

II. EQUUS QUAGGA. — THE QUAGGA.

PLATE II.

EQUUS QUAGGA.—THE QUAGGA.

Quagga or *Quagga* of the Cape Colonists.

GENERIC CHARACTER.—Adult male stands four feet six inches high at the wither, and measures eight feet six inches in extreme length. Form compact. Barrel round. Limbs robust, clean and sinewy. Head light and bony; of a bay colour, covered on the forehead and temples with longitudinal, and on the cheeks, with narrow transversal stripes, forming linear triangular figures between the eyes and mouth. Muzzle black. Ears and tail strictly equine; the latter white, and flowing below the hocks. Crest very high, arched, and surmounted by a full standing mane, which appears as though it had been hogged, and is banded alternately brown and white. Colour of the neck and upper parts of the body, dark rufous brown, becoming gradually more fulvous, and fading off to white behind and beneath;—the upper portions banded and brindled with dark brown stripes, stronger, broader, and more regular, on the neck; but gradually waxing fainter, until lost behind the shoulder in spots and blotches. Dorsal line dark and broad, widening over the crupper. Legs white, with bare spots inside above the knees.

Female precisely similar. Has an udder with four mammæ. Still found within the Cape Colony. Inhabits the open plains south of the Vaal river in immense herds.

CHAPTER II.

THE QUAGGA.

"Who hath sent out the wild Ass free? or who hath loosed the bands of the wild Ass?
Whose house I have made the wilderness, and the barren land his dwellings.
He scorneth the multitude of the city, neither regardeth he the crying of the driver.
The range of the mountains is his pasture, and he searcheth after every green thing."—*Job xxxix, 5—8.*

ADEQUATELY to portray upon paper the magnitude of the measureless landscape which meets the eye of the traveller in many parts of Southern Africa, is beyond the limits of possibility, but some idea of the naked and remarkable scenery of the less sterile plains may be gleaned from the view annexed. A region—to the perception as vast and trackless as the ocean, and, like it, presenting an undisturbed horizon—is spread out for hundreds of miles into one level and treeless expanse of serene and sunny plain. In vain we there seek for the bewitching variety of hill or dale, forest or glade, which constitutes the chief charm of landscape; the eye wanders on, without the smallest check, over interminable flats, which are utterly wearisome from their extent and monotony,—

"All, all is plain,
Plain as the strand, sea lav'd, that stretches far
Beneath yon rocky shore."

Yet nature has endeavoured, in some measure, to atone for other deficiencies, by decking them out in her gaudiest colours, and in some of the most eccentric and attractive forms that exist in the vegetable world. Endless meads, clad in a vernal and variegated robe of gay, but scentless flowers, in whose presence the very desert would seem to smile, exhibit the motley variety of a Turkey carpet. With the vernal Spring, the branching chandelier plant, the purple amaryllis, the golden crocus, and a thousand other splendid bulbs, push forth their blossoms and green leaves, amid trailing geraniums; and, combined with various species of the fleshy cactus, and an endless variety of the succulent green-house plant, styled the Hottentot fig, which there grow wild in profusion, literally impart to the waste the semblance of a flower-garden. Daisies, buttercups, tulips, pinks, and marigolds,—white, yellow, purple, and crimson, spread themselves out into beds and borders of many acres in extent:

"So wondrous wild, the whole might seem
The scenery of a fairy dream."

Now may be descried some reed-encircled fountain, around which hosts of Quaggas and other wild animals have congregated to slake their thirst—fetid and stagnant ponds, covered with flowering water lilies, and surrounded by a broad belt of flags and rushes, which conceal a chain of treacherous pit-falls dug by those brown dwarfs, the wily Bushmen, for the purpose of entrapping the unwary game. Next, a string of frosted salt-pans present themselves to the view,—white and hoar,—with divers antelopes licking up the saline efflorescence, in which they delight; and sometimes, though rarely, may be seen an isolated tumulus, riding, like a ship at her cable, in a floating sea of deceitful mirage, which causes the gay glittering coats of the Quagga to sparkle like mica. Above, through a sky of pure and delicious blue, "spread out like a molten looking-glass," and rarely visited by a cloud, shines the sun, with matchless refulgence; and during his meridian blaze over this level expanse, in many parts, so strongly impregnated with salt, the delusion of the treacherous vapour is no where more perfect. Looming as though "the parched ground had become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water," optical lakes, which are stretched around on every side like a white table-cloth, impart to the wanderers fevered with thirst, the torments of Tantalus—

"Still the same burning sun, no cloud in heaven,
The hot air quivers, and the sultry mist
Floats o'er the desert with a show
Of distant waters, mocking their distress."

