



STREPSICEROS CAPENSIS.—THE KOODOO.

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PLATE XX.

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STREPSICEROS CAPENSIS.—THE KOODOO.

*Koodoo* of the Cape Colonists. *Eechlongole* of the Matabili.

GENERIC CHARACTER.—Adult male upwards of five feet high at the shoulder, and above nine in extreme length. Horns bulky and compressed, having a prominent anterior ridge or wreath, which forms, with them, two complete spiral circles diverging from each other in their ascent; the points turned outwards and forwards. Length from three to four feet, colour pale brown, the tips black, with a white point; base marked for some distance upwards with slight wrinkles, but not annulated; their bony nucleus of the consistency of ivory. Chaffron straight. Muzzle very broad and square. Ears oblique and slouching as in the ox; of a light brown colour outside, whitish within; very large and broad, but pointed at the tips. Frame very muscular and powerful. Neck thick. Withers elevated into a false hump. Dewlap anteriorly square. Legs robust. Pasterns rigid, and hoofs compact. Face brown, becoming almost black on the forehead; a white line passing from the base of the horns over the orbits, unites on the chaffron in the form of a crescent; three white spots on either cheek below the eye. Chin white bearded. A long loose fringe of hair variegated black, white, and dun, depending from the dewlap, and a coarse standing brown mane extending loosely from the crown of the head almost to the tail. General colour of the coat, a silvery buff grey, or sky blue, marked with a white line along the spine beneath the mane, and intersected by five or six transverse white ribbons running downwards from it to the belly, and four more over the croup. Buttocks, posterior portion of the abdomen, and part of the inside of thighs, white. Legs rufous dun below the knees and hocks. A black and a white spot on the posterior side of each fore-arm. Tail rufous, two feet long, edged with white, tapering to a point, and tipped with sable. No suborbital sinus. An entire moist muzzle.

Female slighter, hornless, and with fewer and fainter white ribbons. Has an udder with four mammæ. Gregarious in small families, and still found within the colony, though rare. Inhabits thickets and wooded uplands, as well as the banks of rivers, but is never to be found in the open plain.

## CHAPTER XX.

### THE KOODOO.

"There the speck-boom spreads its bowers,  
Of light green leaves and lilac flowers.  
And the bright aloe rears its crest,  
Like stately queen for gala drest;  
And gorgeous erethrina shakes  
Her coral tufts above the brakes;  
Brilliant as the glancing plumes  
Of sugar-birds among its blooms."

DID empire belong to beauty, the princely Koodoo would experience little difficulty in establishing his right and title to the sovereignty of all the Antelopes. Upon not one of this numerous and highly favoured race has Dame Nature showered her costly gifts with more lavish prodigality—in none other has she combined such dignity of aspect, such nobleness of demeanour, and such splendour of attire. Alike majestic in carriage, and brilliant in hue, all that marks distinction, or can command our admiration in the wild denizen of the waste, would seem to be in him combined and concentrated. Other Antelopes may be stately, elegant, or curious, but the solitude-seeking Koodoo is absolutely regal!

The appointments of an officer of the Surrey Yeomanry, and eke of our Bombay Cavalry, are invariably recalled to my recollection by the colours of this singular looking quadruped. A lively French grey, approaching to sky blue, which forms the basis of his splendid uniform, is faced and turned up with white, and regularly laced with transverse silver ribbons, issuing from a narrow dorsal stripe—a dark horse-hair mane of considerable length decorating the brawny neck and shoulder, whilst both chest and dewlap are tricked out in an elaborate tri-coloured tippet, answering to the embroidered pouch-belt. Thus accoutred, the chaffron and bearded chin, adorned in their turn with silver scales and crescent, the gallant fellow maintains a passing goodly exterior; but his glory is in his cork-screw horns. Ponderous yet symmetrical, they not unfrequently attain the surprising length of four feet; and are boldly convoluted into a wide sweeping spiral, forming, with a prominent wreath that entwines them, two complete turns, of which the worm is so unerring, that a spear might be thrust down its axis into the temples. These elegant but cumbrous appendages seeming almost as ill adapted to the cranium of a quarry that loves the thicket, as the chaco to the brow of the equestrian soldier, are thrown dexterously back along the embroidered flanks, as the lordly wearer dashes, with protruded muzzle, through the mazes of the tangled coppice, or chamois-like, ascends with nimble foot the steep and stony mountain side. Death invariably dims the lustre of his brilliant garb, and converting the silvered hues into a dirty rufous brown, has doubtless given rise to the fictitious colouring, invariably adopted in portraits which have been obtained from dried or stuffed originals.

