



IV. CATOBLEPAS GORGON.- THE BRINDLED GNU.

PLATE IV.

CATOBLEPAS GORGON.—THE KOKOON, OR BRINDLED GNOO.

Bastaard and *Blauw Wilde Beest* of the Cape Colonists. *Kokoon* of the Bechuana. *Kaop* and *Baas* of the Namaquas and Hottentots.

GENERIC CHARACTER.—Adult male about four feet six inches high at the shoulders, and nine feet eight inches in extreme length. Head, neck, and shoulders, extravagantly thick and powerful. Withers very elevated, forming a positive hump, and carcase very deep. Neck massy, but not arched. Head nearly two feet in length. Nose ridiculously aquiline, and covered with extremely coarse black grizzled hair. Muzzle broad, square, and flabby; bare, with ample hanging nostrils; the latter furnished internally with a moveable valve. Horns black, placed horizontally on the summit of the forehead, which is prolonged between them; the points turned upwards, and then acutely inwards; a few rugosities at the base forming a sort of false burr. A long flowing black mane on the neck, glossy, curled, and extending beyond the withers, so as to add considerably to their height, and augment the appearance of obliquity in the back. Chin covered with a copious bristly black beard, frizzled, and descending along the dewlap to the brisket. Crupper drooping. Tail equine, black, flowing, wavy, nearly three feet in length, and reaching to the heels. Ears small and pointed. Eyes small, black, and piercing; mounted very high in the head. A large glandulous naked spot of an oblong form below each eye, distilling a white viscous humour. Legs cervine, slender, and sinewy: crooked at the knee. Hoofs blue-black, small and pointed. Coat close and silky. General colour dark ashy grey, clouded with sepia, and variegated with obscure vertical streaks or brindles. Four or five horizontal stripes on each arm.

Female precisely similar, but on a smaller and more feminine scale. Very gregarious. Never found to the southward of the Orange river. Inhabits the wooded plains of the interior in vast herds.

CHAPTER IV.

THE KOKOON.

Upon the forehead of the bull, the horns stand close and near,
From out the broad and wrinkled skull, like daggers they appear.
His neck is massy like the trunk of some old knotted tree
Whereon the monster's shaggy mane, like billows curled ye see.

To solve the mysterious causes that control the apparently capricious distribution of animal forms, has always been considered one of the most difficult problems in the grand scheme of the creation. An Almighty fiat, "Thus far shalt thou come but no further," has fixed the unalterable limit to the range of every creature, however insignificant; but the nature of the laws, unconnected either with congenial food or temperature, by which are regulated the phenomena of local dispersion, have hitherto been most effectually concealed from human research. In no quarter of the universe, perhaps, are these phenomena more remarkable than in Africa, and amongst the ten thousand which might be adduced, not the least conspicuous is the sudden appearance to the north of the Orange river, of the subject of the annexed portrait. Instantly after crossing that stream, the Kokoon, or Brindled Gnoo, usurps the place of the white tailed species: and although herds of the former may actually be seen grazing on the northern bank, not a single individual has ever been known to pass the barrier. Equally ungainly in point of figure, the animal now delineated differs materially from its brother of the same genus, from which, at the greatest distance, it is readily distinguishable by its black mane and tail, more elevated withers, and clumsier gait. Whilst, however, it possesses neither the spirit, activity, nor speed, of its absurd congener, it is in many respects fully as whimsical, and exhibits in all its peculiarities, even a still greater predominancy towards the bovine character.

