — *Artiodactyla*. — Thick-skinned.

FAMILY — *Rhinocerotidae*. — *Rhinoceros*-like.

GENUS — *Rhinoceros*.



ONE of my readers, suddenly placed in the midst of an Indian jungle, would quite likely be much surprised by the dense growth of strange tropical plants which would surround him, and by the deep rich colors of leaf and flower. But surprise would increase to wonder, and perhaps to terrible alarm, if, by chance, he should meet some of the animals which lurk in those dense thickets, prowl amid the canes, or glide through the rank

jungle grass. He might get a glimpse of the spotted leopard, or cruel tiger, stealing along in search of a supper. He might hear an elephant crashing, with heavy tread, through the bamboo. While admiring the gay plumes of the tropic birds, or amusing himself with the noisy chatter and comical antics of innumerable monkeys, he might be startled by a sudden movement of the deadly cobra. On every hand, he would see the tendency of that warm climate to produce an intensely vigorous form of every kind of animal or vegetable life. It would appear in the dense luxuriance of plants and trees; in the myriads of insect tribes; in the beauty of the birds; in the deadly virulence of animal and vegetable poisons; in the great size of some herb-eating creatures; and in the fierceness and strength of beasts of prey.

The huge size and unwieldy motions of one strange beast, would especially attract his notice. This creature does not wander far from the streams, like the elephant, or live much in the water, like the hippopotamus; but he loves to

wallow in the soft mire, like a huge hog. His legs are thick and short—each foot having three toes, armed with thick and strong hoofs. His skin is nearly or quite bare of hair or bristles; and, as if a little too large for him, is laid in broad folds about his neck, shoulders and thighs. It is studded with knots, like the heads of rivets on iron plate, and is so thick and tough that neither the claws of a tiger or a leaden bullet make much impression upon it. The head and neck are short; the ears of moderate size; the eyes are small, and so set in the side of the head that the creature can not see before him.

The most singular feature of this singular beast, is a large stout horn—some species have two—set, not on the forehead, as horns usually grow, but directly over the bones of the nose. The natives of the jungles call him by various names in their languages; but the Europeans have kept the old Greek word, made of *rhin*, nose, and *keras*, horn; the rhinoceros, or nose-horn.

The horn of the rhinoceros differs from all other horns, in being formed entirely of true horny substance. Those of the deer, though called horns, are composed wholly of bone. Those of cattle, sheep and goats, have a hollow cover of horn, upon a cone of bone. The horn of the rhinoceros has no bone at all, and so is not sensitive, like the horns of other creatures. It seems to be formed of a great number of hairs, or bristles, closely grown together. As each fibre has its own attachment to the skin, the horn is very firmly fixed in its place, and yet may be separated from the bone of the nose by a sharp knife. It is set where the most violent use of it can not injure the brain, and so that it can be driven with the whole weight of the animal. This gives it great power, while it may be worn quite to the stump without pain. It is very hard, and perfectly solid; it makes a fine material for handles of tools, or other articles which need a high polish.

The Indian rhinoceros, *R. indicus*, is about five feet high and nine feet long; the largest weigh

about six thousand pounds. Its horn is slightly curved backward, and is sometimes as much as three feet long, and six inches in diameter at the base. The skin is blackish-gray. Its movements are slow. It carries its head low, like a hog, sometimes plowing its horn into the ground, or crashing through the dense jungle by sheer weight. It is naturally quiet; when attacked, it becomes very furious and dangerous, charging with great fury, and ripping with its horn any creature which opposes it. From its lonely habits, the Malays call it "the re-cluse."

It is fond of burying itself in the soft mud, in the rainy season, and lying quiet, with its nose out. Sometimes it remains until the hot sun has somewhat baked the crust above it, which it breaks with some trouble. The natives of Sumatra are said to take an unfair advantage of any which they find in such a place. They gather dry sticks, and quietly pile a heap of brush over the poor fellow, and then set the heap on fire. The additional heat hardens the

crust so much that the animal can not get away, and is baked on the spot.