Although still existing in the jungly districts immediately bordering upon the Eastern frontier, and even in many portions also of the Cape colony, where his retired habits have in some measure shielded him from deadly persecution, the Koodoo was not once seen by our party until after we had gained the prolific environs of the Cashan mountains. There

———"in the depths of solitary woods,  
By human foot untrod,"

the noble animal occurs in such every-day abundance, that many a gory trophy was realised; but his great sagacity, wildness, and self-possession, demanding the most skilful generalship to out-manceuvre him, the pursuit necessarily differs altogether from the usual stamp of African hunting, and involves no inconsiderable acquaintance with the subtleties of woodcraft. We have here no dashing among countless herds, no helter-skelter riding by the side of a closely packed phalanx; yet have we a quarry well worth the hardest day's fag on foot to triumph over. Shunning both the open plain and the society of the multitude, the crafty fellow never ventures from his almost inaccessible fastness, unless during the morning and evening; and even then must he be sought *au pied* amid the dark upland dells which usually form his solitary abode. With all his wits about him, the lordly bull, active and powerful, may now and then be detected browsing at grey dawn upon some rugged hill summit, or ranging some grassy slope, either alone, or escorted by a small troop of skittish dames, all seeming alike his sentinels; but taking the note of alarm from the slightest noise, he stamps his brave foot upon the ground, tosses his spiral frontlet to the blue sky, and once fairly in motion, never stops to look behind until he has gained the threshold of his sanctuary. There, in some deep chasm which the sun-beam rarely penetrates, among tangled ravines, and hollows densely clothed with trees and

brushwood, he lazily reclines during the solar heat, beside some fern-clad stone, and leisurely turns the cud until the cool breezes of eventide once more invite him from his snug retreat.

Scarcely has the day broke, ere his enemy the hunter, dismounting from a ragged pony, and placing the rudely patched bridle in the hand of a naked attendant, brings a heavy rifle to the trail, and followed at the distance of a few paces by a single savage, prepares to ascend the outskirts of that huge pile of mountains which heave up their shadowy crests around. Those towering peaks in the distance, are faint almost as the sky they seem to emulate; but after toiling some time up the first acclivity, he has gained one of the lower steppes of table land, along which he shapes his silent course, alternately casting a keen glance on every side, and scrutinizing the moist ground, as a book whose pages can reveal the history he seeks to learn. A lone valley stretching away beneath him, discloses at its nearest extremity the white canvas tops of the waggons that he has just quitted, standing out in bold relief against a dark background of trees, before which ascends towards the clear firmament, a column of grey smoke. The verdant meadows upon which he thus looks down like the eagle from her eyrie, are gracefully sprinkled over with yellow clumps of thorny mimosas and evergreen olives; while through their mazes, like some monstrous mythological dragon, winds the tortuous river,—now deriving its colour from the minute leaves of the dishevelled willows that overhang the flood, and now emerging at a right angle into silvery or rainbow brightness. Liberated by the hills, the vale occasionally spreads away to a considerable breadth, and is then embellished with scattered herds of various wild animals, pasturing in undisturbed quietude, and adding life and beauty to the lonely landscape;—again contracting, it is straightened betwixt yon wooded heights which frown on either side—ridge surmounting ridge, and summit rising above summit, until at last the gradually converging range—steep and sterile—has shut in upon the prospect altogether, and formed one unbroken amphitheatre of mountains.

Ere the sun has yet cleared the horizon, the hunter, peeping cautiously round the angle of an abutting rock, has descried upon the opposite bank of a deep ravine, a small troop of the beautiful objects for which he seeks, decked out in all their blue and silver, and browsing unsuspecting of danger on the bare hill-side. Their outward slot being apparent in the pass whereon he is now standing, he feels so well assured that they will return by the same track, that taking up his own position behind a natural buttress, whence, unseen, he can both command the path, and watch the success of his scheme, he at once despatches his attendant by a circuitous route to disturb the quarry from the opposite quarter. And now, with a slow and measured step, the wary herd are in motion. At times either partially or wholly concealed,—at others emerging slowly to view—they wind leisurely down between the huge masses of impending rock, putting into motion sundry loose pebbles which course each other, bounding, from steep to steep, until their last fall is heard on the hard stony bottom. Whilst three or four females in the van are scrutinizing the glen beneath, the rear guard are first gazing intently behind them, and then, as if suspicious of danger, trotting forward to close up their files. One after the other, the whole twelve have at length disappeared under the spreading trees which choke the hollow, but the faint sound of their foot-fall, accompanied by an occasional rustling of the foliage, fails not to apprise the hunter, whose heart is momentarily beating still higher and higher with nervous anticipation, that his plot is well laid, and that his victims, now picking their way obliquely up the rocky ridge, will shortly re-appear within certain range of his ambush.

