

NOTES ON ANIMAL LIFE IN SOUTH AFRICA.

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Part I.

THE distribution of animal life in this quarter of the globe is a subject of considerable interest. In no part of the world do we find a greater variety of the larger Mammalia than in Africa, and nowhere did they once abound so numerous as in its southern extremity, comparatively speaking, but a very few years ago. In the beginning of the eighteenth century, the elephant and the rhinoceros browsed on the proteas and heaths which clothed the skirts of Table Mountain; the lion crouched in the reeds of the Liesbeek, and the hippopotamus gambolled in the waters of the Salt River. The hyena, within the memories of many living, served as a nightly scavenger to our streets, while troops of baboons levied black-mail on the vineyards and gardens of Table Valley. The splendid blaubok, or roan antelope, was found on the hill sides of Swellendam; the blesbok and quagga grazed on the downs of Caledon; whilst the rude pictures in the Bushman caves of Graaff-Reinet, Albany, and Queen's Town, show that the giraffe, at not a very distant period, was well known to the then savage inhabitants of the Sneeuwberg, the Winterberg, and the Stormberg. But all have now passed away: a few spectral-like elephants are heard of, from time to time, as still haunting the deep and gloomy recesses of the Tsitsikama and Kadouw forests, but seldom indeed are they visible to human ken. The rhinoceros (sage old Chikooro) has retreated far, far away to the woody hills of the Limpopo, or the arid plains in the northern Kalihari Desert. One of the last of hippopotami has yielded up the ghost, not very long ago, on the banks of the Berg River, and he is scarcely now to be met with south of the Orange, or west of the Great Fish River. The blaubok has long forsaken the hills of Swellendam, and betaken himself to the rugged solitudes of the Malutis, or the desolate valleys near the source of the Orange River. The giraffe, since the days of Le Vaillant, has not been seen within the colonial border; and at the present time, not for many hundred miles north of it. In the howling wilderness of our northern frontier the roar of a hungry lion may still be occasionally heard; but "the lions," as a body, have

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long forsaken us. All, all the larger and noble Mammalia are fast receding before the march of civilization; the hyena, jackal, and wild dog, alone keeping their ground, and prowling actively as ever as ovicides on our thinly-inhabited sheep farms, or making the night re-echo with their howls while growling over the garbage cast on the dunghills of a frontier outpost. It will be therefore partly the object of this article to fix as accurately as possible the habitat of the principal animals of South Africa in this year of our Lord 1856.

To prove that this subject is of some importance, we need here only remind our readers of the disappearance or extinction of the Dodo from Mauritius, the Dinornis from New Zealand, the Elk from Ireland, the wolf and bear from Great Britain, and the almost extinction of the orrox, lynx, and many other wild animals from the forests of Central Europe. Even in South Africa, several antelopes described by old writers (the Takaitse, for instance) cannot now be found, or at least identified with existing species. Where shall we, in the present day, find a lion, a python, a tiger, or a wild bull in Modern Greece? Yet we know these animals abounded there in classic days, as Hercules, Apollo Belvidere, Bacche Pater, or Theseus, can testify (although, by the bye, jolly old Father Dionusos must have caught his tigers in India). Where shall we in the Cape Colony now find a giraffe, a rhinoceros, a roan antelope, in the localities in which they once abounded? The western side of the colony, and eastward till we reach the plains of Cradock and Colesberg, is now almost denuded of its once rich and interesting Fauna. Peace to their manes!

We shall now proceed to detail more particularly the localities in which the larger animals are found at the present day; and to investigate where they were last seen within our colonial boundary, commencing of course, as in duty bound, with the "Nobel der König" of Goethe, "King of Beasts," the lordly Lion,—*Felis Leo* of naturalists. In our undertaking, we beg to state that we write open to correction, and that the apparition or destruction of any of the animals we describe, at a subsequent period, are facts that should, if possible, be recorded.

THE LION.

With the exception of part of Bushmanland lying north of the Beaufort district, and the most eastern portions of the districts of Queenstown and Albert, we do not believe

a lion, at the present day, is to be found within the limits of the Cape colony. In the Sovereignty, however, they are still numerous,—and that district may even yet be called, like old Numantia, *Leonum arida nutrit*;—also in Natal, the Transvaal Country, Great Namaqualand, and Bechuanaland. In Kaffraria Proper, except in the rugged country bordering on Natal, they have not been found for some years. The last lion killed on the Eastern Frontier was an old male, which Eno's Kafirs despatched with their assegais, near Commetgies Post, in 1842. But stray ones, no doubt, have been heard of in the thinly-inhabited parts of the Uitenhage or Colesberg districts, since that period. We may, in 1856, however, consider the lion as extinct in the Cape Colony Proper, except along the course of the Orange River, or other remote parts of our back settlements. Some few years ago, the Bontebok Flats, north of the Amatola, was a famous hunting ground for lions, and many a grizzly male has fallen there a victim to the rifles of the military Nimrods of the Frontier. Major Bates (our respected Governor's private secretary), also Colonel Kyle, of the 45th regiment, have highly distinguished themselves as lion-slayers in the Sovereignty and Natal. A reference to Pringle will show how numerous lions must have been on the Frontier in 1822; and previous to the war of 1836, Lower Albany was much infested with them.