Entitled only to scanty showers during the summer months, insufficient of themselves "to satisfy the desolate and waste ground," although they may "cause the bud of the tender herb to spring forth," the face of nature, thus beautifully arrayed in herbage and flowers, would appear to be kept fresh and verdant by nightly dews and humid mists, rather than by the partial and niggard showers by which it is occasionally visited; yet neither is the debilitating fervor of an Indian sun experienced in these regions, nor—the country being characterized by extreme aridity,—is any baneful effect experienced from these nocturnal fogs, by the wayfarer who, ensconced in his leathern mantle, may be compelled to stretch his weary limbs upon the bare ground, with the starry firmament for his canopy, and a stone for his pillow.

Although thinly populated by skulking broods of Bushmen, and by the starving remnants of nomadic pastoral tribes, which have been broken up by war and violence, this is a land in which no man permanently abides—neither is the soil accounted any man's property, being abandoned as water and fuel fail. Nearly all the rivers by which it is traversed are periodical, and the scanty pools that exist, being exhausted at certain seasons, the miserable wretches whose existence depends upon the wild animals, migrate with them to distant parts, keeping within the verge of expiring verdure. At length, however, the monotony of this extraordinary wilderness is broken in upon by the Wittebergen, part of a broad basaltic belt stretching parallel to the eastern coast, and dividing Caffraria from Bechuana land. This wild chaos of rocks and cliffs—of barren ridges and towering peaks worn by time into castellated fortresses, and

other fantastic shapes, resembles the ruins of a world. Intersected by yawning chasms, it presents an impassable barrier; but its wild fastnesses afford shelter to various broken tribes, who have been driven by war's alarms from the land of their inheritance. Amongst the savage nations of Southern Africa, as elsewhere, a principle of extinction has for ages past been in active operation. Regions, now silent and deserted, once contained their busy throng, whose numbers and strength have been gradually brought down by war and want. Whole tribes have been rooted out from their hereditary homes, and have either disappeared from off the face of the earth, or pursued by the "gaunt and bony arm" of famine, still wander with fluctuating fortunes over these measureless tracts. For hundreds of miles, therefore, the eye is not greeted by the smallest trace of human industry, nor by any vestige of human habitation—the wild and interminable expanse ever presenting the same appearance—that of one vast, uninhabited solitude.

Amongst the many peculiarities presented by the animal creation of Southern Africa, are three distinct and elegant species of the solid-ungulous family, which belong exclusively to that quarter of the world. The true Zebra, or Daow, which is styled by the Cape Colonists, the Wilde Paard or Wilde Horse, is exclusively confined to mountainous regions, dwelling in "craggy castles on the hill top," from which it rarely, if ever, descends; but the extensive and sequestered plains above referred to, abound with two other members of the equine genus, which are still more closely allied to the horse, and are never to be found, but in the lowlands. These are the Quagga, delineated in the annexed portrait, and the Striped or Bonti Quagga, better recognized as Burchell's Zebra. The former, it will be remarked, is of a fulvous bay complexion, streaked or brindled with brown over the head, neck, and forehead. Burchell's Zebra, again, is adorned over every part, the legs alone excepted, with broad black single or double bands, detached from a dorsal stripe, and elegantly contrasted with a pale yellow ground; whilst the veritable Zebra, which was known to the Romans under the title of *Hippotigris*, is completely covered with alternate stripes of pure black and white, continued singly over the fetlocks, down to the very coronets.

It is now some years since the Zoological Gardens were first graced by living specimens of each of these elegant exotic species, some of which have even bred successfully in their captive state; but the period is not very remote, when the greatest confusion existed in the minds of Natural Historians, respecting the external distinctions of the African solid-ungula. Disguised in a tail borrowed from the rump of the domestic ass, the subject of the annexed portrait sat for its picture to M. Buffon, and may be found in the voluminous works of that eminent author, doing duty for a *female Zebra*! Even the Baron Cuvier has fallen into the error of describing the Quagga to be the proprietor of an asinine tail—a mistake which is the more surprising, since it is stated by the same author in his "*Règne Animal*," that "among the equipages occasionally exhibited in the gay season in Hyde Park, and other fashionable places of resort, may be seen a curriole drawn by two Couaggas, which seem as subservient to the curb and whip as any well-trained horses." Hereafter, in its proper place, a similar fact will be adduced with regard to the Zebra or Wilde Paard, many of which beautiful species are annually taken in the mountainous districts of the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope, and shipped to the Isle of France, where they are not uncommonly driven in harness.

