

LETTERS
ON
NATURAL HISTORY:

EXHIBITING A VIEW OF
THE POWER, WISDOM, AND GOODNESS

OF

The Deity,

SO EMINENTLY DISPLAYED IN THE
FORMATION OF THE UNIVERSE,
And various Relations of Utility which inferior Beings have to the
HUMAN SPECIES.

CALCULATED PARTICULARLY FOR THE USE OF SCHOOLS,
And young Persons in general of both Sexes; in order to impress
their Minds with a just Idea of its great Author,

ILLUSTRATED BY UPWARDS OF ONE HUNDRED ENGRAVED
SUBJECTS APPLICABLE TO THE WORK.

BY

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Author of "Letters on Universal History," "A Geographical and
Historical View of the World," &c. &c.

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moves machines and carries burthens to which the strength of six horses is scarcely adequate; and that to this amazing force he joins courage, prudence, magnanimity and gratitude for kind treatment, we cannot hesitate to give him the first place in the scale of animal beings; nor can we wonder that the ancients considered the elephant as a prodigy, a miracle of nature; and that men have in all ages set a high value on this greatest of quadrupeds,

Flattering myself therefore that this epistle, although long, will not appear tedious, I shall at last conclude with assuring you,

I am most respectfully, dear Sir,

Your's, &c.

LETTER XXIV.

“Canst thou bind the unicorn with his band in the furrow?
Or will he harrow the valleys after thee?”

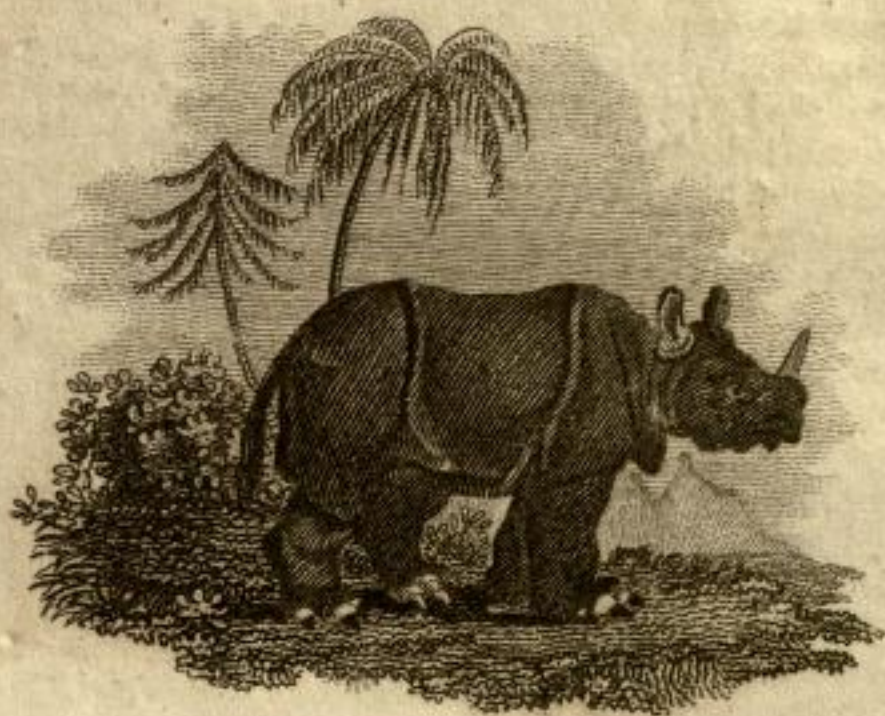
BOOK OF JOB.

DEAR SIR,

HAVING in my last entertained you with an account of the elephant, I shall now be happy to add to your amusement as well as information, by giving you some knowledge of a quadruped which is indeed inferior to it in size, but in strength is surpassed by no other animal.

THE RHINOCEROS

Is a native of the same countries, and inhabits the same forests and deserts as the elephant. The length of this animal from the muzzle to the insertion of the tail, is generally about twelve feet, and the circumference of its body nearly equal to the length. The form of the head resembles that of a hog, except that the ears are larger and stand erect. Its nose is armed with a formidable weapon peculiar to this animal, being an exceeding hard and solid horn, which sometimes grows almost four feet in length, and renders it a complete match for the fiercest adversary. Like



Rhinoceros



Hippopotamus

the elephant, it is formidable to ferocious animals, but perfectly inoffensive to those that offer it no injury and give no provocation.

