

MAN-KILLERS AND MARAUDERS

*SOME BIG GAME ENCOUNTERS
OF AN AFRICAN HUNTER*

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WITH PHOTOGRAPHS



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"I AIM CAREFULLY BY FIRELIGHT, THE BULLET WHINES THROUGH
THE AIR AND THE STARS DISAPPEAR."

(Frontispiece.)

THE FRONTISPIECE

(Chapter 4.)

Compensation for the boats and the natives cost me six heifers, and, in addition, I had lost a rifle worth forty pounds. Fortunately I had no other equipment with me.

There remained, however, two facts upon which I could congratulate myself. One was that in this "no man's" country I could assess the damages myself instead of leaving it to an official, who would probably have formed a higher estimate, and the other that I had not risen to the surface in closer proximity to those evil-looking tusks.

CHAPTER XI

RHINO

THE Rhinoceros is really a big pig. Few hunters can fail to be impressed by the large-scale porcine attributes he exhibits, both mentally and physically.

In head and eyes, legs and body, gluttonous feeding habits, and flesh production; in capacity for slumber, unreasoning gusts of sudden fury, and astonishing celerity of movement, he has much in common with the often somnolent and sometimes ferocious boar of the forest and farmyard.

Like elephant and giraffe, he is a "hush-hush" animal in British Africa. Prosperous gentlemen in far-away mansions have conceived the idea that when, in divers ways, they have acquired slices of this great continent, they have acquired also the right to say on what terms these may be hunted.

Other men, lean of body and keen of eye, whose dwelling is the roofless one of the African bush, think otherwise. They believe that the right to hunt these devolves on some of them-

selves at birth, and on the majority not at all. They say the privileged are known by a readiness to stake life on a game of chance; a capacity for strenuous toil; an ability to endure hunger, thirst, and sickness, for long periods.

I am one of those of the latter belief. Wherefore, in describing certain encounters with rhino, my recollection of the districts where such occurred is lamentably vague. It is quite possible, for instance, that I may remember an adventure which occurred in Northern Rhodesia as happening in the Katanga, or in Angola! But, as my recollection is quite reliable in other respects, I trust my reader will waive the point.

A rhino requires little provocation to become rampagous. He is usually in a condition of truculent passion when observed by humans in his natural habitat. Man-scent is anathema to him, and, whereas other animals express their dislike of it in flight, the rhino's furious resentment is expressed in an instant offensive. He alone attacks man without warning or provocation, always excepting man-eating lions, and rogue elephants, and it is the unexpectedness of his attack which so often renders it deadly.

Yet, if the man be cool-nerved, alert and active, it is generally easy to avoid these attacks, and launch a counter-offensive. For the rhino's charge is directed by blind, unreasoning fury

rather than intelligence. A mad and murderous desire to remove the source of the hated taint. If the source removes itself with speed and discretion the big, stupid pig often stands nonplussed, a picture of comical puzzlement, until a bullet solves the enigma of its disappearance for him.

Keen scent he has, some speed, and great strength, but little of the intelligence and determination of either the elephant or buffalo. In East Africa—in the Tsavo district of the N'yika plateau—is a dense thorn-bush country such as the tough-skinned rhino loves, and on several occasions rhino have attacked moving patrols of troops in that district. As a rule the men were not allowed to fire, but simply scattered. Once up-wind of the patrol the stupid beast has stood and sniffed the air for the taint, and, not finding it, has snorted his disgust and blundered on. On at least one occasion, however, he has paid the penalty, and his head has been brought into camp.

All that seems necessary in face of a rhino charge is to spring well clear of his path, and race down-wind in the direction he has come from; provided he is alone, of course. For his eyesight is poor, and, once out of scent-range, one may observe him at leisure. Only the cow with a calf in the vicinity is really vindictive, and, in following such a beast, the

greatest care should be exercised to locate her before approaching. But, since the habitat of the breed is the dense thorn-bush referred to, this is not as easy as it sounds.

While hunting with a friend in the Katanga, some years ago, I had an experience with rhino which is probably unique, and goes far to show that these evil-tempered beasts go as often on the rampage against their own kind, as against man; at all events where a mate is concerned. It seems to show, too, that feminine preference for the strong male transcends marital affection, even with these huge pachyderms.

We were hunting for a living, and my friend had told the natives that he would pay handsomely for a young rhino calf, as he had received an offer of two hundred and fifty pounds for a specimen from one of the Zoos.

