

THIRD
NATURAL HISTORY
READER

BY THE REV. J. G. WOOD M.A.

AUTHOR OF "HOMES WITHOUT HANDS," ETC.



LONDON
ISBISTER AND COMPANY LIMITED
15 & 16 TAVISTOCK STREET COVENT GARDEN

[*um 1886*]

LESSON XXVII.

pierce	fast'-en-ed	dif'-fer-ence	rhin-ö'-ce-ros
shield	por'-cu-pine	dif'-fer-ent	ap-pear'-ance
jew'-el	ex-act'-ly	dif'-fi-cult	mos-qui'-toes

THICK-SKINNED ANIMALS.—THE RHINOCEROS.

1. ANOTHER of the "Pachyderms," or thick-skinned animals, is the Rhinoceros. There are several kinds of rhinoceros, some of which inhabit Asia, while others are found in different parts of Africa.

2. The rhinoceros is most common in parts of the country near a stream or river; for he is a water-loving animal, and likes to plunge into the cool stream, or wallow in the thick mud on the banks. And he has a very good reason for doing so, for he covers his whole body with a layer of thick mud, and thus prevents the attacks of flies and other insects, which pierce his hide with their sharp beaks, and almost drive him mad with pain.

3. The chief difference between the various kinds of rhinoceros lies in the number, size, and shape of the horns found upon the nose.

4. These horns are worthy of careful notice. They are, in reality, not horns at all, and are not fastened to the skull in any way. In fact, they are nothing more than growths from the skin, and are formed in just the same manner as the quills of a porcupine, or the spines of a hedgehog, or the feathers of a bird.

5. Now, as these horns form the weapons of the rhinoceros, they are very strong and sharp, and are fastened to the head in a rather strange manner. When one of these animals attacks a foe, he rushes at him with lowered head, like an angry goat. As soon as he comes within reach, he tosses up his head and strikes his enemy with the horn, often inflicting a most terrible wound.

6. Now, if the horn were fastened to the bones of the skull, as we might think would be the case, a charge of this kind would cause a great shock to the brain, and thus injure the rhinoceros. So the bones of the face are formed into a kind of arch. And the horn is so placed that, when the animal makes a rush at his foe, the whole shock is borne by this bony arch, while the brain is protected.

7. The eyes of the rhinoceros are set in such a manner that the animal cannot see anything exactly in front of it. But its senses of hearing and scent are so keen that it does not require sight to detect a foe.

8. There are very few animals that possess so tough a hide as the rhinoceros. Upon the upper parts of the body it is so thick that even a leaden bullet will scarcely pierce it; but beneath the body it is not nearly so tough.

9. In the kinds of rhinoceros found in Asia, the hide lies in thick folds upon the body, forming flaps which can be lifted up by the hand. Beneath these folds the skin is very tender, and it is there

that the mosquitoes and other flies bite the animal.

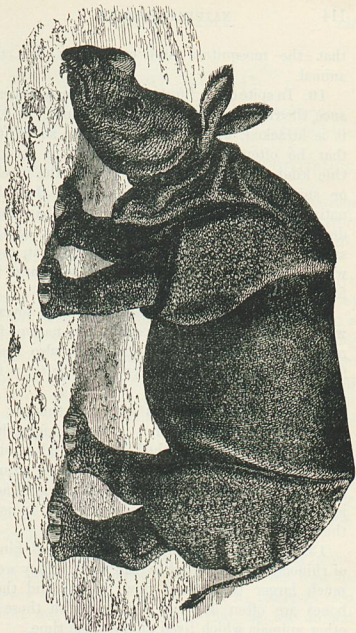
10. In spite of its huge size and clumsy appearance, the rhinoceros is a very active animal ; and, if it is attacked, will pursue the hunter so swiftly that he often finds it very difficult to escape. One kind of African rhinoceros, called the borele, or small black rhinoceros, is so fierce that the natives are said to fear it even more than they do the lion. Yet the white rhinoceros, of the same country, is of so mild a nature that, even when attacked, it does not attempt to charge its foe, but seeks safety in flight.

11. The rhinoceros is useful to man in several ways. His tough hide is used by the natives for making their shields ; and leather is also made from it. The horn, too, is very valuable to us for many purposes.

12. In former days this horn was thought to have a very curious power. It was thought that any poisoned drink touched by it would bubble and boil up. So, many kings had their drinking cups made of the horn, and set in gold and jewels, thinking that if any one tried to poison them, they would be able to find it out.

13. In times very long gone by, several kinds of rhinoceros were found in England. They were much larger than those now living ; and their bones are often dug up, together with those of other animals which lived at the same time.

THE RHINOCEROS.



H