

The utter stillness and vastness of everything contrast strongly with one's own insignificance.

For a couple of hours I had waited, occasionally changing position to ease the cramping of my limbs. "Everything comes to him who waits," and at last, over a rock beyond, appeared the lion, gradually rising into full view. In the dim light he appeared monstrous as he stood, chest full on; and then, as he gave vent to a sonorous roar, which echoed and re-echoed from rock to rock, the effect was grand, and beyond any power of expression. It is under such circumstances as these that you see the lion at his best. Night-time is his day, and in the sunlight he is more or less at a disadvantage. He must have stood a full minute like this; a sore temptation to me to fire, and I believe I should have killed him stone dead had I done so. Having apparently satisfied himself that things were all right, he walked leisurely down to his prey, and again uttering a roar, stood facing me. This time I did not hesitate, but pulling both barrels nearly simultaneously, put both charges into his chest, and the lion fell forward almost without a sound. For a few moments he lay absolutely motionless; then some convulsive movements of the hinder limbs, and all was still, as it had been before he made his appearance.

Percy Selous 1897

IX.

HOW I SHOT MY RHINOCEROSSES.

THE white, or square-nosed rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros simus*), formerly so plentiful, has been practically exterminated south of the Zambesi, unless it may be sparingly found in some isolated tracts in the south-east. The black species, too, has been so harrassed that it may be considered rare in South Africa proper. Nowadays it is generally the countries dubbed "best hunting" which get the onslaught of the sportsman, whilst others are passed over because the probabilities of a large bag are small. So much the better for the naturalist, who then has an opportunity of studying the habits of the fauna under less trying conditions than that of catching a glimpse of an animal in the distance and then having to gallop it down. Of course, it is an acknowledged fact that many of the *Ungulata*, without being strictly migratory, are plentiful in a district for a time, and then may not be met with again for months or even years, when they reappear in large numbers. Take the elephant, for instance; the eland also travels long distances for change of, or for favourite food. So also with the rhinoceros.

They may be to all intents and purposes wiped out of existence, but in consequence of having been left alone for years, they have been found once more in their old haunts. Anyway I got a couple of rhinoceroses where I had never anticipated meeting with any; I also know that these were not the only ones.

I was returning to the waggon with a magnificent bustard (*Otis Kori*), almost as large as an ostrich, slung across my saddle, when I struck, much to my astonishment, rhinoceros spoor. Halting, I satisfied myself as to its freshness: also that there were two of them; and as there were always bushmen hovering around the camp on the chance of any stray morsels, I made up my mind to have a hunt, which I should not otherwise have done. Hastening back I hung my bustard in a thorn tree, and getting a mouthful myself and letting my horse get a bite or two and a drink, just to freshen him without endangering his wind, I started back to where I had first seen the spoor of the rhinoceros, and took it up. Both animals had been to the river to drink, and had there been a moon I should have lain up on the chance of their returning that night. This was, however, impracticable; neither was there any certainty that they would return, as there were plenty

of other places where they could drink equally well. I rode on for several miles, the bush all along being sparsely herbage, open bits of flat alternating with small clumps of thorns. Three koodoos I surprised, two cows and a young bull, whose small horns, however, were not of sufficient inducement to make me risk alarming the larger game by a shot, although they turned and stared at me in a tantalising manner, and my horse champed and pawed the sand in expectation, wondering why I did not allow him to start in pursuit. On I went for another mile or more, when the traces of the rhinoceroses became plainer: the boughs were pulled and browsed, and the dung had been dropped within the hour. This made me brace up in the expectation of coming up with them at any moment, as when they commence feeding they travel very leisurely.

