

THE TROPICAL WORLD:

ASPECTS OF MAN AND NATURE

IN

THE EQUATORIAL REGIONS OF THE GLOBE.

BY

DR. G. HARTWIG,

AUTHOR OF 'THE SEA AND ITS LIVING WORLDS,' 'THE MEDITERRANEAN WORLD,'
'THE GARDENS OF NATURE,' AND 'THE POLAR WORLD.'

WITH EIGHT CHROMOLITHOGRAPHIC PLATES AND NUMEROUS WOODCUTS.

NEW EDITION.

11/25/-
20/5/11

LONDON:

LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.

1873.



RHINOCEROS.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE RHINOCEROS.

Brutality of the Rhinoceros—The Borele—The Keitlon—The Monoko—The Kobanda—Difference of Food and Disposition between the Black and the White Rhinoceros—Incarnation of Ugliness—Acute Smell and Hearing—Defective Vision—The Baptaga Africana—Paroxysms of Rage—Parental Affection—Nocturnal Habits—Rhinoceros-Hunting—Adventures of the Chase—Narrow Escapes of Messrs. Owsell and Anderson—The Indian Rhinoceros—The Sumatran Rhinoceros—The Japanese Rhinoceros—Its involuntary Suicide.

THE Rhinoceros has about the same range as the elephant, but is found also in the island of Java, where the latter is unknown. Although not possessed of the ferocity of carnivorous animals, the rhinoceros is completely wild and untameable; the image of a gigantic hog, without intelligence, feeling, or docility, and though emulating the elephant in size is infinitely inferior in point of sagacity. The latter, with his beautiful, intelligent eye, awakens the sympathy of man; while the rhinoceros is the very image of brutal violence and stupidity.

It was formerly supposed that Africa had but one rhinoceros, but the researches of modern travellers have discovered no less than four different species, two white and two black, each of

them with two horns. The black species are the Borelo and the Keitloa, which is longer, with a larger neck and almost equal horns. In both species the upper lip projects over the lower, and is capable of being extended like that of the giraffe, thus enabling the animal to grasp the branches on whose foliage he intends to feast. Both the Borelo and the Keitloa are extremely ill-natured, and, with the exception of the buffalo, the most dangerous of all the wild animals of South Africa. The white species are the Monoho and the Kobana, which is distinguished by one of its horns attaining the prodigious length of four feet.

Although the black and white rhinoceroses are members of the same family, their mode of living and disposition are totally different. The food of the former consists almost entirely of roots, which they dig up with their larger horn, or of the branches and sprouts of the thorny acacia, while the latter exclusively live on grasses. Perhaps in consequence of their milder food, they are of a timid unsuspecting nature, which renders them an easy prey, so that they are fast melting away before the onward march of the European trader; while the black species, from their greater ferocity and wariness, maintain their place much longer than their more timid relations. The different nature of the black and white rhinoceroses shows itself even in their flesh, for while that of the former, living chiefly on arid branches, has a bitter taste, and but little recommends itself by its meagreness and toughness—these animals, like the generality of ill-natured creatures, being never found with an ounce of fat on their bones—that of the latter is juicy and well-flavoured.

The shape of the rhinoceros is unwieldy and massive; its vast paunch hangs down nearly to the ground; its short legs are of columnar strength, and have three toes on each foot; the misshapen head has long and erect ears, and ludicrously small eyes; the skin, which is completely naked, with the exception of some coarse bristles at the extremity of the tail, and the upper end of the ears, is comparatively smooth in the African species, but extremely rough in the Asiatic, hanging in large folds about the animal like a mantle; so that, summing up all these characters, the rhinoceros has no reason to complain of injustice, if we style it the very incarnation of ugliness. From the snout to the tip of

the tail, the African rhinoceros attains a length of from 15 to 16 feet, a girth of from 10 to 12, a weight of from 4,000 to 5,000 pounds; but, in spite of its ponderous and clumsy proportions, it is able to speed like lightning, particularly when pursued. It then seeks the nearest wood, and dashes with all its might through the thicket. The trees that are dead or dry are broken down as with a cannon shot, and fall behind it and on its sides in all directions; others that are more pliable, greener, or full of sap are bent back by its weight and the velocity of its motions, and restore themselves like a green branch to their natural position, after the huge animal has passed. They often sweep the incautious pursuer and his horse from the ground, and dash them in pieces against the surrounding trees.

