



THE AFRICAN ELEPHANT.

THE OKAVANGO RIVER :
A NARRATIVE
OF
TRAVEL, EXPLORATION, AND ADVENTURE.

BY
CHARLES JOHN ANDERSSON,
AUTHOR OF
“LAKE NGAMI.”

WITH NUMEROUS ILLUSTRATIONS.

LONDON :
HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,
SUCCESSORS TO HENRY COLBURN,
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

1861.

The right of Translation is reserved.

cent imaginary lake, which, on our visit to it in 1850, turned out to be but a large dried-up vley. The Damaras destined for Ovambo Land proposed taking this place *en route*; and, having previously ascertained that the Omuramba was impracticable for travelling beyond a certain point, I determined, as I had just then plenty of leisure time, to accompany them. I left the waggon and the greater portion of my people at a place called Othumbu Yakausha, and on the morning of the 16th of September arrived at Omanbondè, or Saresab, as it is called in the Hottentot language.

CHAPTER IX.

A Retrospect.—Omanbondè a Sheet of Water.—Rhinoceroses, Hippopotami, and other large Game in Abundance.—A beautiful Landscape.—Elephants numerous.—Fatigues and Dangers of Elephant-hunting.—Hints to Elephant Hunters.—Extreme Thirst.—Extreme Exhaustion.—A Man killed by a Rhinoceros.—A Creeping Stalk of a Rhinoceros.—Attack of a Rhinoceros.—An adventurous Chase.—Discovery of the Man killed.—Accidental Death.—Damaras Grave, and Rites of Sepulture.—The Feast after the Funeral.—Lions attack a crippled Rhinoceros.

IT was now close upon eight years and a half since I first visited Omanbondè. Eight years and a half! the fifth part of man's life in its full vigour. What was I at the beginning of this period, and what am I now? Where are the once ruddy cheeks? Where is that elasticity of foot and spirit that once made me laugh at hardships and dangers? Where that giant health and strength that enabled me to vie with the natives in enduring the extremes of heat and cold, of hunger, thirst, and fatigue? Gone, gone, —ay, for ever! The spirit still exists unsubdued, but what with constant care, anxiety, and exposure, the power of performance has fled, leaving but the shadow of my former self. What have I accomplished during these long years? What

is the result of all this toil, this incessant wear and tear of body and mind? The answer, if candid, must be apparently very little. This is a sad retrospect of the fifth part of a man's life, whilst still in the pride of manhood. And yet I feel that I have not been idle, that I have done as much as any man under similar circumstances could have done; and so with this poor consolation I must rest content.

On my first visit to this place, in company with Mr. Galton, Omanbondè was, as I have already mentioned, nothing more than a large dried-up vley; and this being again a year of severe drought,—at least to judge from the state of the Omuramba,—I had expected to see it in a similar condition. Most agreeably was I then surprised to find a sheet of water four and a half miles in extent, abounding with water-fowl, and largely resorted to by a great variety of game and wild animals, such as elephants, rhinoceroses, elands, koodoos, gemsbucks, zebras, pallahs, lions, &c. There were no hippopotami, however, though plenty of "sea-room" for a dozen or two. Besides this vley, I discovered another in the immediate neighbourhood, almost rivalling Omanbondè in size; several bushmen villages besprinkled its borders or banks, which were very high, but sloping, not steep, and richly covered with a luxuriant vegetation, consisting chiefly of very fine groves of acacias, and the giraffe thorn-tree, just bursting forth into spring life. In the back-

ground, and to the northward, were the broken and picturesque limestone ranges of Otjirokaku, Otjomokojo, &c. Altogether the scene, very pleasing, was rendered perhaps more so by the contrast it afforded to the dry and parched state of the country immediately surrounding it. To me it was a real oasis in the desert; and I at once determined to send for my waggon, and settle down quietly until Pereira's return from Otjimbingué.

Elephants being rather numerous in this locality, I lost no time in beginning operations against them. I took advantage of the moonlight to watch for them at night, and followed on their spoor in the daytime. At first I was unfortunate, but at last met with considerable success. Some of my prizes proved splendid specimens of the giant race, with tusks that a Gordon Cumming would have beheld with rapture. I had several very interesting, and sometimes dangerous encounters with my huge game, but having already, and so lately, given a series of adventures with these animals, I will not at present enter into details, but merely confine myself to a few general remarks.