Two native elephant hunters, armed with muzzle loaders, came one morning upon a clearing in the bush which showed the fresh spoor of a calf. With the reward in mind they investigated, and soon found the baby rhino in a shallow pit dug by the mother, and hidden under some brushwood. But before they could remove the tiny creature a squealing grunt of rage, and the crash of a heavy body, warned them that time was precious.

They therefore started to move so hurriedly that one of them forgot his gun. Perhaps this

increased his speed? At all events, he outstripped his comrade, and hearing the pursuit diverge in his rear, glanced round in time to see his companion leap upwards and grasp the limb of a tree, seconds before the enraged cow passed beneath it. To do this he had also dropped his gun, and the more fortunate native, knowing that the cow would not leave her calf, stayed to watch what would happen.

Her first care was to reduce the gun to matchwood, then she rooted the ground viciously with her horn, pausing to utter vengeful squeals of rage, and eye the trembling native in the tree. But she kept a wary eye on the calf, and it soon became apparent that she would remain too close to allow for the escape of the anxious prisoner. Seeing this he yelled to his comrade to "run and fetch the white men, as if they heard there was a calf they would come quickly and kill the mother!" This seemed sound reasoning and the unarmed native set off.

But our camp was ten miles away, and, as it was already about nine in the morning when the boy started; it was mid-afternoon before we arrived on the scene.

We were very anxious to secure the calf, and expecting to find only the cow on sentry duty we anticipated no difficulty in settling accounts with her. Nevertheless we were careful, under the guidance of the native, to approach

up-wind, and this precaution enabled us to witness a curious scene.

On our near approach we had been surprised to hear what sounded like squealing grunts of rage from several animals; the thud of blows; clashing of horns, and the trampling of heavy feet, mingled with occasional sounds as of falling bodies. Parting the bushes cautiously we saw two huge bulls engaged in mortal combat close to the tree in which the native still clung, and it was evident from his bleeding condition, sobbing breaths, and frequent falls, that one of the combatants was almost done for.

The cow divided her attention between nuzzling the calf, now emerged from his concealment, and charging viciously at the already beaten beast. We had watched many minutes when a combined charge of the cow and his opponent placed this animal quite *hors de combat*. Twice more he essayed, unsuccessfully, to rise, and each time the cow horned him viciously. Then she turned and nosed the victor delicately—in shameless congratulation.

It was just at this stage that we took a hand. The victorious bull fell to the first shot, and two others in quick succession sent the cow to join him in the shades reserved for rhino. The defeated beast was already dying, and a merciful bullet started him, too, on the road his conqueror and his faithless spouse had taken. For on

being released the native related the following story.

After the other native had left to fetch us the cow had divided her attention between him and the calf. But it appeared to him that "she was looking for something", as she uttered repeated "calls", and stood as if listening. At last, about noon, one of the "calls" was answered, and soon afterwards the bull, which we had seen defeated, appeared.

He was then bleeding, slightly lame, and seemed to have been fighting; but his spouse, instead of offering sympathy, ran at him viciously, and attempted to horn him. These attacks he either dodged or met with his sound shoulder but, according to the native witness, he made no attempt at retaliation. After expressing displeasure in this manner two or three times, the cow trotted off, and the bull lay down close to the tree, groaning occasionally as though in pain. But when the native attempted a surreptitious descent of the tree, he came quickly to his feet, and proved as vigilant a sentry as the cow he had relieved.

Some little time before we arrived, the cow had suddenly reappeared, accompanied by a bull who also bore marks of recent conflict. No time was now wasted in preliminaries, for, with squeals of rage, the two bulls had once more joined issue. The cow had, at first, stood by

her calf and watched the conflict, but, as the bull which had first arrived fell more repeatedly before his adversary's onslaught, she had lent her aid to the victor in the manner we had witnessed.

Examining the trail by which the bulls had come, we found this led to a "pan" about five miles away, and, out of curiosity as to the meaning of the singular scene we had witnessed, we followed it. From blood-spoor en route, and a trampled battle-ground at the water's edge, my friend was able, with the help of his hunting experience, to reconstruct the probable sequence of events, and the natives endorsed his opinion.

The calf was only a few days old, and the bull had gone first to water, being bound, in accordance with rhino custom, and while the calf is too young to travel, to return and relieve the cow on guard. But at the pan he had met a solitary bull, and the cow taint he carried had led to challenge from the stranger, and intermittent battle through the night hours. He therefore feared to return until his rival had departed, lest he should lead him to the cow and provoke battle to the death. But when his adversary had, at last, temporarily retreated, he had returned, sorely wounded, by a circuitous route. Prolonged thirst, and the threat to the calf, had not improved the cow's temper, and she had

expressed disapproval in the manner described by the native.

