

A RHINOCEROS HUNT.

BY NIMROD.

Two English officers, respectively named Pembroke and Stephens, had ventured from Cape Town far into the interior of that wild, almost unpeopled country, where the huge beasts of the wilderness might with propriety be called the lords of the domain. Here, sometimes alone by themselves, and sometimes accompanied by a few of the natives, they had several weeks' sport, killing something of almost every genus, and of the different species of the antelope, in great abundance.

One morning, as was sometimes their custom, they mounted their horses, and set off alone on the trail of a male giraffe, which they had wounded the night before at a fountain near the camp, where the animal, with many others, had come to slake his thirst during the hours of darkness. The trail being marked by blood, they were enabled to follow it easily, and did so for a considerable distance. It led them into a thick, dark wood, which they had penetrated for something like a mile, when they were somewhat startled by hearing a strange kind of snorting, and a blowing sound, accompanied with a loud rustling and crushing of bushes ahead of them. Simultaneously drawing up their horses, they listened for a few moments to these peculiar sounds, looking inquiringly at each other.

"What is it, Stephens?" asked Pembroke, in a low, guarded tone.

"I cannot imagine," returned the other, "unless it is an elephant. I have never heard anything exactly like it before; but from what I have read and been told, I should not be greatly surprised to find it one of those monstrous beasts."

"Perhaps it is our dying giraffe?" suggested Pembroke.

"It may be, and I hope it is, for I am really anxious to secure one of those long-necked fellows. But we waste time here," he pursued, looking at the caps of his double-barreled hunting-piece. "Let us ride cautiously forward, and be prepared for the worst."

The two hunters accordingly advanced at a slow gait in the direction of the noise, which continued as they had first heard it, but grew more audible every moment. Soon they reached a large thicket of wait-a-bit thorns, which stretched away to the right and left, and was as impassable as a hedge, and from beyond which came the blowing, snorting, and thrashing sounds, louder than ever.

"It is certainly some large beast," whispered Pembroke; "perhaps two of them, engaged in a fierce encounter; but they are evidently not carnivorous, or we should hear their furious growls."

Once more carefully looking to their weapons, the gentlemen rode carefully round the thicket till they came to an opening like an avenue, through which they could see what was taking place; and there, to their great surprise, they beheld a large, black, one-horned rhinoceros, furiously engaged in charging upon a clump of bushes which he seemed determined to destroy, and a considerable portion of which he had already broken down, uprooted, and trampled under his heavy feet.

This being the first of the species that either of the hunters had ever seen, and not knowing that it was the habit of the beast so to conduct himself at certain periods during a wild, mad freak, they were greatly astonished and knew not what to think of it. At first they were disposed to believe that there must be some small animal or snake in the bushes, which had aroused the fury of the monster; but after watching him some time, they became satisfied that he was merely venting his rage upon inanimate objects; and then came the important question as to what they then themselves had better do under the circumstances. It was clearly evident that the furious animal was not aware of their proximity, and they might easily steal away as they had come, unobserved; but this, in the eyes of hunters, looked like cowardice, and both felt a natural ambition to add the monster to their stock of specimens, or at least secure his horn as a trophy of their prowess.

"Shall we fire upon him?" whispered Pembroke, with a nervous working of his fingers about the lock of his rifle.

"If we do," replied the other, "I fear our leaden bullets will not penetrate his thick hide, and then most likely he will make a rush for us."

"But our horses are fleet and in good condition, and we came into this wilderness to take our chances," said his companion.

"True," replied Stephens, "and I am as anxious to kill the beast as you are. At all events, suppose we make the trial. Do you fire first, then, aiming for his fore-shoulder, and if you can succeed in crippling him, I think the rest may be safely managed."

Nothing but his intense occupation with his harmless but furious work of destroying the clump of bushes before him, and the loud blowing, snorting, tramping, and thrashing noise he himself made, had thus far kept the dangerous animal from detecting the presence of his enemies; for the horses of the hunters, unaccustomed to such a sight, had all the time been very restless, champing their bits, snorting, rearing, and dancing; so that now, when Pembroke had resolved to fire, he found it impossible for some minutes to get anything like a correct aim.

But at length there chanced a favorable moment, with one side of the huge beast towards him, and he fired both barrels of his rifle in quick succession. The balls evidently hit the point aimed at; but for any good they did, they might as well have been flattened against a stone wall. The rhinoceros sprang aside as if rather startled than hurt, wheeled face to his foes, and, catching a sight of them, made a sudden and furious rush forward, with elevated head, and a noise something between a grunt and a bellow.

Not troubling himself to take the open avenue through the thicket, he crashed madly through the hedge-like thorn-bushes, trampling them down as if they were so many weeds. Without waiting for him to reach them, both hunters put spurs to their horses, and when the savage beast appeared on the near side of the bushy barrier, they were at least a hundred yards distant, and riding for their lives among the tall trees of the forest.

On seeing the hunters flying so fast before him, the huge animal suddenly came to a halt with a loud, blowing sound, and seemed undecided whether to pursue them or beat a retreat. At this the hunters also checked their flight, and

Stephens, riding out from his companion, who now began to reload with all haste, fired both barrels at the head of the beast. More by good luck than skill, one of the balls struck him in the left eye in a way to destroy the vision without mortally wounding him; and the other went through his flexible upper lip, drawing blood, and the two enraging him to perfect madness.

With a snort of fury, the animal now made a desperate charge for his last assailant, and pursued him for half a mile with such headlong velocity, that at the end of that space not more than twenty yards divided them, although Stephens had made his fleet horse do his utmost, and torn his clothes in ribbons, and lacerated his face and arms in contact with branches, bushes, and brambles. Seeing there was little chance of his escape in a dead race, he now bethought him of doubling upon his pursuer, and fortunately chose his blind side, and soon had the satisfaction of finding himself beside him. Pembroke now rode up, and, while the rhinoceros was beating about in a fury, managed to get within twenty yards, and give him two shots in his left shoulder, one of which fortunately took effect. The enraged animal wheeled and made a limping charge at his foe, who now easily avoided him, when, seeming suddenly to think he was not going to have the best of the fight, he turned and made off as fast as he could.

This was the turning-point in favor of the hunters, who, with shouts of joy, pursued him for more than a mile, each alternately giving him the contents of his rifle as fast as he could load and fire.

At length the beast came to bay, weak and bleeding, in a small thicket, and, springing from his horse, and taking a position directly in front of him, Stephens fired both barrels at his head. The beast now made another charge, and the daring hunter, attempting to fly, slipped, and went down right before him. Before he could regain his feet, the huge animal had passed almost over him without seeing him, one of his feet just grazing his head.

A few more shots then settled the business, and the hunters finally returned to camp, bearing in triumph the hard, polished horn of the brute, and thanking heaven they were alive to tell the story of their perilous adventure.