Twenty minutes have thus been passed in almost breathless suspense; an interval of total silence has twice dashed the sportsman's hopes to the ground, and twice have they been resuscitated by the renewing of these thrilling sounds—at each renewal more audible than before—when at last the points of the leader's corkscrew horns, slowly protruded above the sky line, are succeeded by the stately wearer himself, carrying his armorial devices *argent* upon a field azure; and one by one his shy followers next begin to crown the summit of the hill! Forward they march deliberately and cautiously in single file, examining each object in succession, and stopping at intervals to listen to the echo of the pebbles which are still tumbling over the crags. Halting finally upon a projecting ridge, swelling and proudly jutting out his frilled bosom, the amorous leader now turns to muster his forces. It is a moment of deep and absorbing interest, and the blood of the Nimrod is at a gallop. The bull's broadside is towards the rifle, but his forehead is completely masked by one of the nearest females. Now the lady has obligingly moved on a step, and his dark outline is presented clear against the heavens. Resting the rifle over a projecting stone, the fine drawn sight is brought to bear upon the victim's shoulder. The sharp *ping* of the explosion returned back from the opposite hills makes the wild valley rattle again, and the ragged bullet having sped truly to its mark, has told upon the hard blade bone with a *smack* that is never to be mistaken. Hurrah! there *must* be death in that shot—the stricken quarry having sprung a dozen feet or more into the air, is prostrate for ever upon his grey haunches. Alas! no, he is up again, and as if nothing had happened, is scouring along the height with the rest of the herd; yet see, the blood is pouring from his wound in a stream as thick as one's finger—his race cannot fail to be a short one. Already has he begun to falter, as his timid companions are fast leaving him in the lurch. Sending a wistful look after them, he makes one strong effort to advance, but it may not be. His head is swimming, and by the extension of his fore-legs alone can he preserve his equilibrium. Now his knees are tottering together—his crowned head begins alternately to fall and rise; blood gushes from his distended nostrils, his whole frame quivers, and involuntarily staggering back a step or two, down at last he sinks upon the earth, stiff and lifeless.

Abandoning his concealment, the successful stalker is presently by the side of the humbled quarry, where being rejoined by his sable accomplice, they hastily drag over the cerulean carcase a strong *abattis* of thorns, and silently follow the sinuosities of the glen in exactly the same order as before. Along the bottom of the deep chasm winds the broad bed of the river, here and there encumbered by huge blocks of granite that have been launched from the cliff, and worn smooth as a marble pavement by the sweep of the torrent floods. The buttresses above, to which these masses once pertained, decayed by the gnawing tooth of time have assumed unto themselves, like temples of the Genii, the most grotesque and fantastical shapes of pillars, obelisks, and columns, converging gradually until the walled defile is not more than sufficiently wide to admit of the passage of the periodical torrent. Ramparts of naked rock rising abruptly to the height of many hundred feet, are embattled with castellated turrets, and garrisoned by troops of clamorous baboons. At every turn the outline of the hills varying, present new points of the wildest and most picturesque scenery. At one moment is unfolded an abyss of black rocks, all shaggy with jungle, which is so scathed by the flames of some recent conflagration, as to render the dell it occupies a fit residence only for infernal demons; and at the very next step, perhaps, is revealed through an opening in the hills, a glimpse of wild sylvan beauty almost Elysian. Nor is the whole effect of the landscape a little heightened by the uniformly exotic appearance of the vegetation. A vast variety of aloes, crested with superb tiaras of orange or blood-red, clustering along the summits and in the fissures of the weather-stained rocks, overshadow beds of superb geraniums, whose flowers might well excite envy in the greenhouse. The lofty candelabra-shaped *euphorbia* towers by the side of the gorgeous *corallodendron*, the latter clothed in one dazzling profusion of the brightest scarlet blossoms. As a contrast to their gaudy brilliancy, the scented *queurboom* next

"Spreads in beauty's softest blooms  
Her purple glories through the glooms;"

while the snake-like creepers of the monkey's ladder, coiling around the rough trunks of the elegantly shaped mimosas, stretch their lank arms from tree to tree among the golden blossoms like the cordage of a ship, and fling into the air a wild web of tangled vegetation.