Elephant-hunting on foot and in the hot season is most laborious and harassing work. Indeed, a long experience of this pursuit has brought me to the conviction, that under such circumstances it is far more trying and distressing to the constitution than the most severe manual labour. It was

rarely or never that I could track, stalk, and kill my elephant, and return to camp in less than ten hours ; more frequently it occupied twelve, fourteen, or sixteen — nay, I have been as much as two days and a night on one hunt. My attendants (native) were at times so completely done up—and I generally nearly as much so—that on their return home they would fall asleep where they stood, alike indifferent to hunger, to the chilling night air, or to the scorching sun, as the case might be. I found it at last necessary to divide on these occasions my men into two parties, each party taking its regular turn of duty. It was not hunger or fatigue, however, that was so trying, as the heat. The sun “blazing in a sky of brass,” heating the atmosphere to a state of suffocation, and the loose sandy soil to a blistering intensity, made “Water ! water !” the incessant cry ; but water—frequently half boiling— even when we could carry a decent supply, did rarely allay our burning thirst. Indeed, every fresh draught seemed sometimes merely to augment our ardent craving for more, which often almost bordered on madness. A giddiness, a languor, a sense of oppression throughout the whole system, a choking sensation in the throat, difficulty of speech, a fearful palpitation of the heart, and a night-mare feeling about the chest, were the frequent consequences of our excessive fatigues. For my own part, when once fairly done up, nothing could restore me to myself but quiet, a plentiful supply of cool water, and, above all, a good

wash. I remember, on one particular occasion, when after a long running chase I had come up within 150 yards of an elephant I had seriously wounded, being so thoroughly exhausted as to be actually unable to advance a few paces to give him the necessary *coup de grace*. I was obliged to rest a few minutes, and before I could recover myself the brute had moved off, and was lost to me for ever. Words, indeed, can convey no adequate idea of the hardships and sufferings of the elephant hunter on foot, at the dry time of the year, in regions where water is scarce. Experience alone can enable one fully to understand the severity of the sport in which he takes so much delight.

There were also a good many rhinoceroses at Omanbondè, but it was difficult so to guard so large a sheet of water as to obtain a shot at them when they came to drink at night. I managed, however, to knock over a few ; and knowing the general predilection of readers for adventures ending in a tragical result, I give them the following story, or rather narrative of an event witnessed by myself, which will show the great ferocity of these animals, and the dangers attendant on attacking them without extreme precaution.

On the night of the 19th of September, favoured by a beautiful moon, I had taken up my position alone, as usual, in a shallow nullah, or natural ditch, whence I could command an extensive view. At about eleven o'clock a herd of elephants approached, and just as the leader was about to cross the

nullah where I was stationed, I fired. The bullet struck the beast in the forepart of the shoulder, and I thought I had certainly killed him, when, with a loud shriek, he wheeled abruptly about, and dashing furiously into a neighbouring cover effected his escape.

All was now again silent ; and after waiting patiently a long time in the hope of some other game, and getting tired at last of the useless watch, I made for my camp. I had not, however, proceeded many steps before I perceived, to my delight, two black rhinoceroses sauntering leisurely along at the furthest westerly extremity of the marsh. At once dropping my spare gun and my blanket, I threw myself flat on the ground, and began creeping towards my unexpected quarry. The locality, unfortunately, did not afford me the slightest cover—not even a tuft of grass—and the "stalk" consequently became one of difficulty and danger. I had proceeded perhaps about twenty paces when, to my annoyance and dismay, I saw the rhinoceroses turn abruptly away from the water, and make straight for my person. On making the discovery I am free to confess that my first impulse was to run away; but, on second thoughts, I resolved to abide their approach. Having advanced to within about sixty yards of me they abruptly halted, eyeing suspiciously the black mass before them. Their survey evidently gave them but little satisfaction; for uttering a snort, and tossing their unwieldy heads on high, they retreated a step or

two backwards, as if preparing for a charge. Seeing this, I determined to be beforehand with my antagonists; and, notwithstanding their unfavourable position, I knelt down, levelled full at the breast of the foremost, and pulled the trigger. The bullet took effect. On receiving the shot the brute swerved somewhat to the right, and then dashed wildly forward, followed by his companion. I at once felt convinced that one of them was seriously, if not mortally, wounded, and having reloaded I followed quickly in the direction indicated by their noisy progress. After a few minutes' walk I came up with both ; they were standing quite still, evidently listening. But on my attempting to creep up to them, the one in the rear made a furious charge towards me, and I was heartily glad to save myself by a precipitate flight. I had nevertheless ascertained, beyond doubt, that the wounded beast was a complete cripple, and anticipated no difficulty in finishing him on the following morning.

