

UNFORGIVING MINUTES

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"When Red Gods Call"

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[M. A. Wetherall]

THE BRAIN SHOT AT AN ELEPHANT

THIS IS EITHER A YOUNG FOREST BULL, PROBABLY FROM THE CONGO SIDE, OR A COW, BUT IT SHOWS THE EYE AND EAR HOLES AND THE APPROXIMATE BRAIN SHOT BETWEEN THEM WHEN DIRECT TO THE FLANK



[Frontispiece]

brute from length to tail as he passed directly over me lengthways, one foot between my knees and one fourteen inches beyond my head, and not a graze ! Five tons at least !” Cotton Oswell, in no wise deterred, got up and had a snap at his retreating body !

Yet I wonder if these adventures are any more remarkable than the escape of Captain J. R. D. Salmon, Acting Game Warden of Uganda, whose head was taken by an infuriated elephant in its trunk, given a twist and let go ! That perhaps is a more optimistic note on which to end this chapter.

CHAPTER IV

TWO IRRITABLE OLD GENTLEMEN

THERE are five kinds of rhinoceros : the great Indian rhinoceros, the Javan and Sumatran rhinoceros, the black or common African rhinoceros and the white African rhinoceros. For the purposes of the sportsman of to-day we need only consider the black rhino of Africa, for the other species are so rare that it is now almost impossible to get permission to shoot them. This is as it should be ; for, alas ! these unfortunate animals have been so harried in the past that they have become almost extinct, largely due to the fact that no steps were taken for their protection till it was too late. The differences between the species are, however, more distinctions for the naturalist than the sportsman, because in general the nature of the beast, though not his habits, are similar.

The great Indian rhinoceros is a one-horned beast. Once common all over India, it is now confined to Nepal, Assam and Northern Bengal. The Javan rhinoceros is a smaller animal of lighter build. It is found, possibly, in Southern Burma and the East Indies, but it is one of the rarest animals in the world. It, too, is one-horned. The Sumatran rhinoceros, the smallest of the Asiatic species, is found in Assam and Northern Burma, in Burma and thence farther eastward. It is a two-horned beast, the smallest of the Indian rhinos. Both the African species are two-horned. The so-called white rhino, being the larger animal of the two, though the distinction of colouring

is not very marked. It is now only found in Zululand and the Lado enclave. After the elephant, it is the largest of the land mammals.

The reason for the persecution of the rhino are simple. Powdered rhino horn is considered by Orientals to be a powerful aphrodisiac. Further, a cup made from the horn has qualities which will destroy the poison that your enemy slips into your drink. It is not every big game trophy that has two such eminently desirable properties! So the demand for the horn East of Suez is keen. And the poaching of rhino is second only to the poaching of elephant. At a recent auction in London rhino horn fetched twelve shillings a pound, and an average Burman Sumatran rhinoceros horn (say eight inches) fetches 1,000 rupees.

Though the habits of all these animals are similar, I will deal chiefly with the African black rhinoceros, the only one likely to provide the sportsman with an "unforgiving minute". The death of a white rhinoceros will be followed by an unforgiving minute all right, but it will be with the local game warden! The white rhino, be it here said, would appear to be far less militant than the black, but since the species has ceased to be hunted it may have altered its views on man.

The rhino is probably the most naturally pugnacious animal in the world to-day, and he is also the most stupid. These two qualities combine to make him if not an extremely dangerous animal, at least an infernal nuisance. Yet the number of rhino fatalities are a very small percentage of the annual toll of big game casualties. His frenzied interruptions are generally prompted more by curiosity and indignation than by "vice", if such a term can be applied to the animal preserving its home against



[Herbert Lang

THE ANGRY OLD GENTLEMAN

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the invader. He is the cross old gentleman writing to *The Times* to complain about motor cars, or the ardent young Fascist hurling himself against the Reds, rather than the gunman or the smash and grab expert. Yet of all the African animals, he is possibly the one that the ordinary native fears most.

