



VI. ROSELAPHUS OREAS - THE ELAND.

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PLATE VI.

BOSELAPHUS OREAS—THE ELAND OR IMPOOFO.

Eland of the Dutch Colonists. *T' Ganna* of the Hottentots. *Impoof* or *Pooffo* of the Kafirs and Bechuana.

GENERIC CHARACTER.—Full grown male about six feet six or eight inches high at the shoulder, and upwards of twelve in extreme length. Head light and bony. Facial line perfectly straight. Muzzle broad. Forehead square; covered with a cluster of strong wiry twisted hair, forming feathers of an intense sienna brown colour, margined on either side by a bright yellow crescent, which commences above the eyes, and nearly meets about half way down the face. Eyes large, brilliant, and melting. No expression of ferocity in the face. Ears small, white, flexible, and pointed. Horns placed on the summits of the frontals; about two feet in length, massy, slightly divergent, and nearly straight; but twisted on their own axes, and encircled by a ponderous ring which ascends in a spiral direction almost to the tips. A few transverse wrinkles on the more prominent parts. Bony cores approaching to the weight and substance of ivory. Proportions of the body resembling those of a bull. Figure, square and ponderous. Neck very thick, compressed laterally as in the ox; shoulders very deep, withers slightly elevated owing to the length of the spinous processes. Larynx very prominent, and larger than an apple. An ample pendulous dewlap, very thin, lax, and wrinkled, fringed with long wavy wiry brown hair; and descending to the knees. A crest of bristles from the forehead passing upwards and recurrent along the ridge of the neck, in the position of a mane. Hind quarters extremely heavy. Tail two feet three or four inches long; slender, with a tuft of short and coarse brown hair at the extremity. Hide black. Hair very short and scanty. General colour rufous dun, or ashy grey tinged with ochre. Legs extremely short and bull-like; rufous and buff below the knees. Hoofs large, rounded, and black; the succentorial hoofs much developed. Has a muzzle. No suborbital sinus, or lachrymary depression.

Female much smaller, and of slighter proportions; with longer and more slender horns, generally diverging more, and often capriciously twisted. They are usually about thirty inches in length, and have a swelling of the axis between the spiral turns, which forms a knot, above which they incline backwards. She has no dewlap, but a protruding tuft of stiff rufous hair on the larynx. Colour considerably redder than in the male. General appearance not unlike that of a Guernsey cow. Has an udder with four teats. Gregarious in large droves. Formerly common, but now extinct, in the Cape Colony, and only found in the open or slightly wooded plains of the interior.

CHAPTER VI.

THE ELAND.

Then they cast on their gawnes of grene
And took theyr bowes each one ;
And the merrye-men away to the grene forrest
All a shooting forth are gone.

We will kill a fat bucke then said bold Robyn Hoode
And dress it on the way side here,
So kill me a bucke, quoth bold Robyn Hoode
So slay me a faire fat deere.

OBESITY forming one of the exclusive prerogatives of African royalty, it is not surprising that the Eland—more lusty, fat, and well looking, than any other wild quadruped—should assume unto himself an air of princely consequence. “Lord of an hundred does,” amongst which he moves with all the pomp and self-importance of a nabob in his harem, the stately bull is at once the most corpulent, one of the most ponderous, and certainly the most magnificent, of all the ruminants. In shape and general aspect, he resembles a well conditioned Guzerat ox, not unfrequently attaining the height of nineteen hands at the withers, and absolutely weighing from fifteen hundred to two thousand pounds! But notwithstanding this enormous bulk of carcase, which is literally enveloped in goodly collops of quaking fat, the head is strictly that of the antelope—light, graceful, and bony. It is armed with a pair of elegantly diverging horns, which rising from a mask of bright rufous *feathers*, incline somewhat below the plane of the face, and forming two sides of an isosceles triangle, are encircled by a ponderous spiral ring, the internal nucleus, or bony core of which, is nearly of the consistency and weight of ivory. A deep pendulous dewlap fringed with coarse hair, dangles at his knees; and added to a fatty eminence, which approaches to a slight hump, on the withers, together with sundry rolls of brawn about the collar, produces an extraordinary depth of chest and forehead. The colour varies considerably with the age, being in some specimens dun—in others, ashy blue with a tinge of ochre—and in many, sandy grey approaching to white. The female—ininitely less voluminous, and more lady-like in her figure—exhibits all those separating characters which distinguish the sexes of domestic horned cattle. She resembles in general conformation, a red Guernsey cow, and is provided with longer and more attenuated horns than her very apoplectic-looking lord.

