



W.C. Harvey

XIX. RHINOCEROS SIMUS. - THE SQUARE NOSED OR WHITE RHINOCEROS.

PLATE XIX.

RHINOCEROS SIMUS—THE SQUARE-NOSED, OR WHITE RHINOCEROS.

Witte Rhinoster of the Cape Colonists. *Chickore* and *Mohohoo* of the Bechuana and Matabili.

GENERIC CHARACTER.—Six feet six or eight inches high at the shoulder, and above fourteen in extreme length. General contour somewhat elephantine. Body massive and ponderous. Head shapeless and more than three feet long. Muzzle truncated, upwards of eighteen inches in breadth; furnished with two horns placed one behind the other upon the vaulted dome of the nose; the anterior robust and ringed at the base, tapering to a sharp point, and curved to the form of a cock's spur, generally exceeding three feet in length; the upper portion highly polished, and the base often so beset with bristles as to resemble a worn-out brush. Posterior horn a mere excrescence from four to six inches long, sometimes ringed at the base. Ears pointed and approximated, their edges fringed with bristles. A square massive hump rising from the neck. Eye very diminutive and lateral. Legs short and terminating in three toes. Tail about two feet long, compressed and bristled at the extremity. Hide rough, naked, and knotty; extremely thick, arranged in folds and plaits about the neck, and deeply cut with wrinkles over the face. Colour varying, usually dirty brownish white.

Female similar but smaller. Mammæ two. Very numerous in the interior after passing Kurrichane, and usually gregarious in small parties. Inhabits variously, being found in equal abundance on open grassy plains, and in hilly or thinly wooded regions.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE WHITE RHINOCEROS.

"The desert gave him visions wild,
Such as might suit the spectre's child.
When with black cliffs the torrents toil,
He watched the wheeling eddies boil,
Till from their foam his dazzled eyes,
Beheld the river demon rise;
The mountain mist took form and limb
Of noontide hag or goblin grim."

ALTHOUGH, during the middle ages, when the western world was immersed in darkness, the remembrance of the Rhinoceros, in common with that of many other quadrupeds familiar to the ancients, had altogether passed away, the records of antiquity establish beyond a doubt that one at least of the double horned African species of this animal must have been well known to the Romans, and even swelled the pomp of triumphal processions and the tide of blood that flowed in the murderous arena.* Not many years have elapsed since the ultra-grotesque figure now introduced—long dead to science—was enrolled by the indefatigable Burchell in the catalogue of extant *Mammalia*. Forming in many respects a ridiculous caricature upon the 'half reasoning Elephant,' and ranking second only to him in point of size among the gigantic Pachydermes,

"Formá præstanti, et cornibus ingens,"

it will hardly fail to be considered a seemly companion for the monsters of Pliny, and might even take its place among the most preposterous creations of Heraldry, or the crudest offspring of a distempered fancy. But unnatural and absurd though its proportions may appear to those unacquainted with the ungainly original, we stake our credit as an artist upon the scrupulous fidelity of the portrait. Many a warm and unstiffened corse was measured with tape and two-foot rule, as *Snip* would overhaul the dimensions of a school-boy that needed a suit of holiday garments; whilst the likeness received its finishing touches from a living subject that, as if with the express design of standing for a 'full length,' politely presented its courtly figure within fifty paces of the waggon.

No quadruped with which naturalists are acquainted would appear to correspond more nearly than the White Rhinoceros with the stubborn *Reem* or Unicorn of Holy Writ. Attaining the height of nearly seven feet at the shoulder, and carrying a cranium not very dissimilar to a nine gallon cask,† he flourishes upon the extremity of his square and truncated snout, a formidable weapon some three and a half feet long, fashioned after the approved model of a cobbler's awl, and capable, when wielded by a warrior so unquestionable in pith and renown, of being made to force its way through any opposition—its companion, although certainly a horn, being nevertheless such a mere excrescence, that at the distance even of a few yards it is barely perceptible. Superadding to the almost impenetrable folds of shagreen wherein nature hath encased his ribs, a goodly outer coat acquired by constant wallowings in swamps and stagnant pools, the gentleman is but rarely to be viewed under his true complexion, which if not quite so *blond* as the prefix to his cognomen might indicate, is yet much fairer than that of his swarthy congener, and often approaches to cream colour. Notwithstanding that this is one of the bulkiest land animals in the creation, the cavity which should contain the brain is not nearly so capacious as in the human species; but in removing the horn with an axe, the brain or something very like it, was found seated in a receptacle beneath—a phenomenon in idiosyncrasy which may possibly account as well for the want of intelligence and piggish obstinacy, as for the extraordinary acuteness of the olfactory endowments.