The rhino is able to goad himself into a paroxysm of rage at a moment's notice. He is, as I have already said, the black or sloth bear of the African bush. It is not so much that he is dangerous by design as dangerous by chance. He does not so much seek whom he may devour, as devour those who have no wish to seek him. In rhino country a rifle should always be taken if shooting for the pot. He is without fear of man. Indeed, he is without fear of anything. When the railway was first being built in Kenya a rhino charged a train, came off second best, and promptly charged again. His smell is his predominant sense. He uses it extensively. His eyesight is not good, but his ears are keen, though perhaps of less use to him than his nose. He hunts a man by scent, and if the wind is unfavourable and one keeps still he will have great difficulty in making one out. Moreover, his charge, if he is unwounded, is almost always a demonstration; it is true that probably more unwounded rhino "charge" than other animals, but these charges are as a rule comparatively easily avoided and are rarely pressed home. They can, however, be an infernal nuisance when they charge out on a line of porters, who drop their loads and fly incontinently, leaving the rhino to show his disapproval by wrecking the load containing your last bottle of whisky. They will often remain for a long time unconscious of a caravan, till finally they charge at the line, if upwind, in a blind rage. And if one has pony

transport, the business is a much more serious one.

The rhino would be by far the easiest of all the so-called dangerous game to hunt were it not for one thing—the rhino bird that accompanies him. Black and slim, like the Indian crow, he warns him of the approach of danger by jumping into the air and descending on his back with an admonitory peck. He is his stable companion, like Voltigeur and his cat. But though often easy to approach, the rhino is testing to the beginner's nerve, for they are generally found lying in the open, frequently with sterns to the wind, *i.e.*, facing the stalker, and when he retreats he does so upwind, which of course to some extent accounts for their reputation for charging. Yet for all their stupidity and impetuosity I have seen it computed that of twenty-five rhino who get your wind, one will press home the attack, and of those that do so only one in ten will succeed in doing you harm.

The rhino keeps away from man as far as possible. He is a nocturnal beast. He sleeps in the middle of the day with his feathered sentry keeping guard. About four he will start feeding, making his way towards water. He drinks his fill quite early after sundown, in the most approved manner of the club bar. He and his relations spend the night feeding and otherwise amusing themselves; they are very playful and in the early morning they trek off to lay up for the day, sometimes at a considerable distance from the point where they fed and watered. They keep as far as they can from human habitation as a rule, but they generally stick to one locality.

The rhino treads down paths in the same way as the elephant, though these paths are of a much less defined nature than elephant paths. He is extremely

faithful to them, and after a considerable lapse of time will stick to them with fervour. Therefore, avoid pitching your camp on one of these sites, as they may charge direct through it, wrecking your tents as they go. They have when moving, *en famille*, an order of march of their own: first the bull, then the calves, with mama in rear.

When following the spoor of rhino, it is essential to be on the move as soon as it is light, as the rhino is by nature a nocturnal beast. One must continually test the wind, and it is essential to approach the quarry facing into the wind. The rhino when he stops to rest has a habit—though this of course is not invariable—of turning back parallel and to leeward of his tracks. His charge will almost always be from close quarters and unexpected, so the methods of Agag must mark the measure of the hunter's progress.

There are a very large number of rhino charges recorded, but the number of fatalities from them, by comparison with lion or elephant, is small. The rhino will, on occasions, show a sustained relentless vigour in his offensive, though on other occasions he will be content with tossing a man and rushing on, leaving him lying where he falls. Here is a case of Mr. C. V. A. Peel, shooting in Somaliland.

He had wounded a rhino. "It then became evident that the wounded beast meant to charge us. He tossed his head and looked defiantly at us. He was standing on very rocky and uneven ground, thinly scattered here and there with wait-a-bit thorn bushes, on a steep slope twenty-five yards above us. Suddenly, with a shake of his ugly head, he made a most determined charge straight for the middle of the four of us. Seeing him coming at a terrific pace, and so close upon us, I yelled 'Fire',

and at the same time fired the left-hand barrel of the big rifle I held in my hand. The next thing I remember was a huge dark head coming through the smoke. Whether I fell, jumped, or was thrown out of the way, I don't know, but I saw the huge beast dash past me and felt the wind from his nostrils in my face." His second shikari and another man had thrown themselves behind a bush to the left. The rhino pursued the head shikari. They yelled to him to fire, but the head shikari rather lost his head and stumbled to right. The rhino turned as quickly as a cat and "caught the poor fellow with his horn behind and tossed him at least five feet up in the air so that he landed on the side of his head and shoulder, through a very thick thorn bush on the rough stony ground, before the very nose of the rhinoceros, which had stood calmly waiting for him to fall. When the man fell he lay perfectly still on his side, and I quite gave him up for dead. The rhinoceros now proceeded to give the man's head and side a series of terrific rams with his horn." He eventually drove it off with stones, and then fired at it again, finally shooting at three yards in his neck. Even then he stood perfectly still, but after three seconds he fell over dead. He had eleven bullet holes in him, the first bullet being through the heart.

Another is an adventure of Colonel Patterson.

