THE PROBOSCIDEANS, once varied and abundant over much of the world, are nearing extinction.

The trunk and tusks (elongated front teeth) are most characteristic of the group. Evolved from the pig-sized moeritherium of the African Eocene, the later proboscideans attained great size, exceeded on land only by certain dinosaurs and one rhinoceros (indricotherium).

The American mastodon was abundant in North America, especially in lowlands until a few thousand years ago. The last of the breed, it had four tusks, and only the lower incisors were ever erect. The teeth had low crowns and simple ridges.

Bunomastodonts (gomphotheriidae) comprise by far the most important and varied group of mastodons. Some had four tusks; some had shovel-like lower tusks; from this group the elephants evolved as the teeth of some developed transverse incised ridges.

The mastodontidae were the mastodons most familiar to us, but as a group they were relatively few and unimportant. The teeth had low crowns and simple ridges.

Mammots are extinct elephants.

The proboscideans had tusks, and the teeth of mammoths and elephants have many transverse enamel folds. With descent between, new tusks replace old tusks. Only the lower incisors are ever erect. The teeth of the American mastodon, the African elephant, and the woolly mammoth are more similar than those of the Indian elephant.