

ADVENTURES, NATIONAL CUSTOMS,
AND CURIOUS FACTS.

A RHINOCEROS HUNT.

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 along the trail of a rhinoceros, which they had stumbled upon the night before at a fountain near the camp, where the animal, with many others, had come to slake their 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 crashing 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, grave voice.

"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 these long-necked fellows. But we waste time here," he pursued, looking at the caps of his double-barrelled 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 waist-high bushes, which stretched away to the right and left, and was as impassable as a hedge, and from beyond you, 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 torn 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 themselves had better do under the circumstances. It was clear, however, that the animal's mind was not aware of the proximity of men; and they could not, 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.

"I do," rejoined Stephens, "and I am anxious to kill the beast if possible. At least, 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 hammers but furious work of destroying the clump of bushes before him, and the loud blowing, snorting, trampling,

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, clamping 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 favourable 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 aim, and uttering a short roar, snorted, snorted, snorted, and a noise something between a grunt and a bellow. Not bringing himself to take the open avenue through the thicket, he crushed 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, riding for their lives among the tall trees of the forest.

Seeing the hunters flying so fast before him, the huge animal suddenly came to a halt with a loud, low, groaning sound, and seemed undecided whether to pursue them or beat a retreat. At the hunters also checked their flight; and Stephens riding out from his companion, who had been obliged to ride with his hasty, fired both barrels at the head of the beast. Making his 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 emerged 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 brought him of doubling upon his pursuer, and fortunately chose his blind side, and soon had the satisfaction of finding himself behind him.

Pembroke now rode up, and while the rhinoceros was beating about in 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 be aware that 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 favour 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 a final effort to beat him, uttering a groan, retreating to dry, 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 safely 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.

LIFE STATISTICS.

By means of the registers of deaths actuaries are enabled to construct tables for the regulation of the premium of life insurance, and to ascertain the incidence of life upon various ages by insurance companies. The immense number of observations and experiments of life which they furnish enable them to calculate with wonderful accuracy what is the "value" (the probable length) of life of persons at a particular age. As respects the individuals, they may not be, and do not pretend to be, correct; but when the number of lives is very great, the results which they bring out are amazingly correct. For instance, out of 100,000 persons born alive, the actuary will tell you what number of boys and of girls there will be in the 100,000—that the number of boys will be 51,274, and of girls 48,726; he will further tell how many of these will die in the first year of their lives—14,631; and how many will die in the second year until they have all passed out of life. In the 100,000 persons there will be just eighty persons of the sixtieth year to live to 100 years, and only two persons—one man and one woman—like the lingering barges of an innumerable convoy, will reach their distant haven in 100 years!

Taking all the persons born alive in this country, the

"probable life" of each is about forty-one years—that is, the average age to which they will live. Of course, many live beyond this, and the lives of many more are cut short in infancy; nevertheless the average of the whole number is forty-one years. In Liverpool, the average life of the whole population is only twenty-six years. Of 100,000 persons born in that town, one-fourth of the whole die before they are a year old, and about one-half of the whole have perished before they complete their fifth year. Liverpool (because of its wretched sanitary arrangements) is one of the unhealthiest, and London, notwithstanding many sanitary defects, is one of the most healthy towns.

The mortality is, as might be expected, much greater in the larger towns and in the country districts; and in towns, it is by far the greater in those densely crowded parts which are inhabited chiefly by the working people. Of course, the cause of the greater mortality of infants in the poorer districts, is the greater uncleanness, the worse drainage, and the bad fare and nursing of the children there.

THE QUEEN OF THE DESERT.

During the first conquests of France in Algeria, a French soldier, having been taken prisoner by the Arabs, was carried by them far into the desert. The Arab tried many times in vain to escape during the first few days; but at length, when the Arabs were very many marches beyond the routes of our army, their vigilance relaxed, and one night the Frenchman, finding his way, fell into a trap. He was captured, picked up a scimitar with his hands, and, as he lay on his knees, and so cut his bonds in twain, and was free. He then furnished himself noiselessly with a gun and ammunition, a poniard, and a package of dried dates, and crept swiftly away over the monotonous deserts, where the horses were tethered. He reached the fleetest of the troop, and in another moment was sleeping from his still sleeping foes at his master's utmost speed.

All night he sped at this furious pace, till, as morning deepened into noon, his exhausted steed staggered and fell prone and lifeless on the burning sands, leaving the soldier alone and afoot in the midst of the desert. Till night, however, he continued to march on, but when the shadows began to gather, his pace and courage also lessened, and at length, wholly worn out and hopeless, he had but little strength to ascend a small hill, wherein grew a few palm-trees, and, toiling himself down upon a slab of granite that creviced the sand at their feet. So utterly wearied and despairing was he, that he fell into a deep sleep instantly, without thinking of danger, or taking the least precaution against it. The brilliant morning sun awakened him by its ardent rays falling on the stone, and he gazed round, and afar over the vast, ocean-like plain, the fearful solitude of his position came upon him with terrible force.

All at once his gaze was attracted by a sort of grotto at the base of the hill shaded by a different sort of palm tree to those on its summit; and upon descending to view it nearer, he found the tree hung heavily with ripe dates, and within the grotto a sort of cave hollowed by nature in great masses of granite, and a fresh spring bubbling at its entrance. At this double discovery the instinct of life revived again; and he hoped to be able to live in this grotto till perchance, he should meet the drums of his beloved comrades on their way across the waste.

All that day he worked, to cut down with his knife one of the palms on the hill-top, as a protection against the beasts of prey, which, as he had heard, roamed over the desert. He succeeded in felling the tree; but, in spite of his utmost efforts, he could not cut it into lengths, as bars for his cave-entrance, before night once more came down. Exhausted by the labour and the heat, therefore, he made a hasty couch of leaves within the cave, and stretching his weary limbs upon it, was soon asleep.

In the middle of the night he was awakened by a strange sound, and raising his head from his leafy pillow, he recognized amid the silent darkness the accents of a deep and sonorous breathing, such as no human lungs ever gave forth. A terrible fear seized upon his heart like ice, and his hair grew crisp, and his limbs cold with a dank moisture; when growing up to the darkness, his eyes beheld two faint, yellow glimmers of light, not two feet from him. A little longer, and he made out the form of an enormous animal crouched beside him. But what animal? To which of the fierce desert races did it belong? This he could not tell. A strong and pungent odour was emitted by the sleeping beast—for it had again closed its eyes—and this gave a climax to the poor soldier's terror.

Hour after hour he endured the awful torture of listening to this savage breathing, of scenting this fatal odour, not daring to make the slightest movement, nor close his eyes for a single instant. At length the moon, in its passage, shone through the fissures of the cave, and the soldier beheld in its gleams the splendid