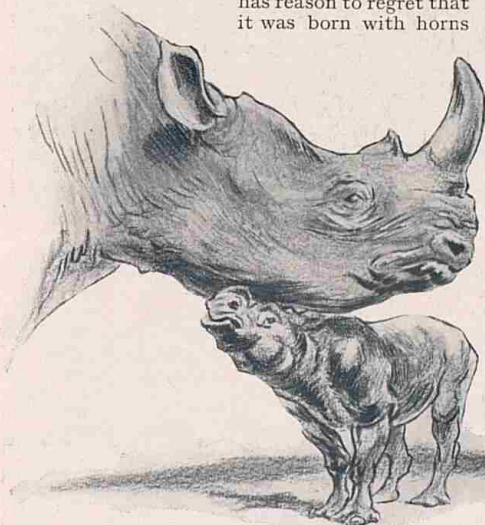


PEOPLE do not say complimentary things to the African rhinoceros; they do not come bearing gifts: all have occasion to be pleased when they reflect that the bars of his enclosure are not only of the best British material and workmanship, but are embedded in cement. For he has an unpleasant way with him; he looks out on to the world through a pair of the unfriendliest eyes to be found anywhere in it; he would trample his own keeper if that cautious, far-sighted man would but give him half a chance. Most vegetarians are kindly folk; this one, though he eats nothing more exciting than hay and roots with a little corn, is more savage than some of the lions that demand raw meat and plenty of it. His bad temper has even spoilt his looks; instead of having a for-horn eighteen inches long, the one he bears in front is no longer than the rear horn that some of his family carry with them in their Tanganyika home. But in truth the rhinoceros, as a class rather than an individual, has reason to regret that it was born with horns



The loveliest baby in all the world.

at all for, although comparatively small, these are very valuable and have led to wholesale destruction of the unfortunate wearers. There is a great demand for rhino horn in China, where it is used for medicine. Unfortunately the clumsy, ill-tempered beast, though really quite harmless if left alone, is very easily killed; Major Radcliffe Dugmore, who knows more about the subject than most people, goes so far as to say that rhinos are in danger of extermination in East Africa.

If this be so, the Zoo rhino, who has not even acquired the distinction of a pet name, has something to be grateful for, though he is quite unaware of the fact.

He stands about five feet high at the shoulder and is ten feet long, or a little less. He has three toes to his feet and would be better without them if he were not living in security, for they make the spoor by which he is followed when he is at large, and when the nearest natives are running short of rhinoceros horn. He is a thick-skinned fellow and this is all to the good, since nobody says nice things about him; he has no hair on his body, but carries stiff bristles on his tail. When in a native state he grows angry or alarmed, that tail stands straight up and those who are his ill-wishers turn to regard him along the barrel of a rifle or, if they haven't one, they

FRIENDS IN CAPTIVITY—XIV.

The African Rhinoceros

BY S. L. BENSUSAN.

Illustrated by
L. R. BRIGHTWELL.



A blameless vegetarian.

begin to think of home. Truth to tell he is always in greater danger than they are, for he is short-sighted. There is a bird that attaches itself to him, lives largely on, and off, his tick-

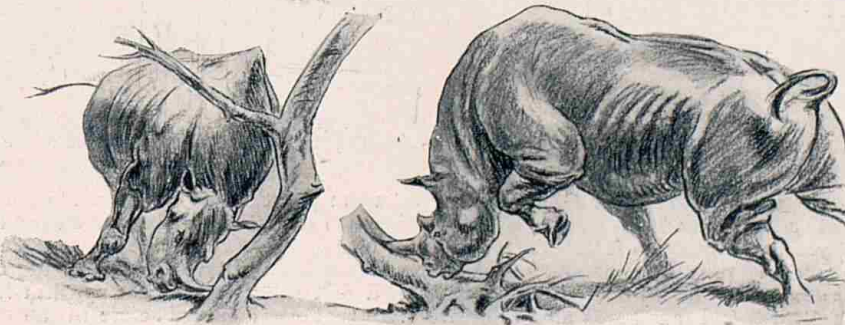


The rhino rises horse fashion—bow first.

laden back and tells him when he should begin to sit up and take notice, but his range of vision is estimated at a maximum of one hundred and fifty yards, some say it is not more than half as much, and he is forced to depend upon a highly developed power of scent. If he smells trouble, he does one of two things. Either he makes off in the opposite direction just as quickly as he can or, far more often, he turns and charges the unfamiliar odour. Two tons of infuriated rhino with tail erect coming down a track at prodigious speed—a brisk gallop that is far more rapid than it appears to be—make for great nervousness on the part of those who have provoked the exercise. It is this blind, furious onrush, which a lithe, active man can nearly always avoid, that has brought him a bad name, and has given rise to an amazing crop of travellers' tales concerning sudden danger and surpassing valour. But this is not



Resting his mighty brain.



It's this sort of thing that wears the horn down.

One of the monsters of the animal world at the Zoo has been chosen this week for Mr. Bensusan's study. This is the short-sighted, thick-skinned African Rhinoceros, an ill-tempered two-tonner, who, harmless if left alone, is very easily and dangerously excited.

wood, and have had the time of their lives. Like King Lear, he is more sinned against than sinning, but he is not the sort of creature to make mistakes about. I don't know if the Zoo rhino feeds by night, probably not; but he would if he were at home. Leaves, grasses, reeds, succulent plants, he would range from one to another, his mouth is fitted specially for the job, the lips are thin in the middle to enable him to take his chosen food at ease. For choice he follows beaten tracks, another unfortunate habit in a world where men are born hunters and know every spoor. He drinks at water holes, and in spite of his great weight treads very lightly. As a rule he does not travel far, but when the torrid heat of the African summer has dried up the usual sources of water supply, he wanders for miles by night, and hunting men have assured me that he can scent water afar.

Even though the rhinoceros is disposed to blink in unfriendly fashion at all who come



Horns as they should be. Very rarely three are developed.

to Regent's Park, he is not insusceptible to the shafts of Cupid. To outward seeming Miss Rhino is no more beautiful than he, but her horns are more delicate—longer and thinner to be precise. Neither his nor hers are attached to the skull. If the course of true love runs smooth she will present him with a family—never more than one calf at a time, and when he is a proud parent his nervousness increases; he looks for whatever trouble his weak eyes can discern. But as many a hunter can testify, rhinos are devoted parents and, if they could talk, would doubtless assure us that their calf is the most beautiful baby in the world. Each of them is prepared to put up a fight to the death in its defence.

It is a pity that the Zoo rhinoceros is so constituted that he cannot make any friends, that even his keeper cannot approach him. Rightly considered he and his family are the Ishmaels of the African wilds, their horns against all men and every man's rifle, spear or game pit against them. Yet they do no harm at all if left to themselves, are dangerous only when frightened, leave both wild life and cultivated lands alone, and ask no more than to be allowed to live out their days in surroundings that none need envy. In spite of the fact that this special friend in captivity resented my advances, I can't help feeling that he has a very just grievance against mankind. The only thing to be remembered is that, if he had not been carried away, those worn-out horns of his might have graced a Chinese drug store.