

# ADVENTURES

AMONG

# WILD BEASTS

ROMANTIC INCIDENTS & PERILS  
OF TRAVEL, SPORT, AND EXPLORATION  
THROUGHOUT THE WORLD

BY

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"ADVENTURES IN THE GREAT DESERTS," "ADVENTURES IN THE GREAT  
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WITH TWENTY-FOUR ILLUSTRATIONS

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## HUNTING THICK-SKINNED

spirits of the departed elephants had to be conciliated and this was done by cutting off the tip of each ear and trunk, and ceremoniously burying them. Finally the tusks were extracted, and the carcasses were left to the dogs and vultures.

When two Kafirs had performed all these operations on the blind elephant, which Steedman could lawfully claim as his, he decided to dissect the beast for scientific purposes ; but when this intention was made clear to the blacks, their very wool bristled with horror at such an indignity to the deceased ; and no amount of persuasion, bribes, or threats would prevail on any of the tribe to help him in such a task, which, accordingly, was not carried out.

The rhinoceros is both unlovely and unreasonable. We have seen that even the lion and the leopard, if left alone, are in the main harmless to man ; but this surly beast is liable to sudden fits of irritation, during which it is better to give him a wide berth. An insect stings him (for, thick as his hide is, it has its tender parts), or a fly gets in his eye, or a blade of grass up his nostril ; the result is that, hopelessly ignorant of the law of cause and effect, he vents his ill-humour on whatever may be in his way, charging at a gate-post or a tree or a man, or even a brother pachyderm, with delightful impartiality. The Rev. J. G. Wood cites an instance of one of them attacking, while in this mood, a number of picketed horses, and ruthlessly slaying several with his horn. Bearing this temper of his in mind, we are bound to sympathize with the hunter who makes it his business to destroy such a public nuisance.



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As to this horn which forms the animal's chief weapon of defence and offence, it should be pointed out that it has no connexion with the bony framework of the head ; it is rather a sort of corn or wart, and could easily be removed with a sharp carving-knife. But having thus been operated on, the rhinoceros would not be entirely defenceless, for his great strength, weight, and speed would still render him almost as dangerous an adversary as the elephant himself.

There are several varieties of the African rhinoceros ; but it will be sufficient to say that there are two black kinds—one large and one small—and that, till recently, there were also two “ white ” or smoke-coloured kinds. The larger white rhinoceros is still occasionally met with in South Africa, and ranks next to the elephant among land mammals in point of size. This species has two horns ; the hind one a few inches long, the other anything up to four feet. The late Roualeyn Gordon Cumming whose rhinoceros-hunting adventures the present writer has related elsewhere\*) killed one of these animals whose fore-horn measured five feet two inches.

The east side of Africa, from Abyssinia down to the Cape, is the special home of the rhinoceros, though persistent hunting is gradually centralizing him midway between the two, and in a few years he will probably be quite extinct. In the time of the great explorer James Bruce, Abyssinia was overrun with them, particularly the two black species ; and he describes the native method of hunting them. Two men, one armed with a long spear, the other with a sword, lay in wait for the animal on the edge of a wood, both seated on one horse, while dogs

\* See “ Adventures in the Great Deserts.”



