

BIBLE QUADRUPEDS:

The Natural History

or

THE ANIMALS MENTIONED IN SCRIPTURE.



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THE RHINOCEROS, OR "UNICORN."

The Unicorn, like "Leviathan" and "Behemoth," has tried the ingenuity of critics, some contending that it was an animal of the buffalo tribe, to which the English name has been erroneously applied, while others suppose it to be a species of deer or antelope. The description which Job gives of it, however, agrees so well with the rhinoceros as to render it most probable that this was the animal intended.

The rhinoceros is a native of Africa and India, and is also found in some of the islands of the Indian seas. Naturalists divide the animals inhabiting these various localities into different species: but their habits and general appearance are so similar as to make it unnecessary that they should be here particularised.

At first sight, the rhinoceros conveys to the mind of the spectator the idea of an enormous hog. It resembles this animal not only in its general form, but also in the shape of the head, the smallness of its eyes, and the size and shape of its ears. Its clumsily-formed feet and legs, however, partake more of the character of those of the hippopotamus and the elephant than of the hog. When full-grown, it is about eight or nine feet in length: but from the shortness of its legs, it does not stand much more than half the height of the elephant. It is covered with a thick skin nearly destitute of hair, and in the Indian species

it is marked with deep furrows, seeming to hang in folds in various parts of the animal, particularly under the throat, and behind the shoulders, and on the thighs. Its most striking peculiarity, however, consists in the horn which springs from its nose, and gives to the animal a very formidable and even dangerous look. Though strictly a vegetable feeder, it is easily excited, and becomes then very bold and persevering in its attacks.

Little is known of the rhinoceros in a state of nature ; and the details of the habits of such individuals as have been kept in confinement are far from satisfactory. Cooped up in a little den, and exposed to all the petty annoyances of inquisitive and impertinent visitors, it is not surprising that such as have been kept in this state have displayed a considerable degree of ferocity. Sir Everard Home furnishes some particulars respecting one which was kept for three years at Exeter 'Change. "It was so savage," says he, "that about a month after it came it endeavoured to kill the keeper, and nearly succeeded. It ran at him with great impetuosity, but fortunately the horn passed between his thighs, and threw the keeper on his head ; the horn came against a wooden partition, into which the animal forced it to such a depth as to be unable for a minute to withdraw it, and during this interval the man escaped. Its skin, though apparently so hard, is only covered with small scales of the thickness of paper, with the appearance of tortoise-shell ; at the edges of these the skin itself

is exceedingly sensitive, either to the bite of a fly or the lash of a whip. By this discipline the keeper got the management of it, and the animal was brought to know him; but frequently, more especially in the middle of the night, fits of frenzy came on, and while these lasted nothing could control its rage, the rhinoceros running with great swiftness round the den, playing all kinds of antics, making hideous noises, knocking everything in pieces, disturbing the whole neighbourhood, and then, all at once, becoming quiet. While the fit was on, not even the keeper durst approach. The animal fell on its knees, to enable the horn to be borne on any object. It was quick in all its motions, ate voraciously all kinds of vegetables, appearing to have no selection. They fed it on branches of willow. Three years' confinement made no alteration in its habits." A specimen which was kept in the Royal Managerie, at Paris, exhibited nearly the same characteristics.

In India the hunting of the rhinoceros is one of the most hazardous and exciting sports. When the hunters fall in with a solitary animal, it generally seeks its safety by retreating into the thick jungle in which it usually harbours; but when it is again disturbed, it advances boldly to the attack. It tries to approach the elephant, upon which its pursuers are mounted, on the side, and by means of its horn to wound it in the belly, or to rip it up. The elephant, on the other hand, wheels round, and receives it on the hinder part of the body, upon the thick and impenetrable skin of

which the horn of the rhinoceros can make little impression. An attack of this nature has been thus described:—“Some years ago a party of Europeans, with their native attendants and elephants, met with a small herd of seven of them. These were led by a larger and more powerful animal than the rest. When this large leader charged the hunters, the first elephants, in place of using their tusks as weapons, which they are generally in the practice of doing, wheeled round, and received the blow of the rhinoceros firm on their hind quarters ; and so powerful was the concussion, that it brought them instantly to the ground with their riders; and as soon as they could get on their feet again, the brute was ready to repeat the attack, and was certain to produce another fall ; and in this manner did the contest continue, until four of the seven were killed, when the rest made good their retreat.”

The African rhinoceros is larger than the Indian one ; it has a second horn, of about half the length of the other, and placed immediately behind it. It is also in a great measure destitute of the folds of skin by which the Indian rhinoceros is marked, but in no case are these entirely wanting, though sometimes only partially developed. Burchell, in his “Travels in Africa,” states that the length of one of these animals, which he measured, was eleven feet two inches, and the circumference of its body eight feet four inches ; and he was informed by the natives that in the interior they were to be found of much larger dimensions. “Their sense of smelling,” says Mr. Burchell, “is so keen and nice,

that they can know, even at a great distance, whether any man be coming towards them ; on the first suspicion of this they take to flight. It is, therefore, only by approaching them against the wind, or from the leeward, that the hunter can ever expect to get within musket-shot. Yet in doing this, he must move silently and cautiously, so as to make the least noise in the bushes, otherwise the hearing of the animal is so exceedingly quick, that they would instantly take alarm, and move far away to some more undisturbed spot. But the dangerous part of the business is, that when they are thus disturbed, they sometimes become furious, and take it into their head to pursue their enemy ; and then, if they once get sight of the hunter, it is difficult for him to escape unless he possess a degree of coolness and presence of mind, which in such a case is not always to be found. Yet, if he will quietly wait till the enraged animal make a run at him, and will then spring suddenly to one side to let it pass, he may gain time enough to reload his gun before the rhinoceros gets sight of him again, which, fortunately, it does slowly and with difficulty. The knowledge of this imperfection of sight, which is occasioned, perhaps, by the excessive smallness of the aperture of the eye (its greatest length being only one inch) in proportion to the bulk of the animal, encourages the hunter to advance without taking much pains to conceal himself ; and by attending to the usual precautions just mentioned, he may safely approach within musket-shot."