I had not ridden many yards further before I sighted the two great animals, busy munching the shoots of some bushes. I had gone up wind, of course; to have done otherwise would have been useless, and my approach had been facilitated by their doing likewise. Although they would have scented me long before, they are not quick-sighted at a distance. But their hearing is as acute as their sense of smell, so I proceeded as cautiously as ever, going down

nearer to the river in order to get the wind a point or two more in my favour, and working from clump to clump of thorn bushes as opportunity served, in this manner getting into a bit of bush about twenty paces from where the rhinoceroses were feeding. Here, however, their keen sense of hearing soon discovered something, and they ceased eating, looking wistfully in every direction with their little twinkling eyes. The weapon I was using was a 10-bore muzzle-loader, for which I had given a £10 note at Vaughan's in the Strand. This rifle had great smashing power, and as a killer would compare favourably with elaborate modern weapons. When a rhinoceros does charge he is by no means particular at what, being so near-sighted that the most conspicuous object gets the onslaught. At the same time I must say they are usually most inoffensive animals, and even when wounded will, as a rule, get out of the way if they can.

One would imagine that with a huge beast like this it would be very easy to plant a bullet in a manner sure to be effective. This is by no means the case, and it took consideration before I settled on the exact spot at which to fire. The brain-pan is so small, and the amount of bone surrounding it so great, that, unless



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from very near, it is a dangerous shot to give, and a good knowledge of the creature's anatomy is necessary. Half-way down the neck, to catch the vertebræ, is a good place if you can make sure of hitting. But through the lungs is the shot *par excellence*, and has the advantage of offering a larger surface. I myself prefer this shot to almost any other, and at any game, and I think a great many other hunters do so, too. So taking a steady aim at the back of the shoulder of the nearer rhinoceros I fired, and the great beast lurched over against his companion, both nearly coming to the ground. He, however, recovered himself and scampered after his fellow, but came to a stop after going three or four hundred yards, evidently labouring heavily for breath. After reloading, I followed, and as I approached he half raised his head and then with an angry grunt made a groggy charge, which I had little difficulty in avoiding, although my horse was very restive, having, at any rate since he had been in my possession, never seen such an animal. The rhinoceros, on missing me, came gradually to a stand, and turned again, but he was bleeding freely both from the wound and from his nostrils; and but for putting him out of his misery, or possibly averting an accident, I had half a mind to let him

die as he stood. I wished afterwards that I had done this and saved a good deal of trouble. But instead, I gave him another shot, on receiving which he immediately set off at such a gallop and at so quick a pace that I found it difficult to keep near him. Right ahead he went as if he were blind, through brush and open just the same; but whilst his heavy carcass crashed through everything as if there were nothing to impede him, it completely threw me out. He made straight down to the river, and I managed to catch a glimpse of him now and again, until he got to the thicker belt of timber running immediately alongside it; I thought I heard the plunge he made into the water, too.

Soon I managed to reach the river-side, and, fastening my horse to a tree, walked down till I found the spot where the rhinoceros had struck the water. I could, however, see nothing of him, and came to the conclusion that he must have swum across to the opposite side, or else died and sunk to the bottom. From the disturbed and bloody state of the water, together with the bubbles continually rising, I was pretty certain that he had gone down; and, as these signs soon disappeared, leaving the surface as unruffled as usual, there was nothing else to do but to allow time for the rising of the carcass. I had

never seen or heard of a rhinoceros dying in this way, but hippopotami always sink when killed in the water, remaining below for many hours, according to whether they be in a fat or lean condition. As I did not imagine he would float before three or four hours at least had elapsed, I rode back for assistance. On the way I met some bushmen, who had got wind of my doings, and I told them to go and watch for the rising of the body and that they could have the meat, but were to leave the horns untouched and I would chop them out myself. I returned to the waggon and sent Bob after them to see that my instructions were carried out, and then, after some slight refreshment, I went to the spot where I had first met with the rhinoceroses, to see if I could not take up the spoor of the one which had got away.