He had found a rhinoceros lying down. "I continued to advance cautiously, wriggling through the short grass until at length I got within fifty yards of where the huge beast was resting. Here I lay and watched him ; but after some little time he evidently suspected my presence, for rising to his feet he looked straight in my direction and then proceeded to walk round me in a half circle. The moment he got wind of me he whipped round in his tracks like a cat and

came for me in a bee-line. Hoping to turn him, I fired instantly, but unfortunately my soft-nosed bullets merely annoyed him further and had not the slightest effect on his thick hide. On seeing this I flung myself down quite flat on the grass and threw my helmet some ten feet away in the hope that he would perceive it and vent his rage on it instead of me. On he thundered while I scarcely dared to breathe. I could hear him snorting and rooting up the grass quite close to me, but luckily he did not catch sight of me and charged by a few yards to my left." Patterson fired again, which annoyed him further, and he then circled round again and charged like a battering-ram. He thundered down, while Patterson pressed himself to the ground like a Chingangtook lying in wait for a pale-face. He missed him again !

That was indeed a let-off, but it showed not only that Patterson was in complete control of his nerves but also that the rhino's sense of smell cannot always lead him to an exact point ; it is directional rather than focused. It also shows the necessity for using hard-nosed bullets against thick-skinned animals. (Mrs. Green was killed in February, 1925, by a rhino near Fort Hall which she had shot at with a .303. Two days later Major Atkins, who was passing along the Fort Hall Road, was killed by the same rhino.)

These, of course, were black rhino. In the records of the older hunters will be found cases of charges of the white rhino, but I have been unable to find a case in the last three decades, owing to the practical extinction (from a big game shooter's point of view) of this animal. Cotton Oswell had a narrow escape from a white rhino. He saw one walking towards him rather inquisitively when he was riding, and he sat and watched it in some

surprise. The rhino suddenly charged and his horse was gored and he himself escaped only with difficulty.

The Indian rhino will charge no less readily than the African. But he lives in very enclosed country, and is a much rarer animal. Colonel Woods in his interesting book, "Shikar Memories", published this year, gives a case in point.

He had wounded a rhino, and returned with his tracker to finish it off, moving down a rhino tunnel in very thick bush.

"There was a loud snort and I saw the rhino thundering down on us. The next instant he was within a few feet of Laloong, who was on my right, almost touching him, tossing its head from side to side and stamping its feet. Laloong threw up his arms with a look of terror, and when the rhino was almost between his legs I let drive. The beast retreated eight or ten paces, bleeding profusely and undecided to charge again or not. I was just going to let him have my left barrel when down the left bank of the tunnel came another rhino, snorting terrifically, and this time came full tilt at me. I jumped to the side and as the brute nearly touched me fired, and he went down. I then looked to my right but could see nothing of Laloong; he had vanished. I called his name several times and got no reply, but at last heard a choking cry and knew that something serious had happened." While he was engaged with the second rhino, the first, the wounded one, had charged on the tracker and worried him like a dog a rat.

A number of the Indian rhino shot in the Himalayan Terai are shot from elephant. In the high grass of the sub-montane districts this is almost the only feasible form of shooting, but it is not a method that offers much risk to the sportsman.

