

BONTIUS

A N
A C C O U N T
O F T H E
D I S E A S E S,
N A T U R A L H I S T O R Y,
A N D
M E D I C I N E S
O F T H E
E A S T I N D I E S.

TRANSLATED FROM THE LATIN OF
J A M E S B O N T I U S,
Physician to the Dutch Settlement at Batavia.

TO WHICH ARE ADDED
A N N O T A T I O N S
By A P H Y S I C I A N.

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M D C C L X I X.

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ON CHAPTER XIV.

Of Ivory, and the Rhinoceros.

I N the 10th paragraph, the author confesses that he never had seen the rhinoceros : but I have not only seen him an hundred times in his den, but also wandering through the woods. His skin is of a dark ash-colour like the elephantinum, very rough, with deep plaits on the sides and back. It is so thick as to be impenetrable by a Japan dagger. This beast is not armed with shields (as it is commonly painted); but these plaits counterfeit them : nor is one part of the skin harder than any other. Its snout resembles a hog's, but is more acute : in the extremity of which is the horn, which has procured it the denomination of bellua. The colour of the horn is various, as black, white, or sometimes ash-coloured. The size of its body is nearly the same with that of the elephant, only its legs are shorter ; and, on that account, it is not so conspicuous. It is a harmless animal, unless provoked, and not carnivorous like the tyger : but eats herbs and twigs, and these, too, very prick-

ly; for it has a very hard tongue, But if it be exasperated, it will toss up a man and horse like a fly, whom it will kill with licking, while by the roughness of its tongue it lays bare the bones. The Moors eat the flesh of it; but it is very hard, and requires the iron teeth of Plautinus. I shall give you an instance of its ferocity. A person of my acquaintance told me, that one day when he had gone out on horseback, with two men in his company, they found a female rhinoceros rolling herself in the mud, with her whelp; for this animal delights much in dirt, as well as the sow and boar. The beast, upon seeing them, arose, and retreating slowly, pushed the young one before her with her snout; when one of the company rashly pursued her, and, with a dagger, struck her on the back. No blood issued forth; but a little of the skin being cut off, there appeared broad white streaks, which the creature suffered patiently, till approaching a neighbouring wood, she hid her whelp among the brakes. Then turning round, and grunting horribly, it made towards the rider; but by good chance the horse, being frightened, leaped back. The rhinoceros, however, snatched the horse's trappings with its mouth, which being

of silk it tore ; the rider in the mean time flying at full speed, and the rhinoceros sharply pursuing. The persecuted horseman now regained his associates, who, to evade the shock of the furious animal, had posted themselves behind two huge trees, which were scarcely two feet asunder. The impetuous rhinoceros, relinquishing its former object, attacked the companions who were on foot (for they had let their horses graze with their legs tied). But whether led by its natural stupidity, or impelled by fury, it sought to push its way betwixt the trees, which it made shake in a terrible manner. Their extraordinary thickness, however, resisted its violence, till the men, recovering from their terror, presented their muskets, and with repeated charges shot the wild beast through the head. Then the Moorish slaves who had come to gather fuel, and been apprised of the event by the rider, effectually killed it with axes, swords, and spears ; while the company, still quaking at their recent danger, inveighed against the temerity of the assailant. Thus happily they escaped the ferocious animal, which, scouring the forests in its agony, spreads ruin and consternation around. But this may suffice of the rhinoceros. All is true which we are told

of the docility of the elephant ; and nothing remains but to remark an error of Pliny and Ælian, who have said that the legs of the elephant are destitute of joints, and inflexible. For while men have articulations only at the knees and haunches, the elephant has them also at the middle of the legs. Moreover (as Plautus well observes) its proboscis serves instead of a hand both in taking its food, and conveying it to its mouth.