PLATE III.

GAZELLA EUCHORE.—THE SPRINGBOK.

Springbok of the Cape Colonists. Tssepe of the Kafirs and Bechuana.

Generic Character.—Adult male about two feet eight inches high at the shoulder, and two or three inches more at the croup. Extreme length about four feet ten inches. Form characterized by elegance and elasticity. Head small and light; face white; both resembling a lamb's in shape and expression. Horns black, lyrate, robust; twelve or fifteen inches in length, with about twenty complete rings; the tips turned inwards, and generally inclined either forward or backward. A chestnut streak passing from the back of the horns, through the eye, to the nose. General colour of the hair, cinnamon or lively dun above; beneath, pure white; the two separated by a broad rich chestnut band passing abruptly along each flank to the shoulder. On the croup are two longitudinal foldings or duplications of the skin, which commence about the middle of the back, and pass over the loins to the tail, bordered by a band of chestnut. The interior of these folds are lined with long silky hair ten or twelve inches in length, of the most dazzling and snowy whiteness, which may be concealed or displayed at pleasure. When the animal is quiescent, a white dorsal stripe only is perceptible, margined with chestnut; but when excited or in motion, the folds are suddenly expanded, so as to form a broad disk spreading over the whole croup, and producing a most singular effect. Legs slender and wiry; white inside only. Nose truly ovine. Lachrymary sinus not remarkably distinct. Ears long, attenuated, and of a dirty white colour. Eyes very full, dark, and lustrous, with long dewy lashes. Tail eight inches long, resembling a large white goose quill, bare inside, and terminated by an eccentric tuft of long wavy black hair, posteriorly directed.

Doe similar, but smaller, and of more feminine proportions; with very slender horns, either straight or capriciously bent, exhibiting a few indistinct annuli at their base. Has an udder with two mammae. Still abundant in the colony, and distributed over the arid plains beyond it, in unlimited herds.
CHAPTER III.

THE SPRINGBOK.

My home is 'mid the mountain rock,

The deserts my domain;

My horns are 'mid the mountain rock,

The deserts my domain.

The countless Springboks form my food,

Spread o'er the boundless plain.

\[\text{My home is 'mid the mountain rock,}

The deserts my domain.\]

\[\text{The countless Springboks form my food,}

Spread o'er the boundless plain.\]

Amongst the many striking novelties which present themselves to the eye of the traveller in Southern Africa, there are perhaps few objects more conspicuous or more beautiful than the dancing herds of graceful Springboks which speckle the broad plains of the interior, as well as some of the more remote districts of the Cape Colony. It not unfrequently happens indeed, that the wide stretching landscape literally offers no other object to rivet the attention—countless myriads of these interesting ornaments of the desert, which are apparently identical with the Tses of the Hebrews, being scattered like flocks of sheep over the plains and valleys;—abounding, at times, to such an incredible extent, that the whole face of the country, far as the eye can sweep, is absolutely white with their congregated multitudes.

Matchless in the symmetry of its form, the Springbok is measurably the most elegant and remarkable species of the comprehensive group to which it pertains. The dazzling contrast between the lively cinnamon of its back, and the snowy whiteness of the lower parts, is agreeably heightened by the intensely rich chestnut bands which traverse the flanks—its dark beaming eye, with its innocent and lamb-like expression of face, and the showy folds of gossamer on the haunches—displayed or concealed at the animal’s volition—combining to render it one of the most beautiful objects in the animal creation. As the traveller advances over the trackless expanses, hundreds of this delicately formed antelope bound away on either side of his path with meteor-like and sportive velocity, winging their bird-like flight by a quick succession of those singularly elastic leaps, which have given rise to its colonial appellation, and which enable it to surpass as well in swiftness as in grace, almost every other mammiferous quadruped.

But although frequently found herding by itself, the Springbok is more usually detected in the society of Gnoos, Gazzas, Ostriches, or Blesboks. Fleet as the wind, and thoroughly conscious of its own speed, it mingles with their myriads in the tossing crowd, summering about with an easy careless gait, occasionally with outstretched neck approaching some coquetish doe, and spreading its other graceful little heads upon the first appearance of any strange object, a dozen or more trot nimbly off to a distance, and having gazed volitionally-combining to render it one of the most beautiful objects in the animal creation. As the traveller advances over the trackless expanses, hundreds of this delicately formed antelope bound away on either side of his path with meteor-like and sportive velocity, winging their bird-like flight by a quick succession of those singularly elastic leaps, which have given rise to its colonial appellation, and which enable it to surpass as well in swiftness as in grace, almost every other mammiferous quadruped.