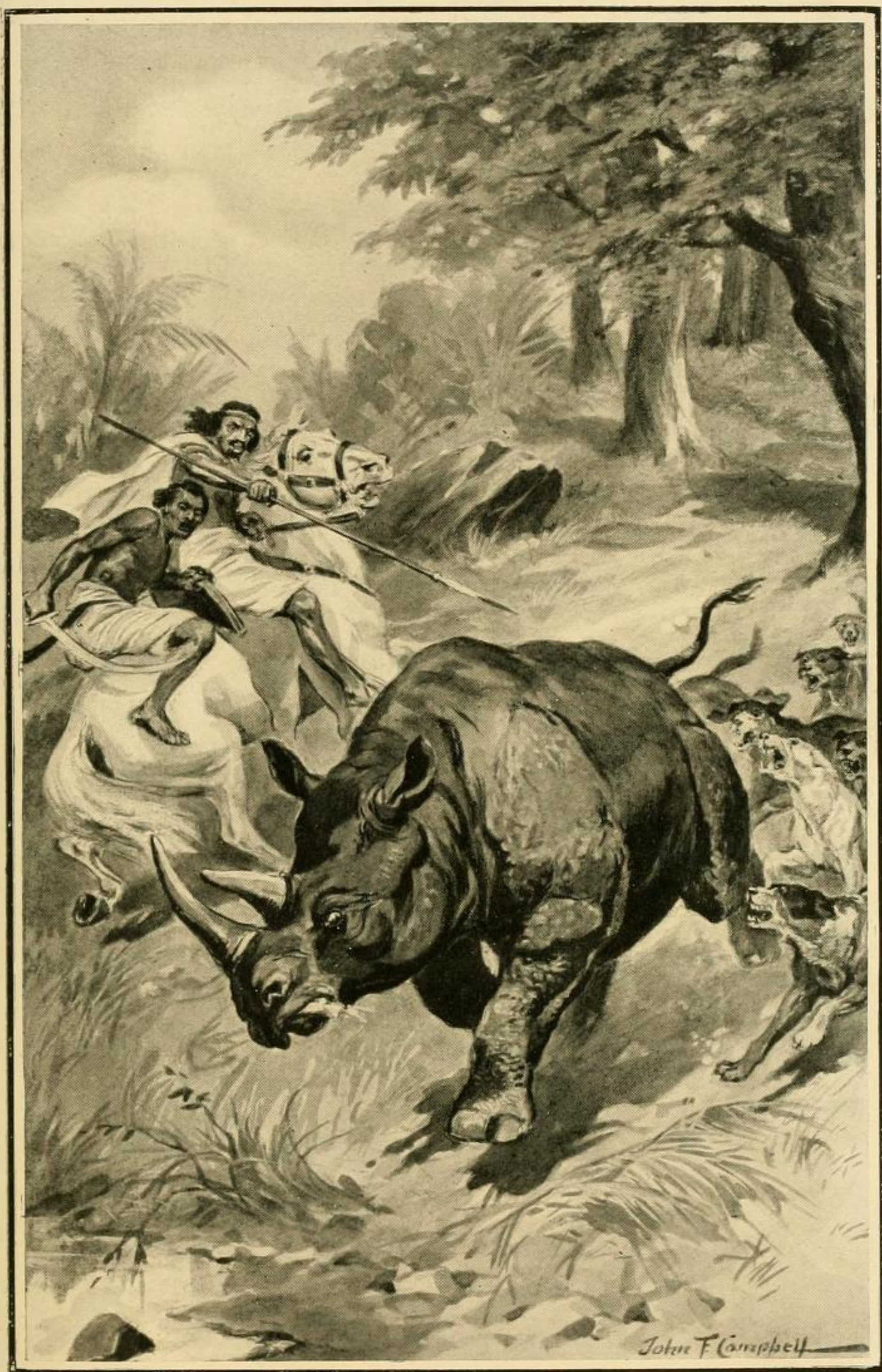
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were sent in to worry him from his retirement among the trees into the open. As soon as he appeared, the man with the lance, who sat foremost in the saddle, guided his horse towards the irritated brute and tried to pierce him in his most vulnerable part—the left flank. More often than not this attempt was fruitless, for, ungainly as he is, the beast moves at immense speed, and can turn with surprising ease. On catching sight of a fresh foe he would trample a way through the dogs that crowded round him, and make a mad rush for the horse.

But all this had been foreseen. The spearman, an expert rider, had only to draw his horse to one side, and the rhinoceros, unable to stop himself for the moment, shot straight past. But he was soon ready to turn again and to make once more for the horse. Here he had reckoned without the man with the sword. He, slipping down from behind his companion just as the horse was drawn to one side to avoid the charge, proceeded to run after the rhinoceros, and before the creature was aware of his presence, had with one swift stroke of his sword severed the large muscle of the ham just above the hock, and the hunt was finished, barring the “death”; for the rhinoceros fell either on his knees or on his side, and lay roaring, screaming, and powerless; and a score of men were soon at hand to stab him to death.

The hippopotamus, a giant twelve feet long, is exclusively an African beast, and, like the rhinoceros, but rarely found nowadays; even as far back as 1833 there were but two left in the Cape Colony, and these were preserved as curiosities. He is still seen occasionally in the northern parts of South Africa, the Congo State





### HUNTING THE RHINOCEROS

In Abyssinia two hunters, one armed with a spear, the other with a sword, are mounted on the same horse. The one with the spear goads the animal to charge, and as the huge brute thunders past, the man with the sword slips down and severs its hamstring.



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and the country of the Niger Basin. In the 'fifties he was common enough in the latter district, and often caused a good deal of trouble to the H.M.S. *Pleiad* exploring expedition under Dr. Baikie, R.N.

Dr. Baikie, it may be remembered, succeeded to the command of the *Pleiad* man-of-war schooner on the death of the Captain, and took her up the Niger and Benue, proceeding two hundred and fifty miles farther inland than any of his predecessors had done. He found the hippopotamus in very bad odour among the natives, despite the peaceable character which most travellers have given to the animal. This might spring from the natural horror that the blacks have of the great river monster, based on the ghastly tales of his dealings with man that have been handed down from father to son ; or it might arise from the very real grievance which they had against him on account of his attacks on their sugar-canes ; or, again, it might be (and probably was) that the negro's inordinate love of hippopotamus-meat, and his desire to barter the skin and tusks, make him seize upon any excuse for killing him by fair means or foul.