The body and limbs of this animal are covered with a skin so hard and impenetrable, that it will turn the edge of the sharpest scymetar, and (except on the belly) will resist the force of a musket-ball. This skin, which is of a blackish colour, forms itself into divers folds by which the motions of the animal are facilitated.

The body, thighs, legs, and feet, are every where covered with tuberosities, or knots, which some writers have denominated scales; but they are mere indurations of the skin, which in the creases between the folds is not only penetrable, but quite soft and of a light flesh-colour. The belly of this animal is large, and its legs short, massy, and strong: its upper lip is long, capable of great extension, and, like the proboscis of the elephant, serves to lay hold of any thing that it would convey to its mouth.

The strength of the rhinoceros is the most conspicuous advantage conferred on it by nature. It seems rather to partake of the stupidity of the hog, than of the sagacity of the elephant, and, without being ferocious, or even carnivorous, is totally untractable. It is a solitary animal, loves moist and marshy grounds, especially near the banks of rivers; and, like the hog, delights to wallow in the mire. It seems to be subject to sudden paroxysms of madness, which are sometimes attended with fatal effects. A rhinoceros, which Emanuel, king of Portugal, sent as a present to the Pope A. D. 1513, destroyed the vessel in which it was embarked; and some years ago another which had been exhibited at Paris, was drowned in a similar manner in its passage to Italy.

The food of the rhinoceros is wholly of the vegetable kind: it seems to prefer the grossest herbs to the most delicate pasturage; but yet it is very fond of the sugar-cane, and of all kinds of grain. The hearing of the animal is very acute, and it listens with attention to any kind of noise; but from the peculiar construc-

tion of its eyes, its sight is defective, and can be directed only to objects immediately before it. The acuteness of its hearing, and impenetrability of its skin, oblige the hunters to follow it at a distance and watch it until it lies down to sleep, when they approach with great precaution, and discharge their muskets all at once into the lower parts of its belly.

A fœtus of this animal, which had been extracted from the mother, was sent from Java, and deposited in the royal cabinet of Paris; and the memorial which accompanied this present stated, that twenty-eight hunters had assembled to attack the female rhinoceros, and followed her at a distance for some days, observing carefully to reconnoitre her progress; and that having by these means surprised her when asleep, they approached so near as to discharge at one volley the contents of the twenty-eight muskets into the vulnerable part of her belly.

Without being useful like the elephant, the rhinoceros is extremely hurtful, by the devastation that he makes whenever he enters any cultivated grounds. His consumption of victuals is exceedingly great.

In the year 1743, Dr. Parsons published a minute description of one of these animals that was brought from Bengal into England. Though only two years old, the expence of his food and voyage amounted to near 1000*l.* sterling. He consumed every day, at three meals, seven pounds of rice mixed with three pounds of sugar, besides a large quantity of hay and green plants: he likewise drank a great deal of water. In his disposition he was perfectly gentle, and would suffer any part of his body to be touched, without evincing the least displeasure; but when hungry, or struck by any person, he became fierce and mischievous, and an immediate supply of food was the only mean of pacifying him.

A rhinoceros brought from Akham, and exhibited at Paris in 1748, is said to have been extremely tame, and even caressing. He was fed chiefly on hay and corn, but the attendants frequently gave him thorny branches of trees and sharp and prickly plants, with

which he appeared much delighted, though they sometimes drew blood from his mouth and tongue.

The only two animals of this species that have been brought into England for a considerable number of years, were both purchased for the menagerie, Exeter 'Change. The first, of which the skin is still preserved, came from the East Indies; arriv'd in England in the year 1790, when he was about five years old: and was soon afterward purchased by Mr. Pidcock, for seven hundred pounds.

His docility was equal to that of a tolerably tractable pig: he would obey his master's orders, walk about the room to exhibit himself, and even allow his visitants to pat him on the back or side. His voice bore some resemblance to the bleating of a calf, and was most commonly excited when he perceived any person with fruit, or other favourite food in their hands.