In the Kokoon, the fore hand bears to the rest of the frame a most remarkable disproportion. The ponderous neck and head are uniformly sunk below the level of the hunch, whilst the fore legs, which are slender and crooked at the knee, are thrown so far behind the shoulder as to give the animal the semblance of being ill-balanced, and under-limbed—an appearance which is still further augmented by cat-hams, and by great obliquity of the crupper. The ludicrously aquiline nose, and the small black leering eyes, placed like those of the Hippopotamus, almost at the summit of the cranium—together impart to the face an almost idiotic expression. Looming at a little distance even blacker than night, the fore hand appears, like that of the American Bonassus, to be completely muffled in long shaggy hair; although on closer inspection this is found to be limited to an ample mane, and a streaming beard. No third variety of the Gnoo occurs in Southern Africa, and the actual existence thereof is greatly to be questioned. By the Dutch boors the present species is termed the Bastaard or Blauw Wilde Beest, *i. e.* spurious or blue Gnoo; throughout the country of the Bechuana as far as to the tropic, it is recognised as the Kokoon, and the Hottentot tribes designate it the Kaop or Baas,* both of which terms signifying *master*, refer in all probability to its bold and terrific bearing.

When excited by the appearance of any suspicious object, or aroused by any unusual noise, the Kokoon is wont to appear much more grim and ferocious than it actually proves—not unfrequently approaching with an air of defiance as if resolved to do battle with the hunter, but decamping upon the very first exhibition of hostility on his part. On being pursued, the herd bring their aquiline noses low between their knees, and flourishing their streaming black tails, tear away in long regular files at a furious gallop; wheeling curiously about, at the distance of two or three hundred yards, advancing boldly towards the danger, tossing their shaggy heads in a threatening manner—presently making a sudden stop, presenting an impenetrable front of horns, and staring wildly at the object of their mistrust. The slightest demonstration, however, is sufficient to put the whole squadron to flight, when they make a somewhat shorter excursion, again wheel in a circle, show a more menacing and imposing front than before, and most probably take up their position within sure rifle range. When engaged in grazing they have an extremely dull and clumsy appearance, and at a little distance might often be mistaken for wild buffaloes; but their usual manner is sportive—at one moment standing to gaze at nothing, and at the next scampering over the plain without any apparent object in view, making various grotesque curvets and plunges, with their preposterous Bonassus-looking heads held down between the fore legs. Blustering along at a little distance, the solitary bulls loom even more like the whiskered monarch of the forest, than do their white-tailed congeners; the resemblance being not a little enhanced by their possessing, like the furious white Uri, produced in days of yore in the forest of Caledonia, *jubam densam, ac demissam instar leonis*; or, as Holinshed has it, "crisp and curled manes like unto fiers leonis"!

It would be difficult for those who have never visited the interior of Southern Africa, to form even a remote conception of the countless herds of this ungainly quadruped, which are occasionally to be met with on the bosom of her broad plains. Lack of water, the curse, and the prevailing feature of these savage regions, frequently compels the *fera natura* to assemble in countless companies around the last dregs of expiring moisture, without reference either to caste or hereditary animosities; and on such occasions the picture they present to the eye of the sportsman, is one of no common enchantment. Delighting in shade, the Brindled Gnoo especially resorts to level tracts, thinly sprinkled with the picturesque and feathery mimosa, reclining beneath spreading clumps of which, or scattered

* A Dutch word. The burly master of a family in the Colony is uniformly styled by his menials, *De Baas*.

