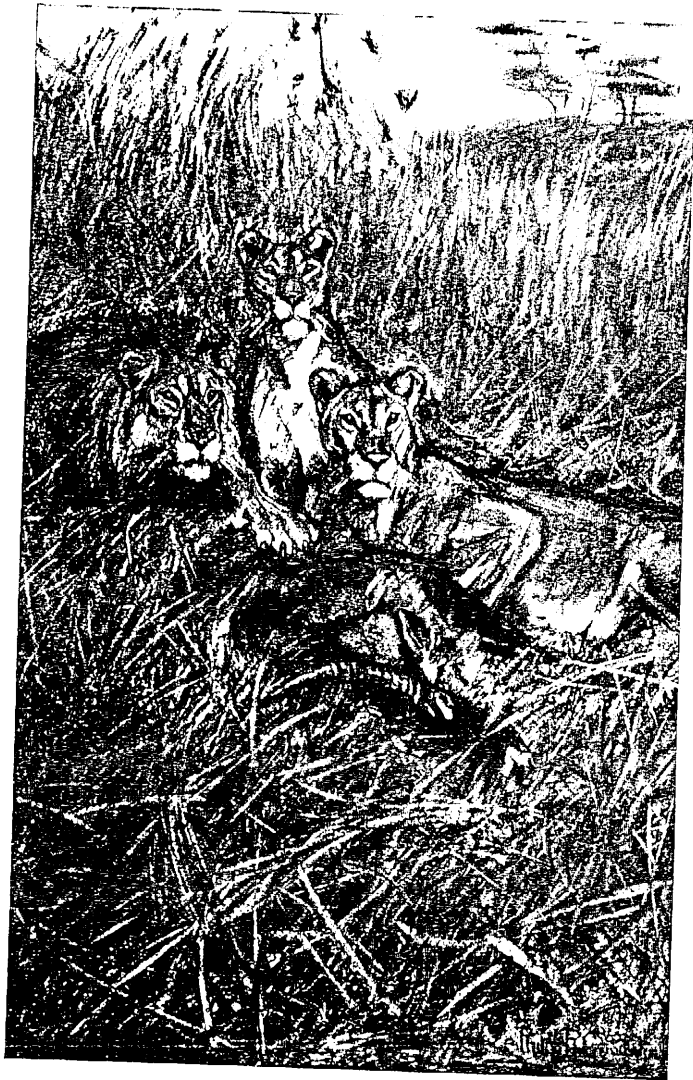


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# THE LAND OF FOOTPRINTS

BY

STEWART EDWARD WHITE, F.R.G.S.



Those were the first wild lions I had ever seen.



THOMAS NELSON AND SONS  
LONDON, EDINBURGH, DUBLIN, LEEDS, PARIS  
LEIPZIG, MELBOURNE, AND NEW YORK

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game that had been down to water. The river, a quite impassable barrier, lay to our right, and an equally impassable precipitous ravine barred their flight ahead. They were forced to cross our front, quite close, within the hundred yards. We stopped to watch them go, a seemingly endless file of them, some very much frightened, bounding spasmodically as though stung; others, more philosophical, loping easily and unconcernedly; still others—a few—even stopping for a moment to get a good view of us. The very young creatures, as always, bounded along absolutely stiff-legged, exactly like wooden animals suspended by an elastic, touching the ground and rebounding high, without a bend of the knee or an apparent effort of the muscles. Young animals seem to have to learn how to bend their legs for the most efficient travel. The same is true of human babies as well. In this herd were, we estimated, some four or five hundred beasts.

While hunting near the foothills I came across the body of a large eagle suspended by one leg from the crotch of a limb. The bird's talon had missed its grip, probably on alighting, the tarsus had slipped through the crotch beyond the joint, the eagle had fallen forward, and had never been able to flop itself back to an upright position!