The rhinoceros is endowed with an extraordinary acuteness of smell and hearing; he listens with attention to every sound, and is able to scent from a great distance the approach of man; but as the range of his small and deep-set eyes is impeded by his unwieldy horns, he can only see what is immediately before him, so that if one be to leeward of him, it is not difficult to approach within a few paces. The Kobaala, however, from its horn being projected downwards, so as not to obstruct the line of vision, is able to be much more wary than the other species.

To make up for the imperfection of its sight, the rhinoceros is frequently accompanied by a bird (*Buphaga Africana*) which warns the beast of approaching danger by its cry. 'Many a time,' says Gordon Cumming, 'have these watchful attendants disappointed me in my stalk. They are the best friends the rhinoceros has, and rarely fail to awaken him, even in his soundest nap. He perfectly understands their warning, and springing to his feet, he generally first looks about him in every direction, after which he invariably makes off. I have often hunted a rhinoceros on horseback which led me a chase of many miles, and required a number of shots before he fell, during which chase several of these birds remained by the rhinoceros to the last. They reminded me of mariners on the deck of some bark sailing on the ocean, for they perched along his back and sides; and as each of my bullets told on the shoulder of the rhinoceros, they ascended about six feet into the air, uttering their harsh cry of alarm, and then resumed their position. It sometimes happened that the lower branches

of trees, under which the rhinoceros passed, swept them from their living deck, but they always recovered their former station; they also adhere to the rhinoceros during the night. I have often shot these animals at midnight when drinking at the fountains, and the birds imagining they were asleep, remained with them till morning, and on my approaching, before taking flight, they exerted themselves to their utmost to awaken the rhinoceros from his deep sleep.'

The black rhinoceroses are of a gloomy melancholy temper, and not seldom fall into paroxysms of rage without any evident cause, often ploughing up the ground for several yards with their horn, and assaulting large bushes in the most violent manner. On these they work for hours with their horns, at the same time snorting and blowing loudly, nor do they leave them in general until they have broken them into pieces. Seeing the creatures in their wild haunts, cropping the bushes, or quietly moving through the plains, you might take them for the most inoffensive animals of all Africa, but when roused to passion there is nothing more terrific on earth. All the beasts of the wilderness are afraid of the uncouth Borela. The lion silently retires from its path, and even the elephant is glad to get out of the way. Yet this brutal and stupidly hoggish animal is distinguished by its parental love, and the tenderness which it bestows on its young is returned with equal affection.

Although not gregarious, and most generally solitary or grazing in pairs, yet frequently as many as a dozen rhinoceroses are seen pasturing and browsing together. As is the case with many other tropical animals, the huge beast awakens to a more active life after sunset. It then hastens to the lake or river to slake its thirst or to wallow in the mud, thus covering its hide with a thick coat of clay, against the attacks of flies; or to relieve itself from the itching of their stings, it rubs itself against some tree, and testifies its inward satisfaction by a deep-drawn grunt. During the night, it rambles over a great extent of country, but soon after sunrise seeks shelter against the heat under the shade of a tree or rock, where it spends the greater part of the day in sleep, either stretched at full length or in a standing position. Thus seen from a distance, it might easily be mistaken for a huge block of stone.

