



XVI. RHINOCEROS AFRICANUS: - THE AFRICAN RHINOCEROS.

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PLATE XVI.

RHINOCEROS AFRICANUS.—THE AFRICAN RHINOCEROS.

Rhinoster of the Cape Colonists. *Borili* of the Bechuana. *Chukuroo* of the Matabili.

GENERIC CHARACTER.—Often six feet high at the shoulder, and about thirteen in extreme length. General contour that of gigantic swine. Body very robust, clumsy, and underlimbed; feet very small in proportion, and furnished with three toes; the hocks unnaturally prominent, as though spavined. Head shapeless. Eyes lateral and extremely small; encircled by a series of deeply furrowed wrinkles, extending over a great portion of the face. Muzzle hooked, and resembling that of a tortoise; armed with two horns on the snout, placed one behind the other, over an arch formed by the nasal bones; they are solid, fibrous, consisting of an agglutination of hair, and attached to the skin only; variously fashioned; usually rough at the base, and highly polished above; the anterior from one to two feet long, the posterior generally much smaller, but capricious, attaining in some specimens the same or nearly the same length.* Ears pointed, small, approximated, and fringed with a few bristles. Hide naked, very thick, rugous, and knotty, but destitute of plaits or folds, a few loose wrinkles about the neck excepted. Usual colour olive brown, approaching sometimes to that of clay mire. Tail about two feet long, laterally compressed at the end, and furnished with a few terminal bristles.

Female similar, but smaller. Mammæ two. Very common in the interior, and frequently gregarious in small groups not exceeding five or six. Inhabits variously, but is most usually met with on thinly wooded plains.

* In no two specimens of this animal which came under my observation were the horns built exactly upon the same model. Disease or accident had not unfrequently rendered the anterior horn the *shorter* of the two.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE AFRICAN RHINOCEROS.

The devilish iron engine wrought
In deepest hell, and framed by furie's skill,
With windy nitre and quick sulphur fraught,
And rammed with bullets round, ordained to kill.

Spenser's Faery Queene.

"If you draw your beast in an emblem," observes Peacham quaintly enough, "show a landscape of the country natural to the beast." In accordance with which sound and excellent counsel, although not directly dealing in emblems, I have striven to display annexed the scenery "natural" to the smaller, and more common of the two species of Rhinoceros that infest Southern Africa. He is a swinish, cross-grained, ill-favoured, wallowing brute, with a hide like a rasp, an impudent cock of the chin, a roguish leer from out the corner of his eye, a mud-begrimed exterior, and a necklace of ticks and horse-flies! Nineteen times out of twenty shall you see the crusty old fellow standing listlessly in the society of Gnoos, Quaggas, and Hartebeests, upon a plain bounded by a low range of azure hills, and dotted over with mokaala trees, distributed with park-like regularity. In imitation of the pendulum of a Dutch clock, his tail is swinging mechanically from side to side—and the odds are fifty to one that, having eaten his fill, he is at that very moment in the enjoyment of perfect idleness, under the shade cast by one of the many thatched cities of the *Lovia* which are within the scope of vision. Indolent and slovenly, he would appear, notwithstanding his enormous bulk, to be a slow and dainty feeder, tasting few of the many shrubs which he approaches, or has even touched with his tortoise-like nose, as though designing to browse thereon; and whilst exclusively subsisting upon brushwood and the smaller branches of dwarf trees—he is to be found in none but wooded districts, his traces become there abundantly apparent, from his accumulated heaps of ordure, wherein he delights to roll, from his singular *trefoil-shaped spoor*, and from the extensive mutilations of his favourite bushes.

Whether from a limited sphere of vision, arising from the extraordinary minuteness of the eyes, which, resembling a pig's in expression, are placed nearer to the nose than in most other animals—or whether from an overweening confidence in its own powers—the Rhinoceros will generally suffer itself to be approached within even a few yards, before condescending to take the smallest heed of the foe who is diligently plotting its destruction. At length, pricking its pointed ears at some unusual sound, it listens with a ludicrous assumption of shrewdness—its elevated snout, armed with a double ploughshare, imparting an inimitable expression of contempt. In an instant the dull and vacant physiognomy has become lighted up with the essence of all that is spiteful and malevolent. Twinkling its hoggish eyes, and turning its shapeless head inquiringly from side to side—elevating its double chin, and restlessly rolling its bemired carcase from side to side—it trots forward a few paces with the vivacity and mincing gait of a French dancing master—wheeling presently to the right about to reconnoitre the enemy. Then uttering a great blast or snort of defiance, and lowering its armed muzzle almost to the ground, grunting and trumpeting, on comes the villain with reckless impetuosity, displaying a degree of activity but ill according with such unwieldy proportions. Once roused from his apparent lethargy, throwing down the gauntlet, he charges with blind fury to the onslaught, aided no less by the length of his stride than by the propelling impetus of his body. Yet his rush is invariably a straight one, and his awkward structure preventing him from turning with facility, it is only necessary to step on one side to be perfectly secure—a bullet, hardened either with tin or quicksilver, and thrown in behind the elbow at the proper moment, being almost sure to prove fatal, after a race of three or four hundred yards. But though, glorying not in panoply of plate armour which encases the ribs of his Asiatic brother, the stupid and vicious beast is nevertheless enveloped in a suit of mail which will successfully repel any ordinary bullet—one of unadulterated lead, far from penetrating, most frequently falling flattened from his hide.

