OF DISTINGUISHED ANIMALS
BY H. PERRY ROBINSON
ILLUSTRATED WITH PHOTOGRAPHS FROM LIFE

VI.—Of Rhinoceroses and Hippopotami.

It is difficult to think of the two beasts apart. Fix your mind on the hippopotamus, and the ugly horn of a rhinoceros comes inevitably lifting into view; consider a rhinoceros, and the other squelches in, with dank

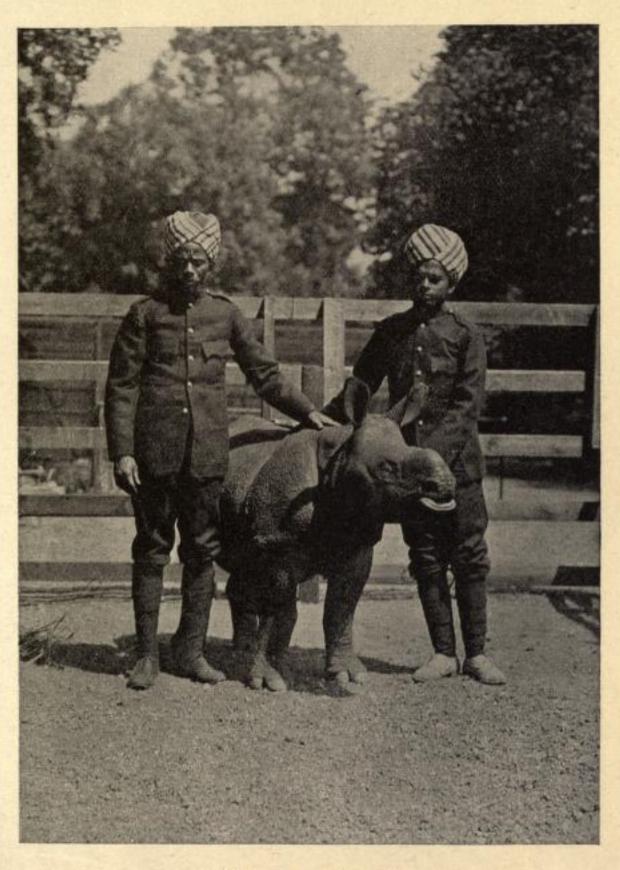
weeds streaming from its cavernous mouth.

The hippopotamus enclosure at the Zoo is just now rather in the nature of a kindergarten, for none of the three occupants will be over four years old till the end of the present year. They are, in fact, "totos"—a charming word for the young of such a cumbersome beast-and two of them are, so to speak, hippopotamæ, being girls. One of the two (which was received from Nigeria when four months old in November, 1906) has, sad to say, some swelling of her internal organs, which is plainly visible even through the thick skin of a hippotamus (suggesting a portmanteau which has been too tightly packed over some over-large and nubbly article within) and must be her despair if she takes any proper feminine pride in her figure.

As the English name is river-horse (not horse-river), it is hard not to be annoyed that the scientific name of the animal is not "potamippus," which, after all, is obviously less unwieldy than hippopotamus; but Sir Thomas Browne has already completely and delightfully

exposed the absurdity of the English name. It is, as he earnestly points out, a reflection on the inventive capacity of an Almighty Providence to make all things which live in the water no better than counterparts of things which live on the land. So far was this carried that the old naturalist-theologians had a complete submarine hierarchy, with water-monks, water-abbots and water-bishops; and the river horse was no more than a land-horse with ridiculously-webbed feet. Apart from the impiety involved in ascribing to the deity so little resourcefulness of invention, this was, Sir Thomas pointed out, zoologically inaccurate. As a matter of fact the hippopotamus was not at all like a horse, but very much like a pig-except in its feet. And this last detail is agreeably illustrative of the quality of the natural science of those days; for it happens to be precisely by their feet, as being both "even-toed," that naturalists to-day link the pig and the hippopotamus together! Otherwise, also, apart from the feet, the rhinoceros is conspicuously more swine-like in appearance than the hippopotamus.