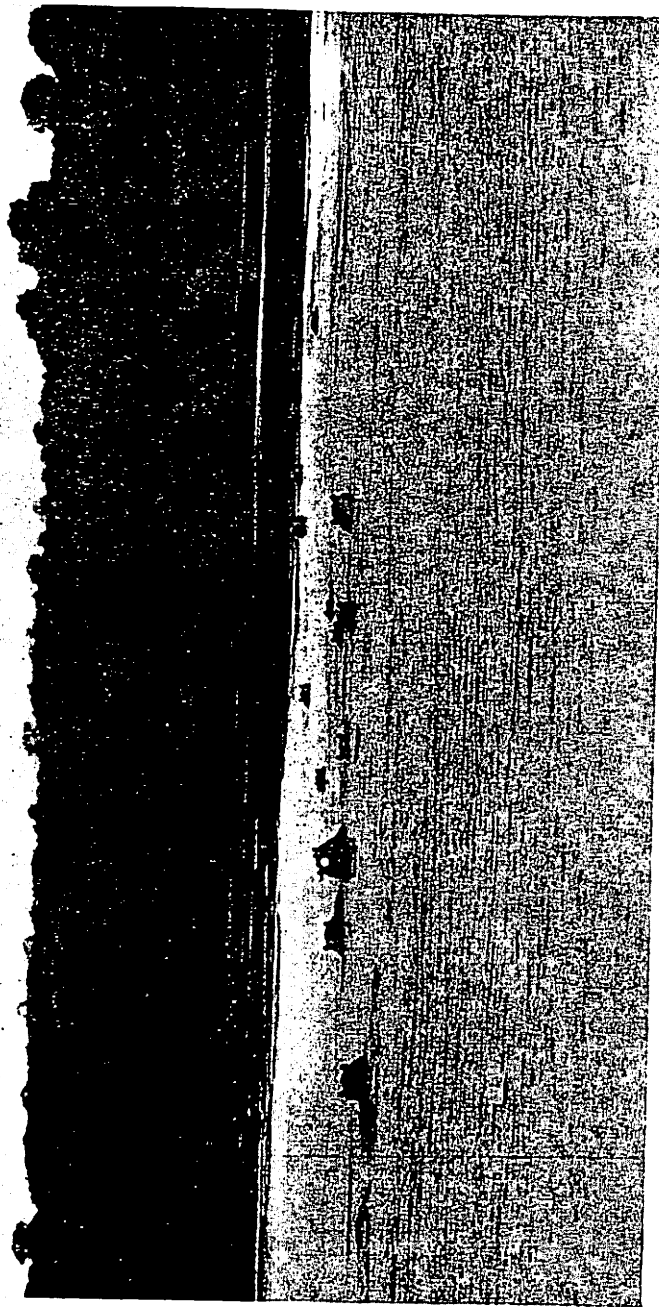
Perhaps of all the adventures at the hands (or horns!) of rhino that I know, I would award the palm for excitement to this story told me by Mr. Norman Smith. He was stalking a waterbuck on one occasion when he suddenly found he was being charged by *three* rhino in line. They were bearing down on him at full tilt like a Russian troika. Now, there was no possibility of getting out of the line of advance, and equally no possibility of killing all three before they reached him, so he determined to wait till they were almost on him and then drop the centre one as soon as he could put a bullet where the neck joins the body, the "matador" shot. Then, if the shot were successful and taken at sufficiently close range, the centre rhino would fall while the two on the flanks would pass him by on either side. Rather a desperate hazard! It very nearly came off however, but unfortunately he fired a fraction of a second too late, and though he instantaneously killed the rhino he was brought down with it and had two ribs broken. At this, his boys who had been watching the original stalk of the waterbuck came dashing up. In the meantime one of the two rhino who had gone on came back and started nosing round his fallen companion trying to get their opponent's wind. While he was smelling away at its back legs, Smith in a dazed condition was lying by its forelegs, no doubt thinking that he was in truth out of the frying-pan into the fire. Suddenly the second rhino winded him and was just lowering his head to charge when he was distracted by one of the boys and turned on him. This gave Smith time to crawl to his rifle, and as the rhino returned to the attack under the cover of the dust made by the stamping, he was able to drop him with a shot behind the earhole. This is a very interesting case for various reasons.

Firstly the rhino charged without provocation ; secondly, three of them together charged down like the Scots Greys at Waterloo ; and thirdly, it shows that the effect of the "matador" shot is instantaneous and highly effective. On the other hand, this shot cannot be taken till the animal is almost on one, and it needs a cool nerve and great self-assurance to be able to take it.

Colonel Essex Capell has sent me two interesting notes of experiences with rhino.

"Some years ago in East Africa (Kenya) I had been out with a fellow after a lone bull buffalo, which we tracked for miles but failed to get a shot at. Rhino in those parts were so plentiful that we seldom shot them—just a case of live and let live. As we strolled homewards along a bush path I saw an old rhino about twenty yards on my left, and speaking over my shoulder said : 'We won't shoot the old buffer, Dennis'. As I uttered these words he charged like a runaway railway engine. I just put up my rifle, a .375 manlicher schonauer, fired, and he fell stumbling at my feet. I jumped aside, he rose and blundered on some fifty yards and fell dead, shot through the heart."