Before proceeding to examine whether the rhinoceros is the animal referred to by the sacred writers, we may remark that the heraldic animal which, in popular language, passes under the name of the Unicorn, never had any but an imaginary existence: it is therefore unnecessary to waste time in searching after its representative.

As has been already mentioned, considerable difference of opinion exists among critics regarding the identification of the unicorn with any known animal. An examination of the passages in which allusion is made to the animal, will best enable us to judge whether the rhinoceros can make good its claim. The first passage in Scripture in which we find it mentioned is in the reluctant reply of Balaam to Balak, when importuned by the terrified king to curse the invading armies of Israel. "God brought them out of Egypt; he hath, as it were, the strength of a unicorn" [Hebrew, Reem] (Numb. xxiii. 22; xxiv. 8). In the book of Psalms it is described as a horned animal. "But my horn shalt thou exalt as the horn of a unicorn" (Psa. xcii. 10). Moses, in his benediction of Joseph, distinctly states that it is an animal having more than one horn. "His horns are like the horns of unicorns" (Deut. xxxiii. 17). In the Book of Job it is introduced as a very fierce and untameable animal. "Will the unicorn be willing to serve thee, or abide by the 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 labour to him? Wilt thou believe him that he will bring home thy seed, and gather it into thy barn?" (Job xxxix. 9—12).

The following remarks of Mr. Bruce, the Abyssinian traveller, seem to include nearly all that can be said on this subject. In continuation of some observations on another subject, he says, "My only business is with the *reem*, which I suppose to be the rhinoceros. The derivation of this word, both in the Hebrew and Ethiopic, seems to be from erectness or standing straight. This is certainly for no particular quality in the animal itself, who is not more nor even so much erect as many other quadrupeds, for its knees are rather crooked; but it is from the circumstance and manner in which his horn is placed. The horns of all other animals are inclined to some degree of parallelism with the nose, or *os frontis*. The horn of the rhinoceros alone is erect and perpendicular to this bone, on which it stands at right angles; thereby possessing a greater purchase or power as a lever than any bone could possibly have in any other position."

"The situation of the horn is very happily alluded to in the sacred writings: 'My horn shalt thou exalt like the horn of a *reem*' (Psa. xcii. 10). And the horn here alluded to is not wholly figurative, but was really an ornament worn by great men in the days of victory, preferment, or rejoicing, when they were anointed with new, sweet, or fresh oil; a

circumstance which David joins with that of erecting the horn.

“ Some authors, for what reason I know not, have made the reem, or unicorn, to be of the deer or antelope kind, that is of a genus whose very character is fear and meekness, very opposite to the qualities by which the reem is described in Scripture; besides it is plain the reem is not of the class of clean quadrupeds; and a late modern traveller very whimsically takes him for the leviathan, which certainly was a fish. It is impossible to determine which is the silliest opinion of the two. Balaam, a priest of Midian, and so in the neighbourhood of the haunts of the rhinoceros, and intimately connected with Ethiopia, for they themselves were shepherds of that country, in a transport from contemplating the strength of Israel, whom he was brought to curse, says, they had ‘as it were the strength of a reem’ (Numb. xxiii. 22). Job makes frequent allusion to its great strength, ferocity, and indocility. He asks, ‘ Will the reem be willing to serve thee, or abide by thy crib?’ (xxxix. 10). That is, will he willingly come into thy stable and eat at thy manger? And again, ‘ Canst thou bind the reem with a band in the furrow, and will he harrow the valleys after thee?’ In other words, canst thou make him to go in the plough or harrow?

“ Isaiah, who of all the prophets seems to have known Egypt and Ethiopia best, when prophesying about the destruction of Idumea, says, that ‘ the reem shall come down with the fat cattle;’ a proof that he knew his habitation was in the neighbourhood. In

the same manner as when foretelling the desolation of Egypt, he mentions as one manner of effecting it, the bringing down the fly from Ethiopia, to meet the cattle in the desert, among the bushes, and destroy them there, where that insect did not ordinarily come but on command, and where the cattle fled every year to save themselves from that insect.

“The principal reason for translating the word *reem*, unicorn, and not rhinoceros, is from a prejudice that he must have but one horn. But this is by no means so well founded as to be admitted as the only argument for establishing the existence of an animal which never has appeared after the search of so many ages. Scripture speaks of the horns of the unicorn (Deut. xxxiii. 17), so that even from this circumstance, the *reem* may be the rhinoceros, as the Asiatic and part of the African rhinoceros may be the unicorn.”

THE HARE.

THE hare of Syria differs in no material respect from that of our own country. Dr. Russell, in his “Natural History of Aleppo,” indeed divides the Syrian hare into two species, which he says differ considerably in point of size—the one inhabiting the plains, the other the desert; both, he adds, are abundant. It is probable that the division here assumed is entirely fanciful—the difference in the size resulting from the



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"Canst thou bind the Unicorn with his band in the furrow? or
will he harrow the valleys after thee?"—Job xxxii. 40.