The geographical range of this species of the Quagga does not appear to extend to the northward of the river Vaal. The animal was formerly extremely common within the Colony, but vanishing before the strides of civilization, is now to be found in very limited numbers, and on the borders only. Beyond, on those sultry plains which are completely taken possession of by wild beasts, and may with strict propriety be termed the domains of savage nature, it occurs in interminable herds; and although never intermixing with its own more elegant congeners, is almost invariably to be found ranging with the white-tailed Gnoo, and with the Ostrich, for the society of which bird especially, it evinces the most singular predilection. Moving slowly across the profile of the ocean-like horizon, uttering a shrill barking neigh, of which its name forms a correct imitation, long files of Quaggas continually remind the early traveller of a rival caravan on its march. Throughout the Scriptures, the inspired poets make frequent allusion to the similar habits of the Asiatic congeners of this animal; and in the vivid and startling picture of the effects of drought, given in the book of Jeremiah, we are told that "the wild asses did stand in the desolate places; they snuffed up the wind like dragons, and their eyes did fail because there was no grass." Bands of many hundreds are thus frequently seen during their migration from the dreary and desolate plains of some portion of the interior which has formed their secluded abode, seeking for those more luxuriant pastures, where, during the summer months, various herbs thrust forth their leaves and flowers, to form a green carpet, spangled with hues the most brilliant and diversified.

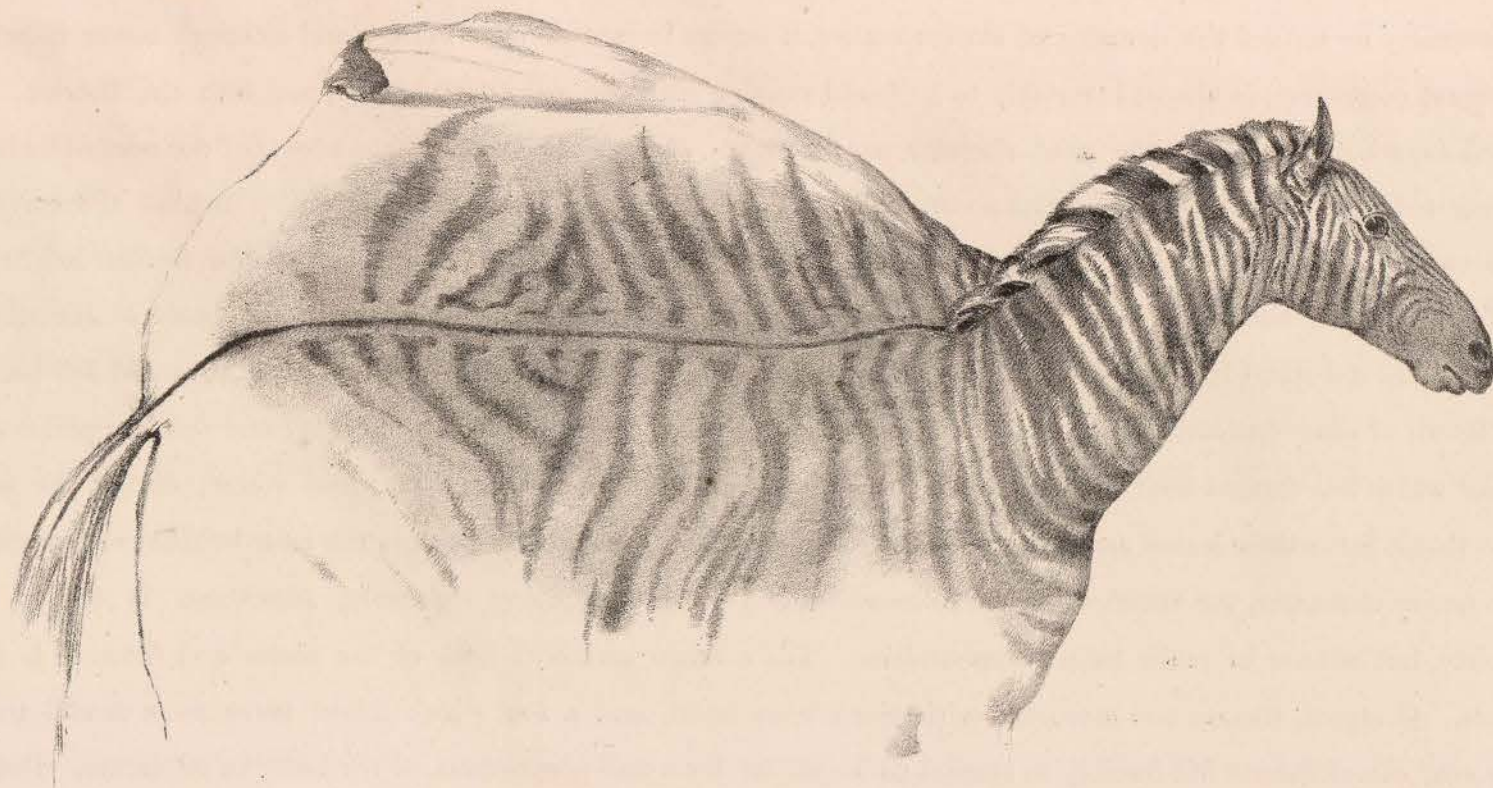
In its native character, the Quagga appears to be social and peaceable, living carelessly, sometimes in troops not exceeding twenty or thirty, but oftener in much larger communities. The average standard both of the males and females, is from twelve to thirteen hands. Compact, strong, and muscular, with clean bony limbs, and a foot which might serve as a model to the veterinary student, this *petit cheval* cannot fail forcibly to remind us in all its form and proportions, of the horse in miniature. Doubtless, it might readily be subdued by bit and bridle, and if not capable of universal distribution, would in its native regions at least, where food and climate are congenial, reward fourfold by its services, the trouble attendant upon its education. Foals have indeed occasionally been reared, when thrown accidentally into the hands of the peasant; but no systematic attempt has yet been made on the part of the indolent Colonists, to reduce the species to a state of domesticated subjection; and the carnivorous savage tribes occupying the regions which now form its *habitat*, regard it in common with the rest of the animal creation, only as furnishing them with an ample repast when slain. By the roving clans of Bechuana hunters, and the voracious Bushman hordes, its disgustingly oily and yellow flesh is even esteemed a delicacy; and the Lion, which invariably follows the tide of migration towards new pastures, is not unfrequently driven from his prey at the assegai's point, by these two-legged devourers of carrion. The flesh is never used by the Colonists, except for the purpose of feeding their tame Bushmen, but the hides are valuable for making sacks to contain grain; and the thicker portions which cover the angle of the hocks, are greatly esteemed for the manufacture of shoe-soles.