The feelings of exultation which attended my first introduction to this noble quadruped on the wooded banks of the Meritsane, will not readily pass from my recollection. My companion and myself had been for some time engaged in the hot pursuit of a motley group of Brindled Gnoos, Quaggas, Ostriches, Sassaybes, and Hartebeests—one of those astounding herbivorous assemblages described in a foregoing chapter—the thunder of whose hoofs, like the distant din of war, sounded in our ears

As if men fought upon the earth,
And fiends in upper air;—

a band of hungry harpies following in our track, tripped nimbly up to each victim as it fell,—completing, by the scientific insertion of the point of an assegai between the vertebræ of the back, the work which our rifle bullets had commenced, and instantly covering the carcase with branches to secure it from the voracity of a host of attendant vultures—when two strange figures were suddenly perceived in the distance, monsters of obesity, which we instantly recognised to be Elands. Swinging their pendulum-like tails from side to side, and sometimes brushing away the troublesome flies with their moist noses, these mountains of flesh and lard were lazily standing under the shade of one of those immense thatched cities constructed by the Loxia in a wide-spreading mokaala, of which tree numbers were distributed with park-like regularity over the level face of the landscape. At the first glimpse of the sleek forms of these animals, the savages became strangely excited. Water trickled from the corners of their capacious mouths, and they impatiently urged us to the pursuit, by running in advance of our horses, pointing energetically with their fingers, and exclaiming with eager delight, Pooffo! Pooffo!—nor had many seconds elapsed ere we found ourselves pressing our panting steeds to the utmost at their retreating heels. Trusting to escape by mixing with the flying troops of Gnoos and Quaggas—which continually dashed across our path, or diverged on either side to admit of the passage of the chase—their deep hairy dewlaps vibrated from side to side, and their pury ribs quivered again with the unwonted exertion. Notwithstanding their unwieldy shape, however, they had at first greatly the speed of our jaded and toilworn horses—covering the ground with a celerity truly surprising, and making the firm earth ring under their efforts to escape; but on being pushed, they presently exhibited symptoms of distress, and turning their beautiful heads, looked repeatedly over their plump shoulders to learn if they had not shaken off their persecutors. Finding us still at their heels, they shortly separated; their sleek coats turned first blue, and then white with froth, the foam fell in bellropes from their open mouths, grease trickled from their nostrils, and the perspiration streamed from their lusty sides. The steeds came up hand over hand, and in another moment were abreast of the now labouring fugitives, whose pace gradually slackened till it had dwindled into a clumsy trot, when with their full brilliant eyes turned imploringly towards us—saying almost plainer than words could speak, “Do pray now leave me alone,”—at the end of a mile, unresisting, each was laid low with a single ball.

How little resemblance did any of the portraits that I had seen of this superb animal, bear to the ponderous original now lying at my feet! In place of the plethora for which the Eland is remarkable, the cunning artist must have surely striven to portray the features indicative of the last stage of a consumption! I was engaged in making a sketch of one of our noble victims, when the savages coming up, breathless with haste, proceeded with cold-blooded ferocity to stab the unfortunate and dying animal—stirring up the blood, and shouting with barbarous exultation as the tide of life gushed from each newly inflicted wound,—regardless alike of our remonstrances, and of the eloquent and piteous appeal expressed in the beautiful clear black eye of the mild and inoffensive Eland, whose tears might well have wrung remorse from a far more ruthless disciple of Nimrod than myself, and have even caused him to sink the exultation of the sportsman in the feelings of the moralist. The stoutest of our savage attendants could with difficulty transport the head to the waggons, where one of the Hottentots had just arrived with the carcase of a *Sassaybe*, that he had dragged a considerable distance, with the assistance of some twenty barbarians, who were no sooner made acquainted with the occurrences of the morning, than they set off at speed upon the fresh tracks of our horses, returning about sunset gorged to the throats, and groaning under an external load of meat, which they had found it quite impossible to make room for, and had therefore thriftily slung about their necks for a future occasion!