The rhinoceros is hunted in various manners. One of the most approved plans is to stalk the animal, either when feeding or reposing. If the sportsman keep well under the wind, and there be the least cover, he has no difficulty in approaching the beast within easy range, when, if the ball be well directed, it is killed on the spot. But by far the most convenient way of destroying the animal is to shoot it from a cover or a screen, when it comes to the pool to slake its thirst. Occasionally it is also taken in pitfalls. Contrary to common belief, a leaden ball (though spelter is preferable) will easily find its way through the hide of the African rhinoceros, but it is necessary to be within thirty or forty paces of the brute, and desirable to have a double charge of powder. The most deadly part to aim at is just behind the shoulder; a ball through the centre of the lobes of the lungs is certain to cause almost instantaneous death. A shot in the head never or rarely proves fatal, as the brain, which, in proportion to the bulk of the animal, does not attain the three-hundredth part of the size of the human cerebrum, is protected, besides its smallness, by a prodigious case of bone, hide, and horn. However severely wounded the rhinoceros may be, he seldom bleeds externally. This is attributable in part, no doubt, to the great thickness of the hide and its elasticity, which occasions the hole caused by the bullet nearly to close up, as also from the hide not being firmly attached to the body, but constantly moving.

From what has been related of the fury of the rhinoceros, its pursuit must evidently be attended with considerable danger, and thus the annals of the wild sports of Southern Africa are full of hair-breadth escapes from its terrific charge. Once Mr. Oswell, having lodged a ball in the body of a huge white rhinoceros, was surprised to see the beast, instead of seeking safety in flight, as is generally the case with this inoffensive species, suddenly stop short, and having eyed him curiously for a second or two, walk slowly towards him. Though never dreaming of danger, he instinctively turned his horse's head away; but strange to say, this creature, usually so docile, now absolutely refused to give him his head. When at last he did so, it was too late, for although the rhinoceros had only been walking, the distance was now so small that contact was unavoidable. In another moment the brute bent low his

head, and with a thrust upwards, struck his horn into the ribs of the horse with such force as to penetrate to the very saddle on the opposite side, where the rider felt its sharp point against his leg. The violence of the blow was so tremendous as to cause the horse to make a complete somersault in the air, coming heavily down on his back. The rider was, of course, violently precipitated to the ground. While thus prostrated, he saw the horn of the monster alongside of him; but without attempting to do any further mischief, the brute started off at a canter from the scene of action. If the rhinoceros imagined it had come off as victor, it was, however, soon undeceived; for Mr. Oswell, rushing upon one of his companions, who by this time had come up, and unceremoniously pulling him off his horse, leapt into the saddle, and without a hat, and his face streaming with blood, was quickly in pursuit of the beast, which he soon had the satisfaction to see stretched lifeless at his feet.

Mr. Andersson, another well-known African Nimrod, having one day wounded a black rhinoceros, and being in an unfavourable situation for renewing his shot with deadly effect, the monster, snorting horribly, erecting its tail, keeping its head close to the ground, and raising clouds of dust by its feet, rushed at him furiously. 'I had only just time to level my rifle and fire,' says this adventurous traveller, 'before it was upon me, and the next instant knocked me to the ground. The shock was so violent as to send my rifle, powder-flask, and ball-pouch spinning ten feet high in the air. On the beast charging me, it crossed my mind that, unless gored at once by its horn, its impetus would be such as to carry it beyond me, and I might thus be afforded a chance of escape, and so, indeed, it happened, for, having been tumbled over and trampled on with great violence, the fore-quarter of the enraged brute passed over my body. Struggling for life, I seized my opportunity, and as the animal was recovering itself for a renewal of the charge, scrambled out from between its hind legs. But the infuriated rhinoceros had not yet done with me, for scarcely had I regained my feet, before he struck me down a second time, and with his horn ripped up my right thigh (though not very deeply) from near the knee to the hip: with his fore-feet, moreover, he hit me a terrific blow on the left shoulder, near the back of the neck. My ribs bent under the enormous weight and pressure,