The nearest accessible locality for sportsmen in search of the lion at the present day, is the country east of the Kraai River and the heads of the T'Somo, lying between Queenstown and Albert districts, about four or five days' journey from Queenstown. In lion-hunting, a female with cubs is always the most dangerous. This was known even in the time of Horace:

Non videas quanto moveas periclo
Pyrrho Gatulæ catulos leonæ.

THE ELEPHANT—(*Elephas Africanus*).

The African elephant, strange to say, since the time of the Romans, has never been seen in Europe,* for we must take it for granted that Hannibal's elephants, at least, must have been African ones, if not those of Pyrrhus also. When the Dutch first formed this settlement on the shores of Table Bay, the elephant abounded in

* A young one has lately been received in the Jardin des Plantes, in Paris, from Central Africa. For this fact, I am indebted to my friend, C. J. Andersson.

the immediate neighbourhood. The old records describe a large male sticking in the mud at Salt River, somewhere near where Montagu Bridge stands at present; and the numerous rivers, hills, and fountains bearing its name show how universally it was distributed over the country, even after its partial settlement. Although seldom seen at the present day, a few elephants are still found in the Tsitsikama forest, and as late as 1852, Captain Robertson, 6th regiment, then commandant at Port Elizabeth, suddenly came upon a troop of eighteen or twenty in a remote part of the Kadouw bush, near Enon, where Pringle describes them, in 1822, as being very numerous. These are, we believe, the only two colonial localities where they are still found. The Fish River bush was formerly a favourite haunt of theirs; but after the war of 1836, being much disturbed, they appear to have migrated through the Buffalo forests, and across the Kei into the inaccessible thickets found east of the Umzimvoobo, where they are still numerous. The traces of their old paths, and heaps of their gigantic bones, still tell of their former presence, and of the slaughter committed on them by the rifles of Thackeray, Driver, and other celebrated ivory-hunters. One fountain, in particular, situated in a dense thicket near Fraser's Camp, being a favourite rendezvous of theirs, many a mighty bull has there succumbed to old Driver's prowess, and their bones whiten this little-known locality to the present day.

Any Nimrod who now wishes the sport of elephant-hunting in the glorious style described so vividly in the pages of Andersson and Cumming, will hardly meet with any south of Lake N'Gami, or he will have to penetrate into the unhealthy region north of Delagoa, or that part of the Kalihari between Lake N'Gami and Ovampo country. The Boers have long since annihilated them in the Sovereignty and the Trans-Vaal country (tabooed to hunters). A few may be found in the eastern border of the Great Desert; and in Moselikatzé's country they still abound.

How the few elephants that yet inhabit the Tsitsikama and Zuurberg forests are allowed to live in peace and quietness appears to us a mystery, and can only be explained by the denseness of the bush, the extreme ruggedness of the country, and the fact of the animals themselves being cautious and shy in the extreme. One was killed in the Zuurberg in 1851, and some perhaps since. No animal would be more prized in Europe than

an African elephant, and it would well repay a trader to bring a healthy calf here or to Port Elizabeth, for exportation. The elephant, as well as the lion, is unusually distributed over the African continent, south of Lake T'Chad, although the latter is still found on the shores of the Mediterranean. To the gourmand, the elephant presents rare attractions. *Pied d'elephant roti, à la Andersson*, is most appetising, and *Trompe sauté, à la Gordon Cumming*, "is a dish fit for an emperor." For ourselves we prefer, like Beau Tibs, a slice of his cheeks piping hot, served up with white ants' eggs and young locusts,—the sauce poor old Secheli was so fond of before the Boers ate him up. For large feeders, his paunch, dressed *à la haggis ecossais*, is a most excellent and economical dish,—*verbum sap!* It may be satisfactory generally to the public to know that there are not less than 10,000 distinct muscles in an elephant's trunk, a fact that will be appreciated in this ivory country by scientific hunters and frontier smousers.

THE RHINOCEROS.