The Javanese rhinoceros, *R. javanus*, is smaller than the Indian. His skin folds are arranged differently, and he is longer and more slender. He is fond of the coffee-bush and pepper-vine, and does great mischief at night in gardens. He is sometimes tamed and ridden, or made to draw.

Until lately, travelers have described only one species of African rhinoceros, but at least four are now known. The one longest known is the "keitlea," or rhinaster, *R. bicornis*. It has a second smaller horn just behind the large horn on the nose. This kind is found throughout Africa, from the Cape of Good Hope to the Nile. It is fierce and dangerous. One is described which charged upon a heavy wagon, stuck fast in the deep sand, and with its horn lifted the wagon out of the sand and drove it forward some distance. It then turned aside and spent its fury upon the bushes.

The natives cut the thick skin of this animal

into long strips, which they beat with hammers on the ground, and so harden; they are then smoothed and sand-papered, and used for whips.

Besides the keitloa or two-horned black rhinoceros, there is the "borèle," with a single horn, also black. Like the other, it attacks any thing which provokes it. It feeds upon roots, and the branches of the "wait-a-bit" thorn—a species of acacia, whose long and numerous thorns usually cause any one who is caught by them to wait a bit before he gets clear. It does not accumulate fat, and its flesh is so tough that even Bushmen will not eat it.

The white, two-horned variety, *R. sinas*, is larger than either of the others. In temper it is much milder than the black, even seeking to escape when wounded, unless defending its young. Its flesh is said to be excellent—Mr. Cumming preferred it to beef. The natives call him the "muchuco."

A fourth variety, *R. ascellä*, is quite rare. It is also two-horned, and the foremost horn projects forward, almost touching the ground

when the creature runs. This horn is very straight and long, sometimes four feet. The Africans make ramrods and clubs of it.

Many trees in the tropical forests, where the rhinoceros lives, grow very quickly, and have no firm wood, but are huge stalks, just fit for this creature to eat. His upper lip is flexible, and can be lengthened out so that he can take hold of the branches, as an elephant would with his trunk. With this lip he pulls down the branches which have most leaves and eats them first. When he has thus disposed of the branches he does not stop: he thrusts his horn as low in the trunk as he can, rips the body of the tree into laths, and then grasps huge mouthfuls in his jaws, and twists them off like so many bunches of celery.

When pursued, he runs with considerable speed, in spite of his great size and his short legs. He has a kind of shambling trot, which increases after a few moments, and carries him rapidly along. While it is true that a horse can seldom come up with him, it is quite as

much due to his cunning as to his speed. He makes from wood to wood, choosing the thickest jungle rather than the open plain. The dry trees he breaks down, and the green bamboos, which he pushes aside with his great body, spring back again with such force as to be troublesome and even dangerous to his pursuer. If the horse gets before him he halts a moment, and then dashes straight forward at the hunter. This movement defeats him, for the horse turns aside and allows him to pass, while the man slips to the ground and disables him by a cut across the tendon of the heel.

The remains of several extinct species are found in the rocks. One was disclosed by the melting of ice in Siberia. The flesh, skin and hair were all so well preserved as to show clearly what the living creature had been, and that it was well fitted to bear a Siberian winter. Fossil remains have been found in Italy and in Germany. Bones of a species not larger than the hog have been found at a great depth in France, mingled with those of extinct kinds of

crocodiles and tortoises. A fossil species is found in Nebraska.

The rhinoceros is probably the unicorn of the Bible. Some have supposed that this animal was a kind of goat or antelope. But no single horned species of either has yet been found, and it can hardly be believed that an animal so widely distributed, and so remarkable in every way, was unknown to the sacred writers, or would not have been mentioned by them. In Job we find written—

Will the unicorn be willing to serve thee?

Or will he abide by thy crib?

Canst thou bind the unicorn with his band in the furrow?

Or will he harrow the valleys after thee?

Wilt thou trust him because his strength is great?

Or wilt thou leave thy labor to him?

Wilt thou believe him, that he will bring home thy seed,

And gather it into thy barn?

THE HYACINTHUS.

Another beast, still larger than the rhinoceros, lives in the warm lands of Africa, and though not of the same genus, belongs to the same