Accordingly, as soon as it was light enough to continue the search with something like safety, I started in pursuit of my game, accompanied by the very best of my Damara attendants (Kozengo), and the lad Chookoroo, to carry a spare rifle. A short walk brought us to the spot where I had left the rhinoceroses on the preceding night. Pools of blood marked the progress of the one whose right fore-leg was evidently smashed. Knowing the great ferocity of the black rhinoceros

when wounded, I repeatedly warned my attendants to be on their guard. I had done so for the last time, and we had just emerged from some low brushwood, purposing to enter a small thorn brake, when, lo! the monster lying on his side, to all appearances quite dead. On making this discovery, Kozengo turned smilingly to me, and ejaculated "Jacocca"—dead. "Well," I rejoined, "but take care, for there was another rhinoceros in company with him last night."

I had taken a step or two forward, and was in some measure hidden from the animal by a small tree, when suddenly I observed my attendants wheel about and retreat precipitately. Not seeing the cause of their sudden flight (though of course suspecting it) I stood my ground, when all at once I caught sight of the brute protruding his ugly head within a few paces of my person. As he was coming right at me, I deemed it, under the circumstances, imprudent to fire, and quickly took to my heels. He followed at his best pace, which was really very rapid, considering his crippled condition. In my hurried flight my wide-a-wake blew off my head, and fell right in the path of the pursuing beast, who pulled up abruptly at the sight of it. Swift as thought I turned on my heels and fired, but fairly, I believe, missed, for the monster at once dashed forward again, snorting violently. After running for a short distance he again halted, but kept looking about him in a very restless manner. I then crept cautiously up to within

about 100 yards of him, and just as for a moment he exposed his broadside full towards me, I fired. He dropped dead to the shot.

Having ascertained that his life was quite extinct, I hallooed for my runaway men, but receiving no answer, concluded they had returned to camp. Quieted by this thought, I was gazing at the prostrate animal, when all at once my attention was drawn to a confused noise hard by, as of a number of human beings discussing some exciting event; and in a few moments I saw several natives, headed by Chookoroo and "Paadmaker,"—the last of whom I had sent on the spoor of the wounded elephant—emerge from the bushes. The lad was crying bitterly, whilst Paadmaker had his hands tightly clasped to his sides, just like a man seized with sudden pain. My first impression was that the man had been hurt by the elephant; but, alas! his grief arose from a far more serious cause. A dreadful suspicion then took possession of me, and I hastily exclaimed, "Where's Kozengo?" "Dead, sir!" was the solemn and startling reply. "Dead?" I repeated, "impossible! how? why, the rhinoceros has never been out of my sight. Besides," addressing myself, "I have heard no scream, no groan, nor any other cry of distress." "Oh, yes!" sobbed poor Chookoroo, "Kozengo is dead; he is killed by the rhinoceros." "Show me the man and the spot," I said, as I mechanically turned to follow the men. We had not far to go. Within

a stone's throw I found the unfortunate man lying under a bush, stiff and motionless! His forehead was split in two, apparently by a single thrust of the horn of the infuriated animal, and part of the dislocated brains was mingling with the dust. His face, which was slightly turned upwards, wore the same calm, placid, though somewhat heavy expression as in life. For a moment or so I could scarcely realise the terrible event, and involuntarily addressing the corpse I muttered,—“Are you really dead, Kozengo? Why did you not run farther off; you had plenty of time to save yourself?”

“So as I gazed on him, I thought, or said—
‘Can this be death? then what is life or death?
Speak!’ but he spoke not: ‘Wake!’ but still he slept!”

We found this poor fellow, as I have said, lying under a bush with his head close upon the ground. Had he throughout kept this position—and probably he did so—it seems impossible that the rhinoceros should have seen or smelt him, especially as the wind was in the man's favour. It is my belief, therefore, that the beast was accidentally passing the spot, and finding his victim in his path, had accidentally as it were destroyed him. The animal, from the moment I fired at him the first time until his death from the second shot, had never stopped running. The accuracy with which he had hit upon the unfortunate man was consequently the more remarkable. If the man had wilfully placed

himself before him, and said—“Now try to do your best to hit me here in the head,” he could not have succeeded better. There was one poor consolation in Kozengo's untimely end, viz., he had died instantaneously. He had not had time even to utter a cry; and the agony of death was over the instant it was felt.

