

VIII. ACRONOTIS LUNATA: - THE SASSAYBE.

PLATE VIII.

ACRONOTUS LUNATA.—THE SASSAYBE OR BASTARD HARTEBEEST.

*Bastard Hartbeest* of the Cape Colonists. *Sassaybe* of the Bechuana and Matabili.

GENERIC CHARACTER.—Adult male four feet six inches high at the shoulder; four feet at the croup. Eight feet two or three inches in extreme length. Horns robust, about twelve inches long, turning outwards and then sweeping inwards with a regular curve, so as to form two segments of a circle, with a general inclination backwards—the whole when seen from the front, forming a complete crescent. They are marked with from twelve to fifteen incomplete annuli, occupying about half their length; the rest smooth. Neck short. Body rather bulky. Legs slender. Hoofs black and tapering. Withers very elevated. Back remarkably sloping, and crupper very drooping. Head long, narrow and shapeless; wearing a bubaline appearance. Facial line strait. A dark soot-colored streak extending in a lozenge shape from between the horns to the nose, widest below the eyes. Ears fawn color, nine inches long. Hair of the body close, silky, and glossy. General color, deep blackish purple brown above, forming a pompadour as it descends; beneath fulvous and tawny. A dab of slate color extends from the middle of the shoulder to the knee; and another from the middle of the flank to the hock, outside. An abrupt transverse band of the same color passes diagonally across the inside both of fore and hind legs, upon a fulvous ground. Lower part of the legs deep fulvous. Tail twenty-two inches long, descending to the hocks, rufous, and covered below with posteriorly directed wavy black hair. Rump fawn color. Eyes high in the cranium, and fiery red. A semi-muzzle separating the nostrils, and a very indistinct lachrymary perforation.

Female precisely similar, but smaller and less robust, with more slender horns. Mammæ two. Gregarious. Inhabits the country of the Bechuana, and as far as the Tropic, in considerable herds—generally associating with the Hartbeest.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE SASSAYBE.

Spread out below, in sun and shade,  
The shaggy glen lies full display'd—  
Its shelter'd nooks, and sylvan bowers,  
And meadows, flush'd with purple flowers.  
The sultry summer noon is past,  
And mellow evening comes at last,  
With a low and languid breeze  
Fanning the mimosa-trees,  
Which cluster o'er the tangled vale,  
And oft perfume the panting gale  
With fragrance faint—that seems to tell  
Of primrose-tufts, in Scottish dell.

A MEMBER of the same subgenus as the Hartebeest, and generally appearing with it, the Sassaybe is neither less singularly colored than its gaudy congener, nor less remarkable for its elevated withers, drooping hind quarters, and triangular form. The brush of the sign painter too, has evidently been busy with the robe of this whimsical animal, and would seem equally to have left the goodly work unfinished. Seen under different lights, the hues of the body vary and shift from purple violet, to puce, pompadour, lilac-pink, and a deep blackish-purple-brown—the daubings on the hams and fore-arms being of a slate-color or iron-grey. Nothing can surpass the beauty of the paces of this animal, which are characterised throughout by the same speed and *oily* smoothness as those of the Hartebeest—the colours above described forming a curious contrast to the bright orange and red tints of its brother, whether quietly consorting in mixed herds, or racing past, neck and neck, as if contesting the gold cup! Like the Hartebeest, the Sassaybe also frequently turns to reconnoitre the pursuing foe—its long, wise-looking noddle, and fiery red eyes, giving it a most sinister appearance. Whilst engaged in taking off the hairy spoils of a Brindled Gnoo shot near the Mariqua river where the present species was particularly abundant, a large male advanced to the distance of two hundred yards, and taking up his position in the shade of an umbrella-topped tree, quietly scanned our operations. The first ball from my rifle struck the stem of the mimosa close above his head, though it merely caused him to shift his position to the other side; but the second bullet told upon the point of his shoulder with a crack that could not be mistaken. Retiring to a small bush, and quietly subsiding, he was gathered unto his fathers, and it was from his remains, the finest of many dozens killed during the expedition, that the annexed portrait was made.

