

THE RHINOCEROS

FOR a century or more the rhinoceros market has been very steady, with demand exceeding supply, and prices tending to stiffen. Good quality Indian are quoted round about one thousand guineas, which may be taken as the highest average price for zoological specimens for exhibition purposes. Elephants occasionally fetch higher prices, owing to their money-earning power; and certain of the rarer monkeys are possibly dearer, in view of their shorter expectation of life; and the giraffe, which fluctuates largely, has been on certain occasions in the same category. The African two-horned rhinoceros, which is a more startling creature than its one-horned cousin and is much more rarely offered for sale, is quoted as a rule at rather more than 600 guineas, at which figure it is by far the more expensive as, for some reason as yet undiscovered, its longevity is barely half that of the Indian beast. These big, bulky, rather stupid creatures are still fairly numerous in their native haunts, their destruction by modern firearms having been checked in the nick of time by the general adoption of Game Laws and the formation of Game Reserves.

To quote an example, the square-mouthed or White Rhinoceros of South Africa, had been reduced to thirty specimens before it was protected,

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George Jernison

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of natural history.

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in a reserve of 75,000 acres in Zululand, and even that poor remnant is subject to illicit persecution.

In 1927 two men were each fined £120 for this big poaching—which is reminiscent of these humorous reflections of a Scotch marauder which appeared in *Punch* on an earlier and similar occasion :

I've poached a pickle pairtricks when the leaves were turnin' sere,
I've poached a twa-three hares an' a goose, an' mebbe whiles a deer,
But ou, it seems an unco thing an' jist a wee mysterious
Hoo any mortal could contrive tae poach a rhinocerious.

I've crackit wi' the keeper, pockets packed wi' pheasants' eggs,
An' a ten-pun' saumon hangin' down in baith my trouser legs,
But eh, I doot effects wud be a wee thing deleterious
Gin ye shuld stow intil yer breeks a brace o' rhinocerious.

I mind hoo me an' Wullie shot a Royal in Braemar
An' brocht him down tae Athol by the licht o' mune an' star,
An' eh, Sirs! but the canny beast contrived tae fash an' weary us—
Yet staigs maun be but bairn's play by a weel-grown rhinocerious.

I thocht I kent o' poachin' jist as muckle's ither men,
But there is still a twa-three things I doot I dinna ken,
An' noo I canna rest, my brain is growin' that deleerious,
Tae win awa' tae Africa an' poach a rhinocerious.

Fortunately, another supply has been found on the west bank of the White Nile, separated only by this deep stream from the Ketloa (Prehensile-lipped or Black Rhinoceros). The boundary must mark a great natural cleavage thousands of years old, of which the White Rhinoceros held the western side in undisputed sovereignty. This beast, whose remains are found in the London clay, has a longer neck than the Ketloa, and much longer horns—the record length is over five feet—from which the “kerries”¹ are made that have been so often the

¹ Walking-sticks and symbols of sovereignty.

cause of wars between the Kafir tribes. And there is a remarkable contrast in the instinct of maternal care; they let the calf run in advance, guided by a touch of the mother's horn, whereas across the river the little ones always follow their dams. In colour, curiously enough, they are alike—a dirty khaki.

They differ slightly in temper—the black is a lively, often truculent beast, weighing round about two tons; the white, some few hundred pounds heavier, is generally a placid brute, but it was this usually inoffensive creature that made a murderous attack on W. Cotton Oswell.

He had fired one barrel, and expected it to make off, instead of which it stopped, walked calmly towards him, and drove its horn through his thigh and the horse he rode, tossing the mount and rider into the air. Oswell had a scalp wound four inches square from his stirrup-iron that put him out of action for half a year.

In spite of this, he continues, “My after-rider came up with another gun. I half pulled him from his pony, and mounting it, caught and killed the rhinoceros.”

How different this from the same tale told by Sir Samuel Baker, who professes to be repeating Oswell's own description! There, the rhinoceros had not even been molested; it walked towards the rider, then ran for fifteen yards and tossed the man and horse, and the former knew no more until he recovered consciousness, to find himself on a led horse with two men holding him in the saddle.