When the Dutch first established themselves at the Cape of Bon Esperance—now nearly two centuries ago, the *Zwart Rhinoster* existed in considerable numbers on the present site of Cape Town, along the base of Table Mountain; but within the Colony the species has long ceased to exist, the remnant having instinctively fled before the destructive cannonade to which it was subjected. Gregarious in fives and sixes, they are extremely abundant in the wilds of the interior, and I have, during a single day, counted upwards of sixty. The Hottentots, ever gasconading of their skill in hunting them, had long kept us on the *qui vive*, but it was not until we had reached the sedgy Molopo, that the animal's dusky form actually

appeared to me. Whilst the teams were being unyoked, I had gone out on horseback with the design of ministering to the inordinate appetites of a party of savages who had joined us on the road; and was busied in the pursuit of a troop of Hartebeests, when two colossal figures which my friends at once pronounced to be *Borili*, were descried, motionless as statues, in the middle of the level and treeless expanse. I at first endeavoured to approach, frog-fashion, upon all fours, under cover of the grass, but a strong wind setting towards them, they went off at a heavy trot, and as it was getting dark, I remounted my horse, and galloping within seventy or eighty yards—the nearest I felt disposed to venture on so short an acquaintance—treated the more bulky to a brace of rifle balls. Carrying his snout close to the ground, he did but run the faster, and by the time I had repeated the dose without any better effect, it had become so dark that I was compelled to abstain from further hostilities.

The next apparition was even more shadowy. Accompanied by a band of natives who volunteered to show me a Giraffe, I had ridden so far in advance of the waggons—then plodding at a funereal pace through the heavy forest that envelops the foot of Kurrichane—that night overtaking me, I began to feel apprehensive of having to bivouac in the bush. My companions evidently contemplated a similar contingency, and evinced a vast longing to rejoin four of their number who had wisely tarried behind with the carcase of a *Sassaybe* that I had inconsiderately shot. Giving by signs to understand that I disapproved of the measure, we pushed on briskly towards the halting ground that had previously been agreed upon. A contumacious Rhinoceros was stationed directly in our path, and although repeatedly hailed, most peremptorily refused to make way. There was just twilight sufficient to admit of my discharging both barrels of my rifle into his unwieldy form from behind a strong breast-work of thorn bushes. Sneezing violently and wheezing, he ran off in the direction that we were taking, but presently subsided heavily in the path. We approached him with caution, and were well pleased to find that he was extinct—a volley of musquetry at the same moment in reply to my rifle, together with a bright beacon fire which suddenly blazed forth towards heaven, directing our benighted steps to the encampment.

Arriving at the *Mariqua* several days after this occurrence, we had formed the camp on a verdant spot on the river bank near to an extensive *Matabili kraal*—the captain of which, at the head of some ten of his clan, being clamorous for victuals, I willingly placed myself under his guidance, and dived into the heart of the extensive groves, where, although the sun was shining brightly, a dry cutting wind rendered the cold scarcely endurable, even under the defence of a *duffel* jacket. After running a few hundred yards, the savages, halting, pointed to a huge shapeless mass, which bore so strong a resemblance to a sleeping Rhinoceros, that without asking any questions, I poured through the trees at his indistinct outline, a broadside, which from treble the same distance, would have more than satisfied any other animal in the creation. But notwithstanding that the beast was mortally wounded, he twice contrived to cross the river, and I had no alternative—a cold one though it proved—but to wade after him through water which reached to my middle, following the bloody trail among the intricacies of the grove, until from single drops the traces became splashes of frothy crimson. Still striving to force his tottering frame through the tangled covert, the dying monster at length sank upon his knees, when another bullet behind the shoulder terminated his giant struggles, as he was tearing up the earth with his ponderous horn.

A flash like fire within his eyes
Blazed as he bent no more to rise;
And then eternal darkness sunk
Through all the palpitating trunk—
Nought of life left save a shivering
Where his limbs were slightly quivering.