Baikie met with two native methods of destroying the creature—neither of them particularly sportsmanlike—traps and poisoned arrows. On the banks of the Benue he soon learned to know the track of the hippopotamus, and to avoid it, not from fear of the animal so much as of the horribly dangerous trap which was fairly certain to be somewhere in the neighbourhood. This consisted of a few poles planted firmly in the ground in a rough circle, slanting upwards till the tops almost met. Lightly held by these tops was a heavy perpendicular beam, shod with a sharp iron point. In theory, this mighty engine



## CHAPTER XVII

### TAPIR AND RHINOCEROS HUNTING

the hyrax, the tapir, and the rhinoceros.—Mr. Elliott's attempt to catch a hyrax.—A plucky little beast.—The tapir a prehistoric animal.—The Asiatic variety.—M. Benant's adventure.—Trying to catch a baby tapir.—Reckoning without the mother.—Flight.—Tapir *versus* Malay.—A timely shot.—The Asiatic rhinoceros.—A cowardly variety.—Roasting the Sumatran rhinoceros.—Another adventure of John White's.—The danger of possessing a lame horse.—An angry rhinoceros.—Pursued and overtaken.—A narrow escape.—Death of the horse.—And of the rhinoceros.

MORE or less intimately connected with the elephant are the rhinoceros, the tapir, and a remarkable little creature of which very little seems to be known—the hyrax. Each of these animals has a representative in either the South or the West, but here we shall discuss only those specimens which are found in the Eastern portion of the earth.

At first glance the hyrax would seem to have no more in common with the elephant than we have, for he is a soft-coated little thing, scarcely the size of a hare; yet the modern zoologists, following in the wake of Cuvier, tell us that he undoubtedly is very nearly related to the rhinoceros, etc. The Eastern variety of hyrax is found in Syria and round about the Red Sea, and most probably is the "coney" frequently mentioned in Holy Scripture.



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Mr. C. B. Elliott, the traveller in Palestine, occasionally came across families of these little things, burrowing in the hills or among the ruins of ancient Eastern cities, and not unnaturally mistook them for a kind of earless or short-eared rabbit.

Once—and only once—he endeavoured to catch one. He ran him down from the mouth of a burrow into a narrow defile, which, curving round the foot of a hill, came to an abrupt end two hundred yards farther on at the bottom of a low precipice. Mr. Elliott hailed this precipice with delight, for he was bound now to have the hyrax in a *cul-de-sac*, unless the little thing tried to scale one of the two steep banks on either side of the pass, and this was very improbable.

Finding at length that he had come to the end of his tether, the fugitive did not turn to bay as most hunted beasts would do, but, with his back turned to his pursuer, hopped from right to left, now and then pushing his nose under a huge stone, as though hoping to find shelter there. His would-be captor stood watching him three feet away, expecting every moment that the creature would at least turn and endeavour to dodge between his legs. But the “coney” still gave no other sign of knowing that he was “wanted” than before; and, tired of watching these evolutions, Mr. Elliott made a grab at him.

But he had not allowed for the animal’s possessing quite an elephantine sense of smell; as he stretched out his hand, the little head suddenly turned, the hyrax made a sideward spring, and bit his thumb to the bone.

Mr. Elliott was neither a veterinary surgeon nor a game-keeper, and did not know how to collar a vicious animal; he was, moreover, short-tempered, which a hunter of wild



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beasts has no right to be ; and, carried away by his feelings, he snatched his hand free again, and aimed an angry kick at the offender. In an instant the formidable teeth were through his trousers, into his calf and out again, striking, rather than tearing, the flesh painfully.

Ready now to laugh at himself for being frightened or outwitted by such a contemptible foe, he stooped over the animal, but was soon glad to spring erect again ; for the hyrax immediately raised his head with the obvious intention of driving his powerful little teeth through the nose or chin of his opponent. Foiled in this benevolent attempt, the hyrax still showed no sign of turning to flee, but stood looking, half inquisitively, half defiantly, at the disturber of his peace. Mr. Elliott grew to like the position less and less, and at length drew several paces back, and the victorious animal, seeing a way of escape, suddenly darted between the explorer's feet and scuttled back towards his burrow.

The tapir, as may be seen from a glance at a portrait of him, is closely related to the elephant, the pig, and the horse, and, next to the hyrax, is to zoologists the most interesting of the group ; for, like the marsupials, he seems almost to have no business on the earth nowadays. He is prehistoric, and absurdly out of date—behind the times altogether, in fact. If, having the elephant, we can dispense with the services of the mastodon or the mammoth, we could equally do without the tapir, now that we have got used to a revised edition of him in the horse.