A sequestered dell, broken up into rocky nooks half choked with dwarf timber and copsewood, now discloses to the hunter at intervals, grey moss-grown stones partially concealed by the trailing ivy geranium, and backed by cliffs of the deepest red. Here a solitary bull Koodoo is lazily reclining in his woodland palace, among bluebells growing at the head of a babbling spring, which, gently issuing from a cavity of the rock, trickles onward beneath an overhanging bower of the *speckboom*. His quick ears having already detected the rustling of a leaf, he has sprung nimbly upon his feet, and as the first bullet spins harmlessly over his striped back, and flattens against the rocks behind, he flings up his wild head in derision. Now unharboured,

"Like deer, that, rousing from their lair,  
Just shake the dewdrops from their hair,  
And toss their armed crests aloft,"

he shakes his azure flanks, which are but indistinctly visible through the gloom of the thicket, and throwing back his twisted horns, dashes headlong through the flowery copse as it bends under his burly weight. Mounting the naked side of that steep bank by a narrow ledge, impracticable to any animal less surefooted than himself, he exhibits his proud form for one instant only on its verge, and *that* instant has proved sufficient to place the seal upon his doom. Unhappy fellow! but for this mistake thou hadst escaped scatheless—the second ball has pierced thy laced side! Stung by the wound he rushes forward with meteor-like velocity, but has not fled five hundred yards ere he is fain to pause for breath beneath a friendly knoll; when the nature of the hurt having been ascertained through a telescope by the anxious sportsman, he hastily reloads, advancing at the same time with as much celerity and caution as the nature of the ground will admit. Arriving breathless and streaming with perspiration, within long rifle range of the spot, he betakes himself to his knees and hands, but in spite of this quadrumanous progress, the bleeding quarry is again off at score before a shot can be obtained. Thrice is he thus lost, but thrice redeemed by a view of his all-glorious horns, which are protruding above the coppice, his slot having each time been long and patiently traced through strips of fire-disfigured forest, wherein he has vainly sought to conceal his noble figure. The open face both of hill and valley having here been charred by a still unextinguished conflagration, either kindled by design or accident, his track from one scrub to another is easily carried over the bare soil. Four bullets have struck him, and although not in the right place, he has gradually waxed fainter from loss of blood. Again the pursuer is at fault, and on the very verge of an impenetrable forest, is casting earnestly about for the trail, when a violent floundering draws his attention to the ravine below—the exhausted animal in striving to descend has slidden from the bank, and ere he can recover his balance, receiving the *coup de grace*, lies weltering in a flood of purple gore.

Laden with the choicest *spolia*, the weary, but well-requited hunter, has already been some hours at his wild camp, when night, casting her murky shroud over the face of the landscape, gradually reveals a scene which for solemnity or magnificence could hardly be exceeded. The flames which during the stillness of day had made but slow and partial progress over the theatre of his morning ramble, have now by a strong wind been driven into one general conflagration, which is leaping wildly over the country in tumultuous billows, and leaving all behind it scorched and desolate. Ten million burning flakes whirling off like a host of meteors through the pitchy sky, the whole mountain side has presently become enveloped in a sheet of living fire—dense volumes of smoke which roll upwards and hover over its summit imparting the appearance of a burning volcano. Now fanned by a fitful current, the forked red flames flare with a surly roar through the vapour as it rolls off the blackened

sides—and now, curling again to the earth, they seem to lick up every substance upon which they breathe. Checked for a moment by some sluggish stream until a concentration of heat shall have sucked up the moisture—like an army impatiently awaiting the operations of a battering train to open its way to death and desolation—it is compelled to pause; but quickly overcoming the barrier, on again rolls the devouring element with a loud crackling noise, in long red lines, the dry bushes exploding as they take fire with a succession of sounds that form a correct imitation of the snipping of skirmishing parties of sharp shooters. With devastating fury it sweeps along the heights, brilliantly illuminating the landscape, and threatening to denude the whole universe of its vegetation; until, the entire aerial expanse being at last charged and quivering with rays of intense heat, which play around the crackling stems of the trees that crown the higher ground, with a noise resembling that of the stormy ocean the destroyer envelopes each in succession:

"Seizes the trunks, amid the branches soars,  
Sweeps through the blazing leaves, and fiercely roars;  
From bough to bough the insulting victor spreads,  
Pursues his conquest o'er the top-most heads,  
Sheets the whole wood in flame, and upwards driven,  
Rolls in thick clouds that dim the cope of heaven."

As the night wears on, the crash of falling branches, and occasionally the thundering echo of some prostrated trunk, is heard amid the awful stillness that pervades the air, and which, with the dark clouds that continue to gather in the horizon, portend a coming crisis in the atmosphere. Hark! the thunder of heaven's artillery begins now to roll among the mountains. The flames, as if aware that a mightier Hand were about to arrest their progress, no longer whirl in the uncertain current of their own eddies, but blaze brightly and steadily upwards—the more distant lines appearing like streams of burning lava. The piles of smoke, too, which float above the valley begin to ascend, and streaks of vivid lightning come dancing through the black clouds that hang about the hills. Suddenly the storm has burst above the scene. The wind which has hitherto been increasing, is instantly hushed. A death-like stillness succeeds to the crackling of the flames, and every spark of the conflagration being extinguished in an instant by the deluge that descends, the Egyptian-like darkness of the night is unbroken even by a solitary star!



*Head of Hoodoo as preserved by Capt. Harris.*