"When we consider," observes M. Cuvier, "that this species is capable of highly beneficial services in a domesticated condition; that its natural courage is evinced in its wild state by the manner in which, according to the report of travellers, it repels the Hyena and the Wolf,—an endowment which would be of great value to the animal if completely subjected to man; that this species is an

inhabitant of the hottest parts of the earth, and is therefore likely to be of service where the horse loses his capabilities by climate; we may naturally be surprised that the Couagga has been suffered by us to retain its liberty so long. Naturalists now, however, have discovered the pliability of its disposition, in conjunction with its physical powers; and practical men will probably in time take advantage of the discovery, by adding the Couagga to the number of species subdued to the general profit, convenience, and pleasure of mankind."*

Judging from its low, and somewhat laboured pace, the inactive spectator would pronounce the Quagga to be a slow and heavy galloper; but it is only necessary to follow its flight a few yards on horseback, to be convinced of the rate at which it covers the ground. Singly, in a stern chase, it can laugh at the miserable, conditionless hacks, upon which it is usually hunted by the Boors and Griquas; but when congregated in dense masses, nothing is easier than to turn the flank of the troop, which then immediately sounds the halt, and fronting the pursuer, gazes for a few seconds with distended nostrils, before again neighing the retreat. On nearing their heels, stones, dust, and pebbles fly at a surprising rate, periling the eyes and teeth of the pursuer: and when wounded, they prove especially ugly and vicious customers. Amongst other sporting anecdotes with which one of our Hottentot followers occasionally favoured us, when in an amiable humour, was a touching account of the death of his only and beloved brother, Phœbus Cockerlockie, from a fracture of his skull inflicted by the heels of a half disabled Quagga, that he had incautiously approached with hostile designs. Had the cranium of the luckless deceased possessed but one third the solidity of that of his surviving relative, this catastrophe could scarcely have occurred. I have myself narrowly escaped from many a well-directed salute, and once saw a wretched savage, every finger of whose dexter hand had been stripped off by the long yellow teeth of a wounded male. Of the many specimens killed by us, all the males were entire; no instance coming under my notice of the mutilation which is of such common occurrence amongst those of the *Khur-Guddrey* or Wild Ass of India, chiefly found on the Runn, or desert of Cutch, and of which nine-tenths are actually gelt by the teeth of the jealous sire, the moment they are foaled. If not entitled to a full share of the extravagant eulogiums that have been lavished upon the Dziggtai of the wilds of Tartary, "who snuffeth up the wind at its pleasure," and can distance the fleetest Arabian courser that ever scoured the desert,—the Quagga, nevertheless, responds to that animal in the distinct Zoological regions of Southern Africa, no less than to the Asiatic species now referred to; and the habits of each of these elegant Solipedal varieties, as well as of those which will hereafter be noticed, are alike comprehended in the poetical and beautifully graphic description of the Wild Ass, which has already been quoted at the head of this Chapter, from the oldest Book of the World.

* Griffith's Translation, Vol. III, p. 465.



Head and Skin of the Animal exhibited as a Quagga at the Zoological Gardens, Regent's Park.