

INTERVIEWS AT THE ZOO. THE RHINOCEROS.

NO matter how much respect or admiration you entertain for the Rhinoceros it is difficult to imagine he was ever intended for a boudoir pet. He is sturdy of structure and straightforward of intention, but he lacks grace; and, even in his most playful moods, there is something about him that fails to attract that companionship which often exists between man and other members of the animal kingdom. It may not be his fault, but the Rhinoceros possesses a bad eye. I do not mean that there is anything the matter with his sight. That is all right, though he can only see straight ahead, for which the rhinoceros hunter ought to be thankful. But there is an expression in his eye, particularly in captivity, tantamount to a warning to keep at arm's length and not indulge in familiarities. If a Rhinoceros does not feel well-disposed towards you at first he will never do so. Take the case of Moses, the oldest Rhinoceros at the Zoo. He has lived there for many years, but only under protest. He is on no better terms with his keeper now than he was during the first week of his visit. The keeper feeds him regularly and well, and Moses, if put on his oath, would be compelled to admit as much, but to this day the keeper enters the stall of Moses with the greatest circumspection and throws in his meals with an unusually long fork. Even then he always keeps both eyes on Moses, just as Moses does on him, and at the slightest indication of a rush the keeper disappears, and the slam of a heavy door informs the Rhinoceros that once more he has been foiled in an attempt to spread his benefactor all over the stall. Moses looks like a perambulating boiler-shop in need of repairs. He weighs more than a ton and looks as if he might weigh twice as much. His hide is voluminous enough to clothe himself and a family of two. It hangs in huge, loose folds about neck and body and appears as if made out of the armour-plate of old and condemned battleships. It seems impossible Moses could ever have had a complexion. Of course, a complexion rated

high in one part of the world may be a drug in the market in some other. In England a combination of rose and snowflake is considered hard to surpass. In Central Africa, on the other hand, a skin possessing the hue and gloss of anthracite coal is valued as one of the most precious of gifts Nature can bestow. It is beyond the ability of man to even imagine the trouble that would ensue if tastes did not differ. This brings us back by easy stages to the deficiency of Moses in the matter of complexion. It can hardly be said he has a colour, because in the course of a long, if sedentary, career he has had ground into his hide so many different materials that the original hue of his hide is as difficult to decipher as the hieroglyphics on an Egyptian obelisk whereof the key has been lost. In the dusk Moses

appears to be part of it. When the sunlight is making all nature smile and is, at the same time, making the street sweeper's occupation a ridiculous and obvious attempt at highway robbery, Moses looks like a blot. Not that he cares, and his demeanour makes this so plain to even the most casual that he seldom attracts even a small percentage of the sympathy to which he is really entitled. Moses has soured on the world. His every action shows this, even the way in which he waves his tail, the only thing about a Rhinoceros that does not seem in keeping with the rest of him. A good deal has been written about the Rhinoceros by men who contribute to encyclopedias and other light literature. These agree that he is an animal of large size and small intelligence. They also agree that he is timid in disposition, except when attacked and brought to bay. Now the more thought you devote to this scientific description the less thought it seems to deserve. Anybody who has ever seen an adult Rhinoceros knows he is of large size: for such a statement the scientist deserves no credit. The scientist says the Rhinoceros possesses little intelligence. How does he know? Has any scientist ever gained the affection of a Rhinoceros? Ordinary people know there are two methods of taming wild animals: one through affection, the other through fear. There is no record that a scientist ever gained the love of a Rhinoceros, even by underhand means, and nobody will for a moment believe that even the most pusillanimous Rhino looked on a scientist with feelings akin to terror. So you see the mere bald statement that a Rhino has little intelligence is founded upon nothing stable. It requires more than an ordinary imagination to conceive Moses as timid. I have looked at him by the hour and he is accustomed to me by sight, but if there had not been bars between us I would not have looked at him by the second except from a position that was impregnable. Moses and timidity are as foreign to each other as beer and ice-cream. Then again, of what value is the scientific assertion that the Rhinoceros is ferocious when attacked or brought to bay. The every-day rat is considered a synonym for cowardice, but he will fight when brought to bay, and the mildest mannered man will generally develop dangerous symptoms if attacked with a tithe of