By all classes in Africa, the flesh of the Eland is deservedly esteemed over that of any other animal—

"Nor finer, nor fatter,
E'er roamed in a forest, or smoked on a platter."

Both in grain and color it resembles beef, but is far better tasted and more delicate, possessing a pure game flavor, and exhibiting the most tempting looking layers of fat and lean—the surprising quantity of the former ingredient with which it is interlarded, exceeding that of any other game quadruped with which I am acquainted. The venison fairly melts in the mouth; and as for the brisket, *that* is absolutely a cut for a monarch! With what satisfaction would not King Jamie of hunting memory, have drawn his good blade adown the breast of a plump Eland, to be rewarded with five full inches of "prime white fat on that ilk," instead of three, as on the occasion in Greenwich Park, when Nigel assisted his sporting Majesty in the sylvan ceremony. The vast quantity of tallow yielded by the fat bulls, furnished us with constant material for manufacturing "dips" in a candle mould with which we were provided; and during the greater part of our journey it was to the flesh of this goodly beast that we principally looked for our daily rations, both on account of its vast superiority over all other wild flesh, and from the circumstance of its being obtainable in larger quantities with comparatively less labour. Pursued, the fat sluggards delay their flight as long as possible, but when no longer able to avert the evil hour, they go off at a smart pace, galloping less clumsily, leaping, and clearing broken ground with much greater facility, than could be expected from their huge proportions. Once blown, however, the unfortunate beast is far more manageable than a Smithfield ox; and after giving the unwieldy old bulls a *spurt* in order to render them somewhat less frisky, in spite of their repeated attempts to break away—made whenever their wind returned—we were in the constant habit of driving them at a walk before our horses, to the camp, from their pastures several miles distant. No opportunity of levying a tax upon their herds was ever suffered to pass. We invariably selected the fattest and bonniest of the whole lot, and after hitting upon this plan of driving them up to the shambles, not only was the trouble of carrying the meat from a distance avoided, but a constant supply of hides obtained for the repair of our traces and waggon gear—a purpose for which they are most admirably adapted. Setting aside the utility of the *quarrée*, the hunting this splendid animal in such a fashion was so full of novelty, that it could not fail to be looked upon as very "plesaute and full of pastyme." By our followers the death of an Eland was considered the signal for a general carouse; and our own kitchen, as in the days of Taylor the Water Poet, like that "of my good Lord Erskine, being alwayes made on the side of a banke, there were on these occasions many kettles and pottes boyling, and many spittes turning and winding, in truth with great variety of cheere, as venison baked, sodden, rost, and stu'de—the repast being finally crowned with libations of most potent aquævitæ."

The Eland frequents the open prairies and low rocky hills interspersed with clumps of wood, but is never to be met with in a continuously wooded country. Rejoicing especially in low belts of shaded hillocks, and in the isolated groves of *acacia capensis* which, like islands in the ocean, are scattered over many of the stony and gravelly plains of the interior, large herds of them are also to be seen grazing like droves of oxen on the more verdant meadows, through which some silver rivulet winds in rainbow brightness betwixt fringes of sighing bulrushes. Fat and lethargic, groups may be seen scattered up and down the gentle acclivities, some grazing on the hill side, and others lazily basking in the morning sun-beam. Advancing they appear to move like a regiment of cavalry in single files; the goodliest bulls leading the van: whereas during a retreat, these it is, that uniformly bring up the rear. As the day dawned over the boundless meads of the Vaal river spread with a rich carpet of luxuriant herbage, and enamelled with pastures of brilliant flowers, vast droves of these lordly animals were constantly to be seen moving in solemn procession across the profile of the silent and treeless landscape, portions of which were often covered with long coarse grass, which when dry and waving its white hay-like stalks to the breeze, imparted to the plain, the delusive and alluring appearance of ripe cornfields. It is a singular fact that the bodies of these stately animals are infested to a great extent by the ticks and parasitic flies which torment domestic cattle—the rank odour arising from a drove of them, moreover, exactly resembling the fetid exhalation from a cattle close. This taint being fully as strong as that of the ground on which sheep have been folded, may be winded at an incredible distance. An initiated nose will never fail to sniff out the form upon which the Impofo has been recently lying, many of the scrubby mimosa brakes in which they delight, being literally redolent of their musky scent. In such situations, a little casting about seldom fails to discover the corpulent figure of a portly bull, either chewing the cud beneath the scanty shade of some parasol-topped acacia, or raking his sharp and formidable horns against its rough thorny stem.