By what means I know not, the subject of the present chapter has contrived to secure unto himself the reputation of being less bellicose than him whose portrait has already appeared. Never extremely wild, it was yet prudently careful of its person, and entertaining a very becoming respect for fire-arms, was usually ready enough to retire before the bombarding and platoon firing to which it was exposed; but being subject to the same paroxysms of reckless and unprovoked fury, we often found it fully as troublesome as its sable relative. Dull, slow, and wallowing in its ordinary state; daring, swift, and perse-

* "Namque gravem gemino cornu sic extulit ursum,
Jactat ut impositas taurus in astra pilas."—MARTIAL.

† Half a dozen persons can with difficulty raise the entire head of a white Rhinoceros upon a waggon, where it forms almost a load in itself. The horns, adhering to the skin only which covers the vaulted nose, become detached in the course of a few weeks, by the jolting of the vehicle.

vering when excited, it was wont to rush forth with loud snorts and whistles as though it had been the sole object of hostilities, whereas in reality no soul had done more than ken of its presence. Neither, like the black Rhinoceros, did it hesitate upon occasion to defend a pass with determined obstinacy, or to pursue our horses with ludicrous and fruitless industry, evincing a spitfire disposition almost peculiar to the class of which it is no unworthy member. Old Chaucer in his "Nonne's Preeste's Tale" has truly enough observed,

"For naturely a beest desireth flee
Fro' his contrarie if he may it see;"

and it is certain that even the most ferocious and blood-thirsty of the 'prone and mute creation' when disturbed in the native haunts, unless sore pressed by hunger, are much more frequently disposed to make way for man than to oppose him. The savage natives of Africa who regard neither species with much dread, wage a successful war against them with the assagai; and pitfalls containing pointed stakes, constructed purposely for the accommodation of the unwieldy beasts were of very frequent occurrence. Strewed with huge skulls and bones, they differed from those excavated for the smaller quadrupeds in being dug singly, instead of in groups—of increased dimensions—at the extremity of a narrow path cleared through the bushes and stoutly fenced on either side with thorns; a sharp turn leading so directly upon the hidden sepulchre, that the clumsy monster, if driven furiously down the avenue, can have little chance of evading it—

"But, by the wily African betray'd,
Heedless of fate within its gaping jaws,
Expires indignant."

In no region of the globe does there exist so vast a variety of herbivorous quadrupeds, and of such gigantic dimensions as in the southern regions of Africa—the poor and scanty vegetation afforded by her wide plains, rendering it matter of some astonishment how such a goodly host can find subsistence. Notwithstanding that the growth of herbage is there surprisingly rapid, and that animals of the greatest bulk undoubtedly wander over a large extent of country in quest of their daily food, one cannot help surmising that a foraging party comprising a dozen monsters such as this, 'eating grass like an ox,' would in less than a week devour every blade of which the continent south of the Tropic can boast! Gregarious in small groups, so many as six or seven might frequently be seen herding together; and in the vicinage of the Cashan mountains especially, where on our first arrival the country absolutely presented the appearance of a Zoological Garden, or a Travelling Menagerie turned loose, an abstract of the host that daily exhibited themselves would almost exceed belief. Eighty were on one occasion seen during the day's march, and on my way from our encampment in the valley of the Limpopo to a hill only half a mile distant, no fewer than twenty-two were counted, of which we were compelled in self defence to slaughter four.*

It was shortly after we had crossed the Mariqua, that the first white Rhinoceros seen by our party was numbered with the dead. Numerous savages had followed in our train with the design of obtaining a supply of dried flesh, and being already tolerably well laden with prime joints from the Quagga and Sassaybe, amongst a large mixed herd of which animals great havoc had just been committed, it is scarcely possible to comprehend the unqualified delight with which they discovered this new mountain of carrion standing stupidly under the shade of a spreading acacia—its dull heavy eye rivetted upon the earth as in a brown study. Pointing eagerly towards it, their suppressed exclamations of *Chickore! Chickore!* were accompanied by an epicurean smacking of the lips, and by many telegraphic anticipations of the farther work which awaited their already swollen abdomens. Before commencing the attack, I had approached unperceived to within thirty yards of the enemy, and being securely ensconced behind an extremely thick bush overhanging the brink of a precipitous ravine that formed a gulf betwixt us, leisurely planted a two ounce bullet behind his armpit. But this assault had no other immediate effect than to bring my antagonist square to the front, in which position he stood eyeing my place of concealment, and practising various absurd contortions of the features, until, having reloaded, I bestowed two ounces more. Snorting, groaning, and bleeding, away he then scoured—his nose close to the ground, and the whole meat-laden mob at his heels; but it was not until he had made four clumsy charges, and received as many more shots behind the shoulder, besides four times that number of assagais in his crupper and haunches, that he thought proper to deliver up the ghost. In the chase, as in war, is it that the energies of the savage are displayed to the greatest advantage—the metamorphosis from his usual apathy and listless indifference being never more complete or more sudden. At one moment might their shadowy forms be perceived stealing amid the bushes with noiseless tread; and at the next, uttering a yell of savage exultation, and bounding forward with the elasticity of a tiger, they had sheathed their slender weapons in the tough hide of the tortured quarry, and were dexterously retreating before its reckless charge.