Thus are histories made, and the dangers of big-game shooting illumined with the warm glow of romance.

The stories of rhinoceros-hunting are legion. Opinions differ as to the danger of the encounter; some of the native tribes despise the creature, others fear it more than the elephant. European hunters and traders agree that the damage it does is the result of fear rather than malevolence. It has an acute ear and a keen sense of smell, but very weak eyes, which are often handicapped by the obstruction of the horn.

The unaccustomed noises of a passing caravan agitate the nervous creature long before the sense of smell has fixed a point of danger and turned nervousness into a panic that sends it headlong to safety, or with almost equal possibility may drive it right through the long line of carriers, with much resultant excitement and breakage of loads.

Such unfortunate chances added a grim horror to the infamous slave trade. A rhinoceros, dashing through the long files of wretches fastened by wooden yokes to one another, would often break the necks of every one of them. The most ludicrous example of this impetuous charge dates from the beginning of last century, when a lumbering rhinoceros dashed into a battery of Cape Artillery, putting it totally out of action. Sight must be of some importance, nevertheless, if there be any truth in the statement of the farmer in the Athi Plains, who told Mr. Roosevelt that his white horses had

been charged so often by rhinoceroses that he had painted them khaki to avoid further trouble.

The beast only charges by chance in the direction of the hunter, unless it be wounded, and even then but rarely, though the imagination of men in great danger often leads them to believe that they only escaped from a serious predicament by extreme agility. The wonderful sidestep which Maxwell says would do credit to a Torero could not escape the wide swing and well-directed action of the rhinoceros' horn; and there is little time to avoid an animal that gets into its stride with surprising quickness, and covers ten or, according to Maxwell, twelve yards in a second. Two or three preliminary sniffs mark the intention to charge (this sign of anger was noted in the contest arranged in Lisbon in 1517 against an elephant; the snorts raised little whirls of dust); it begins with a trot and develops into a gallop, with tail up and head lowered to take the whole impact on the horn. A fight between rhinoceroses is the eternal battle of sex and the age-old struggle of arms *versus* armour, in which the contestants know well their weak spot—the soft underparts which can be cut with a small knife. Deep and long are the furrows on the cheeks and sides of many rhinoceroses, but the tough hide is too much for the sharp-pointed horn with all its driving force. Maxwell, who killed a female and wounded her mate, tells how it first prodded her with its horn and finally struck with such force that the body was rolled over; but even that blow did not



[Photo: New York Zoological Society

THE AFRICAN WHITE RHINOCEROS

Inset: A young two-horned rhinoceros in the Sultan's collection at Constantinople.
From the Natural History of Akroandhis of Bologna, 1599.

pierce the skin. Lion-hunters, using the knowledge, cut a hole in the hide of a rhinoceros bait, so that their quarry may not eat too quickly nor carry off the meat.

To modern rifles the protection is valueless, but in the days of the smooth bore the sportsman required to shoot from thirty yards to achieve success. The soft iron spears of native hunters are of so little account against the armoured hulk that they can only attain their end by traps and trickery. The rhinoceros has a habit of leaving droppings in definite places, often at the foot of a large tree. There they dig a hole but little larger than a hat-box, of which the lid is made of sharpened slats pushed into the surrounding earth and pointing downwards at the centre.

Round this hole is a noose fastened by a long rope to a log of two or three hundred pounds weight. The trap is covered with leaves and droppings. The animal, pawing the ground, slips a leg into the hole; as it is withdrawn the sharp spikes stick to the skin, and form a frill on which the noose rests until the first tug pulls it taut. The beast rushes away hauling the log, and leaving a broad trail through the forest; but, so clogged, it is quickly wearied, and in general is found a self-made captive round some tree. There it is killed at discretion not without risk, for in the fury of pain it often breaks the rope and charges the surrounding mob of spearmen with terrible effect.

