



FIGHT BETWEEN AN ELEPHANT AND A TIGER

# POPULAR NATURAL HISTORY

FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

BY

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WITH EIGHTY-SIX ENGRAVINGS

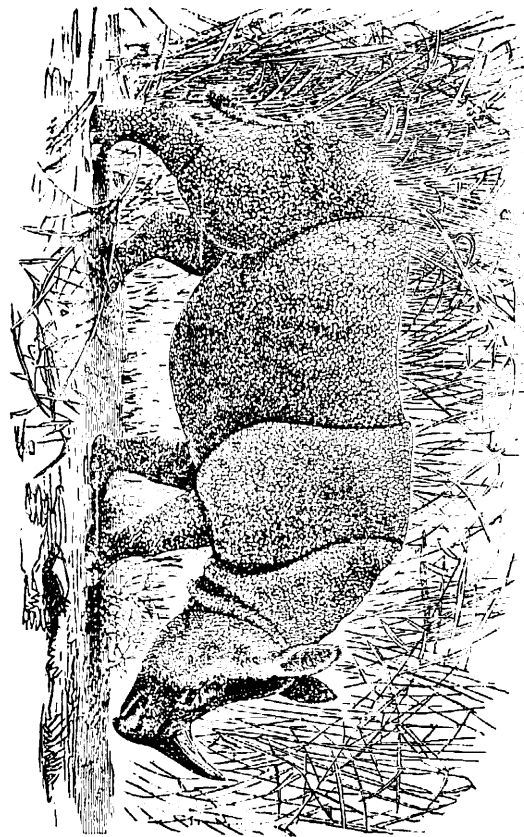
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56 PATERNOSTER ROW AND 65 ST PAUL'S CHURCHYARD

1899

ass, the Asiatic one, *E. hemionus*, with short ears, and the African one, *E. asinus*, with long ears, both of them very handsome animals, and far better-looking than 'the wild fiery mustang of the prairies,' or 'the noble tarpan of the Asian wilds.' The ordinary donkey is a domesticated African ass, and the occasional stripes on its legs are ancestral, just as are the occasional stripes on the horse. All these animals, it may be as well to note, are very short in the humerus and femur, so that their elbows and knees are close up to the body. What is generally called the horse's knee is really his wrist, and his hock is his heel.

The species of rhinoceros were formerly very numerous and widely distributed over the Old World and the New. There were rhinoceroses even in the Thames Valley and on what is now the coast of Norfolk. Nowadays they are found only in Africa and Southern Asia and Malaysia; and these are rapidly disappearing, for the rhinoceros is a big, conspicuous brute, much less terrible than he looks, and easily shot; his 'armour' being penetrable even with a pocket-knife when he is alive, although hardening till it is nearly bullet-proof when stripped and dried. In Asia there are three species, *Rhinoceros unicornis*, the Indian single-horned one, *R. sondaicus*, the smaller single-horned one found from Bengal to Borneo, and the Sumatran, *R. sumatrensis*, which has two horns and is found at intervals from Burma to Borneo. In Africa there are also three species, all with two horns. One of these is the white or square-mouthed rhinoceros, *R. simus*, now nearly extinct.



INDIAN RHINOCEROS

According to Mr. F. C. Selous, 'Twenty years ago this animal seems to have been very plentiful in the western half of South Africa; now, unless it is still to be found between the Okavango and Cunene rivers, it must almost be extinct in that portion of the country. And this is not to be wondered at when one reads the accounts in Andersson's and Chapman's books of their shooting as many as eight of these animals in one night as they were drinking at a small water-hole; for it must be remembered that these isolated water-holes at the end of the dry season represented all the water to be found over an enormous extent of country, and that therefore all the rhinoceroses that in happier times were distributed over many hundreds of square miles were in times of drought dependent upon perhaps a single pool for their supply of water. In 1877, during several months' hunting in the country to the south of Linyanti on the river Chobi, I only saw the spoor of two square-mouthed rhinoceroses, though in 1874 I had found them fairly plentiful in the same district; whilst in 1879, during eight months spent in hunting on and between the Botletli, Mababe, Machabe, Sunta, and Upper Chobi rivers, I never even saw the spoor of one of these animals, and all the Bushmen I met with said they were finished.'