At the close of a long and sultry march, we halted late one afternoon upon the steep bank of the Simalakate, near to where the grey arms of a clump of moss-grown mimosas, entwining, admitted through their loose tresses the last long-dancing gleams of departing sunshine. Beneath, the pensive willows laving their silvery garlands in the blue stream, over a bed of tall flowering reeds that sighed and rustled at their feet, forming the most inviting of canopies; and our two surviving dogs

* Many months after these sketches were penned, Mr. Darwin's recently published volume, forming one of the Narrative of a Voyage of H. M. Ship *Beagle*, arrived in India. From it I perceive that Dr. Smith, whilst travelling in latitude 24 degrees (two degrees north of the mountains in question), saw during one day's march with the bullock waggons, and without wandering to any great distance on either side of their track, between one hundred and one hundred and fifty Rhinoceroses, and not fewer than one hundred Giraffes. His party had, on the previous day, killed eight hippopotami in a single pool, and seen many others; and on a subsequent occasion seven lions were counted at the same time, walking on the plain around the encampment of the Expedition.

half blind with thirst, running heedlessly down to the water's edge, one of them was unexpectedly arrested by the gaping jaws of a basking alligator. The other instantly returned with his tail betwixt his legs in dreadful consternation. Then a splash was heard, and bubbles of blood rising a moment afterwards to the rippling surface of the stream, too truly told what had been the fate of his less fortunate companion. The sun was now setting, and whilst we were bewailing in no very amiable humour the loss of our valued four footed ally, an unwieldy white Rhinoceros,

"Sheathed in his iron panoply,"

came sauntering towards the waggons, evidently bent upon no friendly designs. It being considered necessary that prompt counter measures should be adopted, and neither bush nor hollow favouring my advance, I crawled towards the conspirator under cover of the long grass, and arriving within forty yards, discharged a brace of balls into his brawny shoulder.* He started, sought wildly around for some object on which to wreak his vengeance, and—his mouth streaming with blood—actually charged to within a few arms length of my concealment;

"His eye-ball glared, deep breath with hollow tone
Heaved his long flanks and burst with frequent groan."

but by crouching low, I was so fortunate as to elude his observation and his fury, and after he had trotted some hundred yards beyond my ambushade, I had the satisfaction of seeing him drop suddenly down dead of his wounds.

During the time that we halted on the Tolaan, our little camp was one dark night thrown into considerable confusion by the visit of an inquisitive fellow that actually stood some time betwixt the waggons ere their sleeping inmates were aroused by the bellowing and tumult among the cattle. On this occasion, the obscurity befriending him, he had it all his own way, and got clear of the scrape without the smallest personal injury; but the following evening, as the sun was sinking below the horizon, rendered bolder by escape, he again imprudently appeared on the opposite bank of the river, within pistol shot of our position, and five bullets being immediately lodged under his short ribs, he retreated in the greatest disorder, and was picked up at no great distance the following morning.

Being one day on the hot trail of a wounded bull Elephant, whose warm life-blood was welling from fifty gaping wounds, we were tracking through a heavy forest, in momentary expectation of closing with the game, when an ill-tempered brute dashed with an astounding grunt out of a bush into the middle of our party, divers of whom were overthrown in their efforts to afford him a wide berth, although fortunately not one was injured. On another occasion, the line of march along the base of the Cashan mountains, leading through a field of tall reed grass, that waved high above the horns of the oxen, a vicious rascal, starting from his slumbers therein, at once made furiously at the leading team, crushing the dry flags before him, and terrifying the cattle by his loud snorting and hostile demonstrations. A well-directed volley cooling his courage, he retired to a suitable bush, and was there finally gathered unto his fathers. Not half an hour afterwards, whilst sitting at breakfast on the river brink, an old lady, accompanied by her calf, three quarters' grown, was perceived to be in undisputed possession of a deserted stone kraal, some two hundred yards distance from our bivouac; and these, as well as another that opposed our progress towards that night's halting ground, were duly added to the list of casualties. With this last, our friend Claas,—at best but a bungling sportsman—had a very unpleasant *rencontre*, and withal, a most hair-breadth escape—his little bandy legs encased in a pair of unyielding leathern trowsers, only barely contriving to carry his diminutive person out of reach of divers most vigorous thrusts and lunges.