over the boundless landscape like "cattle grazing upon a thousand hills," they impart to the sylvan scene a truly pastoral effect. At a single *coup d'œil*, may be seen mixed multitudes of those inseparable friends the Kokoon and Burchell's Zebra—the Damon and Pythias of the brute creation—interspersed with gaily painted groups of the Hartebeest and Sassaybe, both seeming to have just escaped from the hands of the sign dauber. Some are quietly cropping the short grass, and others are huddled together beneath the shadow cast by some tall umbrella-shaped mokaala, the tree that forms the favourite food of the stately Giraffe. From the spreading boughs of this magnificent species of acacia, the only approach to a tree which may be seen in these regions, dangle clusters of evergreen mistletoe, sparkling with scarlet berries. And under the deep shadow cast on the sunny landscape by yonder clump, the twisted branches of which literally groan under the weight of the huge haystack-looking nests of the industrious little republican bird,* stand the sombre and massive figures of a pair of unwieldy Elands, indolently defending their sleek, pury sides from the buzzing persecutions of a host of yellow-bodied cattle flies, or leisurely chewing the cud in the midst of a knot of recumbent Gnoos, whose high humps peer above their elliptical horns. Mixed squads of Kokoons and Zebras are practising their wild gambols over the level plain—kicking, frolicking, butting, and pursuing each other with untiring perseverance. Here a pair of exasperated combatants are engaged in a deadly joust, in the presence of a group of dames, who, as of old, will bestow their favours on the most valiant. Battering their hard fronts against each other, tossing their curled manes aloft, and lashing their swarthy sides with their streaming tails, their fierce little round eyes glisten the while, like sparks of fire beneath their shaggy forelocks. Umpire like, on one side of the scene of this gentle passage of arms, behold a few solitary bulls at gaze, posted apparently as sentinels, and standing at attention full to the front, their dark eyes glancing wildly from the duellists to the enemy, and a deep hollow moan occasionally escaping from their innermost recesses. The human foe still approaches, and is observed to be armed with weapons of offence! Up go their taper heels with a sideling flourish, the signal for the cessation of intestine hostilities, and for an indiscriminate retreat. With their high Roman noses almost raking the earth, *saute qui peut*, away they scour in headlong haste, turning up the sand by bushels-full. Now the sleek variegated coats of a well-drilled troop of Burchell's Zebras glisten in the rays of the sun as they charge furiously past in close squadron—at one moment obscured under the gloom of an avenue of spreading mokaala trees—at the next emerging in unbroken files, followed by a smoke-like pillar of dust, which traces their serpentine course long after they have disappeared over the brow of yon gentle eminence. Crack goes the rifle, and the leading Gnoo of the next sable section, arrested in full career, cuts three or four perfect summersets, measures his shaggy length upon the ground, and is trampled underfoot of his thronging companions. Troop upon troop now pour in from every quarter, and continue to join each other, until the whole plain seems literally alive; and thousands still bearing down from every point of the compass, a vast extent of country, which presently becomes chequered white and black with their congregated masses, at length presents the appearance of a moving mass of game. The clatter of their hoofs becomes perfectly astounding, and can be compared to nothing but the din of a tremendous charge of cavalry, or the rushing of a mighty tempest. Their incredible numbers so impede their onward progress, that the horseman experiences no difficulty in closing with the motley band. As the panic caused by the repeated reports of his rifle increases, the rear ranks pressing tumultuously upon the heels of the leaders of the retreating phalanx, cause indescribable confusion. Dense clouds of dust hover over them, and the long necks of troops of ostriches are to be seen, towering above the heads of their less gigantic neighbours, and sailing past with astonishing rapidity. Groups of purple Sassaybes, and brilliant red and yellow Hartebeests, charging down from every direction, likewise lend their aid—whilst a host of hungry vultures, which, wheeling in airy circlets like small specks in the firmament, have been gradually descending, and now stoop with the velocity of lightning as each succeeding flash of the deadly tube gives token of prey—serve to complete a picture which must be seen to be understood, and which beggars all attempt at description.

" Rolling and blackening, swarms succeeding swarms,
With deeper murmurs and more hoarse alarms,
Dusky they spread, in close embodied crowds,
And o'er the vales descend in living clouds."

It was on the banks of the Meritsane, south of the twenty-sixth parallel of latitude, that we first witnessed one of these grand and imposing spectacles. Countless herds, which had congregated from every quarter to drink of the stagnant waters of that river, literally covered the wide extended landscape for many miles, nor could the numbers assembled have fallen short of fifteen or twenty thousand. "You should have seen this ground ten years ago," is the observation which usually grates on the ear of the disappointed sportsman who visits some boasted hunting grounds in India, only to find it tenantless; and so little game had been seen by our party previous to reaching this river, that we were strongly tempted to treat the accounts that had been given of its abundance, as altogether fabulous. With this noble panorama, however, we opened our campaign against the African Fauna. A host of famished savages scoured in our wake, dexterously despatching the wounded animals, as they fell, by a touch on the spine with the point of an assegai—hastily covering up the carcasses with thorn branches, to secure them from the voracity of the impatient vultures, which stooped in myriads, and seeming utterly heedless of the presence of man, plucked out the eyes of the yet living victims. Never perhaps has there been witnessed such an onslaught since the days

" When Nimrod bold
That mighty hunter, first made war on beasts,
And stained the woodland green with purple dye."