It is doubtless the constant mental association of the two that is responsible for the common belief that the rhinoceros is almost an amphibious animal, a thing necessarily of the swamps and river banks. A writer on natural history, who has devoted himself largely to exposing the errors of others, speaks of the African rhinoceros as spending its time in "some secluded swamp," with no other companion but water-fowl, or among the "squashy brakes of the Nile"; and he



Rhinoceros (India).
Prince of Wales' Collection (H.M. King George)

tells how the Romans dragged it out from its "Nubian fens" to delight the crowds in the amphitheatre. As a matter of fact, neither species of African rhinoceros, the black or the white, frequents damp country, and the former at least is said to be generally out of health in wet seasons. "The dry, barren wastes of British East Africa," says Mr. Neumann, "seem to suit it best," and "the open arid plains of Masailand and Laikipia." It is true that the rhinoceros likes to drink once in twenty-four hours or so (and sometimes it visits water at dawn as well as in the evening), wherefore it prefers to stay within, at most, a dozen miles of a lake or river; and many a thirsty traveller in Africa has welcomed a meeting with a rhinoceros, knowing it to be a sure sign that water was not many miles away, or has been led to a stream by following the great brute's path through the scrub.

We know that a full-grown rhinoceros has recently been successfully "roped," even though its captors were unable to keep it after getting the huge beast to camp. But the most extraordinary incident in connection with rhinoceroses of which we have any record is doubtless the story of that full-grown black rhinoceros cow which went down to drink at the Thika River, near its junction with the Tana, in British East Africa, and was seized and pulled under water by a crocodile. The struggle was witnessed by Mr. Max Fleischmann, who was able to get photographs of it in its various phases, which, together with a detailed account of the fight embodied in a letter from Mr. Fleischmann. are given in Mr. Selous's "African Nature Notes and Reminiscences." But for the fact that the thing was seen, and for the evidence of these photographs, no one probably would have believed that a crocodile or any number of crocodiles could compass the death of a full-grown rhinoceros; but the latter, having been seized by a hind leg when in shallow water, was unable to get a good fair pull on his antagonist, and was gradually dragged out into the stream until beyond its depth. And anything more horrible than the picture of the huge brute, when once it had disappeared beneath the blood-stained water, being torn to pieces, even as it drowned (for it is believed that before the end other crocodiles had been attracted by the struggle, and they were probably swarming about it), it is not easy to conceive.

All the three species of Asiatic rhinoceros (though it is possible that a fourth species exists unidentified in Burma) haunt chiefly riverside swamps or a similarly wet neighbourhood; but the African rhinoceros, black or white, is no amphibian. It loves, indeed, to wallow in a mud-hole, as it delights to roll in the dust, wherefore it commonly has no inconsiderable quantity of the soil of the neighbourhood clinging to its already sufficiently unlovely person. There has been some discussion as to how the great blunt-nosed rhinoceros (next to the elephant the largest known land-mammal living) came by its name of "white," given to it by the Boers, seeing that the "black" species is often the

lighter of the two; but it has been pointed out that when covered with dust and standing in the full African sun, it may well have looked truly white. So disguised, indeed, may the creatures be with dust or mud that "in one district they appear almost white and in another red or nearly black, as the case may be," in harmony with the surrounding soil.

The white rhinoceros used to exist in almost countless numbers over wide areas in Southern Africa, from which it has been so completely exterminated that it was believed to be practically extinct until the discovery a few years ago that it still abounds in a particular district. Standing as much as 6ft. 6ins. at the shoulder (or a foot taller than its black cousin, though the great Indian rhinoceros has been known to reach 6ft. 4ins.), and measuring over 14ft. in length, the white rhinoceros habitually carries its unwieldy head so low that the front horn continually rubs against the ground and is more or less worn away by the constant friction. Gross and unlovely though it looks, however, its flesh is said to have been considered by both the Dutch and English hunters superior to that of any other game animal in South Africa; a fact which goes some way to explain the rapidity with which it has disappeared. The chief object of the slaughter, however, was the possession of the horns, which sometimes exceed 60ins. in length; and it is recorded that one hunter killed 60 white rhinoceroses in a season and another nine in a day.

The Zoological Gardens at present contain four

rhinoceroses, and they are accounted among the worst tempered and most dangerous beasts in Regent's Park. The young Indian rhinoceros from Nepal, presented by the King when Prince of Wales, the keeper can in a measure overawe and keep at bay with a broom; but no one takes liberties with the larger Indian specimen presented by H.H. the Maharajah of Cooch Behar, or with the female black rhinoceros from East Africa. Nor is the even more uncomely hairy-eared rhinoceros (also from India, and best considered as only a variety of the Sumatran species) any more sweet-tempered. This animal, the public is informed by the label on its cage, was "received in exchange," an announcement which has prompted Mr. Emanuel to remark that he does not know for what it was exchanged, but he considers that "the Society got done over the deal." In the rhinoceros, indeed, we see almost the reductio ad absurdum of nature's principle of sacrificing beauty to utility; and this particular creature is so frankly and universally unprepossessing that it seems ungenerous of science to call attention to so trivial, if distinctive, a detail as that it has hairy ears.