and for a moment I must, as I believe, have lost consciousness; I have at least very indistinct notions of what afterwards took place. All I remember is, that when I raised my head, I heard a furious snorting and plunging amongst the neighbouring bushes. I now arose, though with great difficulty, and made my way in the best manner I was able towards a large tree near at hand for shelter; but this precaution was needless; the beast, for the time at least, showed no inclination further to molest me. Either in the *mêlée*, or owing to the confusion caused by its wounds, it had lost sight of me, or felt satisfied with the revenge it had taken. Be that as it may, I escaped with life, though sadly wounded and severely bruised, in which disabled state I had great difficulty in getting back to my screen.'

The rhinoceros is hunted for its flesh, its hide (which is manufactured into the best and hardest leather that can be imagined), and its horns, which, being capable of a high polish, fetch at the Cape a higher price than ordinary elephant ivory. It is extensively used in the manufacture of sword-handles, drinking-cups, ramrods for rifles, and a variety of other purposes. Among Oriental princes, goblets made of rhinoceros horn are in high esteem, as they are supposed to have the virtue of detecting poison by causing the deadly liquid to ferment till it flows over the rim, or, as some say, to split the cup.

The number of rhinoceroses destroyed annually in South Africa is very considerable. Messrs. Oswell and Varden killed in one year no less than eighty-nine, and in one journey, Andersson shot, single-headed, nearly two-thirds of this number. It is thus not to be wondered at that the rhinoceros, which formerly ranged as far as the Cape, is now but seldom found to the south of the tropic.

The single-horned Indian rhinoceros was already known to the ancients, and not unfrequently doomed to bleed in the Roman amphitheatres. One which was sent to King Emanuel of Portugal in the year 1513, and presented by him to the Pope, had the honour to be pictured in a woodcut by no less an artist than Albrecht Dürer himself. Latterly, rhinoceroses have much more frequently been sent to Europe, particularly the Asiatic species, and all the chief zoological gardens possess specimens of the unwieldy creature.

In its native haunts, the Indian rhinoceros leads a tranquil

indolent life, wallowing on the marshy border of lakes and rivers, and occasionally bathing itself in their waters. Its movements are usually slow, and it carries its head low like the hog, ploughing up the ground with its horn, and making its way by sheer force through the jungle. Though naturally of a quiet and inoffensive disposition, it is very dangerous when provoked, charging with resistless impetuosity, and trampling down or ripping up with its horn any animal which opposes it.

Besides the single-horned species which inhabits the Indian peninsula, Java, and Borneo, Sumatra possesses a rhinoceros with a double horn, which is, however, distinguished from the analogous African species by the large folds of its skin, and its smaller size. It is even asserted that there exists in the same island a hornless species, and another with three horns. There surely can be no better proof of the difficulties which Natural History has to contend with in the wilder regions of the tropical zone, and of the vast field still open to future zoologists, than that, in spite of all investigations, we do not yet even know with certainty all the species of so large a brute as the rhinoceros.

In Java, this huge pachyderm is met with in the jungles of the low country, but its chief haunts are the higher forest-lands, which contain many small lakes and pools, whose banks are covered with high grasses. In these solitudes, which are seldom visited by man, the rhinoceros finds all that it requires for food and enjoyment. As it is uncommonly shy, the traveller rarely meets it; but sometimes, while threading his way through the thicket, he may chance to surprise wild steers and rhinoceroses grazing on the brink of a pool, or quietly lying in the morass. The grooved paths of the rhinoceros, deeply worn into the solid rock, are found even on the summits of mountains above the level of the sea. They are frequently used for the destruction of the animal, for in the steeper places, where, on climbing up or down, it is obliged to stretch out its body, so that the abdomen nearly reaches the ground, the Javanese fix large scythe-like knives into the rock, which they cover with moss and herbage, thus forcing the poor rhinoceros to commit an involuntary suicide, and teaching him, though too late to profit by his experience, how difficult it is to escape the cunning of man.