When she at last reached the "pan" she had found the second bull there; perhaps seeking a resumption of the conflict, or driven by thirst occasioned by his wounds. Which-ever it may have been he had at once followed the cow, and, with the mating urge strong upon him, and greater recuperative powers than his older adversary, had finally achieved a victory to which the cow had contributed.

The young rhino died of stomach trouble, as so many of them do, but we accounted ourselves fortunate in having witnessed a battle between the lords of the silent spaces, and in having been vouchsafed an insight into animal psychology seldom accorded man.

On another occasion a friend and myself were conducting a young fellow recently out from England, and as he was particularly keen on rhino we went into Portuguese territory, where, in a certain district we knew of, they were very plentiful. On the day of the hunt I went down with a dose of fever and stayed in camp. What subsequently transpired came to me that evening from the lips of my friend.

The youngster was a fair shot, but inclined to be very cock-sure, and to resent advice. In the veld it is dangerous to refuse to learn, and he found it so on this occasion. They had found

the spoor of a large bull shortly after dawn, and had followed it up. Only one native accompanied them, but about twenty others followed behind, to be handy if and when required.

By the time the sun was an hour old they were already seven miles from camp, and for about half that distance had followed the spoor steadily. Then they came to an open glade, and ahead of them saw a patch of dense thorn-bush. Considering it possible that there might be a cow and calf with the bull this looked to my friend like a probable cover, so he stopped his client and whispered,

"In all probability we shall find our friend in there. If it is necessary to crawl let me go first, and follow without noise!" Then, as he noted a rebellious look on the boy's face, he added, "Don't worry! I'll give you the shot at the right time. Rhino do unexpected things at times, and I want to weigh up the probabilities before you come into action!"

When they reached the thorn-bush they were compelled to assume a crouching posture to avoid the interlacing branches, which had swung across the rhino-path since his passage. My friend went softly forward, followed by his client and the native, and after about a hundred yards emerged into a sort of natural clearing in the bush, filled with stunted bushes and a few saplings.

The spoor went straight on across the clearing to a similar patch of bush on the opposite side, and the youngster stepped eagerly ahead of his guide to follow it up. There was no time to give him "chapter and text"—to warn him that the animals might be ambushed near—so my friend caught his arm and said, "Wait! He may be watching from cover and get our wind. We must be prepared for a charge."

"Oh, hell!" the youth answered impatiently. "I am not nervous, man! I have my rifle. I want to see if he has gone on. He may be running away and increasing his lead."

Seeing that the youth was determined to buy his experience my friend wasted no further argument, but brought his rifle to the ready and watched keenly for any sign of life, especially on the left-hand side of the clearing, which was down-wind; and he had not long to wait. The young fellow had barely covered half the distance to the opposite side—about fifty yards—when there came a vicious snort, a mighty crash of bushes on his left, and a black mass, with lowered head carrying two evil-looking horns, hurled itself on him at racing speed.

The startled youth whirled in his tracks, jerked his express to his shoulder, and fired hurriedly. The spurt of dust to the right of the charging bull showed the futility of the shot, and, on the echo of the report, came the crack

of my friend's Mauser. The bullet went straight to the heart, and the great beast swerved slightly as he plunged onwards, but his massive shoulder caught the young man full in the chest, sending his rifle into the air and his body crashing earthwards several yards away.

There he lay inert, but, for the moment, there was no time to go to his assistance. A second rhino had followed ten yards behind the first, and now came to a slithering halt beside her fallen mate who had somersaulted to earth twenty yards from where the bullet struck him. My friend had expected this, and his sights had covered her shoulder as she crossed the clearing. As soon as she halted his rifle spoke again, and she fell in a heap beside her mate. A few convulsive efforts to rise, a fall back sideways, and a stiffening shudder of the short, thick legs guaranteed that she would rise no more.

Then my friend hastened to his fallen client, to find him slowly regaining the breath which the tremendous impact had knocked from his body. Examination revealed a badly bruised shoulder and a broken rib; for he had unfortunately struck a fallen log as he fell. Like most men in the veld my friend had some rough surgical knowledge, and we always included a medicine chest in the outfit carried by the reserve boys. This was now sent for, and while they waited they exchanged impressions of the furious

three minutes just past. According to my friend's account the conversation went something like this,

"I say, old chap," commenced the youth, "it strikes me I have to thank you for my life. And apologise to you for neglecting your advice!"

