

BESIEGED BY A RHINOCEROS.

(A South-African Yarn.)

BY DAVID KER.

"BAAS, baas! spoor groed one-horn skellum!" Such was the, to me, rather unintelligible announcement with which my friend M——'s bush-boy came rushing in just about sunrise one morning, as we were sitting over our breakfast at the door of the house,—one of those regular old Dutch-built farm-houses, that one hardly ever sees nowadays, except in South Africa. But he meant by it was, "Boss, boss! the trail of a big rhinoceros rascal!"

"Where?" cried M——, jumping up; for he was a keen sportsman, and never lost an opportunity of "potting" something.

"Out by Hollow Spring, baas;—spoor good!"

"There's a chance for you, my boy," said M——, turning to me. "Now you'll be able to see how these elephant-guns of mine do their work; I think you'll find them the right sort."

"Let me try the job by myself," cried I, eagerly; for, like all "greenhorns," I was frantic to do some unheard-of feat, and win my laurels at once. "I've never shot a rhinoceros yet, you know."

"Can't, really, my dear boy," said M——, in the most exasperatingly indulgent tone; "when you're a little better used to the African bush, you can do what you like; but if I were to let you go alone now, the least I could expect would be a life-

long remorse for having connived at a suicide. No, we'll make a party of three to visit our friend, and he'll hardly give the slip to us all, I fancy."

Accordingly, we started out that very night, Swart, the bush-boy, making the third of our party; but I suppose the rhinoceros was too modest to face so many visitors at once, for although we kept watch till sunrise, there was no sign of him. The next night it was just the same; and at last I got so mad at the idea of losing my chance,—the first I had ever had with the big game,—that, in spite of what M—— had said, I made up my mind to try my luck single-handed.

I should have told you that the Hollow Spring frequented by my four-footed friend, lay about eight miles from the house, in a deep gully, one side of which went up into a steep hog-backed ridge, topped by a big knuckle of rock that overlooked the spring at a range of fifty yards—as pretty a "stand" as any sportsman could wish. So, when night came, I stole out of the house with one of M——'s vaunted "elephant-guns,"—a piece carrying a five-ounce "explosive ball," steel-tipped, and holding enough fulminating powder to blow out the spine of a megatherium. To guard against the recoil of such a charge, the stock was fitted with a thick pad; so, with gun and ammunition

together, I had quite enough to carry for an eight-mile tramp through the bush.

I dare say there are ugly thickets in South America and Central Asia; but Africa beats them both. Imagine a forest of fish-hooks, relieved by an occasional patch of penknives, and you have it exactly. There 's one horrid spiky thing, called by the Dutch "Wache-em-betje," which the English have corrupted into "wait-a-bit," and it

The full moon was just rising over the trees (a glorious sight, I can tell you), when I heard a distant trampling, like the tread of an elephant, only quicker; for a full-grown rhinoceros, clumsy as he looks, can be active enough at times, as you'd soon find if you stood a charge from him when his temper 's up. So I had not long to wait before there came a thick snort, and the great brown barrel of a body loomed out in the streak of



AN ADVENTURE AT LAST.

does make you wait a bit, if it once gets hold of you. I 've known a fellow be laid up for a fortnight with a gash from one. So you may think that with masses of this nice stuff all around me, I had to pick my way gingerly enough.

When I got to the place, lo! and behold, the pad of my gun had fallen off! To go back and look for it would have been like hunting for a needle in a hay-stack; so I filled my handkerchief with wild grass, and tucked it in under the shoulder of my jacket as a substitute, and then I took my post behind the rock, and waited.

moonlight, just over the spring. I hardly stopped to take aim, before I pulled trigger.

The next few seconds were a blank; and then I awoke to the consciousness that my shoulder was aching as if it were broken, and that something was grunting savagely a few yards off; and then I saw the huge snout and great white tusks coming right at me! I don't think any acrobat could have been quicker than I was in clutching a projecting bough, and swinging up into the tree overhead; and I 'd hardly got there when the brute came bang against the trunk, almost shak-

ing me off again. For a minute or two, my heart was in my mouth, for he thumped against the tree till I really thought he would have it down; and when he found he could n't, he stamped the earth in a fury, and tore it up with his horn in a horribly suggestive way that made my flesh creep.

Here I was, then, in the crisis of a regular "adventure," such as I had always longed for; but somehow, now that I was in it, it did n't seem so very delightful. It's one thing to read of adventures in an easy-chair after dinner, and another to act them for yourself all night on a hard bough, with thousands of mosquitos pitching into you, and a mad rhinoceros galloping about underneath.

The likeness between my situation and some of those recorded by Captain Mayne Reid set me overhauling my recollections of that veracious author, in the hope of an idea; but the more I thought, the more the Captain failed me. Basil, when followed up a tree by a bear, got his brothers to throw him up a rope, and slid down; but I had no brothers, and no rope. Ben Brace, when "treed" by the lion, lassoed his dropped musket, and slew the king of beasts therewith; but I had no lasso, and could n't have used it if I had. Somebody else, blockaded by a "grizzly," waited

till Bruin fell asleep, and then slipped away; but my rhinoceros seemed distressingly wide-awake, and even if he had dozed, the experiment would not have commended itself to my fancy. In short, the most masterly stratagem I could devise was to stay still where I was, and I did so.

That night was the longest I ever spent, and no mistake. Toward morning, Master Rhino frequently took a brief leave of absence into the bush, as if to tempt me down; but I heard him trampling in the distance, and was n't to be caught. Day was just dawning, and I was beginning to wonder how much longer I could stand the thirst that was parching me up, when suddenly I heard a shot among the bushes, so close that it made me start. Then the boughs parted, and I saw M——'s jolly face looking up at me, with a grin from ear to ear.

"Fairly treed, eh, my boy? Well, I've raised the siege for you, and yonder lies the enemy. Your bullet's run down his side, under the skin, without exploding; so I suppose you must have hit him slantwise. Better luck next time. Anyhow, I'm glad to find you alive; but I fancy you won't go out alone again in a hurry!"

And, to tell the truth, I did n't, for a pretty long while after that day.