Amongst themselves the males have frequent and desperate battles, many specimens that came under our observation being covered both with scars and green wounds, and humbled also of one horn. This was the case with the largest we killed, which

measured nineteen and a half hands at the shoulder, and was armed, unicorn-like, with a single horn, nearly two feet six inches in length. The oldest and stoutest bull not unfrequently expels all other males from the herd; and compelling them to flock together, takes the ladies under his own especial charge. It is, however, more usual to see both sexes feeding indiscriminately together, and the cows being found in calf all the year round, there can be no determined season for rutting. Although in disposition the Eland is so extremely docile that it may be trained without the smallest difficulty, its strength is neither proportioned to its gigantic bulk, nor are its apparently massive shoulders possessed of sufficient solidity to bear the yoke of domesticity, or render it capable of labouring with advantage to the agriculturist. The existence of a second species, the *Boselaphus Cana* of naturalists, yclept by the Colonists the *Bastaard Eland*, is, I think, extremely questionable in Southern Africa. I could never myself meet with any such variety, and all the descriptions given of it answer exactly to the appearance of a growing bull, the horns and colour of which, as in other quadrupeds, are then constantly changing. The word Eland, in the Dutch jargon, signifies *Elk*, an animal to which I need hardly say the subject of the annexed portrait bears little resemblance beyond the fact of its being the proprietor of four legs. In days of yore, the species was abundant in the Cape Colony, but it has long since become extinct within the boundary—the value of its flesh and hide, added to its inability to escape from the mounted pursuer, having soon led to its utter extermination. Large parties of Boors, however, occasionally proceed across the boundary, and return with waggon loads of beef, salted and packed away in the skins. The Griquas, also persecute these noble creatures unceasingly; and even the savages who have no horses, not unfrequently race them down on foot, and stab them with their assegais; converting the horns into tobacco-pipes, which, from their huge dimensions, admit of the weed being inhaled after the most approved fashion.

The *slot* or mark left by the foot of the Eland resembles that of the buffalo in point of size, but is readily distinguishable from it by a practised eye; nor did it ever occur on the sandy plain, without eliciting from the Hottentot discoverer some sapient remark, prefaced by the exclamation of *Elands' bull! Elands' cooe!* according as the sex was denoted by the spoor.* Whilst hunting Elands on the Molopo, a curious scene occurred, which I shall here adduce as a fair specimen of the every-day behaviour of our exemplary and attached retainers. Having ridden down a portly bull, and brought the Hottentots to the spot, they proceeded with unwonted alacrity to divest the animal of its valuable hide, and had nearly completed the operation, when Richardson casually remarked that it would make magnificent *riems*, or halters, which were much required for securing our horses. The villains looked at each other askance—every knife was instantly closed, and returned to the pocket of the owner with the remark that they had been flaying the carcase for the purpose of manufacturing *veldt scoen*, or country buskins, for their own feet; but since we required it, would give themselves no further concern on the subject—a determination to which, be it known, they most rigorously adhered.