His food was invariably seized in his projecting upper lip, and by it conveyed to his mouth. He usually ate twenty-eight pounds of clover, the same weight of ship-biscuit, and a prodigious quantity of greens every day. He was likewise allowed five pails of water twice or three times a day; this was put into a vessel containing about three pails, which was filled up as he drank it, and he never ended his draught till the water was exhausted. He was also extremely fond of sweet wines, of which he would sometimes drink three or four bottles in the course of a few hours.

In the month of October, 1792, as this animal was one day rising up suddenly, he dislocated the joint of one of his fore legs, and this accident brought on an inflammation, which occasioned his death about nine months afterwards. He died in a caravan near Portsmouth, and the stench arising from his body was so intolerable, that the Mayor ordered it to be immediately buried. However, about a fortnight afterwards, it was privately dug up during the night, for the purpose of preserving its skin, and some of the most valuable of the bones, though the stench was so power-

ful, that the persons employed found the greatest difficulty in performing their operations.

The other rhinoceros exhibited at Exeter 'Change, was considerably smaller than the former. It was brought over in the year 1799, and was purchased by an agent of the Emperor of Germany, for 1000*l.* but it died in a stable-yard, in Drury-lane, about twelve months after its arrival in this country, and two months after it was sold by Mr. Pidcock. This animal is supposed to be the unicorn of the ancients. It was known to the Romans at an early period, and Augustus caused one to be exhibited in his triumph over Cleopatra.

The flesh of the rhinoceros is esteemed excellent by Indians and Negroes. Kolben says, that he has often eaten it with pleasure; but the skin is the most valuable part, as it makes the hardest and best leather of any in the world. In the countries where the rhinoceros is found, its horn, and indeed almost every part of its body, is esteemed an antidote against poison, as well as a remedy against various diseases. These virtues, however, are doubtless no more than imaginary. The period of this animal's life is supposed to be about eighty years; but this, and its time of gestation are equally uncertain.

The double-horned rhinoceros is extremely rare, and its existence was long considered as fabulous, or at least, doubtful, until it was discovered at the Cape of Good Hope, by Dr. Sparrman, who has published a most exact anatomical account of this before-undescried animal, which, however, does not appear materially to differ from that of which I have just given a description, except in the circumstance of having two horns, and in the appearance of its skin, which, instead of being covered with armour like folds, has merely a slight wrinkle across the shoulders, and on the hinder parts.

Mr. Bruce's account of the manners of the two-horned rhinoceros, is particularly worthy your attention. He observes, that "besides the trees capable of most resistance, there are in the vast forests within

the rains, trees of softer consistence, and of a very succulent quality, which seem to be destined for the principal food of this animal. For the purpose of gaining the highest branches of these, his upper lip is capable of being lengthened out, so as to increase his power of laying hold with it, in the same manner, as the elephant does with his trunk. With this lip, and the assistance of his tongue, he pulls down the upper branches, which have most leaves, and these he devours first. Having stripped the tree of its branches, he does not immediately abandon it; but, placing his snout as low in the trunks as he finds his horns will enter, he rips up the body of the tree, and reduces it to thin pieces, like so many laths; and when he has thus prepared it, he embraces as much of it as he can in his monstrous jaws, and twists it round with as much ease as an ox would do a root of cellery, or any small plant.

“When pursued and in fear he possesses an astonishing degree of swiftness, considering the unwieldiness of his body, his great weight before, and the shortness of his legs. It is not true, that in a plain, he beats the horse in swiftness; for though a horse can very seldom come up, this is merely owing to his cunning. He makes constantly from wood to wood, and forces himself into the thickest parts of them; the trees that are dead or dry, are broken down as with a cannon shot, and fall behind him and on his side, in all directions; others that are more pliable, or fuller of sap, are bent back by his weight and the velocity of his motions; and after he has passed, restoring themselves, like a green branch, to their natural position, they often sweep the incautious pursuer and his horse from the ground, and dash them in pieces against the surrounding trees.”

In my next I shall endeavour to amuse you with some new curiosity in nature, and in the mean time, beg leave to assure you, that

I am, with unfeigned affection, dear Sir,
Your's, &c.