My companion the next morning achieved a 'gentle passage of arms' with the very duplicate of this gentleman; but *his* antagonist could not be prevailed upon to surrender to superior weapons, until it had considerably disfigured with the point of its horn the stock of the rifle employed in its reduction. Aroused from a siesta in a thick bush by the smarting of a gunshot wound, the exasperated beast pursued its human assailant so closely, that Richardson was fain, in self-defence, to discharge the second barrel down its open throat! On our way to the *Ooli* river, a few days subsequently, having left the waggons to proceed by the direct route, I took a circuitous line to the left, and was ascending a stony eminence, when sundry discharges of musquetry accompanied by loud shouts and clamour, were followed by the sudden appearance of an infuriated female. Streaming with gore, she rushed over the brow of the hill with snorts and grunts, looming like a colossal sow—and was actually within pistol shot ere a soul was aware of her advent. No bush presenting itself behind which to hide, I threw my hunting cap to divert her attention, 'Lingap meanwhile striking his shield, and shouting with stentorian lungs until the brute turned off, when I saluted her fat buttocks with the contents of both my barrels, and she was immediately afterwards overturned by a running fire from the Hottentots.

As we advanced, the species became daily more and more abundant, and I shall hardly gain credence when I assert, that in the valley of *Limpopo* specimens were so numerous, that on arriving in the afternoon at our new ground, it was no uncommon thing to perceive a dozen horned snouts protruded at once from bushes in the immediate vicinity. No sooner were the teams unyoked, than the whole party in the regular routine of business, having assumed their weapons, proceeded to dislodge the enemy, and right stoutly often was the field contested. But where is the quadruped that can stand before the grooved rifle? It will take the conceit out of the most contumacious, and like a sedative, will calm his ruffled temper in a minute. Every individual came in for a share of cold lead and quicksilver; and the stubborn brute that would not quietly withdraw,

satisfied with the mercurial dose he had received, was ultimately badgered to death as a matter of course. Daily almost, two or three were thus annihilated within view of the camp; and not only during our hunting excursions was the path constantly disputed by some rebellious rascal, who refused to move on one side until the smarting of his wounds compelled him,—but when on the point of drawing the trigger at some object that I coveted, a scoundrel has frequently leapt with a grunt out of a bush not many yards removed from my elbow. I have elsewhere related, that on the occasion of my first humbling a Giraffe, my advance towards the herd was opposed by a spiteful old vixen, that twinkled her wicked eyes, and with her antiquated little calf, seemed so bent upon interference, that I had no alternative but to direct Piet van Roy to salute her with a broadside; a white turban that during the chase was torn by a projecting bough from around my hunting cap, being afterwards charged and trampled under foot by no fewer than three ungainly beasts in concert, whom I could long perceive snorting and wheezing in an abortive attempt to overtake me.

During the time that we were encamped in the valley of the Limpopo, a huge male came sauntering down one evening after we had all returned tired from hunting, and proceeded coolly to take up his position under a spreading tree, not three hundred yards from our waggons. A general move was made towards the guns, which had been slung in their accustomed places within the awning; and Andries, contriving to obtain his *roer* the first, pompously announced his intention of giving the party a lesson *gratis* in the art of Rhinoceros shooting. “*Jaa,*” said he confidently, “*daar in die veld ik zaal de schelm dood maaken.*”^{*} Impelled by this bold determination, he crept with suitable caution against the wind, taking especial care ever to keep the trunk of a tree interposed betwixt himself and the object for whose life he thirsted; and deliberately seating himself at last upon the ground within thirty paces of the unconscious target, he levelled a full minute over a branch, and drew the trigger. The clattering together of the heavy flint and steel was the only response, and the Rhinoceros, quite in the dark as to the cause of a sound so unusual, pricked its sharp ears, elevated its snout, and, having sniffed about a little, trotted quietly on to the next tree. The foiled preceptor nimbly advanced to the position that it had vacated, and another minute’s aim produced a flash in the pan. Again the beast trotted on, and wheeling about, fronted the adversary, and commenced winking its little eyes in a most ominous manner. Still resolved to learn how a Rhinoceros *ought* to be slain, not a man interfered, and Andries, having leisurely cleared the ample touch-hole of his blunderbuss with an acacia thorn, and then by the aid thereof inserted a suitable modicum of powder, obtained with some difficulty from his gigantic ox-horn magazine—which complex operation occupied other two minutes and a half—levelled for the third time. On this occasion the bullet *did* leave the tube, and away thundered the irritated animal—the sanguinary sportsman offering large bets that Death would overtake his victim ere it had travelled an hundred yards! But from the top of an eminence we gazed at the dusky figure as it waned smaller and smaller to the perception, now trotting, now galloping over the plain below, until at length it stood stock still, and began browsing upon the bushes; whereupon the preceptor, covered with infamy, having tossed his empty gun over his brawny shoulder, cocked his only optic at his jeering messmates, and acquainted them that the failure of his experiment was solely to be attributed to the infamous quality of the *kruid*.[†]