Returning one day from hunting the Giraffe to the Northward of the Cashan mountains, and looking for our waggons which had moved a march in the meantime, we mistook a large herd of Elands grazing in a mimosa brake, for our own oxen, and were literally amongst them before we had discovered the truth. But by far the largest herd seen during the expedition was on the plain of the gurgling Chonapas, shortly after moving to the Southward of the Cashan mountains, on our way towards the Vaal river. It may probably have consisted of three hundred head, or more, and in appearance could only be compared to a vast drove of stall-fed oxen. Ignorant of the nature of the country in advance, we had determined to obtain a supply of tongues and briskets for salting, lest our provisions should run short from the failure of game. Lighter bodied and more active than their ponderous chiefs, the dun colored cows jumped nimbly over each other's heads as if they had been all their lives accustomed to the use of the skipping rope; but the apoplectic old bulls puffed and laboured in the rear, shaking the firm earth with their heavy tramp—their coloped sides quivering again with fat, and embossed with froth and foam. At intervals, we crossed solid natural pavements of granite, which ringing to the tramp of their hard hoofs, gave forth a clangor as from a blacksmith's forge. Two minutes sufficed to reduce the whole cavalcade to a painful trot. We dashed into the middle of the herd, and although some few of the toiling victims turned in desperation with the design of impaling their persecutors on their marline spike looking horns, the giants of obesity were so easily disposed of, that every individual might have been incontinently massacred. The weapon I carried was a double-barrelled rifle, gauged eighteen balls to the pound; and upon coming up hand over hand with the spent *quarrée*—reeling, covered with foam, and steaming with sweat, its nostrils expanding as it gasped for breath—a single shot delivered pistol fashion at arm's length, into any part of the soft and sinewless frame, invariably brought the unwieldy beast to the ground, like a lasso'd bull, with a force that made the earth tremble again—the impetus acquired in the sturdy animal's progress causing it to plough the soil a considerable distance on its knees and horns.

We had terminated the chase, and strolling over the scene of carnage were filling in the list of casualties, when one of the largest bulls, which had been knocked over by Richardson about the beginning of the skirmish, and left under a thorn tree, to all appearance in a dying state, was remarked to be missing. After a laborious search, his twisted horns were at length observed protruding from a pit, barely large enough to contain his vast bulk; and on being approached he set off again as if nothing had happened, and gave a better run than at first. Leading my own horse, laden with *spolia*, I was walking slowly along, witnessing this singular scene, when an enormous bull rose leisurely from a tuft of grass, and seeing the horns of some of his beheaded comrades peering above my saddle-bow, approached with cautious step to scrutinize them. Although I had stayed my hand from slaughter, I was not proof against this temptation. Casting the ponderous trophies on the earth, I vaulted again into the saddle, and presently took the conceit out of this burly fellow, accounting also for another, equally large, by which he was joined during the chase. Leaving the carcase a banquet for the vultures, we loaded our meagre steeds with the choicest morsels, and rejoined the *cafila* in the afternoon. Ne'er did bold Robin Hood and his "brave fellows" taste such "fat ven'son by the highway side, in the forest of merry Sherwood," as we carried to our wild bivouac on that memorable evening. The camp had been formed on the sedgy banks of the deep Chonapas, the murmuring waters of which

* Spoor. The Dutch word for the trail or foot print.

seemed with difficulty to force their way through the reeds which choaked the channel. Not a single twig could be obtained for fuel in the whole neighbourhood, but after breaking up some useless waggon boxes, the feasting became general; nor can I better describe the proceedings of this day of carnage, than by drawing again upon the Water Poet, who in his work entitled the "Pennyless Pilgrimage," has favoured us with the following graphic description of the *finale* of a great hunt celebrated by the Earl of Marr in 1618, at which he had the good fortune to be present. "In the space of two hours," says he, "fourscore fat buckes were slaine, which after were disposed of, some one way and some another; more than enough being left for us to make merrey withall at our rendezvous; and being come to our lodgings there was such baking, boyling, roasting, and stewing, as if cook Ruffian himself had been there to have scalded the deyvill in his feathers."



Male

Female

Heads of Elands as preserved by Capt. Harris.