Of the temper of the rhinoceros when at large accounts are curiously contradictory, the subject, so far as the African species are concerned, having recently been well threshed out by Mr. Selous in the book already quoted. He himself considers the black rhinoceros to be "stupid and blundering," but rarely intentionally aggressive, saying that he has "never known an instance of one not running off immediately

African Rhinoceros

on getting my wind." Similarly Mr. F. Vaughan Kirby declares it to be "naturally timid" and "the easiest to kill of all large game." The experience of Mr. Neumann coincides with this, the beast, in his opinion, being "intensely stupid and marvellously blind." The white rhinoceros (in spite of the fact that one threw him and his horse into the air) Mr. Cotton Oswell apostrophizes as "Poor old stupid fellow the very thing for young gunners to try their 'prentice hands upon"—sad words, seeing how nearly the white rhinoceros has come to being extinct.

Many other authorities, however, speak of the animal's exceeding and gratuitous ferocity. Mr. Abel Chapman ranks the rhinoceros next to the elephant as the most dangerous of African wild game. Gordon Cumming found the black rhinoceros "extremely fierce and dangerous"; and the divergence of opinion appears in some points to extend to matters of fact on which discrepancy would seem unnecessary. Thus Mr. Neumann says that the Ndorobo "have far less fear of rhinoceroses than of elephants," while Mr F. J. Jackson, speaking also of natives of East Africa, avers that "as a rule they are more afraid of a rhinoceros than of either an elephant or a buffalo."

The Asiatic rhinoceroses, of which three different species are recognized, are generally regarded as more or less inoffensive until wounded or attacked; and in regard to the African black species the fact probably is that there is great variety of disposition among individuals; and it may well be, as Colonel Patterson says,

that the same animal is "one day savage and timid the next." That they are formidable antagonists when they attack may well be believed, for, in spite of their size and weight, they are very nimble on their feet, and can, as one sportsman says, "turn in their tracks like monkeys."

It is almost certain, however, that many of the cases of ferocity which are reported are no more than manifestations of the animal's stupidity-what is mistaken for a charge being but the bewildered rush of a frightened beast endeavouring to get away. With its miserable sight the rhinoceros is usually made aware of the approach of danger, if at all, either by its sense of smell or by the warning of the rhinoceros bird which, haunting the beast for the sake of the ticks which infest it, acts as sentinel. In the latter case the animal probably has no idea from what quarter it is threatened, and in the former it probably places the direction of the peril but vaguely. All rhinoceroses seemingly run up wind when suddenly roused or alarmed; and it necessarily follows that the first blind rush not seldom takes them straight at the object the scent of which has disturbed them. Thus many instances have been reported of their charging straight at passing and peaceful caravans, sometimes breaking through the line of porters, sometimes heading direct for one of the wagons; and whatever comes in the way of a rhinoceros moving at full speed is likely to suffer. The most remarkable story of the kind is perhaps that of Colonel Patterson, who tells how

A gang of 21 slaves, chained neck and neck as was the custom, was proceeding in Indian file along a narrow path when a rhinoceros suddenly charged out at right angles to them, impaled the centre man on its horn, and broke the necks of the remainder of the party by the suddenness of its rush.

Most African hunters have had the experience of being robbed of a shot at rhinoceros or buffalo by the bird (Buphaga—called also tick-bird or pecker) referred to above, which haunts the large animals for the sake of the ticks and other parasites which infest them. On catching sight of the hunter the bird rises into the air above the animal's back, in short quick flights, while uttering its alarm cry; and the beast, seeming to understand thoroughly the significance of the warning, usually bolts-or charges-at once. And the preponderance of opinion is that the bird knows well what it is doing, not being so much alarmed for itself as intending purposefully to give warning to its shortsighted host. It is always difficult in any wild creature to distinguish instinct from deliberate intent; but it is a curious fact, apparently well vouched for, that the same bird when frequenting domestic buffalo or other cattle goes through no such performance, but appears to be indifferent to the approach of man. If this be true, however cautious one may be (and it is necessary to be very cautious) in interpreting the actions of wild creatures, it is hard not to think that the bird is the animal's intentional ally against man,-that it acts, that is, with the direct intention of protecting the beast which furnishes its food supply from danger.