## XXI.

## THE RHINOCEROS.

THE rhinoceros is, with the giraffe, the hippopotamus, the gerenuk, and the camel, one of Africa's unbelievable animals. Nobody has bettered Kipling's description of him in the *Just-so Stories*: "A horn on his nose, piggy eyes, and few manners." He lives a self-centred life, wrapped up in the porcine contentment that broods within nor looks abroad over the land. When anything external to himself and his food and drink penetrates to his intelligence he makes a flurried fool of himself, rushing madly and frantically here and there in a hysterical effort either to destroy or get away from the cause of disturbance. He is the incarnation of a living and perpetual Grouch.

Generally he lives by himself, sometimes with his spouse, more rarely still with a third that is probably a grown-up son or daughter. I person-

ally have never seen more than three in company. Some observers have reported larger bands, or rather collections, but, lacking other evidence, I should be inclined to suspect that some circumstance of food or water rather than a sense of gregariousness had attracted a number of individuals to one locality.

The rhinoceros has three objects in life—to fill his stomach with food and water, to stand absolutely motionless under a bush, and to imitate ant-hills when he lies down in the tall grass. When disturbed at any of these occupations he snorts. The snort sounds exactly as though the safety-valve of a locomotive had suddenly opened and as suddenly shut again after two seconds of escaping steam. Then he puts his head down and rushes madly in some direction, generally upwind. As he weighs about two tons, and can, in spite of his appearance, get over the ground nearly as fast as an ordinary horse, he is a truly imposing sight, especially since the innocent bystander generally happens to be upwind, and hence in the general path of progress. This is because the rhino's scent is his keenest sense, and through it he becomes aware, in the majority of times, of man's presence. His sight is very poor indeed; he cannot see clearly even a moving object much

beyond fifty yards. He can, however, hear pretty well.

The novice, then, is subjected to what he calls a "vicious charge" on the part of the rhinoceros, merely because his scent was borne to the beast from upwind, and the rhino naturally runs away upwind. He opens fire, and has another thrilling adventure to relate. As a matter of fact, if he had approached from the other side, and then aroused the animal with a clod of earth, the beast would probably have "charged" away in identically the same direction. I am convinced from a fairly varied experience that this is the basis for most of the thrilling experiences with rhinoceroses.

But whatever the beast's first mental attitude, the danger is quite real. In the beginning he rushes upwind in instinctive reaction against the strange scent. If he catches sight of the man at all, it must be after he has approached to pretty close range, for only at close range are the rhino's eyes effective. Then he is quite likely to finish what was at first a blind dash by a genuine charge. Whether this is from malice or from the panicky feeling that he is now too close to attempt to get away, I never was able to determine. It is probably, in the majority of cases, the latter. This seems indicated by the fact that the rhino, if

avoided in his first rush, will generally charge right through and keep on going. Occasionally, however, he will whirl and come back to the attack. There can then be no doubt that he actually intends mischief.

Nor must it be forgotten that with these animals, *as with all others*, not enough account is taken of individual variation. They, as well as man, and as well as other animals, have their cowards, their fighters, their slothful, and their enterprising. And, too, there seem to be truculent and peaceful districts. North of Mt. Kenia, between the peak and the Northern Guaso Nyero River, we saw many rhinos, none of which showed the slightest disposition to turn ugly. In fact, they were so peaceful that they scabbled off as fast as they could every time they either scented, heard, or *saw* us; and in their flight they held their noses up, not down. In the wide angle between the Tana and Thika rivers, and comprising the Yatta Plains, and in the thickets of the Tsavo, the rhinoceroses generally ran nose down in a position of attack, and were much inclined to let their angry passions master them at the sight of man. Thus we never had our safari scattered by rhinoceroses in the former district, while in the latter the boys were up trees six times in the course of one

morning! Carl Akeley, with a moving picture machine, could not tease a charge out of a rhino in a dozen tries, while Dugmore, in a different part of the country, was so chivied about that he finally left the district to avoid killing any more of the brutes in self-defence!