The countless Springboks form my food,

Sprinkle my path with beauty's boon.

\[\text{The countless Springboks form my food,}

Sprinkle my path with beauty's boon.\]
Yet so distinctly has the unerring hand of Nature prescribed to each species of antelope the limit of its own cantametum, that whilst those which inhabit the wide and open savannahs, are never known either to wander into the woodlands or climb to higher levels, others, whose locality is restricted to the fen, the forest, or the mountain top, evince no disposition to trespass upon the prairie. Although liberally distributed over every level part of Southern Africa, the uninterrupted sandy plains which border upon the equator, may be considered the head-quarters of the Springbok. In this region of stunted bushes and brackish pools, they increase and multiply to an unlimited extent, and are disturbed by none save by wild beasts, and the yet wilder sons of the desert, who, regarding them as their own flocks, occasionally entrap them in pit-falls, or poison the stagnant waters to which they resort. Like all creatures, however, whose weakness renders them a prey to the more ferocious, their increase bears to their diminution a relative proportion; and though thousands annually fall to glut the prowlers of the waste, their loss is yearly supplied. Retreating as human society advances, the wilds, the deserts, and the solitude, have still formed their homes. Preferring searched and open tracts where they are least likely to be assailed with success by any of their numerous enemies, these vigilant and timid animals would appear to select for their haunts, the most bleak and barren heaths—treeless and sometimes shrobless flats, where they browse on the heather and withered herbage, and nibble the bitter succulents which abound in such situations, thriving especially,

Out the leaves fortune, where the bleating cry
Of the Springbok's form sounds plaintively.

In common with most gregarious quadrupeds, those of the antelope tribe more particularly, this species evinces the greatest curiosity at the sight of objects to which it has been unaccustomed—bounding away in the utmost alarm, with a lightness and grace absolutely unrivalled, but suddenly stopping in the midst of its headlong flight, to turn and gaze at the object of its terror. Its usual cry is a feeble bleat, resembling the voice of a lamb, but whilst thus scrutinizing strange objects, it utters a sneezing noise, accompanied by an impatient twitching of the head; the taper foot being stamped petulantly on the ground at the same time. The young fawns are easily reared, and in a domesticated state are extremely gentle, playful, and confiding; going forth with the flocks to pasture, and constantly forming the cherished pet of the farmer's children, whom they will follow about with the attachment of a dog.

Trusting for their escape to speed alone, in no animal are the senses of sight, of hearing, and of smell, found in more exquisite perfection than in the true antelope. Its dark glancing eye, no less than its proverbial symmetry of form, has ever been a theme of poetical enthusiasm; and both have furnished to Eastern bards the choicest images wherewith to illustrate perfection in female charms. The most celebrated of our modern poets have employed the same beautiful metaphors; and

Maidens in whose orient eyes
More than summer sunshine lie s,

night "look on those of the Gazelle," and envy their long silken fringes and speaking brilliancy. From the increased volume of the auditory cavity, which determines the power of hearing, the ear of the antelope derives great superiority over that of every other ruminating animal; and the powers of scent, as well as the facilities of breathing, are greatly increased by the sack or suborbital pouch, which in different species is found variously developed and more or less capable of contraction and expansion. The antelopes constitute the largest assemblage in the whole order of ruminants, and although subdivided into numerous small groups or sections, possess in common the distinguishing feature of persistent horns, standing usually above and between the arches of the orbits. Consisting of solid osseous cores externally sheathed over with true horny matter, which increases by the addition of successive layers in proportion to the growth of the internal nucleus, they form part and parcel of the frontal bone, and are consequently never shed like those of the stag. Nothing therefore can be more gratifying to the ear either of the sportsman or the naturalist, than to hear the antelopes termed deer, not a single species of which tribe exists in Southern or Central Africa. The horns of all antelopes are simple or unbranched, but whilst some are perfectly smooth, the surface of others, like the lyreform appurtenances of the Springbok, are more or less annulated with raised circular rings. Buffon was however mistaken in supposing the age to be indicated by the number of these rings, Pallas having clearly shown that although there is a positive augmentation in their number as the animal advances in age, yet, since the horns themselves increase less and less in volume during each succeeding year of existence, there can subsist no equal relation between the progress of life and the development of the annuli.