An old belief was that the rhinoceros whetted its

horn upon a rock (or an agate, according to Pliny) before it began to fight; and had it no majesty of its own it would, in poetry and tradition, be dignified by the enemies which it made, its hereditary antagonists being the lion and the elephant.

In the wastes of India, while the earth Beneath him groans, the elephant is seen, His huge proboscis writhing, to defy The strong rhinoceros, whose pond'rous horn Is newly whetted on a rock.

So Darwin, and again Glover :-

Go, stately lion, go! and though with scales inpenetrable armed, Rhinoceros, whose pride can strike to earth the unconquered elephant.

Cowper and Dryden, however, are of the opinion that it was the elephant that did the striking to earth, the rhinoceros being no match for "her unequal foe." But as a matter of fact a fight has been witnessed between an Indian rhinoceros and a full-grown male wild elephant in which the former came off victorious.

If we follow those writers who identify the rhinoceros with the unicorn, then its hereditary feud with the lion dates back to ages when there were hardly any crowns to fight for; and if the lion generally had the better of the fight it was by cunning rather than by strength, for "as soon as the lion sees the unicorn be betakes himself to a tree," when "the unicorn in his fury, with all the swiftness of his course, running at him sticks his horn fast in the tree, and then the lion falls upon him and kills him."



This seems to have been the invariable procedure. Spenser tells the same story, and we know from Shakespeare that "unicorns may be betrayed with trees." It is not necessary, however, to suppose that the rhinoceros furnished the first suggestion of the unicorn, which was probably as purely fanciful a creature as the phœnix or the hippogriff, the early poets and naturalists, bent on inventing the most fearsome beasts which their imagination could concoct, hitting as easily on the idea of a straight-horned horse as they did on that of a winged lion, or of an eagle clad in a scaly coat of mail. Some at least of the much-prized "unicorn's horns" (so precious, when fashioned into drinking cups, for the detection of poison, that one horn was "worth a city") were horns of the narwhal. Both the existing African species of rhinoceros and one of the three Asiatic are bicorned, and "rhinoceros ivory" (in itself a preposterous term) is a substance composed of agglutinated hairs. It is reasonably certain that the unicorn of the Bible was not a rhinoceros, says the Rev. J. G. Wood, who went into the subject thoroughly, inclining to identify the Hebrew reem, plausibly enough, with the huge member of the ox tribe, the now extinct urus.

The rhinoceros, then, need not shoulder the feuds of the unicorn; and if he has any quarrel with lion or elephant he must settle it in his own person. But in truth "the mailed rhinoceros that of nothing recks" has little to fear from any living thing but man, in spite of the one black rhinoceros which we know was killed by crocodiles, and the fact that, according to Mr. Cotton Oswell, the male white rhinoceros has sometimes been destroyed by hyenas. Combats between two rhinoceroses have been often seen in Africa, when the object of each appears to be to hook his antagonist in the soft region around the throat; but though they fight doggedly and are sometimes badly lacerated about the face, Mr. Jackson thinks it "highly improbable that they ever kill each other." Curiously enough, none of the Asiatic species seems to use its horn as a weapon of offence. Colonel Heber Percy says that the great Indian rhinoceros, when it charges home, "only bites"; the fact apparently being that it strikes with its lower side tushes, like a boar; and with these, according to Colonel Pollok, it "can inflict a fearfully clean and deep cut, and an elephant once ripped by one will never go near a rhinoceros again."

While, as has been said, the rhinoceroses are accounted among the most dangerous animals in the Zoo, the young hippopotami are so markedly docile that they will allow even a stranger, when properly introduced, to rub their noses with his hand. But the nose of a hippopotamus is not only disagreeably wet and slimy, but unexpectedly set with bristles; so that rubbing one (except for the distinction of being permitted to do it) is a doubtfully pleasurable occupation. Though the reputation of the rhinoceros, however, is so evil, while the hippopotamus is commonly considered fairly harmless, the testimony of so high an authority as Mr. Hagenbeck is all in favour of the former.