The fact of the matter is that the rhinoceros is neither animated by the implacable man-destroying passion ascribed to him by the amateur hunter, nor is he so purposeless and haphazard in his rushes as some would have us believe. On being disturbed, his instinct is to get away. He generally tries to get away in the direction of the disturbance, or upwind, as the case may be. If he catches sight of the cause of disturbance he is apt to try to trample and gore it, whatever it is. As his sight is short, he will sometimes so inflict punishment on unoffending bushes. In doing this he is probably not animated by a consuming destructive blind rage, but by a naturally pugnacious desire to eliminate sources of annoyance. Missing a definite object, he thunders right through and disappears without trying again to discover what has aroused him.

This first rush is not a charge in the sense that it is an attack on a definite object. It may not, and probably will not, amount to a charge at all,

for the beast will blunder through without ever defining more clearly the object of his blind dash. That dash is likely, however, at any moment, to turn into a definite charge should the rhinoceros happen to catch sight of his disturber. Whether the impelling motive would then be a mistaken notion that on the part of the beast he was so close he had to fight, or just plain malice, would not matter. At such times the intended victim is not interested in the rhino's mental processes.

Owing to his size, his powerful armament, and his incredible quickness, the rhinoceros is a dangerous animal at all times, to be treated with respect and due caution. This is proved by the number of white men, out of a sparse population, that are annually tossed and killed by the brutes, and by the promptness with which the natives take to trees—thorn trees at that!—when the cry of *faru!* is raised. As he comes rushing in your direction, head down and long weapon pointed, tail rigidly erect, ears up, the earth trembling with his tread and the air with his snorts, you suddenly feel very small and ineffective.

If you keep cool, however, it is probable that the encounter will result only in a lot of mental perturbation for the rhino and a bit of excitement for yourself. If there is any cover, you should duck

down behind it and move rapidly but quietly to one side or the other of the line of advance. If there is no cover, you should crouch low and hold still. The chances are he will pass to one side or the other of you, and go snorting away into the distance. Keep your eye on him very closely. If he swerves definitely in your direction, *and drops his head a little lower*, it would be just as well to open fire. Provided the beast was still far enough away to give me "sea-room," I used to put a small bullet in the flesh of the outer part of the shoulder. The wound thus inflicted was not at all serious, but the shock of the bullet usually turned the beast. This was generally in the direction of the wounded shoulder, which would indicate that the brute turned toward the apparent source of the attack, probably for the purpose of getting even. At any rate, the shot turned the rush to one side, and the rhinoceros, as usual, went right on through. If, however, he seemed to mean business, or was too close for comfort, the point to aim for was the neck just above the lowered horn.

In my own experience I came to establish a "dead line" about twenty yards from myself. That seemed to be as near as I cared to let the brutes come. Up to that point I let them alone on the chance that they might swerve or change their

minds, as they often did. But inside of twenty yards, whether the rhinoceros meant to charge me or was merely running blindly by, did not particularly matter. Even in the latter case he might happen to catch sight of me and change his mind. Thus, looking over my notebook records, I find that I was "charged" forty odd times—that is to say, the rhinoceros rushed in my general direction. Of this lot I can be sure of but three, and possibly four, that certainly meant mischief. Six more came so directly at us, and continued so to come, that in spite of ourselves we were compelled to kill them. The rest were successfully dodged.

As I have heard old hunters, of many times my experience, affirm that only in a few instances have they themselves been charged indubitably and with malice aforethought, it might be well to detail my reasons for believing myself definitely and not blindly attacked.

The first instance was that when B. killed his second trophy rhinoceros. The beast's companion refused to leave the dead body for a long time, but finally withdrew. On our approaching, however, and after we had been some moments occupied with the trophy, it returned and charged viciously. It was finally killed at fifteen yards.

The second instance was of a rhinoceros that



"The rhinoceros is . . . one of Africa's unbelievable animals."

got up from the grass sixty yards away, and came headlong in my direction. At the moment I was standing on the edge of a narrow eroded ravine, ten feet deep, with perpendicular sides. The rhinoceros came on bravely to the edge of the ravine—and stopped. Then he gave an exhibition of unmitigated bad temper most amusing to contemplate—from my safe position. He snorted, and stamped, and pawed the earth, and ramped up and down at a great rate. I sat on the opposite bank and laughed at him. This did not please him a bit, but after many short rushes to the edge of the ravine, he gave it up and departed slowly, his tail very erect and rigid. From the persistency with which he tried to get at me, I cannot but think he intended something of the sort from the first.

