

## AFRICA AND ITS ANIMALS.

"SERENGETI SHALL NOT DIE." By BERNHARD AND MICHAEL GRZIMEK.\*

An Appreciation by SIR CHARLES PETRIE.

FOR the benefit of the uninitiated Serengeti is a game reserve covering roughly 6000 square miles just inside the northern borders of Tanganyika; Dr. Bernhard Grzimek is Director of the Frankfurt Zoo; and Michael Grzimek was his son, who was killed in a flying accident—a vulture had collided with the right wing of his plane—in the course of the investigation which is the subject of this book. The volume is beautifully produced, with illustrations which are a delight in themselves, and while the narrative is lively, provocative, and extremely discursive; the authors can never resist a digression from their main theme, and in this way they should attract numerous readers who are not primarily interested in Natural History.

The problem which the authors put may well be insoluble, but it should not be ignored on that



A COLLISION BETWEEN NATURE AND SCIENCE: THE CAR RAN INTO THE RHINOCEROS WHILE TRAVELLING AT SEVENTY MILES AN HOUR. THE DRIVER WAS UNHURT.

score. They took a census, mostly by air, of the number of animals in Serengeti, and they arrived at a figure of 367,000, all of whom at present live relatively untroubled by man. They argue that to reduce this area in any way would be to defeat the purpose of the game reserve, which is to enable the animals there to continue in their native state; in fact they put forward an eloquent plea for more wardens to deal with poachers. On the other hand, the demand for land in Africa is increasing with the population, while that available is diminishing: we are told in these pages that owing to the encroachment of the Sahara during the last three centuries some 390,000 square miles of good land have been lost, and that in Kenya the desert advances against the primæval forest at the rate of six miles a year.

The love and favour of men is not to be relied on. When the purse or fashion takes a hand they are easily reversed. That is why we wish this wilderness, in which men cannot make a living anyway, to remain a sanctuary where a few hundred thousand wild animals can live in complete independence. Our grandchildren, as well as those of the Africans, should see what Africa was like before we Europeans brought Christianity and slavery, human rights and machine-guns, medicine and motor-cars.

In the course of collecting data on the life of these animals in Serengeti, the authors acquired a mass of miscellaneous information which will come as a surprise to very many readers who are not too well versed in African lore. For example, we are told that the first foreigners to visit Tanganyika were probably the Chinese, who, with the monsoon to aid them, sailed to Africa from November to February, and back to Asia between April and September. Chinese coins minted 1200 years ago, and pottery of an even earlier date, have been found, while in about A.D. 1000 a Chinese author wrote a description of East Africa and its people; 400 years later a Chinese expedition took a giraffe home to their Emperor as a present.

Nothing—animal, vegetable, or mineral—escaped the notice of these two travellers, typical

as they were of all that is best in German scholarship and research. As they flew over Libya they noticed what they rightly describe as "the only good thing left by the war," namely, living grass where none was before. Apparently what happened was that the seeds of a grass from Australia were accidentally introduced in some horse-fodder, and in their new conditions they prospered to such an extent that the desert round El Alamein started to grow green; "a fertile carpet," up to 6 ft. in height, spread on either side along the coast as far as the Nile delta, and even began to move inland. On the other hand, if the flora has prospered with the passing of the years, the fauna has disappeared. Long ago mariners sailing along the coast of North Africa used to be able to see antelopes and even lions from the decks of their vessels, and as recently as 1922 there were black-maned Barbary lions in Morocco; all these are now things of the past.

Fashion, too, has a great deal to do with the disappearance of wild life as the ostrich has cause to know. He was relatively safe when the only demand for his feathers was to decorate the helmets of mediæval knights, but when fashionable ladies required them for their hats his outlook was black indeed. Almost too late he was for a time protected, but that protection has come to an end, and unfortunately for him it has now been discovered that his skin makes excellent wallets and handbags.