The Africans do not make pets, but tame rhino-

ceroses have been kept by Eastern princes for some thousands of years. They take them everywhere with the court for show, or as emblems of royal power. In 1398 rhinoceroses and elephants were made to bow down before Timor, the conqueror of Delhi. They were taught to carry a howdah like the elephant, or, like so many other creatures, were set to fight for the royal pleasure, being painted in distinctive colours that the wagers might follow more easily the fortunes of their champion. The Indian haunt of the rhinoceros is very different from the African is found, and the mode of hunting is varied accordingly. We have heard of Hindoos catching a rhinoceros in a pit, and, in their perplexity, appealing to the British Raj on the means to employ for its extraction; but the drive is the traditional method for destroying the old and capturing the young. Tamerlane in the fourteenth century hunted the rhinoceros thus; Baber also in 1525; and quite recently the Maharajah of Nepal arranged a similar drive to capture calves for Herr Hagenbeck. The country is broken and covered with jungle-grass, twenty or thirty feet high, in which a row of beating elephants is lost a hundred yards away. Through this the rhinoceroses tunnel in all directions, as completely hidden as rabbits in an English cornfield. The writer was told that 3000 cavalry and 20,000 foot were used to beat them from their cover. Five heifers were caught and immediately released. Four males were brought by Herr Hagen-

beck to Europe. One, almost the smallest, thirty inches high, came to the writer's collection. It was picked from the group as the most lively. The choice was good, for some of the others did not live long. It needs the wiles of Ulysses and the strength of Ajax to catch alive a baby African rhino. It may take weeks to find one sufficiently grown to feed and small enough to hold, and then the hunt is only begun. The rhinoceros has excellent ears and an acute sense of smell that call for the utmost skill in woodcraft and stalking. His eyesight is bad, but nature has provided an excellent watchman to counteract this failing. This is the red-billed ox-bird, one of the starling tribe, which attaches itself to most of the hoofed inhabitants of South Africa, and so particularly to this animal as to earn the popular name "rhinoceros bird." Two dozen or so often collect upon the backs of the beasts, picking out the ticks and other little insects that infest the folds of skin, and it is rare to find a rhinoceros, asleep or awake, without at least a pair of these wideawake watchers. They rise with a sharp, twittering note, and, unless they settle again, the hunt is spoiled; the rhinoceros is suspicious, too ill at ease to rest even if his own powers foretell no danger. A mother rhino will move off at once at a fine pace, the hunter following, perhaps for miles, before he can safely plant a mortal shot. The calf usually stays by the mother, making charges that often scatter the native followers before a well-executed tackle brings it to grass. Then it is

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THE UNICORN. Chapter 16.
From Edmund Topsell's "Historie of Four-Footed Beastes," 1607

tethered, and has to be half led, half dragged to the camp. It must be taught to suck goat's milk from a bottle.

This is the critical moment. Will it feed or will it stand moping, dull and listless, sorrowing for its dam until it drops from inanition?

It needs friends and may find them anywhere—the cook, a soldier, dog, or cow. Herr Schilling's great rhino went to the coast and thence to Berlin in company of a goat; and there is a much more remarkable tale of a rhinoceros that had lost such a foster-mother, saved by the motherly love and sympathy of a woman who had lost her baby. With a friend, the little rhino is full of gaiety and high spirits. It will march untethered, with the caravan, though that has to move by slow stages, and at night, to save the weakling from the blazing sun. And on the sea it may have the run of the ship, the pet of every one aboard. Some never grow vicious. The earliest rhino at Belle Vue had the run of the gardens, and did not resent being chased by a boat from his wallow in the lake when he was required for exhibition. He frightened no one, and only annoyed the laundry-maids by mumbling the clean linen on the lines. His successor was very wild, and in the mad fury of youth would charge the walls until the blood flowed. The writer has had others that grew wicked with the growth of the horn. Possibly the process of growth produces an irritation akin to toothache; the health of the animal is not endangered.