The third instance was much more aggravating. In company with Memba Sasa and Fundi I left camp early one morning to get a waterbuck. Four or five hundred yards out, however, we came on fresh buffalo signs, not an hour old. To one who knew anything of buffaloes' habits this seemed like an excellent chance, for at this time of the morning they should be feeding not far away preparatory to seeking cover for the day. Therefore we immediately took up the trail.

It led us over hills, through valleys, high grass, burned country, brush, thin scrub, and small woodland alternately. Unfortunately we had happened on these buffalo just as they were about changing district, and they were therefore travelling steadily. At times the trail was easy to follow, and at other times we had to cast about very diligently to find traces of the direction even such huge animals had taken. It was interesting work, however, and we drew on steadily, keeping a sharp lookout ahead in case the buffalo had come to a halt in some shady thicket out of the sun. As the latter ascended the heavens and the scorching heat increased, our confidence in nearing our quarry ascended likewise, for we knew that buffaloes do not like great heat. Nevertheless, this band continued straight on its way. I think now they must have got scent of our camp, and had therefore decided to move to one of the alternate and widely separated feeding grounds every herd keeps in its habitat. Only at noon, and after six hours of steady trailing, covering perhaps a dozen miles, did we catch them up.

From the start we had been bothered with rhinoceroses. Five times did we encounter them, standing almost squarely on the line of the spoor we were following. Then we had to make a wide,

quiet circle to leeward in order to avoid disturbing them, and were forced to a very minute search in order to pick up the buffalo tracks again on the other side. This was at once an anxiety and a delay, and we did not love those rhino.

Finally, at the very edge of the Yatta Plains, we overtook the herd, resting for noon in a scattered thicket. Leaving Fundi, I, with Memba Sasa, stalked down to them. We crawled and crept by inches flat to the ground, which was so hot that it fairly burned the hand. The sun beat down on us fiercely, and the air was close and heavy even among the scanty grass tufts in which we were trying to get cover. It was very hard work indeed, but after a half-hour of it we gained a thin bush not over thirty yards from a half-dozen dark and indeterminate bodies dozing in the very centre of a brush-patch. Cautiously I wiped the sweat from my eyes and raised my glasses. It was slow work and patient work, picking out and examining each individual beast from the mass. Finally the job was done. I let fall my glasses.

"Monumookec y'otey—all cows," I whispered to Memba Sasa.

We backed out of there inch by inch, with the intention of circling a short distance to the leeward, and then trying the herd again lower down. But



some awkward, slight movement, probably on my part, caught the eye of one of those blessed cows. She threw up her head; instantly the whole thicket seemed alive with beasts. We could hear them crashing and stamping, breaking the brush, rushing headlong and stopping again; we could even catch momentary glimpses of dark bodies. After a few minutes we saw the mass of the herd emerge from the thicket five hundred yards away, and flow up over the hill. There were probably a hundred and fifty of them, and, looking through my glasses, I saw among them two fine old bulls. They were, of course, not much alarmed, as only the cow knew what it was all about anyway, and I suspected they would stop at the next thicket.

We had only one small canteen of water with us, but we divided that. It probably did us good, but the quantity was not sufficient to touch our thirst. For the remainder of the day we suffered rather severely, as the sun was fierce.

After a short interval, we followed on after the buffaloes. Within a half-mile beyond the crest of the hill over which they had disappeared was another thicket. At the very edge of the thicket, asleep under an outlying bush, stood one of the big bulls!

Luck seemed with us at last. The wind was right, and between us and the bull lay only four hundred yards of knee-high grass. All we had to was to get down on our hands and knees, and, without further precautions, crawl up within range and pot him. That meant only a bit of hard, hot work.

When we were about half-way, a rhinoceros suddenly arose from the grass between us and the buffalo, and about one hundred yards away.