The Sassaybe, like its congener, delights in the neighbourhood of hills, frequenting the open country with island-looking mimosa groves, as well as the patches of scraggy forest that skirt the foot of many of the superior mountain ranges, which, however, neither species ever ascends. Amongst the parks of mokaala trees, and about the Cashan and Kurichane mountains, the bases of which are fringed with stately trees, from whose boughs depend clusters of moss and festoons of various parasitic plants, we constantly saw them. In such situations the ground is often broken and stony, abounding in parts with deep holes. When in the act of killing a Sassaybe, my horse put his feet into one of these, and coming down with frightful violence, broke his own nose, cut my knees and elbows to the bone, and what was a far greater misfortune, and one that I had long anticipated, fractured the stock of my only and especially favorite rifle. Would tears have availed anything, I could have wept over the fragments. A strip of the Sassaybe's hide however rectified the damage for the time, until a second fall ultimately obliged me to open a blacksmith's forge, in order to put the weapon into an efficient state of repair.

In the thinly-peopled regions of Southern Africa, where the indigent inhabitants, unacquainted with fire-arms, subsist almost entirely by the chase, artificial fences, stretching over a great extent of country, are commonly employed to assist in gathering and conducting the wild beasts to particular spots, where the pitfal, the spear, and the club, await them, to their destruction. The game from far and wide having been collected and driven onward by a host of marshalled savages, is forced by the gradual contraction of the line to some central spot, where hundreds are promiscuously slaughtered. These princely *battues* are especially carried to a great extent in Moselekatse's territories—that mighty potentate, who has long ceased to lead his victorious armies to battle, still condescending to honour with his presence the great hunting expeditions which frequently take place. On these occasions, the remnants of the conquered nations being expressly assembled, he is attended by a retinue of several thousand vassals, who, extending themselves in a circle, enclose many square miles of country, and gradually converge so as to bring incredible numbers of wild animals within a small focus. Still advancing, the ring at length becomes a thick and continuous line of men, hemming in the game on all sides, which in desperate efforts to escape, display

the most daring and dangerous exhibition of sport that can be conceived. As the scene closes, the spears of the warriors deal death around them, affording a picture, thrilling to the sportsman, and striking in the extreme.

No haunt unsearched, they drive  
From every covert and from every den  
The lurking savage. Deep in his gloomy lair  
The lion starts, and morsels yet unchewed  
Drop from his trembling jaws. The shouts  
Of eager hosts through all the circling line,  
And the wild howlings of the beasts within  
Rend wide the welkin. Pressed on,  
At length within the narrow plain confined,  
A listed field marked out for bloody deeds,  
An amphitheatre more glorious far  
Than ancient Rome could boast, they crowd in heaps,  
Dismayed and quite appalled. Flights of arrows, winged  
With death, and javelins launched from every arm,  
Gall sore the brutal band, with many a wound  
Gored through and through. Prostrate on the ground  
The grinning monsters lie, and their foul gore  
Defiles the verdant plain. With pointed spears men pierce  
Through their tough hides, or at their gaping mouths  
An easier passage find. The King of brutes  
In broken roarings breathes his last. Through beasts of every kind,  
A strange promiscuous carnage drenched in blood,  
And heaps on heaps amassed, grim Slaughter strides along,  
Glutting her greedy jaws.

