

Practical Natural History.

STRANGE ICE ACCIDENT TO THE RHINOCEROS.

I WENT up early on Wednesday morning to the Zoological Gardens to study the footsteps of wild animals in the snow. I was unfortunately just too late to witness a curious and most unexpected accident to the rhinoceros. The animal had been turned out that morning as usual into the paddock behind the elephant house while the dens were being cleaned. The snow had fallen thickly during the night, so that the pond was not to be distinguished from the ground. The rhinoceros not seeing the pond put her fore feet on the ice, which immediately gave way, and in she went head over heels with a crash. The keepers ran for Mr. Bartlett, the resident superintendent; when he came (in a few minutes) he found the poor rhinoceros in great danger of drowning, as she was floundering about among great sheets of ice, under which she had probably been kept down till her great strength enabled her to break up the whole mass. Here then was a most awkward accident under unexpected and novel circumstances, putting Mr. Bartlett's readiness of action to the test. My friend, however, with his usual courage, quickness and readiness of resource, was quite equal to the occasion. He immediately let the water off the pond by knocking away a large plug which he has thoughtfully fixed instead of a tap, which is liable to get out of order. In the meantime the poor rhinoceros was in great danger of drowning, as the pond is nine feet deep, so while the water was running off Mr. Bartlett, losing no time, sent for all the available keepers and a long and strong rope; barrow loads of gravel were at the same time strewed on the sloping sides of the pond, to give the exhausted animal a foot hold. The rope was then tossed round the haunches of the rhinoceros, like the kicking strap of a horse in harness, and twenty six men, one-half at one end of the rope and the other half at the other, pulled hard on the rhinoceros, so that in her struggles to get up the bank she would not only be supported but pulled forcibly forwards. After much hauling on the part of the men and much plunging on the slippery bank of the pond, the rhinoceros was at last landed on *terra firma*. The salvors of this valuable living property had then to look out for themselves. Mr. Bartlett had anticipated this, for he had left the sliding gate of the enclosure open just wide enough to let out one man at a time, but not a rhinoceros. An absurd scene then took place, everybody rushed to the gate, but the first of the fugitives from the rhinoceros naturally stout, and possibly stouter at Christmas time than usual, jammed fast in the open gate, so that the other twenty-five men were in the paddock with the rhinoceros. The poor frightened and half-frozen beast luckily behaved very well; she did not rush after the men, but stood still, pricked her ears and snorted, giving the keepers time to get out as fast as they could and how they could, through the ingenious "man hole" or guard in the railing, made in case of emergencies. Neither the rhinoceros or the men received the slightest injury. Shortly after the accident I saw the rhinoceros munching her breakfast as if nothing had happened. The rhinoceros was the big female, she is about 10ft. 6in. long and about 5ft. high at the shoulder, and she weighs at a guess between three and four tons. The ice I found was four inches thick.

I think the Society are much indebted to Mr. Bartlett for the admirable way in which he prevented what might have been a bad accident.

Dec. 29th, 1870.

FRANK DUCKLAND.

ARRIVALS AT THE ZOOLOGICAL GARDENS.

- 2 North American Tortoises (*Testudo polyphemus*).
- 2 Wrinkled Terrapins (*Emys rugosa*).
- 4 American Box Tortoises (*Terrapine carinata*).
- 2 Blue-beaked Grosbeaks (*Spermospiza hamulata*).
- 2 African Leopards (*Pelis leopardus*).
- 1 Azara's Opossum (*Didelphys azarae*).