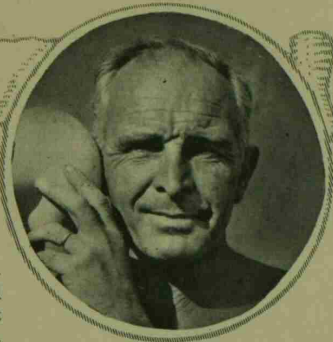
The extent to which wild life is perishing at the hands of man rendered the authors somewhat pessimistic for the future, more particularly when the countries in question pass under local control. Dr. Grzimek and his son were none too satisfied with the attitude of more than one European authority, but they are definitely fearful if power falls into native hands too quickly.

This is the reason why I am not sure whether the over-hasty conversion of coloured colonies into independent democratic States is good for the inhabitants. This may be the fashion to-day, and an easy road for colonial administrators, who may thus rid themselves of many annoyances, expenses and difficulties.

Then the Doctor continues:

Things are not improved by quickly founding a few universities which have more professors than pupils. What the coloured countries need are teachers and tens of thousands of elementary schools. After ten years these should be followed by thousands of secondary schools, and they in turn by high schools and universities. Should those who love and honour the coloured people like brothers lay down their appointed task in anger only because they are urged by the native politicians and their own countrymen at home? The right to vote and a voice in the affairs of the nation should not depend on the colour of the skin, but on literacy and learning. Under these conditions the law would be the same for black and white, and the African would take part in the government as soon or as late as he was capable of doing so.

Since these lines were written the progress of events in the Congo has thrown a fierce light on the problems they raise.



A JOINT-AUTHOR OF THE BOOK REVIEWED ON THIS PAGE: DR. BERNHARD GRZIMEK.

This book, however, is primarily concerned not with men but with animals, and the care and skill with which the authors have investigated this vast game reserve—it is nearly twice as large as Devonshire—is a most remarkable feat, quite apart from the information which they gained from their researches.

In the course of their narrative they do a certain amount of quiet debunking, particularly where snakes are concerned: apparently there is no truth whatever in the theory that it is useless to run away from a snake because it can move as fast as a car when it is really roused. We have all heard the story of the Government official who was driving through the brush when he saw a mamba on the track and tried to run over it: according to the legend the snake rose, pursued the car, jumped in through the window, and killed two of the occupants. Unfortunately for devotees of the sensational the curator of reptiles in the New York Zoo has gone very carefully into the speeds at which these snakes travel, and he has timed them with a stop-watch; the greatest speed at which a mamba will travel is about seven miles an hour for not more than forty-seven yards, and the mamba is generally supposed to be the fastest of snakes. So much for the Government official and his car. As to the quantity of these reptiles, Dr. Grzimek says that in all his wanderings he has only seen one mamba out of captivity.

What he has to say about relative speeds is further proof of his passion for accurate detail. He tells us that snakes do not strike like "lightning." The striking speed of a rattlesnake was timed, and found to be 8½ ft. per second. A cobra is six times as slow. By comparison a trout



AN ANIMAL WHICH IS ONLY THE SIZE OF A RABBIT BUT WHICH IS RELATED TO THE ELEPHANT: THE HYRAX, WHICH LIVES IN THE ISOLATED GRANITE HILLS OF THE PLAINS OF SERENGETI. IT IS THE CONEY OF THE BIBLE.

The illustrations from the book "Serengeti Shall Not Die" are reproduced by courtesy of the publishers, Hamish Hamilton Ltd.

swims at 7½ ft. a second, a bee flies at 9, and a dragon-fly at nearly 25; a good drive at golf can reach 43 ft. a second. There is a great deal of miscellaneous information of this nature.

In fine, although this book is nominally a plea for the continued existence of Serengeti and for more game-wardens to deal with poachers, it is also an encyclopædia of East Africa to-day.

\* "Serengeti Shall Not Die." By Bernhard and Michael Grzimek. Translated from the German by E. L. and D. Rewald. Illustrated in colour and black-and-white. With Maps. (Hamish Hamilton; 30s.)