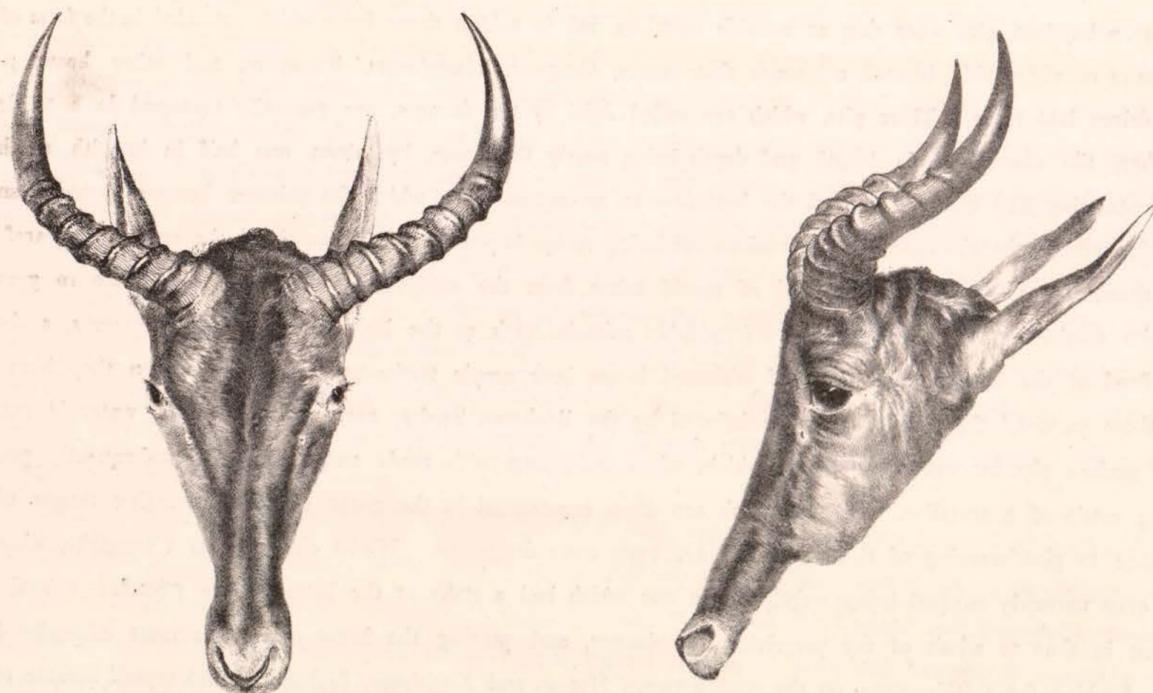
Pitfalls of various kinds are also constantly employed to entrap game, and throughout the Matabili country they were of almost daily occurrence. The first we saw were at Chooi, to the North of the great saltpan, to which, and similar reservoirs, the wild animals resort in great numbers. Excepting a belt of crisp and sour grass, by which it is encircled, the country around is destitute of verdure, a few brown stunted bushes being the only covering to the gravelly soil. A tract of low ground is occupied by a vast sheet of fine dry crystalized salt, of brilliant whiteness, resembling a frozen lake; and the saline efflorescence receiving the impress of the foot in the same manner as hoar frost, was covered with the *slot* of every species of animal. From fifty to a hundred pits were dug at suitable openings left in a high thorn fence which extended in the form of a crescent a mile or more on either side, in such a manner that Gnoos, Quaggas, Hartebeests, Sassaybes, and other heavy game, might readily be driven into them. These pits, which are called *keisi* by the savages, are generally arranged in a treble row, and close together, the dimensions in length and depth being nearly the same, by about one half in breadth at the top, but gradually contracting like a wedge toward the bottom—an arrangement by which the prisoner becomes jammed and perfectly incapable of exertion, the circumscribed dimensions rendering escape impossible. The mouth of the aperture is carefully covered over with grass, leaves, or twigs, the mound of mould taken from the excavation being in a little time so grown over as not to excite suspicion. To impale the more formidable animals, such as the Rhinoceros and Hippopotamus, a sharp stake is sometimes fixed at the bottom, and heaps of whitened bones bear ample testimony to the destruction they have occasioned.