What had aroused him, at that distance and upwind, I do not know. It hardly seemed possible that he could have heard us, for we were moving very quietly, and, as I say, we were downwind. However, there he was on his feet, sniffing now this way, now that, in search for what had alarmed him. We sank out of sight and lay low, fully expecting that the brute would make off.

For just twenty-five minutes by the watch that rhinoceros looked and looked deliberately in all directions while we lay hidden waiting for him to get over it. Sometimes he would start off quite confidently for fifty or sixty yards, so that we thought at last we were rid of him, but always he returned to the exact spot where we had first seen him, there to stamp and blow. The buffalo paid no attention to these manifestations. I suppose

everybody in jungleland is accustomed to rhinoceros bad temper over nothing. Twice he came in our direction, but both times gave it up after advancing twenty-five yards or so. We lay flat on our faces, the vertical sun slowly roasting us, and cursed that rhino.

Now the significance of this incident is twofold : first, the fact that, instead of rushing off at the first intimation of our presence, as would the average rhino, he went methodically to work to find us ; second, that he displayed such remarkable perseverance as to keep at it nearly a half-hour. This was a spirit quite at variance with that finding its expression in the blind rush or in the sudden, passionate attack. From that point of view it seems to me that the interest and significance of the incident can hardly be overstated.

Four or five times we thought ourselves freed from the nuisance, but always, just as we were about to move on, back he came, as eager as ever to nose us out. Finally he gave it up, and, at a slow trot, started to go away from there. And out of the three hundred and sixty degrees of the circle where he might have gone he selected just our direction. Note that this was downwind for him, and that rhinoceroses usually escape upwind.

We lay very low, hoping that, as before, he

would change his mind as to direction. But now he was no longer looking, but travelling. Nearer and nearer he came. We could see plainly his little eyes, and hear the regular *swish, swish, swish* of his thick legs brushing through the grass. The regularity of his trot never varied, but to me, lying there directly in his path, he seemed to be coming on altogether too fast for comfort. From our low level he looked as big as a barn. Memba Sasa touched me lightly on the leg. I hated to shoot, but finally, when he loomed fairly over us, I saw it must be now or never. If I allowed him to come closer, he must indubitably catch the first movement of my gun and so charge right on us before I would have time to deliver even an ineffective shot. Therefore, most reluctantly, I placed the ivory bead of the great Holland gun just to the point of his shoulder and pulled the trigger. So close was he that, as he toppled forward, I instinctively, though unnecessarily of course, shrank back as though he might fall on me. Fortunately I had picked my spot properly, and no second shot was necessary. He fell just twenty-seven feet—nine yards—from where we lay !

The buffalo vanished into the blue. We were left with a dead rhino, which we did not want, twelve miles from camp, and no water. It was a

hard hike back, but we made it finally, though nearly perished from thirst.

This beast, be it noted, did not charge us at all, but I consider him as one of the three undoubtedly animated by hostile intentions. Of the others I can, at this moment, remember five that might or might not have been actually and maliciously charging when they were killed or dodged. I am no mind reader for rhinoceros. Also I am willing to believe in their entirely altruistic intentions. Only, if they want to get the practical results of their said altruistic intentions, they must really refrain from coming straight at me nearer than twenty yards. It has been stated that if one stands perfectly still until the rhinoceros is just six feet away, and then jumps sideways, the beast will pass him. I never happened to meet anybody who had acted on this theory. I suppose that such exist; though I doubt if any persistent exponent of the art is likely to exist long. Personally, I like my own method, and stoutly maintain that, within twenty yards, it is up to the rhinoceros to begin to do the dodging.

## XXII.

THE RHINOCEROS (*continued*).

AT first the traveller is pleased and curious over rhinoceros. After he has seen and encountered eight or ten, he begins to look upon them as an unmitigated nuisance. By the time he has done a week in thick rhino-infested scrub he gets fairly to hating them.