the energy thrown into an assault upon a Rhinoceros who is attending to his own affairs and upon his own domain. To look at a Rhino in a captive state you would not think he could get up steam at short notice and be able to cover a mile in less than five minutes. More than one man has fallen into this error: it is an error made but once by the same man. The Rhinoceros who catches his assailant lifts him on the end of his horn and tosses him. Then before the unfortunate knows where he is the Rhinoceros walks on him, after which he is of no further use to anybody. If pursued on horseback a Rhinoceros can gallop, and for a quarter of a mile he holds his own, but never having been trained over hurdles or for long distance racing he is passed by a horse. He has one weak point. When the hunter passes him and pulls up, the Rhino, instead of pulling up also, sails past at full speed and thus presents a broadside into which the hunter pours all the lead his gun holds. All Rhinos do not act in this way. The prehensile-lipped variety always swerve and present a back view to the assailant. Both the Indian Rhinoceros, with the truncated upper lip, and the square-mouthed or so-called white Rhinoceros, hold their heads low when they charge. The hearing and smelling ability of the Rhinoceros are very acute. He is always accompanied by several Rhinoceros birds. These run about the spot where it is lying or browsing, and when they see any signs of danger they flap their wings. The moment the Rhino hears the flapping he rises to his feet and begins to work his nostrils, and the instant he scents a foe off he goes at a swift trot, for in spite of his size and strength he is not always spoiling for a fight. Though appearances do not so indicate, the Rhino is a cleanly animal. He is fond of bathing. When he cannot find water, he wallows in mud, not because it is mud, but on account of the moisture invariably to be found in mud. All authorities agree that a Rhinoceros has never been domesticated, but they do not say that for this, man and not the Rhino, is to blame. The Rhinoceros existed in both the Old World and New, before the Miocene Period, which was somewhat in advance of the beginning of the present reign. In America the Rhino became extinct before the end of the Pliocene period. I tried to induce Moses one day to tell me why, but he refused. The Rhinoceros was found at one time in Europe. Whenever a specimen made his appearance in the vicinity of a city not walled, the inhabitants were accustomed to take to the hills, and to remain there until he trotted off into the next county. When the people began to use his hide for shields, he took a dislike to Europe, swam the straits at Gibraltar, and settled in Africa. He is now to be found, in an untrammelled condition, only in Africa, and portions of Indian and Indo-Malayan regions. The two-horned variety is found in India, and is also to be met with at the Zoo. The horns grow one in front of the other. Sometimes the front horn is longer, and sometimes it isn't. For many



MOSES IN HIS DEN

hundreds of years the Rhinoceros was not known by sight to Europeans save only those who travelled in Asia or Africa. Of course, like every other animal worth looking at, he figured in Roman shows, but when the Romans began going down hill he was forgotten. At the beginning of the sixteenth century one was sent to the King of Portugal as a peace-offering. His Majesty, not knowing what else to do with him, had him excavated and made into a safe deposit vault. In Africa the two-horned is the smaller of the two well marked species found there. He ranges from Abyssinia to Cape Colony when the roads are fit for travelling. The square-mouthed, or white Rhinoceros, is the largest of the group. He has a truncated upper lip, which he uses with dexterity. He is found only in Africa, south of the Zambesi, and grows scarce. It is said that no specimen of the square-mouthed variety has ever been brought alive to Europe, at least, not since the Romans laid claim to most of the continent. He is huge, ungainly, and has a head that looks disproportionately large. A large male stands six feet six inches at the shoulders. The Rhinoceros browses upon grass and tree-shoots. He prefers open country. It is his custom to take a siesta in the heat of the day, and to feed during the cool hours of night or morning. From March to August he is fat, and, if there is nothing better to be had, his meat is deemed excellent. It tastes like beef, if you haven't had beef for a long time. The best part for eating purposes is the hump. A Rhinoceros always has a hump, and he always looks as if he had the hump also. The horns of the Rhino as he appears in captivity are short, generally not more than a foot long, but it is known that they sometimes grow to a length of almost six feet. Mr. Rowland Ward had, not long ago, a horn that measured 56½ inches long. To be lifted on a horn of this length is a sensation altogether different from a lift on a horn only twelve inches long, and blunt at the point. A Rhinoceros in chewing moves his under jaw from left to right. He does this whether he is left or right-handed. A Rhinoceros has a sense of humour, but it never comes to the surface, save in the bosom of his family, which is another proof that there is always some cause for thankfulness.

THE OUTLAW.