Alas! in the Colony of the Cape of Storms, how have the wild sports dwindled from their former prosperity. Those gloomy forests that no longer clothe the base of the cloud capped mountain which frowns over the metropolis, were tenanted in ruder times by the noblest as well as by the wisest of the brute creation. But before the strides of civilization, together with the rugged aborigines, have receded also the scarcely more savage quadrupeds; and saving certain diminutive antelopes which will hereafter be noticed as frequenting the sea coast, the Springbok now affords the only four-footed game that occurs in any abundance. Man, whether in an uncultivated or civilised state, is ever a hunting animal; venator has been his synonym from time immemorial; and this beautiful antelope is consequently slaughtered in vast numbers by the Dutch Boors both on account of the pleasant pastime its pursuit affords, and for the sake of its fine venison, which in different species is found variously developed and more or less capable of contraction and expansion. The horns of all antelopes are simple or unbranched, but whilst some are perfectly smooth, the surface of others, like the lyreform appurtenances of the Springbok, are more or less annulated with raised circular rings. Buffon was however mistaken in supposing the age to be indicated by the number of these rings, Pallas having clearly shown that although there is a positive augmentation in their number as the animal advances in age, yet, since the horns themselves increase less and less in volume during each succeeding year of existence, there can subsist no equal relation between the progress of life and the development of the annuli.
mackintosh; and a pair of tanned sheepskin trousers, commonly called crackres, envelop his nether man. His lower extremities are thrust into pieces of fresh hide, which have accommodated themselves to the shape of his huge feet; and a white felt hat with an ample quaker brim, shades his uncombed head. By his side dangles a magazine of powder, constructed of an entire ox horn of those Boedigheimer dimensions which only Africa can produce; and his loins are girt about with a pouch containing a corresponding supply of two ounce balls. Similar in size and shape of person, similarly arrayed, and similarly equipped, forth ride the broussas to the hunting ground, distributing themselves over the plain, and approaching at a slow pace as near as the game will permit. Like most other antelopes the Springbok almost invariably runs against the wind when alarmed. By preserving the windward gauge therefore, to use a nautical expression, and galloping on a diagonal course, nothing is easier, upon a tolerable horse, than to intersect their path, and thus compel the whole herd to cross within a few yards of the gun:—

In speed
They spottily put their feet, and round by fare
Give all their well aimed horse to right.
Against the breeze they dart that way the more,
To keep the maddon’t ceasing my ballot.

As the white rumped hucks sweep past, Harlequin-like, by a succession of magic bounds, ricocheting over each other’s heads as if struck with a cricket bat, and invariably following every four or five springs by as many strokes of a gallop,—the Dutchman, vaulting heavily from the well-padded saddle, delivers his shot, first casting the bridle over the head of the perfectly trained horse, which will stand if necessary for hours together without attempting to stir from the spot. Delicate and fragile as the Springbok appears, many a choice morsel of its venison nevertheless escapes the spit or the cabobs stick, after the successful marksman has counted it his own. What boots the loss of a limb? Every antelope can run better upon three legs than upon four, and a heavy bullet may pass through and through the tender form of one of these tough lived little animals without so much as causing its pace to slacken; although, after keeping up the race for some distance with its more fortunate confreres, it is destined to sink upon the wide plain and close its bright eye for ever.

The mystic operation of breaking, or in vulgar phraseology, of cutting up the quarry, preparatory to packing it away behind the saddle, immediately follows. The head and offal having first been removed, and either thrown to the vultures, or quarrelled for by the Hottentot attendants, whose perquisite they are acknowledged to be, the cavity is stuffed with whatever grass or herbs may be obtainable. A portion of the front skin being left entire, the knee joints are then divided, and the tarsal bones stripped to the fellock; the bones of the pelvis are also cut through, and the couronne de chasse introduced between the two middle vertebrae of the spine to make it ride steady. The carcass, which in an adult buck is fully as heavy as that of the largest sheep, having then with some difficulty been thrown across the horse’s crupper, the dangling tarsal bones are twisted under the girths on either side in order to secure it in that position, and Myndier resumes his saddle and his sport. Of a truth, a field of portly boors fully harnessed, pricking their wretched garrons over the plain, and having each a cumbersome carcass bumping at his breech, is a sight passing goodly to behold. Two Springboks may even thus be carried without alarming inconvenience to the equestrian; but as the steed cannot of course under such circumstances move beyond a foot’s pace, it is usual to bring pack horses into the field,—although in default thereof, and as a dernier recours, a third carcass may still be thrown across the saddle. This arrangement is little patronized by the boors, who at best are sorry pedestrians, but it was one to which, in the absence of assistance, I was frequently compelled to have recourse. Having no fear of the embock before their sudden sunken eyes, the Hottentots of our party greatly preferred shooting on their own account, to assisting me in the toils of the chase, which indeed they rarely condescended to do. The most brilliant exploit of venerei claimed by these lazy gentlemen during the whole expedition, was achieved before crossing the Colonial boundary, when three of the best shots having wheedled us out of a supply of ammunition to admit of their proving their new carbines—expanded no less than six rounds of it upon a foible fawn which had recently been dropped under a thorn bush. Failing altogether in their numerous designs, the little watch was ultimately taken prisoner, only alas! to become food for our famished Zoroastrian domestic, whose religious antipathies prevented his even tasting the flesh of any animal that wore a benigne expression of face, and who, but for this timely windfall, might peradventure have been starved.