They are bad enough in the open plains, where they can be seen and avoided, but in the tall grass or the scrub they are a continuous anxiety. No cover seems small enough to reveal them. Often they will stand or lie absolutely immobile until you are within a very short distance, and then will outrageously break out. They are, in spite of their clumsy build, as quick and active as polo ponies, and are the only beasts I know of capable of leaping into full speed ahead from a recumbent position. In thorn scrub they are the worst, for there, no matter how alert the traveller may hold himself,

he is likely to come around a bush smack on one. And a dozen times a day the throat-stopping, abrupt crash and smash to right or left brings him up all standing, his heart racing, the blood pounding through his veins. It is jumpy work, and is very hard on the temper. In the natural reaction from being startled into fits, one snaps back to profanity. The cumulative effects of the epithets hurled after a departing and inconsiderately hasty rhinoceros may have done something toward ruining the temper of the species. It does not matter whether or not the individual beast proves dangerous; he is inevitably most startling. I have come in at night with my eyes fairly aching from spying for rhinos during a day's journey through high grass.

And, as a friend remarked, rhinos are such a mussy death. One poor chap, killed while we were away on our first trip, could not be moved from the spot where he had been trampled. A few shovelfuls of earth over the remains was all the rhinoceros had left possible.

Fortunately, in the thick stuff especially, it is often possible to avoid the chance rhinoceros through the warning given by the rhinoceros birds. These are birds about the size of a robin that accompany the beast everywhere. They sit in a row along his back, occupying themselves with ticks and a good

place to roost. Always they are peaceful and quiet until a human being approaches. Then they flutter a few feet into the air, uttering a peculiar rapid chattering. Writers with more sentiment than sense of proportion assure us that this warns the rhinoceros of approaching danger. On the contrary, I always looked at it the other way. The rhinoceros birds thereby warned *me* of danger, and I was duly thankful.

The safari boys stand quite justly in a holy awe of the rhino. The safari is strung out over a mile or two of country, as a usual thing, and a downward rhino is sure to pierce some part of the line in his rush. Then down go the loads with a smash, and up the nearest trees swarm the boys. Usually their refuges are thorn threes, armed, even on the main trunk, with long, sharp spikes. There is no difficulty in going up, but the gingerly coming down, after all the excitement has died, is a matter of deliberation and of voices uplifted in woe. Cuninghame tells of an inadequate slender and springy, but solitary, sapling into which swarmed half his safari on the advent of a rambunctious rhino. The tree swayed and bent and cracked alarmingly, threatening to dump the whole lot on the ground. At each crack the boys yelled. This attracted the rhinoceros, which immediately charged the tree full tilt. He

hit square, the tree shivered and creaked, the boys wound their arms and legs around the slender support and howled frantically. Again and again the rhinoceros drew back to repeat his butting of that tree. By the time Cuninghame reached the spot, the tree, with its despairing burden of black birds, was clinging to the soil by its last remaining roots.

In the Nairobi Club I met a gentleman with one arm gone at the shoulder. He told his story in a slightly bored and drawling voice, picking his words very carefully, and evidently most occupied with neither understating nor overstating the case. It seems he had been out, and had killed some sort of a buck. While his men were occupied with this, he strolled on alone to see what he could find. He found a rhinoceros that charged viciously, and into which he emptied his gun.

"When I came to," he said, "it was just coming on dusk, and the lions were beginning to grunt. My arm was completely crushed, and I was badly bruised and knocked about. As near as I could remember, I was fully ten miles from camp. A circle of carrion birds stood all about me not more than ten feet away, and a great many others were flapping over me and fighting in the air. These last were so close that I could feel the wind from their wings. It was rawther gruesome." He

paused and thought a moment, as though weighing his words. "In fact," he added with an air of final conviction, "it was *quite* gruesome!"

