

## ON THE RHINOCEROS TRAIL—I

By W. S. CHADWICK

I STRONGLY dislike the rhinoceros; and that not merely on aesthetic grounds. His crass stupidity and chronic truculence are nearly always annoying, and, although I enjoy the spice of the "unexpected," the rhino's efforts in that direction are almost invariably overdone. One may have too much even of a good thing!

Yet as an item on the menu the lion loves him—principally on account of his fat—and probably hates him, too, for his frequent disturbance of such rare feasts. For at full growth the rhino is far too big a mouthful for Leo to chew, and only in tender youth may he be satisfactorily dealt with.

Because "Ma" and "Pa" rhino are aware of this fact, one or the other usually stays within call of their offspring, and when they eventually turn him adrift he adopts the maxim of "safety in numbers," and wanders in company with several companions. These habits render Leo's achievement of such luscious fare difficult. But he sometimes succeeds, and on two such occasions I was present.

I was approaching a rhino trail to water one evening about sundown with the intention of shooting a good specimen by moonlight, when I heard a snarling roar from some dense bushes about a hundred yards away, followed by grunts and squeals which indicated angry rhino.

Stealing forward with one boy, I crept to leeward of the thorn bush. The sounds were repeated in increased volume. I was already closer than I wanted to be, and could still see nothing, when I came to a fairly tall mimosa tree. In spite of the long white thorns I managed to climb it, and my naked henchman followed me, after first handing up my rifle.

From my perch the cause of the uproar was revealed. Amid scattered bushes lay the torn body of a young rhino, perhaps a week old, and snarling malevolently beside it stood a fine lion and lioness. Squealing with rage and rooting the ground with their horns, the victim's parents were preparing to charge. They had evidently done so once at least already, for there was blood on the bull's quarter, and a gaping wound showed on the cow's flank.

As we took in the scene they hurled themselves on the lions again. About six tons of vengeful fury descending on about eight hundred pounds of rage as red and desperate! But what the lions lacked in weight they made up in agility and weapons.

Side-stepping as neatly as a dancing master, the lion avoided the rush and sprang at the bull as he passed, clung for a moment with tooth and claw, then dropped lightly and whirled aside. The lioness made one swift stroke at the cow with a flashing forepaw, and whirled beside her mate, with teeth bared in defensive menace.

In the rhino's thick hides gaping wounds showed as they slithered to a halt and turned, and it was obvious that but for those thick hides they themselves might have formed a meal for their lighter adversaries. As it was, they halted a moment, then, turning, came and stood beside the body of the calf; while the lion and lioness growled defiance and showed no sign of retreating.

It may have been borne in on the rhino's ponderous mental processes that what they guarded was now of no value to any but the lions; and that in a game of patience the latter could give them points and a beating. Or it may have been the sudden appearance of another rhino couple a few yards away, which distracted their attention? I do not know. I did not see the latter couple arrive.

It was the bereaved bull's grunt which drew my attention to them, and then I saw that these also had a calf a few months old with them. The lions ceased snarling and stared at the newcomers; contenting themselves with a warning growl occasionally. But they showed no intention of attacking the second calf. He was too well guarded for such a scheme to hold any prospect of success.

The bereaved bull and his mate apparently forgot what a moment earlier had been so precious to them, and shambled towards the strangers. Whether they sought sympathy or help we may not know. It is certain, however, that they received none. No sooner did they arrive within a yard of the strangers than the bull emitted an angry squeal and struck violently with his horn at the already mauled one. The latter grunted, whirled aside, made one vicious upward thrust which seemed to glance off the other's hide, then turned and trotted off, followed by his mate.

Neither seemed to have received any injury, and the demonstration appeared rather like resentment of undue familiarity than a definite attack. The mauled rhino evidently accepted it as such, and in his departure from the scene either forgot his loss completely or resigned himself to it.

At their exodus the lions promptly got busy on the carcase again, and as the rhino family seemed about to take the water trail I got equally busy. The bull had a good horn, and since he was there a vigil by the path seemed unnecessary.

He dropped to the first shot, and as the lion and lioness sprang erect and glared suspiciously around I dropped the lion, letting the rhino cow and calf go. The lioness bounded a few yards away, stood for an instant trying to locate the danger, and then came and sniffed at the lion. As she did so I fired again, and she fell across him stone dead.

## A SATURDAY DICTIONARY

## DIEHARD

POLITICAL names are often fanciful, but it would be difficult to discover any which have been used in a greater variety of misleading senses than the term "diehard" at the present moment.

Originally the word had a well defined meaning. It meant a Peer who in 1911 desired to see the Parliament Act rejected by the House of Lords, even in face of the Liberal threat to swamp their Conservative majority by new creations. An alternative current at the time was "last ditcher"—a man who would fight for his principles until the last ditch.

The word was next applied to those Conservatives who in the 1922 Parliament persisted in opposing the Irish Settlement to which the Country was already committed. This was a development, if a legitimate development. It no longer referred to the political tactics of a body which wished to die hard, but to opinions and not to men, to supposedly outworn doctrines "dying hard" in ultra-conservative breasts.

But now the word appears to have lost this sense as well, and taken on a contrary meaning. A "diehard" is no longer a person who is simply opposed to anything at all. He is a man who proposes legislation, of whatever sort, to which Liberals and Socialists object; the word includes in fact all Conservatives who by their conduct actively disprove the taunt that the Conservative Party is a party of stagnation.