Although the Kokoon instantly disappeared after we had crossed the Likwa on our return to the Colony, it was more or less abundant throughout our northern perigrations. On the grassy slopes that form the environs of the Cashan mountains, large herds were constantly to be seen, and from nearly our last encampment on the willow-grown Limpopo, only a few miles south of the tropic, a large troop of them—pursued through a valley by an infuriated Rhinoceros, which had been worried almost to madness by the peppering

* *Loxia Socia*; the Social Grosbeak.

of the Hottentots—dashed into a narrow defile leading through the hills. Having reconnoitred the ground not an instant before, I galloped to the only other outlet, and stationing myself behind an abutting rock, disposed of two with each barrel, the muzzle of my rifle being only a few yards removed from the dense phalanx, which, still goaded on by the stiff horn of the Rhinoceros, rushed at the top of their speed through the opening, as closely packed together as a Manchester mob. Generally speaking it was found requisite to hunt these animals on horseback; but from the screen of the advancing caravan, I repeatedly slew them at long balls, a rifle bullet thrown from a distance of even three or four hundred yards into the middle of a squad, being nearly certain of tripping up *somebody*. The flesh of the Kokoon, like that of the white-tailed Gnoo, although lean, is tender and palatable, not much unlike beef in grain. It is greatly sought after by the savages, who entrap the animal in a variety of ways hereafter to be described, converting the hides into mantles, by dressing them without removing the shaggy hair of the mane and beard, which prove highly ornamental tippets.

The Kokoon is most abundantly found in level grassy tracts, intersected by gentle slopes, where green lawns are shaded by clumps and labyrinths of stately trees, distributed with almost park-like regularity. Among the many species of mimosa which occur in these regions, the *Acacia giraffe* is the most remarkable, its spreading umbrella-shaped top casting a delicious umbrage, while the gaudy yellow blossoms, shaped like a powder puff, with which they are covered, fill the atmosphere with an aromatic and overpowering perfume. The boughs of many are decorated with green clusters of mistletoe, the bright scarlet berries hanging from which prove highly ornamental; and the huge thatched nests of the *Loxia Socia*, which are piled up amongst the branches of others, attract the attention of the traveller at every step—the little speckle-headed tenants fluttering round their hive like a busy swarm of bees, or assembled in congress upon some old withered branch, where they perch in a long row, and gravely discuss the important affairs of the commonwealth. The banks of the Orange river constitute the southern limit to the range of this industrious little architect, which is about the size, and has much the appearance of the common house sparrow that, without the smallest variation, pesters mankind in every known part of the globe. To this species of the feathered race are exclusively confined those republican principles which actuate a number of individuals to associate; and clubbing their labour, to build their cities under one common roof. A large and lofty tree having usually been selected, the little community proceed heart and hand to construct the public canopy, in the completion of which all are equally interested; and having piled up a sufficient quantity of coarse grass to serve as a general roof, each pair constructs its own nest beneath, of similar materials—placing them side by side, until the lower surface of the mass exhibits the perforated appearance of a honey-comb. Never frequenting the old nests a second season, but year after year adding a fresh tier to the under part of the old pile, it not unfrequently occurs, that although firmly interwoven with the branches of the tree to which it is suspended, and often embracing also within its substance a portion of the stem, the superincumbent weight of the mass at length causes the fall of the support, and with it, the annihilation of the overgrown fabric.



Head of Kokoon as preserved by Capt. Harris.