The Indian rhinoceroses in particular are hardy animals, and with care accommodate themselves so well to the vicissitudes of our climate that, though probably shorter-lived than elephants, their expectation of life in a menagerie is about a decade longer, owing to the earlier age at which they join the collection. Adult elephants are easily tamed and trained, whereas a full-grown rhinoceros would pine or dash itself to death. This savagery suited the sports of the arena, and the Romans presented both the Indian and African varieties in the circus. The two-horned specimen shown under Domitian was a terrible fellow; timid or slow, he had to be goaded to the fight, but nothing could stand against his fury. He killed the bear, the bison, an aurochs, and two steers—the lion would not face his wrath; and the bull—the bull he tossed like a ball in the air. The elephant was not set against him, and their respective strengths are still unknown. In Lisbon, when the two were matched, the elephant fled; but far away in India about the same date, the rhinoceros in its turn ran away. Strabo saw a fight without chronicling the result, but at least they met. Their actions are not antipathetic by instinct; the writer had two that for a while were cage companions, and in London a century ago a rhinoceros let itself be crushed to death for love of its friend. "He was constantly forced upon his belly by a pugnacious elephant (Jack) who pressed his tusks upon the back of his neighbour when he came near the palings which separated their en-

closures." "This rough treatment appears to have led to his death, as Professor Owen found, on dissecting the massive brute, which weighed upwards of two tons, that the seventh rib had been fractured at the bend near the vertebral end, and had wounded the left lung." The Council adds that "as the animal had been upwards of fifteen years in the menagerie, its longevity, rather than its decease, was matter for remark."

They do much better now. Rhinoceroses were very rare in Europe before the Cape route to India was discovered. The two in Lisbon are the first recorded, 1498 and 1515, but very probably they occurred occasionally at Constantinople. Thevet saw one in Cairo, 1544, and there is a fine engraving of a young Ketloa (*i.e.* Black Rhinoceros) in Aldrovandus, probably the one seen by S. Kiechel of Ulm at Constantinople in the sixteenth century—a tame specimen wearing a leather collar. The beasts, both African and Indian, were well known to the Ancients, who mix very careful observation—for instance, of their biting habits—with most ludicrous beliefs, that they carry the young on their backs, and that they whet their horns upon a stone before fighting one another, which they do after the manner of bulls. The horns caused much searching of heart; two horns tandem were beyond their comprehension, and the second was placed on the right shoulder by those who knew the beast, and those more ignorant depicted a side and median horn on a creature very like a cow. Nor could they distin-

guish sex in these strange creatures. "All are males," says Ælian. "Are they bred from the rocks, these awful beasts, or from the land or vitals of the earth, or do they spring from mutations of themselves; horrid portents without love, marriage, or production."

To what myth in the misty past is due the strange belief that cups made of this horn betray a poisoned liquor? It is an Eastern tale well known and widespread long before it grew current in the West, where it was fostered by the Arab traders who waxed fat on the silly notion. It was implicitly believed by Indian princes.

That and more. "On the day that they drink from the cup, they cannot fall sick, nor suffer if wounded, nor be injured though they pass through fire."

"Wherefore these cups belonged to the king alone, nor might any other hunt this animal."¹

"And," said Damidis to Apollonius the seer, "do you believe in this tale of the cup?"

The sage replied, "I believe it if I find the king of this country is immortal. For if any one gave to me, or to another, such a health-bearing cup, is it not likely that I should use it daily and drain it to the dregs?—nor could any one blame me for getting drunk under such circumstances."

¹ Philostratus, *Appollonius*, about A.D. 250.

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THE UNICORN

THIS strange creature that may not even be termed an animal is most worthy of inclusion among the beasts that are strange to us, for though it can be found alive, most people consider it to be a mythical creature, one that does not exist, a mere figment of exuberant imagination.

"We are come," as that worthy clergyman, Dr. Edward Topsell, wrote in 1607, "to the history of a beast, whereof divers people in every age of the worlde have made great question, because of the rare Vertues thereof; therefore it behooveth us to use some diligence in comparing together the severall testimonies that are spoken of this beast, for the better satisfaction of such as are now alive, and clearing of the point for them that shall be borne heereafter, whether there bee a Unicorne; for that is the maine question to be resolved.

"Now the vertues of the horne, of which we will make a particular discourse by it selfe, have bin the occasion of this question, and that which doeth give the most evident testimony unto all men that have ever seene it or used it, hath bred all the contention; and if there had not bin disclosed in it any extraordinary powers and vertues, we should as easily beleeve that there was a Unicorne in the worlde, as we do beleeve there is an Elephant