But a few are probably still living in Mashonaland, and last year two were shot by Mr. Coryndon, one of which is at South Kensington and the other at Tring. The common African rhinoceros is the black one with the prehensile lip, *R. bicornis*, in which the horns will sometimes reach forty inches,

the back horn being often longer than the front one. Exceptionally this species may have three horns. It is purely a vegetarian, and browses on the leaves and twigs and even the roots of certain bushes; and according to Mr. Selous it thrives in districts devoid of grass, whereas the square-mouthed species could not live in the hill country, owing to the pasturage being insufficient.

Clumsy as the animal may look, the speed at which he can move is considerable, and quite equal, for a time at least, to that of the average horse. Among the Hamran Arabs he is chased on horseback and hainstrung, and a very exciting sport it is. These extraordinary Nimrods hunt and kill wild animals of every sort, from the antelope to the elephant, with no other weapon than the sword, and defend themselves with oval and circular shields of rhinoceros hide or the almost equally tough skin of the giraffe. The average sword of these hunters is a yard long, and has a five and a half inch hilt, and a blade nearly two inches across, almost as sharp as a razor. With no knowledge of swordsmanship they never parry with the blade, but trust entirely to the shield, and content themselves with slashing either at their adversary or at the animal he rides. 'One good cut,' says Sir Samuel Baker, 'delivered by a powerful arm would sever a man at the waist like a carrot.' And then he describes a rhinoceros hunt. 'The two rhinoceros were running neck-and-neck like a pair of horses in harness, but bounding along at tremendous speed within ten yards of the leading Hamran. This was Taher Sheriff, who, with his sword drawn, and his long

hair flying wildly behind him, urged his horse forward in the race, amidst a cloud of dust raised by the two huge but active beasts, that tried every sinew of the horses. Roder Sheriff, with the withered arm, was second; with the reins hung upon the hawk-like claw that was all that remained of a hand, but with his naked sword grasped in his right, he kept close to his brother, ready to second his blow. Abou Do was third, his hair flying in the wind, his heels dashing against the flanks of his horse, to which he shouted in his excitement to urge him to the front, while he leant forward with his long sword in the wild energy of the moment, as though hoping to reach the game against all possibility. I soon found myself in the ruck of men, horses, and drawn swords. There were seven of us, and passing Abou Do, whose face wore an expression of agony at finding that his horse was failing, I quickly obtained a place among the brothers. The horses were pressed to the utmost, but we had already run about two miles, and the game showed no signs of giving in. On they flew—sometimes over open ground, then through low bush, which tired the horses severely; then through strips of open forest, until at length the party began to tail off and only a select few kept their places. Only four of the seven remained, and we swept down an incline, Taher Sheriff still leading and Abou Do the last! His horse was done, but not the rider; for, springing to the ground while at full speed, sword in hand, he forsook his tired horse, and, preferring his own legs, he ran like an antelope for the first hundred yards. I thought he would really pass us and win the honour of the first blow.

It was of no use: the pace was too severe, and although running wonderfully, he was obliged to give way to the horses. Only three now followed the rhinoceros—Taher Sheriff, his brother Roder, and myself. I had been obliged to give the second place to Roder, as he was a mere monkey in weight, but I was a close third. The excitement was intense. We neared the jungle, and the rhinoceros began to show signs of flagging, as the dirt puffed up before their nostrils, and with noses close to the ground, they snorted, as they still galloped on. Oh for a fresh horse! We were within two hundred yards of the jungle, but the horses were all done. Roder pushed ahead. We were close upon the dense thorns, and the rhinoceros broke into a trot; they were done! Away he went; he was close to the very heels of the beasts, but his horse could do no more than his present pace. Still he gained upon the nearest; he leaned forward with his sword raised for the blow—another moment and the jungle would be reached! One effort more, and the sword flashed in the sunshine as the rearmost rhinoceros disappeared in the thick screen of thorns with a gash about a foot long upon his hind-quarters!

The fourth sub-order of the ungulates is that containing the hyraces, and known in consequence as the *Hyracoidea*. These are allied in structure to both the rhinoceros and the elephant, but in size are not much larger than a rabbit. There are over a dozen species of them, some living among rocks, most of them in trees, nearly all of them African, ranging down to Cape Colony, one of them being found in Arabia and Syria. Their feet are very