A huge monster having one morning come down to drink at a pool hard by our encampment, I advanced behind the screen of a tree at the edge of the bank, and whilst his snout was still immersed in the water, wounded him severely from a distance not exceeding fifty yards. Feeling confident that the ball had pierced the tucks of his elbow, and that his minutes were consequently numbered, I followed the retreating *shamrock-shaped* spoor, in the full expectation of finding him dead.—Certain dark objects attracting observation in a thick bush, Piet and myself peeped in, and beheld no fewer than three snoring giants huddled together like so many pigs in a sty, we could not resist the temptation (who could indeed?) of treating them to a salvo, which produced one of the most alarming rushes that I have ever witnessed. Galloping heavily to a little distance, the insulted trio wheeled about with an air of consummate defiance, and perceiving their despicable assailants standing near the bush, charged impetuously back in concert, compelling us to seek refuge in the den whence they had themselves so recently been expelled, and which in their turn they now closely invested. Piet nimbly ascended a tree which arose through the middle of it, and I, making myself as small as I could, stowed away into the snuggest corner of the lair, the besiegers standing round about, grunting and charging with a vigour that I shall not easily forget, in their repeated efforts to carry our strong-hold at the point of the bayonet. Our artillery being however at length reloaded, we proceeded to batter the most forward and audacious, when his uncouth capers had the desired effect of drawing off his associates—one of them nevertheless

* This little adventure reminds me of an anecdote recounted at Litakoo by our friend Mr. Moffat, which is not more strongly characteristic of the sport than of himself. "For three several days," said that worthy missionary, "had I been vainly endeavouring, in a country almost destitute of game, to obtain food for my starving followers, when a mountain of a Rhinoceros was at last discovered, idly sunning his huge back in the very middle of a wide plain, on which stood neither tree, nor bush, nor in fact any object saving himself. Obtain possession of his carcase we must, or die outright of hunger; so, creeping onward upon my hands and knees, I contrived to steal a march upon the enemy from the rear, and to arrive within certain aim, when, levelling my two ounce Elephant rifle, and drawing the brute's attention by a low whistle, I fired the instant his broad shoulder was presented fairly towards me. Had not this shot fortunately killed my colossal adversary on the spot, as it did, he would unquestionably have slain me; but, on the other hand, we must all have starved had I left him lord of that naked plain; so there was no other course to be pursued!"

twice returning, and with lance in rest, tilting furiously at the bush, as if with the determination, at all risks, of forcing his way in. Heartily rejoiced indeed was I at length to find that they were satisfied, and that we were suffered to effect our escape in a sound skin—a piece of good fortune which at one period of the siege, I confess I saw little grounds to anticipate.

A meddling officious marplot, perpetually in the way, and always prepared for mischief, wheresoever the Rhinoceros was not required, there was he sure to be. But the pair that succeeded in giving me the greatest annoyance during all my wars with the wild beasts, were posted in a defile in the Cashan mountains, by which it was requisite that I should descend, in order to arrive within rifle range of a herd of Roan Antelopes, then a great novelty, that were grazing in a dell beneath. With this anecdote I must close my account of the obnoxious tribe. Owing to the impossibility of discharging a gun without disturbing the gemsbok, it is with no little difficulty that I escaped from the tormenting attentions of the ugly couple, who ran grunting round our party, returning continually, and trotting daintily up in the most bullying manner to within forty or fifty paces, although pelted and abused whenever they displayed their saucy snouts. For so unprovoked an outrage on the part of himself and partner, we had however the satisfaction of calling the belligerent gentleman to a serious account the following morning, when, having afforded us a gratuitous interview in a deep wooded glen, to which he had been driven by a conflagration that had laid bare the greater portion of the mountain side, he thought proper to repeat his attentions, and to his surprise and consternation was received with a general broadside! The simultaneous whizzing of seven tin bullets was followed instantly by cries and squeaks of distress. His side perforated like a cullender, the crest-fallen bravo straightway sounded his retreat, making the loose pebbles spin behind him as his heavy feet clattered less and less audibly over the stony ground. But, alas! the conviction of inferiority had arrived too late. An ominous black vulture swept in all her grand expanse of pinion from the cloudless sky, and wheeling thrice in a diminishing circle, perched like the genius of desolation upon the bare branch of an aged tree, that extended its scorched and blackened arms over the outlet of the glen. That sign was not to be mistaken. Arriving in the pass, we found the huge bird gloating over the mortal remains of our humbled foe, who, as we had anticipated, was seated stone dead upon his knees and hams, according to the singular fashion in which, when mortally wounded, the Rhinoceros almost invariably makes his exit. Arrested by the clammy hand of Death, the unwieldy monster doubles his stumpy legs under his voluminous carcase, something in the position assumed by an elephant that is about to receive the howdah, and subsiding suddenly in full career

"His glazed eye droops, each flaccid flank extends,
And prone to earth, his ponderous neck descends."



The Horns of White Rhinoceros as preserved by Capt. Harris.