Of the rhinoceros and its varieties we need hardly say that not even the elephant has entered into the nomenclature of our colonial localities so often as our friend "Chikooro," as the numerous Rhenoster Bergs, Agter Rhenoster Bergs, kuils, vleys, puits, kops, fonteins, spruits, rivers, &c., called after him can testify. He also, in days of yore, was wont to disport over the ground now graced by the villages of Mowbray, Rondebosch, and Wynberg. Where, then, shall we now find him? Go one thousand miles into the interior, look for his spoor, and you may perhaps hear of him further on. One hill in the Sovereignty, a little to the south of Vaal River, is called Rhenoster Kop, from the fact of the last one in that country having been killed there, in 1842; and yet, strange to say, in that year one or two were still living in the Fish River Bush, and a couple more on the Coega, near Port Elizabeth, where the last of the "Chikooros" was shot in 1853 (a large old male, who carried a couple of score of bullets in his jacket), by a feeble old Hottentot that he stumbled over. Another male was killed by the well-known Koester family in the Ecça Valley, in 1842, and was considered to be the last in these parts; so that it may now be safely said to be extinct in the Cape of Good Hope. They are still very numerous in Bechuana and Damaraland, in Great Nama-

a pity he had not tasted its delicious fat and marrow bones, and we have no doubt he would have given poor Behemoth a better reputation. Albertus Magnus portrays it with a neck as long as a giraffe, supporting a most awful chuckle head, garnished with terrific grinders and goggle eyes, and looking fearfully ill-tempered as it raises its immense visage out of its watery dwelling. Vincent of Beauvais asserts it had a tail like a fish, and Polycarp of Avignon vowed it had feet webbed like a duck. Between all these learned men, it was hard to say whether our poor friend was fish, flesh, fowl, or good red herring.

The fat, tongue, marrow bones, and biltong of the sea-cow, are all very excellent, and hippopotamus sausages, about as long as the cable of a first-rate man-of-war, are found on all the principal tables in Bechuanaland. For our own part we have fared very daintily on the plain hide, prepared either *au naturel* or *à la sjambok*, and once or twice *à la veldt schoen* or *remetje*.

Gordon Cumming's waltz with a sea-cow is well known. It is, however, generally believed that in this case the noble Highlander drew rather plentifully on his imaginative powers, for it is surmised this old Behemoth would have been rather a rough partner.

The old Arab medical writers say that the liver of the hippopotamus, dried and dissolved in chamber-lye, is a sovereign cure for all megrims in the head, and rush of blood to that region. The remedy appears a simple one, and would be worth a trial.

THE BUFFALO—(*Bos Caffer*).

Except near Plettenberg's Bay and the Fish River bush, we believe the buffalo is no longer to be found within the colonial boundary, and will probably hardly be met with south of the Vaal, or west of the Umzimvoobo rivers. In 1842-3-4, we have often seen a small herd that frequented the country between the Koomes and Fort Brown, and once saw a shaggy old bull grazing quietly with a span of bullocks, only a few hundred yards from the post at Fraser's Camp. At that period there were also a few near the mouth of the Sundays River, where they may still be found, the country being well adapted for them. The horns of a full-grown bull are very fine, but require great care in preserving them, as they are very liable to be attacked by worms.

The favourite habitat of the buffalo at present appears to be the dense thorn thickets of Damaraland, and the

woody hills of the Limpopo and its tributaries. The flesh makes excellent biltong, and resembles bull beef. We once made a very delicious meal of a Fingo shield made of a buffalo hide, and it is a very great advantage to the light troops of that nation that every man may be considered, in case of necessity, to carry a week's rations on his arm, and so be almost independent of any commissariat department whatever. What a relief it would have been to poor Mr. Commissary Filder, if our Crimean heroes at any time could satisfy nature for a week or ten days, by eating their boots or devouring their shakos and belts, if made of such a nutritious substance as buffalo hide!

HOW I CAME TO EMIGRATE.

To those who are interested in the comparative tables of prices in England and her colonies,—the relative value of capital and labour,—the soil, climate, and productions,—the sources of wealth and revenue; to those who have emigration theories of their own, or other people, to support; to those versed in statistics,—financial, population, and agricultural returns, and a dozen other serious and important subjects of the same class: to all such people I have only one remark to address, viz., don't on any account read this paper,—or, as a linedraper's apprentice would call it, "this article." For I, the author thereof, do solemnly assure you that you will not meet with the smallest particle of the information you desire on any of the above matters, nor the slightest argument wherewith to support your own theories, or to attack those of others. There is, indeed, nothing weighty in this narrative of mine, save the weight that rests on my own heart; nothing in the financial way, except an occasional allusion to my own finances; and no emigration scheme, but the one I formed for emigrating myself, to relieve my mind from the terrible pressure caused by—what I am going to tell you.

If, after this fair warning of what you have to expect, you complain of want of depth, frivolity, folly, or anything else, you are a most unreasonable reader, and have entirely mistaken your own caste of mind in perusing this story at all. You may be a man of sound judgment and strong understanding; but if you want roast beef and plum-pudding, you have no business to be plunging your knife and fork into my whipt-cream and syllabub.