I stayed to see the poor man interred. A hole for this purpose was scooped in the ground between four and five feet deep, about as long, and two feet wide. Under this again, and on one side, a smaller hole was hollowed out, just sufficiently large to admit of the corpse in a reclining position. This was the grave, and was carefully lined with fine soft grass. The body was then doubled up, the head being forced between the legs, and there secured by means of part of the enormous coil of bandages which encircled the man's waist, in the usual Damara fashion. His face, and as much of the body as was practicable, was afterwards covered over with a sheep-skin, forming part of the dress of the wife of the deceased man. Thus “shrouded,” his remains were deposited in the grave, which was bedecked in the same way as its cavity had been lined. Sand was then shovelled over the whole, and every particle of the soil removed in digging the sepulchre was scrupulously replaced, or rather heaped up in a mound over it. Even the sticks, pieces of bark, &c., made use of in the operation were left on the spot. And, lastly, a quantity of thorn bushes were

stuck in a circle round the tomb, in order to prevent wild animals from disinterring the corpse. The ceremony being concluded, a particular kind of root was dug up, and being divided into small pieces, each of the chief bystanders tasted it—a charm, I presumed, against death or injury from the departed.

A singular and affecting incident occurred just as the last shovelful of earth was thrown upon the grave. A small dog belonging to the deceased made at this moment his appearance; he smelt first all round the mound beneath which rested the remains of his late master, then, wagging his tail, looked wistfully up into my face with an expression which said—"What have you done with him?"

Kozengo's wife, who had been informed of her sad bereavement, attended the funeral, and exhibited the most heart-rending sorrow,—at least, outwardly. The wailing was of a most melancholy description—a sort of chaunting, with a peculiar (almost hysterical) ejaculation after each intonation. Poor woman! I heartily sympathised with her, and I am sure I was the only person present of all the numerous assembly (by this time all the Damaras had reached the spot) who at all felt for her lonely condition. Many a laugh was heard, but no one looked sad. No one asked, or cared about the man; but each and all made anxious inquiries after the rhinoceros;—such is the life of barbarians! Oh, ye sentimentalists of the



DISAPPOINTED LIONS.

Rousseau school — for some such still remain — witness what I have witnessed, and do witness daily, and you will soon cease to envy and praise the life of savages !

I have omitted to notice a rather remarkable circumstance connected with this rhinoceros hunt. Whilst following up the trail of the animal we came to a spot where one or two lions, probably taking advantage of his crippled condition, had evidently attacked him, and after a desperate scuffle had been compelled to beat a precipitate retreat — perhaps, chiefly through the assistance of his companion, who had evidently only left him when he could walk no further. This is the sole instance I know of lions daring to attack rhinoceroses ; though I have seen it stated in print that not only will they assail but can master the horned monster.

we came up with him in a dense brake; but the Damaras kept up such a riotous noise that the few dogs left with us—the greater portion having returned home—were insufficient to bring him to bay, so he managed to escape. Once, indeed, we caught sight of him as he was crossing a small opening, but here, the bushes becoming thicker than ever, we left him. The chase was a short one, but exceedingly exciting. Had I been alone, *i. e.* with merely my own people about me, it is very likely I should have succeeded in despatching this brute too—apparently a she-lion of huge stature.

That day I dined on beefsteak *au lion*, and hump *de rhinocéros*, done under the ashes. On sitting down to this singular meal, I could not help remarking—partly addressing the cook and partly myself,—“I wonder what Her Majesty the Queen of England would say to such fare?” “Oh, what a beast the man must be!” I had never before partaken of lion’s flesh, but found it very palatable and juicy, not unlike veal, and very white. Rhinoceros hump was also a frequent and favourite dish of mine.

The Ovambo caravan alluded to in the preceding pages, were still sojourning in my neighbourhood. At first they behaved themselves with due decorum; but, on a closer acquaintance, proved a perfect nuisance, more especially when feeding (not dining) time came. Very often on killing game I had to fight for morsels of it; nay,

I was at times necessitated to threaten my black friends with the gun before I could obtain needful food. The scenes that sometimes presented themselves on these occasions were truly disgusting. To say nothing of the screams, vociferations, curses, &c., which were deafening, assegai stabs and knobkurrie blows were administered indiscriminately and remorselessly,—all for the sake of a lump of meat. Just endeavour, reader, to imagine from one to two hundred starving and ferocious dogs laying hold of a carcass, each tearing it away in his own particular direction, at the same time biting and snarling incessantly at his neighbour, and you will have a faint notion of the beastly scrambles I allude to. I have seen human blood flow as freely at these feeds as had that of the animal we were devouring. The sacred ties of kindred and friendship were totally lost sight of in the all-absorbing anticipation of a gorge. All the revolting qualities of man in a barbarous condition were brought on these occasions out into startling relief. Human nature seemed lower than that of the brute creation, whilst at the same time almost diabolical.

In order finally to accomplish the object of the expedition, it had been my intention to follow up the Omuramba Ua' Matako as far as Otjtu, thence across to the Omuramba Ua' Ovambo, by which means I trusted to reach the Cunené. But on looking at the map one day, it became evident to me that the more direct route would be to go