ANECDOTAL AND DESCRIPTIVE

NATURAL HISTORY.

BY

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ILLUSTRATED WITH

EIGHT COLOURED PLATES AND NUMEROUS WOOD ENGRAVINGS.

LONDON:
GROOMBRIDGE AND SONS,
5, PATERNOSTER ROW.
MDCCCLXXII.

CHAPTER III.

THE RHINOCEROS.

AMONGST the *Pachydermata* the genus Rhinoceros holds a conspicuous place. The animals of this genus, though inferior in size to the elephant, astonish by their massive and clumsy figure, and by the tremendous strength displayed when their energies are roused by aggression. It is generally thought by the ablest commentators that the unicorn or reem of Scripture is the Rhinoceros, and though this opinion be not absolutely proved, it is, at all events, probable.

The genus Rhinoceros contains six living specimens, as far as naturalists are able to determine, and nine fossil species have been recorded, the relics of which are found in the same strata that contain those of the fossil elephant. They vary from five feet to five and a half in height at the shoulder, and from eleven feet to twelve feet in length of body and head. The general contour and proportions of the Rhinoceros have long been known; but the earlier figures of the animal were to a certain extent incorrect and exaggerated. When living specimens are not accessible, artists and naturalists are liable to mistakes, which are too often

perpetuated, and which, indeed, are not always easily eradicated.

Clumsy, massive, and low on the limbs as it is, the Rhinoceros is more prompt and rapid in its movements than its uncouth form would lead a person unacquainted with its habits to anticipate. In sluggishness of appearance it is, indeed, exceeded only by the hippopotamus. The body is protuberant, the belly almost touching the ground; the back falls from the withers and rises again on the crupper; the head is a ponderous mass, supported by a short and powerful neck; the shoulders are massive, and the limbs present the appearance of short stout pillars for the superincumbent weight to be sustained. The feet are divided into three toes, encased each in a solid hoof. In its whole appearance the Rhinoceros reminds us of a huge hog, and its heavy movements contribute to strengthen the resemblance.

On each side of the hinder summit of the head are placed the ears, which are large, open, pointed, and very movable, the animal being able to freely turn them in every direction; and thus its sense of hearing, as might be expected, is extremely acute. The eyes are very small, but bright and prominent; their situation is remarkable, for they seem as if placed rather on each side of the snout than in the ordinary position, being, in fact, nearer to the muzzle than in most animals, so that a slight turn of the head brings an ample circuit within their range of vision.

But that which gives most character to the head of the Rhinoceros is the horn, which is single in some

species and double in others. This horn is placed in a situation of which it is the only example, being seated on the nasal bones, which are of a thickness and solidity not to be found in any other race of quadrupeds. In the two-horned species the posterior horn rests on the *os frontis* or frontal bone. It is of a conical shape, curving backwards. The single or principal horn, where there are two, is sometimes nearly three feet in length, and, though a blunt looking instrument, when wielded by an animal of such bulk and strength, is made to force its way through almost any resistance. This organ differs in structure from that of every other animal, being composed of parallel fibres, which are analogous to hair agglutinated into a solid mass, and have much resemblance to those into which whalebone is so easily separable. At its base it is, in most instances, evidently rough and fibrous, like a worn-out brush. It grows from the skin only, in the same manner as the hair, is without any surrounding horny sheath or socket, and is unconnected with the bone of the skull. At the tip it appears less fibrous, this part being always worn down by continual rubbing, and thus having a considerable degree of polish. From this formation it is not at all extraordinary that the Rhinoceros should possess the power of moving it to a certain degree, since the hog, to which, in the natural arrangement, it so closely approaches, has a much greater power of moving its bristles, which, if united, would form a horn of the same nature. All the African species, and one of the Oriental, have a second horn, which is placed behind the first, and is shorter in the

Indian species and in one of the African, the other two having horns of about equal length.

On the ears there are a few stiff bristles, and similar bristles fringe the tail on each side at its tip; with these exceptions the skin is naked, and of a dark grayish black, with a slight tinge of purple. Hard and dense as this integument is, it is, nevertheless, far from being destitute of sensibility, and the animal is constantly annoyed by the bites and stings of insects, which abound in the swampy places which it inhabits; and it is to protect himself against these petty but multitudinous tormentors that he rolls in the slimy marsh, so as to cover the body with a layer of mud, which not only resists their attacks, but at the same time also defends the skin from the effects of a burning sun; hence the partiality of the Rhinoceros for localities which abound with water. It is not, however, only in the mud bath that the animal revels, for he delights in the water itself, and swims with ease and vigour. But independent of the instinctive partiality which this animal manifests for the swamp or border of the river, necessity restricts him to such localities; the quantity of vegetable food and water he requires is very great, and in such places, beneath an Indian sky, nature provides him with a never-failing magazine of food. Suppose an animal requiring for his daily support from sixty to seventy pounds' weight of vegetable matter, and fourteen or fifteen gallons of water, were placed in the midst of a scantily watered district, with a meagre crop of herbage, slowly renewed, it is easy to imagine the straits to which he would be soon reduced.

Providence, however, in appointing every animal to a given locality, makes no such errors, and in endowing the huge Rhinoceroses with instincts leading them to affect the water, at the same time places the means of sustenance immediately within their reach. Where they exist there alone are they fitted to exist, and to that spot are they bound by instinct.

