

THE SPORTS CLUB.

Photographs by H. R. Gibbs, Kingsland Road, N.

Some years ago, in the latter half of the 'eighties, the late Sir John Astley conceived the idea of starting a club for which the qualification should be active interest in some branch of sport or pastime. Like many other happy thoughts, the scheme took long to incubate, and, when at last it came to life, received such slender support that there were times when the infant "Sports" alarmed its parents by symptoms of premature collapse. The first few years of its existence gave no promise of the future before it—clubs and men are very much alike in this respect—and not until it moved into the house it now occupies in St. James's Square did the tide of its prosperity begin to flow. When the tide did turn, it turned with extraordinary rapidity; in these days of "records" in all things, from bags of game to cycle performances, it is peculiarly fitting that the record in the annals of Clubland should have been achieved by the Sports, and its record is distinguished from others in that it is not likely to be beaten. On Feb. 1, 1893, the club took possession of its present quarters, with under five hundred names upon the members' roll; in twelve months from that date it counted upwards of two thousand six hundred members, and now, with three thousand seven hundred names on the books, is admitting new members at the rate of five in every two days. No other club in London can point to an advance at this rate. The reason lies on the surface: the recruiting-grounds of the Sports are the Universities and the Army; and the certainty of meeting friends of kindred taste and social standing is sufficient inducement to bring young men to the handsome club-house in

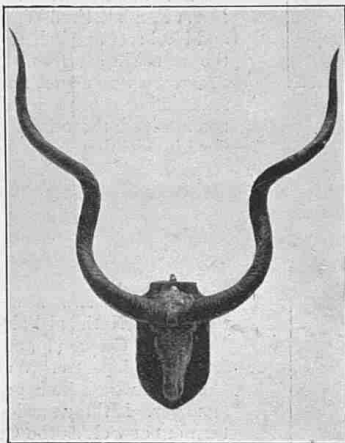
Evanger River, Norway, by Mr. Ernest Horn, stands in what is left of the alcove which once contained the altar. At a later period the house was leased by the Corinthian Club, which converted the chapel into a ball-room, the alcove offering a convenient place for the band. The Sports Club then occupied the house in York Street adjoining, and when the Corinthian closed their doors, absorbed the whole of the premises.

There are two trophies worth looking at outside the smoking-room door—a hippopotamus skull and the head of a Javan rhinoceros killed by Mr. Campbell last year. There are few examples of the Javan species of rhinoceros in this country, and the club is fortunate in owning so good a specimen. Do not, by the way, forget to look at the walrus skull which was presented by Mr. J. M. R. Francis; it deserves its place, overlooking the entrance hall, for its fine tusks. The head of a gaval (*gavialis gangeticus*), given by Captain Campbell, is also a notable trophy. The ugly monster to which this belonged was a representative of the oldest families of saurians now existing; the gavials have relations among the fossil reptiles of the Siwalik Hills, and are found on the mud-banks of the Ganges to-day. More attractive is the head of the Greater Koodoo at the foot of the stairs, opposite the dining-room door, one of Captain A. St. H. Gibbons' many gifts. This trophy is one of the finest specimens known; it measures 59½ in. round the outer spiral, while the longest known horn tapes 64 in. Higher up on the opposite wall is the head of a wapiti, killed by Captain Campbell; larger heads are recorded, but none excels this in massiveness of beam, "wildness," and symmetry. Facing this

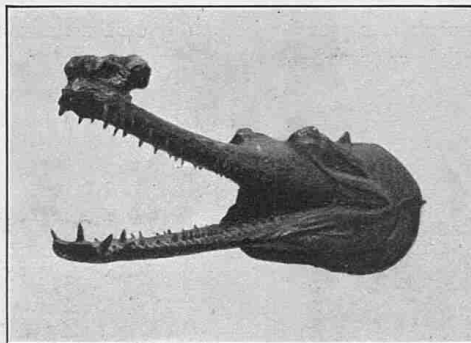


INYALA.

head are two moose trophies, conveniently hung for purposes of comparison. One belonged to a large low-ground moose, with enormous palmed antlers; the other is that of a Rocky Mountain moose, the smallness of whose antlers



KOODOO.



GAVIAL.



MÁRKHOR.

St. James's Square. Though a large proportion of the members are young men who have yet their spurs to win, the walls of the Club bear ample evidence that among its supporters are men who have made names as explorers and sportsmen. The Sports can boast a collection of big-game trophies as complete as that of any club in London or without. An institution of the club is the system of arranging dinners at which members devoted to each branch of sport or pastime may meet. The first "Big-Game Dinner" was held on Jan. 20, and the occasion suggests noticing a few of the many trophies which adorn the walls. It is impossible to even mention a twentieth part of these, and ere long the collection will be augmented by further gifts, whose number will cover the walls of the great smoking-room. That room, by the way, offers a curious example of the changes that befall a London house: at one time the front portion of the club-house was the Italian Embassy, and what is now the smoking-room was the private chapel! A big glass case containing a fifty-five pound salmon killed in the

lends colour to the opinion once held that this was a distinct species, and not merely a "local variation," as it is now acknowledged to be. Among the heads on the top landing you must remark the head of a markhor, shot by Mr. G. V. Davidson, R.A. It is a fine trophy, and much above the average size. Perhaps the specimen of which the Club has most reason to be proud is the lion lent recently by Captain Gibbons. It is the second largest, in point of height, ever shot, and measured 43 in. at the shoulder; his skin when pegged out taped 12 ft. 1½ in. from nose to tail-tip. Mr. Gerrard, the taxidermist, who mounted the skin, was photographed with his work in order to afford an idea of the size. Mr. Gerrard stands 5 ft. 11 in. Captain Gibbons shot this lion last August in the Mashikolumbé country, north of the Zambesi, a tract which had never before been visited by a European. In the thirteen days prior to his death the brute had killed two women, two oxen, two donkeys, a sheep, a lamb, and a goat; the feelings of the natives when they saw him lying dead can, therefore, be appreciated.



LION SHOT BY CAPTAIN GIBBONS.