"Again, years ago in Kenya, we often heard rhino in the bush or forests, but a shout would always send them blundering away. The day I was out after oryx, and a professional hunter named Bates, now dead, who owned a stout heart and a *very* squeaky voice, was my companion. His gun-bearer had given him the wrong sized cartridge for his rifle, and it had jammed in the breach. We were in intensely thick, almost impenetrable bush, in which we stood in a patch of clearing of some few yards, the bush like a wall all round us. Bates was steadily ramming away with a twig we had cut to get the



FAMILY GROUP OF HIPPO

THIS PHOTOGRAPH SHOWS FAR MORE OF THE HEADS OF THESE ANIMALS THAN ONE USUALLY MAY HOPE FOR. THE PICTURE WAS TAKEN BY MR. RONALD KER MAXWELL

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cartridge out when two old rhino poked their heads through the bush within four or five yards of us. Their wrinkled faces were almost within touching distance. I confess to being perturbed, and worked a cartridge from the magazine into the chamber. A low squeaky voice, 'Leave them alone, they're all right,' stayed any further action, but I said, 'I must either shoot or shout', and I did the latter, on which the dear old things just did a very silent and deliberate 'inwards turn' and ambled off, and we cleared the rifle all right. My conclusions are that rhino are terrified of the human voice, but not of the human scent to so great an extent; in fact I have been hunted by scent by a rhino."

If charged by a rhino, one should always stand to the charge and try and turn the aggressor. He is fairly easily turned (Sir F. J. Jackson records turning a charging rhino at fifteen yards with No. 8 shot), and there is always a good chance that if he is hit he will not press his charge home if one holds one's ground; if one runs the odds are that he will hunt you like a terrier after a rat. A flying figure represents just what he wants to wreak his vengeance on. If for any reason one cannot fire—a jam, a missfire or a bolting gun-bearer, or if one has emptied one's rifle and failed to stop the charge—one should jump aside when he is reasonably close and make oneself as scarce as possible, running with the wind if possible. If the rhino comes back it is then best to keep absolutely doggo in the hope that he will neither get your wind nor be able to pick you up. A rhino is more likely to make your servants panic than any creature. When he charges he may knock you down or toss you and gallop on, or he may turn back and try to finish you off either by butting with his horn or sticking it into you. Stigand was charged by a

rhino, who knocked him down and then turned and tossed him twelve feet in the air, badly tearing his chest.

A rhino dies fairly quickly and is not so difficult to kill as his great bulk and thick skin suggest. If the first bullet penetrates lungs or shoulder (it must, of course, be a solid) he will probably be easy to dispatch. But after the first bullet the succeeding ones, if in the same place, have little or no effect. If taking a flank shot it should be rather low in the shoulder for the heart, or rather higher behind the shoulder for the lungs. A shot on the right side in the lungs will go right through and perhaps will reach the heart or break the point of the far shoulder. These shots, unless at a very acute angle, are not difficult to take. The most common mistake of novices is to place the heart shot too high; the rhino has a low chassis and his engine is placed to correspond. If the brain shot is to be taken it should be placed just behind and below the ear, while a very telling shot either when obliquely in front, or in the rear of the direct right angle from the side, is one slightly high through the centre of the neck.

In a charge, vital shots at a rhino are a great deal less easy. He comes very low on the ground and with his head down. His head covers his chest and heart and his horn covers his brain. Probably one's best chance is to try and turn him with a shot high in the shoulder which may break it. One can, of course, try the "matador" shot through the top of the neck when he is quite close, which I have already described. I do not think this is a shot for novices. The moment that the rhino prepares to charge is always quite clear as his head and tail go up and he gives a grunt. Once he has made up his mind where to go to, he covers the ground with extra-

ordinary speed. But the danger lies in the suddenness and unexpectedness of his onslaught, which is due to a natural irascibility of temperament more than the calculated cunning of design. There let us leave him: the old gentleman who, for all his ill-temper, the ordinary hunter regards with a curious affection.

The hippopotamus is generally considered one of the dangerous animals, and as such it would be as well to include it here, but I have never been able to consider it either as a potential danger or even hardly as a beast of venery. It is true that it offers the chance of a rather unusual form of stalking—by water—and that when stalked the few inches of nose and eyes showing above the water demand accurate shooting. But he is too much of a peculiarity to make me feel that his pursuit can compare with the hunting of tiger, buffalo, elephant or lion on foot. The natural method for man to hunt his quarry is on his legs. I ask nobody to agree with me, but I do not include the hippo among the animals that may be bagged under normal circumstances under the heading of big game shooting. One is competing under different rules and on alien elements. I know again that the "trophy" should not be the sole aim and object of the hunter. A day's sport cannot be considered in terms of so much wall space suitably covered, or in lantern slides ultimately to be revealed to the British Legion Club. Nevertheless, the hippo cannot offer any adequate trophy to the hunter, and I have always felt that shooting him, except under certain circumstances, where he has done or may do damage for instance, savours rather of target practice. After all, if you want to test your rifle you can always fire at a mark. Shooting a hippo has always seemed to me not so very far