

## AN ADVENTURE WITH A RHINOCEROS.

One day Sir John had a serious rencontre with an old rhinoceros, which cost him "rather dear." For some time the animal had been prowling about the flanks of the caravan. By the blackness of his skin Mokoum had recognised the "chucuroo" (such as the native for this animal) as a dangerous beast, and one which, more agile than the white species, often attacks man and beast without any provocation.

On this day, Sir John and Mokoum had set off to reconnoitre a hill six miles away, on which the colonel wished to establish an indicating post. With a certain foreboding, Sir John had brought his rifle with conical shot instead of his ordinary gun; for although the rhinoceros had not been seen for two days, yet he did not consider it advisable to traverse unarmed an unknown country. Mokoum and his companions had already unsuccessfully chased the beast, which probably now had abandoned its designs. There was no reason to regret the precaution. The adventurers had reached the summit of the hill, when at the base, close to a thicket of no large extent, appeared the chucuroo. He was a formidable animal; his small eyes sparkled, and his horns, planted firmly one over the other on his bony nose, furnished a most powerful weapon of attack.

The bushman caught sight of him first, as he crouched about half a mile distant in a grove of lentisk.

"Sir John," he cried, "fortune favours you; here is your chucuroo!"

"The rhinoceros!" exclaimed Sir John, with kindling eyes, for he had never before been so near the animal.

"Yes, a magnificent beast, and he seems inclined to cut off our retreat," said the bushman. "Why he should attack us, I can hardly say; his tribe is not carnivorous; but any way, there he is, and we must hunt him out."

"Is it possible for him to get up here to us?" asked Sir John.

"No, his legs are too short and thick, but he will wait."

"Well, let him wait," said Sir John, "and when we have examined this station, we will try and get him out."

They then proceeded with their reconnoitring, and chose a spot on which to erect the indicating-post. They also noticed other eminences to the north-west, which would be of use in constructing a subsequent triangle.

Their work ended, Sir John turned to the bushman, saying, "When you like, Mokoum."

"I am at your orders, Sir John; the rhinoceros is still waiting."

"Well, let us go down, a ball from my rifle will soon settle matters."

"A ball!" cried Mokoum, "you don't know a rhinoceros. He won't fall with one ball, however well it may be aimed."

"Nonsense!" began Sir John, "that is because people don't use conical shot."

"Conical or round," rejoined the bushman, "the first will not bring down such an animal as that."

"Well," said Sir John, carried away by his self-confidence, "as you have your doubts, I will show you what our European weapons can do."

And he loaded his rifle, to be ready to take aim as soon as he should be at a convenient distance.

"One moment, Sir John," said the bushman, rather piqued, "will you bet with me?"

"Certainly," said Sir John.

"I am only a poor man," continued Mokoum, "but I will willingly bet you half-a-crown against your first ball."

"Done!" replied Sir John instantly. "Half-a-crown to you if the rhinoceros doesn't fall to my first shot."

The hunters descended the steep slope, and were soon posted within range of the rhinoceros. The beast was perfectly motionless, and on that account presented an easy aim.

Sir John thought his chance so good, that at the last moment he turned to Mokoum and said,—

"Do you keep to your bargain?"

"Yes," replied the bushman.

The rhinoceros still being as motionless as a target, Sir John could aim wherever he thought the blow would be mortal. He chose the muzzle, and his pride being roused, he aimed with the utmost care, and fired. The ball failed in reaching the flesh; it had merely shattered to fragments the extremity of one of the horns. The animal did not appear to experience the slightest shock.

"That counts nothing," said the bushman, "you didn't touch the flesh."

"Yes, it counts," replied Sir John, rather vexed, "I have lost my wager; but come now, double or quits."

"As you please, Sir John, but you will lose."

"We shall see."

The rifle was carefully reloaded, and Sir John, taking rather a random aim, fired a second time; but meeting the horny skin of the haunch, the ball, notwithstanding its force, fell to the ground. The rhinoceros moved a few steps.

"A crown to me," said Mokoum.

"Will you stake it again?" asked Sir John, "double or quits?"

"By all means," said Mokoum.

This time, Sir John, who had begun to get angry, regained his composure, and aimed at the animal's forehead. The ball rebounded, as if it had struck a metal plate.

"Half a sovereign," said the bushman calmly.

"Yes, and another," cried Sir John, exasperated.

The shot penetrated the skin, and the rhinoceros made a tremendous bound; but instead of falling, he rushed furiously upon the bushes, which he tore and crushed violently.

"I think he still moves," said the bushman quietly.

Sir John was beside himself; his composure again deserted him, and he risked the sovereign he owed the bushman on a fifth ball.

He continued to lose again and again, but persisted in doubling the stake at every shot. At length the animal, pierced to the heart, fell, impotent to rise to its feet.

Sir John uttered a loud hurrah; he had killed his rhinoceros. He had forgotten his disappointment, but he did not forget his bets. It was startling to find that the perpetually redoubled stakes had mounted at the ninth shot to £32. Sir John congratulated himself on his escape from such a debt of honour, but in his enthusiasm he presented Mokoum with several gold pieces, which the bushman received with his usual equanimity.—*The Adventures of Three Englishmen and Three Russians in South Africa.*