INTRODUCTION.

When the dry season prevails, they are sometimes in great distress for water; and then it is
that the cunning mule manages to satisfy his thirst by a very clever stratagem. He searches in
the burning plain for a round fruit like a melon, called the melocactus. This plant is covered
with prickles; but the mule does not care for that, for he knows that it contains a watery pulp
or juice. So he stamps upon it and kicks at it till he has burst it open; and then, with his
large fleshy lips, he sucks out the juice with great delight, while the horses and oxen, less clever
than he, go about parched with thirst.

But when the rainy season sets in, all is changed. There is water now in plenty; for the
rain pours down in streams, and the whole sky is black with clouds. The entire plain is covered
with pools and lakes, and the cattle have to swim about from one island to another, as if they
were amphibious animals, or adapted to live in the water as well as upon land; and not a few
of them are seized and devoured by the ravenous crocodiles and alligators that lurk in the
waters for their prey. And yet, through all these dangers and difficulties, the wild cattle and
horses of the steppes struggle on, and increase rather than diminish in numbers.

Another remarkable feature in the domestic animals is found in the various uses to which
they can be applied. Let us take, for instance, the ox. He can be used as a beast of draught
or burden, and will draw the plough with untiring strength, day after day. When he has
finished his work on the farm, he falls into the hands of the slaughterman, and every part of
him, his horns, his hoofs, his hide, his flesh, and his bones, will be found valuable and useful.

In the sheep we see the same peculiarity. Wool, skin, flesh, bones, tendons, all and each
are made by man to serve some useful purpose, after the death of the patient animal to which
they belonged. Contrast the sheep with one of the feline animals—for example, the tiger.
When the beautiful striped hide has been stripped from the dead brute, the rest of his carcass
is absolutely useless, so far as man is concerned, and can only be left as a prey to the jackals
and vultures, and other beasts that feed upon carrion. For the tiger feeds upon meat, and this
renders his flesh unfit for food.

Another and a very noticeable feature in the animals adapted to be the servants of man,
and to live with him in a domestic or tame condition, is the wonderful increase in numbers
they exhibit. Many a man has begun in Australia, or elsewhere, with a few sheep, perhaps a
score or even fewer, and has found his flock increase year by year, until he has become a
wealthy man. The flocks of sheep and the herds of cattle have, indeed, been so important,
that some nations have depended upon them for their very existence. Even now there exists in
Asia and elsewhere numerous nations whose only wealth consists in the domestic animals they
possess. How valuable domestic animals were considered among the Eastern nations of old,
can be easily seen from the words of the Bible, where the wealth of Abraham is enumerated
thus: “He had sheep and oxen, and he-asses, and men-servants, and maid-servants, and she-
asses, and camels.” We are also told that “Lot, which went with Abraham, had flocks, and
herds, and tents, and that the land was not able to bear them” (that is to say, to provide pasture
for their flocks and cattle), “that they might dwell together; for their substance was great, so that
they could not dwell together. And there was a strife between the herdsmen of Abraham’s
cattle and the herdsmen of Lot’s cattle.” And again, in the description of the rising fortunes
of Jacob, who tended the cattle of his uncle Laban, we are told, “The man increased exceed-
ingly, and had much cattle, and maid-servants, and men-servants, and camels, and asses.”

Of these domestic animals we have now to speak, beginning with the ox tribe.