After following for a couple of miles, the bush became thicker, and I half wished I had come on foot, for I dared not leave my horse fastened up for long, out of sight, or would have dismounted and gone on by myself. I therefore proceeded as well as I could, and under no slight difficulties. I don't think we could possibly have got through, but that the rhinoceros had opened up a kind of lane by smashing everything before him. Glad I was when the bush became less

dense; he had halted on reaching the open, and had torn up the ground with his horn for several yards around and then gone on at a walk. So I cautiously reconnoitred. Just at this moment three koodoo bulls dashed past a little ahead of me, but they gave me no chance of a shot, even if I had not now made up my mind to possess the fine horns of the rhinoceros, the anterior one of which looked to be almost two feet in length, whilst the other did not appear so very much shorter, which is unusual. I now caught sight of him, rather to my astonishment, as I did not expect, after the koodoos galloping past, to have seen him just yet. He was standing under a thorn bush, almost hidden from me by thick brush. His small ears were flapping, and I could see his head was held on one side in an attitude of attention. Before, when I had come upon them, I had not noticed the *Buphagas* or rhinoceros-birds, though doubtless they were in attendance; but now several of these birds, reminding one somewhat of the missel thrush of England, were vociferating around and endeavouring to bring their huge companion to a sense of his danger. For some reason he did not take any notice. I suppose they must have followed him overhead, for I don't see how they could have done so through the undergrowth.

Feeling my chances of a shot depended on my looking sharp, I trotted quickly up to where he was standing and fired as soon as I could get a sight at his shoulder. With a snort he rushed forward a few yards, and stood, looking spitefully from side to side. I could feel my horse trembling between my knees, but he did not otherwise move, and I suppose my background of brush prevented the rhinoceros from catching a definite sight of us in his confused state. I therefore let him have the other barrel, and he fell forward, getting up again immediately, however, and coming straight on at me like a battering ram. My gun was now empty and my horse became very unruly; but I evaded his rush and galloped across to the other cover as the rhinoceros crashed headlong into that I had left. Once out of sight I loaded as quickly as possible, putting two bullets into my left barrel. I was debating how to act next, for I could hear my friend rampaging around in the thicket, when he suddenly emerged, looking, however, very sick; and, after standing staring about him for a few minutes, he quietly lay down. This was rather perplexing. It might probably mean that he was done. But I was not by any means certain about the accuracy of my two shots, for they had been fired from the back of a restive

horse. Besides, his ears kept flapping, as if his senses were still on the alert.

I was much too far away for firing safely, so I got my horse in hand and started towards him again. As I had half anticipated, up he got, as nimbly as if his vast body were no weight to speak of, and, with a vicious shake of his head, came charging at us once more. I had, however, got my horse more under command, and, wheeling just in time, I gave him the double bullet charge at close quarters as he passed me, this time catching him in the right place, rolling him over in such a manner that he was past returning to the attack. He was, however, not yet dead; and I was compelled to put him out of his misery with a ball through the brain. I measured his horns with my little tape, and found the longer one to be twenty inches in length round the curve, and the posterior one seventeen and a half inches. The longest black rhinoceros horn I had seen before had a length of twenty-five inches. The so-called white species, of course, carried much longer nasal appendages, from three to four feet being sometimes recorded, and even longer. There was nothing now to do but to leave him as he lay until next day, so I took the back trail down to the river, where I found the

bushmen had already dragged the rhinoceros on to the shelving bank and were busy to their hearts' content. I now set to work and chopped out the horns. They were, however, considerably less than those of the one I had just killed, it being a younger bull and a smaller animal altogether. Taking one thing with another, this had been a tolerably stiff day's work, and I was not sorry to get back again to the waggon, and, after a hearty meal of koodoo steak, to seek my blanket, to dream of charging rhinoceroses and sundry exciting incidents, more imaginary than real, such as too hearty application to rather heavy nutriment would be apt to induce when taken just before turning in. Then, again, I wanted to be about at first dawn, to attend to the skin of the bustard, which really ought to have been seen to there and then.