In those parts of the country that are infested by the Bushman hordes, every paltry pool of water is surrounded by a chain of sunken pits for entrapping game, which, when overgrown with reeds and sedge, not unfrequently prove fatal to the straying cattle of a traveller. Others, which are often constructed in the gorge of two converging ranges of hills, and have no fence to give warning of their existence, are even more dangerous. Whilst riding down a Sassaybe, whose leg I had broken, I once narrowly escaped being engulfed in one which had a stake at the bottom—the wounded animal falling into another just in time to admit of my perceiving the danger, and putting the horse over what must otherwise have proved his grave. Looking for a Rhinoceros, on the road between Mosega and Kurichane, Richardson and myself became so completely entangled in a labyrinth of newly-constructed thorn fences, that we had the greatest conceivable difficulty in extricating ourselves. Stiff thorn branches, too high to be surmounted, flanked by trunks of trees, were firmly fixed in the ground, and so entwined amidst a dense grove of mimosas, that, after fruitless endeavours to force a passage in various places, we at length found that we had actually ridden completely round the enclosure, to the very point at which we had first effected our entrance.

The painted skins of both the Hartebeest and Sassaybe, but especially of the latter, are in great request amongst the savages for *kobos* or leathern mantles—as well on account of their brilliant colors, as from the extreme suppleness of their nature. The shining black tail, being opened and squeezed flat, depends from the back of the neck like a *queue*, the universal admiration in which this elegant appendage is held, rendering it the subject of many a quarrel. Ignorant of the process of tanning by the use of bark and astringent lyes, the wretched savages, whose time is quite valueless, cure these skins by dint of continual rubbing, stretching, and scraping, for which purpose they are constantly carried about, and referred to as an amusement in moments of *leisure*. The process of converting larger hides into leather, however, is one of greater difficulty, requiring the united efforts of ten or a dozen hands, who *knead* in concert, pushing and distending the skin by various evolutions, until the object is at length accomplished. This operation, which, to an indolent savage especially, is one of great manual labour, is rendered less tedious by the constant addition of grease and ochre, and somewhat less irksome by certain savage howlings and gruntings of a nature highly complimentary to the pigs, and doubtless intended to pass current for singing, though in fact much more resembling the music of curs contending over a bone.

The kobo or kaross, which in addition to the scanty leathern girdle and apron worn by both sexes, forms the aboriginal

dress of all the Bechuana and pastoral tribes inhabiting the regions we visited, who can afford so extravagant a luxury, is neither more nor less than the Roman toga in its rudest and most primitive form; and being simply fastened across the breast, may be readily thrown off and resumed according to the caprice of the wearer. In common with the filthy body of the owner, these cloaks are so besmeared with a pigment of red ochre and grease, as to contaminate every thing they touch, and even the sides and poles of our waggons, against which they frequently rubbed themselves, were indelibly stained with red, like the fleece of an English sheep after having been shorn. A more expensive and very beautiful description of fur mantle is manufactured of the skins of smaller animals, such as the jackal, the weasel, and the wild cat, from fifty to a hundred of which are curiously sewn together with the animal's sinews, and the skin of the head and muzzle left entire in the upper row, so as to form a scalloped border. All perforations and flaws are elaborately patched and repaired; the inner side of the garment being finally strengthened with a neat leathern edging, stitched with a praiseworthy exactness, that is rendered perfectly wonderful by the rudeness of the implements with which it is achieved. The operation of sewing is not confined to the ladies, but performed by the gentlemen also, through the agency of a huge skewer or awl, of the most unworkman-like manufacture, and which upon occasion would serve to truss a fillet of veal. A hole having been bored with this weapon, a thread is introduced, in texture resembling a fine fiddle string; a large bundle of the dorsal sinews of the antelope, from which this article is principally manufactured, being usually slung at the girdle, to be converted into thread, and employed also in the important service of stringing beads and buttons, as well as to suspend about the neck, knives, whistles, snuff-boxes, and other essentials, which by more civilized beings would be lodged in the waistcoat pocket.



*Head of the Safsaybe as preserved by Capt. Harris*