Shrugging his shoulders, my friend replied, "You don't have to thank me. I'm here to see that you don't get into trouble, or buy your experience too dearly. As for taking advice, your refusal to do so is not unusual. Most 'new chums' have better hearts than heads, until they learn to strike a balance. I'm only sorry that you are likely to pay for this lesson with the loss of a month's hunting."

"So it appears. Still, it might have been worse, and would have been but for your shot! How do you account for the rhino coming from the left? The spoor went straight on.

"There is nothing unusual in that. A wounded buffalo is not the only animal which deals in ambushes. A rhino charges on scent; often when the person he charges is not hunting, and is unaware of his presence. Very often, especially if a cow or calf is in the neighbourhood, the rhino turns back parallel to his trail, and seeks a resting-place for the day to leeward of it.

"I expected that to-day. The ground here showed that this place is much used by more than

one animal, and from the quantity of fumets I should say it is the ante-room to a favourite bed-chamber. I warned you as a result of those observations. There was no time to detail them. These animals were resting, and as you moved forward you gave them your wind. Probably we shall find there is a calf nearby."

And so it proved. Search revealed a small rhino lying concealed as usual in a shallow pit covered with brushwood, with only his small nose showing. In two days he was quite companionable. But, alas, he was only three days old when found, and cow's milk was a hundred and twenty miles away, at our own home-camp. Maizena gruel made with condensed milk soon upset his tender stomach, and five days later he followed his mother. As we viewed the corpse my friend muttered gloomily, "Two hundred quid gone west!" And I knew he was thinking of the little creature's value to far-away Zoos.

It may be noted here that even cow's milk is often inadequate for very young animals. The capturing of specimens is an easy matter compared with keeping them alive afterwards. They must of necessity be very young, for, within a week or two, they become strong enough to put up resistance, and then often suffer injury in capture.

I have since found that what the Dutch call "Meelbal" mixed with cow's milk gives

the best results. The former is just flour baked dry and hard, and a little of this is scraped into cow's milk diluted with water. The difficulty in many hunting districts is to keep the cows handy; both on account of tsetse-fly and carnivora. One has, of course, no time to build suitable, and strong, kraals under such conditions.

A very comical adventure with rhino, which might nevertheless have proved tragic, occurred when I was returning from an arduous thousand-mile trip through the Katanga, some few years ago, and was passing through a belt of thorn-country, where spoor and fumets showed that the rhino had not overlooked its claims to their consideration. I had with me about twenty carriers. Marching at the head of the line I had just reflected that a sudden charge from the bush would considerably disorganise my rear-guard when the half-expected happened.

We were crossing a fairly open space when a chorus of yells caused me to turn my head in time to see every carrier drop his load and race for the trees; into which most of them climbed like monkeys. Behind them plunged a big, black rhino, which had charged out of the bush on the right of the path; having evidently caught our scent.

Right in his path lay my black, steel trunk, which a native had dropped, so, lowering his

head, the bull drove his front horn clean through the bottom which faced him, the consequence being that the box became firmly wedged on his nose. Whether he imagined this an added weapon or not I cannot say, but he promptly charged at the last native to leave the ground, and who was only just beginning to climb into his tree. The rhino's charge moved him to surprising activity, and he was well out of range of the horn and box before the bull arrived.

Then the stupid beast endeavoured for a moment to rid himself of his steel incubus by dashing it on the ground, and against the tree, but this move only seemed to wedge it more firmly. The angry brute looked so comical that I could have laughed had not thoughts of my clothes and papers induced gravity; so I raised my rifle, and was just about to fire when the bull suddenly headed for the path by which we had come.

There was a crash as my rearguard, which had just arrived on the scene, dropped his load and raced for a handy tree. As he sprang upwards and seized a limb my black box, impelled by the rhino, took him squarely on the buttocks and lifted him several feet into the air. The boy then improved the occasion by seizing another branch and pulling himself up into safety, howling with pain and terror. His unsympathetic comrades, safe on their perches, chaffed him

unmercifully about his inability to climb without help, whilst the bull stood squealing with rage, and trying to rid himself of the box.

I now promptly put paid to his account, with a solid .400 behind the shoulder. My box was now worthless, and the contents had not been improved by his attentions. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the last native would have been impaled had it not been for the box, which acted like the button on a foil.

I remember, too, how I sighed for a camera on that occasion. A picture of that big, stupid pig endeavouring to rid himself of the box he had charged so eagerly would probably have been worth more than the entire contents.