Of all the *Pachydermata* the Indian Rhinoceros is most distinguished for the density of the skin; nor does it lie smooth over the body, as in the African species or the hippopotamus, but it is thrown into large folds, which add to the uncouth appearance of the animal, and form a sort of armour, very difficult to be pierced; hence it is manufactured into shields and the like. The arrangement of the folds, or rather solid plates with folded edges, is as follows:—Around the neck, which is short and deep, the skin forms two deep folds, of which the last hangs over the front of the chest. The shoulders are covered with a thick hard plate falling in a fold over the top of the fore limbs, and separated also by a deep posterior fold from the plate covering the body; this is folded across the top of the crupper, the fold running down just before the haunch bones, and losing itself on the belly. The crupper-plate is divided by a longitudinal fold running to the root of the tail on each side, from a large crural or leg plate, which hangs in a deep fold over the thighs. Between the folds the skin is soft and flexible, and of a pale pink or flesh colour; but everywhere else it is hard and dense, and covered with tubercles or horny incrustations; hence, were it not for these folds.

the animal would be necessarily limited in his motions. Dr. Parsons observes, that if the skin, thus hard and inflexible, were "continued all over the creature, as the skins of other animals, without any folds, he could not bend any way nor perform any necessary action; but that suppleness in the skins of other quadrupeds, which renders them flexible in all parts, is very well compensated in this animal by those folds; for since it was necessary his skin should be hard for his defence, it was a noble contrivance that his skin should be so soft and smooth underneath that, when he bends himself any way, one part of his board-like skin should slip or shove over the other, and that these several folds should be placed in such parts of his body as might facilitate the performance of every voluntary motion he might be disposed to." The hide of the African species, though thick and dense, is not thrown into heavy solid shields as in the common Indian species, and would appear to be much more easily pierced. The African are also distinguished by their blind ferocity and malignity, while the Asiatic are dull, peaceable, and inoffensive.

Sluggish in his habitual movements, the Rhinoceros wanders through his native plains with a heavy step, carrying his huge head so low, that his nose almost touches the ground, and stopping at intervals to crop some favourite plant, or, in playfulness, to plough up the ground with his horn, throwing the mud and stones behind him. The jungle yields before his weight and strength, and his track is said to be often marked by a line of devastation. As they are animals which depend

much upon smell for their existence and safety, it is necessary to advance upon them from the leeward side, if it be wished to get close without being discovered. In pursuit they also trust for guidance to the same sense, and they may be heard forcibly inspiring the air when they have lost the scent of the object they were following. The ticks and insects with which they are covered furnish them another source of intelligence, by attracting a number of birds, which sit quietly picking them off when nothing strange is in sight, but fly away when any object excites their fear. So well does the Rhinoceros understand this, that he proceeds feeding with the greatest confidence while the birds continue perched upon his back; but the moment they fly the huge animal raises his head, and turns it in all directions to catch the scent. Whether he accomplishes that or not, he generally feels so uncertain of his position, that he moves to some other locality. Alluding to the organs of the senses, F. Cuvier observes, respecting that of touch, that it is confined to the upper lip, adding that all the other senses appeared to be tolerably acute. "He frequently made use of that of smell, and preferred sugared fruits, and sugar itself, to every other aliment. He collected together the smaller morsels of food with his movable upper lip to carry them to his mouth; and when he ate hay he formed it with his upper lip into little bunches, which he afterwards introduced between his teeth by means of his tongue."

The Abyssinians, who are familiar with the animal's stupid and unvaried mode of charging, and who are excellent horsemen, attack the Rhinoceros on horseback,

and on an open plain, without fear. As the Rhinoceros rushes forward after the manner of the wild boar, the horse, which is well trained and in hand, is easily made

HUNTING RHINOCEROS.

to turn short aside and avoid the shock; on the instant a naked man drops from behind the hunter on the saddle, and, unperceived by the beast, which turns with difficulty, cuts at a blow with a sharp sword the tendon of the heel, so as to render the poor animal incapable of flight. Mr. Burchell describes an ingenious mode adopted by the Bettcoust hunters of escaping from its impetuous attacks. They carry a sort of umbrella, made of ostrich plumes, and this, when held present and

in imminent danger, they stick into the ground, and leave it to the fury of the enraged beast, which, imagining that its enemy is planted before it, makes the feather-stick, as it is called, the object of attack, the hunter in the mean time being enabled to effect his escape, or gain time for a second attempt to kill the animal. Its flesh is by no means despicable as food. Sparrman observes that its flavour, when broiled, is not much unlike that of pork, in which he is supported by Bruce, who states that "the most delicate part about him is supposed to be the soles of his feet, which are soft, like those of a camel, and of a gristly substance. The rest of the flesh seems to resemble that of the hog, but is much coarser." Mr. Burchell, however, says that its flesh is like beef, and adds, "The tongue would have been pronounced a dainty treat, even by an epicure."

The Rhinoceros is capable of domestication. Bishop Heber, while at Baroda, observes—"In passing through the city I saw two very fine hunting-tigers in silver chains, and a Rhinoceros (the present of Lord Amherst to the Guicar), which is so tame as to be ridden by a *mahout*, quite as patiently as an elephant." Previously, however, he had seen tame Rhinoceroses, and noted their tractable disposition. But the natural sluggishness, conjoined with his liability to sudden outbursts of rage, during which he would deal destruction around him, are circumstances which must ever prevent his being used as an ordinary beast of burden, even where he can be easily procured.