The most calm and imperturbable rhinoceros I ever saw was one that made us a call on the Thika River. It was just noon, and our boys were making camp after a morning's march. The usual racket was on, and the usual varied movement of rather confused industry. Suddenly silence fell. We came out of the tent to see the safari gazing spell-bound in one direction. There was a rhinoceros wandering peaceably over the little knoll back of camp, and headed exactly in our direction. While we watched, he strolled through the edge of camp, descended the steep bank to the river's edge, drank, climbed the bank, strolled through camp again, and departed over the hill. To us he paid not the slightest attention. It seems impossible to believe that he neither scented nor saw any evidences of human life in all that populated flat, especially when one considers how often these beasts will *seem* to become aware of man's presence by telepathy.\* Perhaps he was the one exception to the whole race, and was a good-natured rhino.

\* Opposing theories are those of "instinct," and of slight causes, such as grasshoppers leaping before the hunter's feet, not noticed by the man approaching.

The babies are astonishing and amusing creatures, with blunt noses on which the horns are just beginning to form, and with even fewer manners than their parents. The mere fact of an 800-pound baby does not cease to be curious. They are truculent little creatures, and sometimes rather hard to avoid when they get on the warpath. Generally, as far as my observation goes, the mother gives birth to but one at a time. There may be occasional twin births, but I happen never to have met so interesting a family.

Rhinoceroses are still very numerous—too numerous. I have seen as many as fourteen in two hours, and probably could have found as many more if I had been searching for them. There is no doubt, however, that this species must be the first to disappear of the larger African animals. His great size, combined with his 'orrid 'abits, mark him for early destruction. No such dangerous lunatic can be allowed at large in a settled country, nor in a country where men are travelling constantly. The species will probably be preserved in appropriate restricted areas. It would be a great pity to have so perfect an example of the Prehistoric Pinhead wiped out completely. Elsewhere he will diminish, and finally disappear.

For one thing, and for one thing only, is the

traveller indebted to the rhinoceros. The beast is lazy, large, and has an excellent eye for easy ways through. For this reason, as regards the question of good roads, he combines the excellent qualities of Public Sentiment, the Steam Roller, and the Expert Engineer. Through thorn thickets, impenetrable to anything less armoured than a dreadnought like himself, he clears excellent paths. Down and out of eroded ravines with perpendicular sides he makes excellent wide trails, tramped hard, on easy grades, often with zigzags to ease the slant. In some of the high country where the torrential rains wash hundreds of such gullies across the line of march, it is hardly an exaggeration to say that travel would be practically impossible without the rhino trails wherewith to cross. Sometimes the perpendicular banks will extend for miles without offering any natural break down to the stream-bed. Since this is so I respectfully submit to Government the following proposals:—

(a) That a limited number of these beasts shall be licensed as Trail Rhinos; and that all the rest shall be killed from the settled and regularly travelled districts.

(b) That these Trail Rhinos shall be suitably hobbled by short steel chains.

(c) That each Trail Rhino shall carry, painted conspicuously on his side, his serial number.

(d) That, as a further precaution for public safety, each Trail Rhino shall carry, firmly attached to his tail, a suitable red warning flag. Thus the well-known habit of the rhinoceros of elevating his tail rigidly when about to charge, or when in the act of charging, will fly the flag as a warning to travellers.

(e) That an official shall be appointed, to be known as the Inspector of Rhinos, whose duty it shall be to examine the hobbles, numbers, and flags of all Trail Rhinos, and to keep the same in due working order and repair.

And I do submit to all and sundry that the above resolutions have as much sense to them as have most of the petitions submitted to Government by settlers in a new country.

## XXIII.

## THE HIPPO POOL.

FOR a number of days we camped in a grove just above a dense jungle, and not fifty paces from the bank of a deep and wide river. We could at various points push through light, low undergrowth, or stoop beneath clear limbs, or emerge on tiny open banks and promontories to look out over the width of the stream. The river here was some three or four hundred feet wide. It cascaded down through various large boulders and sluiceways to fall bubbling and boiling into deep water; it then flowed still and sluggish for nearly a half-mile, and finally divided into channels around a number of wooded islands of different sizes. In the long, still stretch dwelt about sixty hippopotamuses of all sizes.

During our stay these hippos led a life of alarmed and angry care. When we first arrived they were distributed picturesquely on banks or