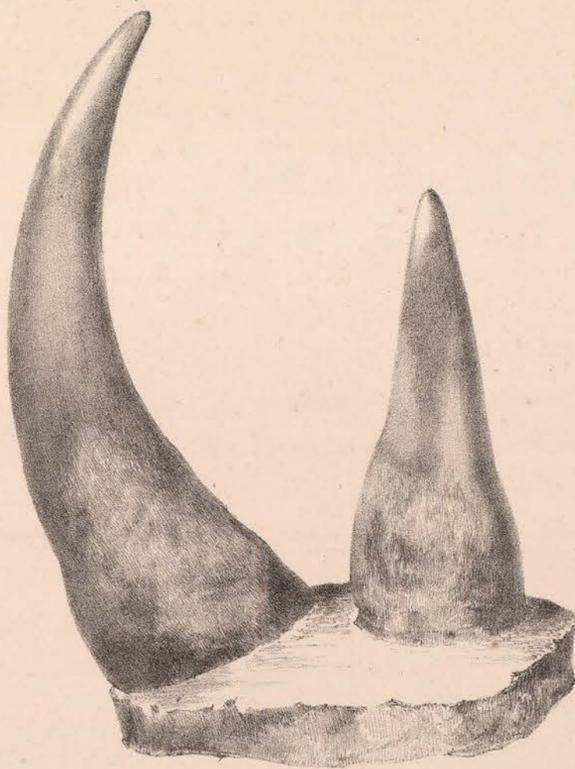
Our friend on the other hand, received upon a subsequent occasion rather an awkward lesson in the process by which the Rhinoceros conducts the war against the human species. We were leading the hot trail of a herd of Elephants, and whilst passing a little green knoll, an old lady was perceived sunning herself under the walls of a deserted stone kraal which crowned the summit. Andries had that morning drawn the dappled mare in the lottery, and being in an unusually crusty humour thereat, was resolved to mar the sport to the utmost of his poor ability. Dismounting without saying a syllable, and making fast the bridle to a tree, he boldly advanced towards the quarry—which for once in a way appeared to be most peaceably disposed—and cocking his long gun with an air of singular success, triumphantly fired a four-to-the-pound ball into the animal’s ribs. Forth she came, brandishing her ploughshare in a towering passion—and whilst not an object appeared in the whole landscape behind which to seek refuge, the mare, having broken her bridle, was trotting quietly away. A pair of tight leathern inexpressibles, which from their fashionable cut had long formed his boast, so impeded his downward progress, that he was overtaken in a trice, and the rent inflicted in their nether portion by a thrust of the animal’s sharp horn, sufficiently proved how nearly we had been bereft for ever of the valuable services of our now crest-fallen hero.

One stormy morning, when hunting was altogether out of the question, our little party was on its way to cut out the teeth of sundry elephants that had been slain the preceding day. The road lay under a ruined cattle enclosure, whence a vicious Rhinoceros, the only tenant, perceiving the difficulty with which we extricated our feet from the deep black mud—of which several pounds attached themselves at every step—resolved to take us at a disadvantage. With a grunt and a whistle, out he sallied accordingly, fully bent upon mischief; and the dampness of the atmosphere causing no less than three out of our four guns to miss fire, the assassin was actually in the middle of us, when a ball from my second barrel fortunately piercing his eye, he fell dead at our feet. Ere many days had elapsed, however, I took my revenge for this act of unprovoked aggression upon an unhappy member of the fraternity that I detected asleep in another of these stone enclosures. The walls, which were extremely extensive, had only one outlet, before which having drawn a stiff thorn branch, and taken post outside, I aroused the slumberer by a shot under the left ear. Never shall I forget his amazement.

^{*} Angl. “Aye, I shall smash the rogue on that very spot!”

[†] Angl. Gunpowder.

Starting upon his legs, he ran with closed eyes full butt against the opposite wall, and finding the masonry harder than his ugly head, made divers uncouth attempts to scramble over, pawing down the loose stones, and in his bursting rage, kicking them backwards and forwards among the wild tobacco plants. A brisk fire from the gateway deterred him from following up any decided attempt in that quarter, although as he raved round and round the enclosure, and flew from one compartment to another, he eyed it perpetually. Bullet after bullet whacked against his devoted ribs, and it being next to impossible to take any aim, no less than twenty-seven had struck the miserable fellow before he finally gave in—his riddled carcase, as well as the foam which had churned around his chops, having by that time assumed a dye of crimson. Fearful indeed was the uproar that attended the division of his mutilated remains—a large party of famished Baquaina females, whose wardrobes were even more remarkably slender than usual, rushing forth like so many weird witches, and leaving in the course of a few hours nothing to attest the slaughter, saving a pool of blood!



Horns of Rhinoceros Africanus as preserved by Capt. Harris.