The truth is that, where natural man is concerned, we often find a sort of implied treaty with those of the lower animals that are not required for food, personal adorn-



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ment, or domestic use, and that do not avowedly threaten the lives or the interests of the human race. Among the few beasts that come within this narrow category is the tapir, and to him man has tacitly said for countless centuries : "Leave me alone, and I'll leave you alone ; and when I want thongs I'll cut them out of rhinoceros- or cow-hide, as long as you behave yourself." Thus, while his early contemporaries are only known to the geologist, the tapir himself still lives on, for he has generally kept to the conditions of the contract.

The Asiatic variety is to be found round about the Malayan district, and is distinguished from the Western species by having a longer proboscis, and by the possession of a large white patch that extends over the beast from saddle to rump. The markings of the young, however, are very different, the little things being covered with an orderly arrangement of light-coloured spots and bars which, thrown into relief by the black ground of their hides, are very ornamental.

The desire to possess one of these Malayan baby-tapirs, for exhibition purposes, once brought M. Benant, a French museum curator, into very serious trouble. M. Benant, accompanied by a native guide, was searching for botanical and zoological treasures in the swamps of Malacca, when an old female tapir and her young one came suddenly into view from the other side of a fringe of bushes hard by. They were, no doubt, in search of mud wherewith to coat themselves against the stings of the flies and scorpions, for at sight of the swamp both plunged eagerly forward towards the water and slime that lay at their feet. But scarcely had the mud touched her when the mother raised her head, sniffed the air sharply as though conscious of



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the presence of trespassers, and at length turned her eyes to the two men who were but ill-concealed behind a tree. The Frenchman was armed with a single-barrelled gun, and the Malay with a spear and a heavy native knife, or *pisang*.

"I shall shoot her and capture the little one," whispered Benant, as he raised his gun. But his marksmanship was not equal to his scientific lore; the bullet missed the mother, and lodged in the neck of the little one just as she was trying to persuade it to move to the far side of the river.

Generally the tapir is the gentlest and timidest of beasts, but even a human mother would not see her offspring slaughtered without protest. With a roar of vengeance, the old tapir charged with incredible speed towards the mother, and M. Benant frankly took to his heels. The native hurled his spear at the charging beast, and, seeing that it glanced off her shoulder, inflicting but a skin wound, she hung hand and foot to the tree, hoping to climb out of reach before she could get at him. But it was too late; the trunk was very large, and offered no more foothold than a blank wall. In despair the Malay made a tremendous upward spring, hoping to reach a branch with his fingers, and so draw himself into safety.

Meanwhile, out of breath and half ashamed of himself, Benant had halted behind a tree fifty yards or more from the swamp. As he looked round, the Malay was making frantic efforts to reach the branch; his heels were nearly three feet above the ground, and he was hanging on by the tips of his fingers. But before he could get a surer hold, the tapir had reached him in full gallop; her prodigious hoofs struck his calves violently, causing him first to



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swing like a gigantic pendulum, and then to lose his g altogether, and fall half stunned to the ground.

In France M. Benant had seen a prostrate dog maul by a wild-boar, and the tapir's next proceeding was horrible reminder of that experience ; for she gripped the Malay between her forefeet, battered his body with her snout, and at last, opening her mouth, seized his hip in her powerful jaws. The pain seemed to rouse the native to his senses again, for with a stupendous effort he wrenched his *kris* free from his girdle.

Shivering to think of how little use this unwieldy weapon would be at such close quarters, the Frenchman threw aside his fears, reloaded his gun, and ran back to the fray almost as hard as he had run from it. And not too soon for at sight of the moving arm of the Malay the tapir let go his hip and seized him by the elbow so fiercely that he screamed out with the pain. Reckless now of his own safety, and conscious of the uncertainty of his aim, the impetuous Frenchman did not stop till the muzzle of his gun almost touched the furious animal's eye ; then he fired, and seldom has a tapir been killed at so close a range. M. Benant thus got two dead animals instead of one living one, and saddled himself with a heavy surgeon's bill for his guide.

When an artist wishes to paint a rhinoceros, it may be noticed in nine cases out of ten that he chooses a particular variety for his subject, and the result is that most of us have grown up in the belief that the rhinoceros is a beast that wears a skin at least three sizes too large for him. Now, this is to paint the evil one blacker than he is ; for, when we come to the facts, the skin of the animal is not at all a bad fit, excepting that of





### AN INFURIATED MOTHER

The tapir is credited with an amiable and gentle disposition, but when M. Benant shot a young one the mother charged furiously. The zoologist took to his heels, and his Malay servant tried to climb a tree, but the brute was upon him before he succeeded, and knocked him down and mauled him badly before M. Benant shot it.



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the Indian species, which certainly does lie in generous holds.

If "handsome is as handsome does" be not always true, the opposite is certainly the case where the rhinoceros is concerned, no matter whether he hails from Africa, India, or the Eastern Archipelago; and if the elephant be the gentleman of the forest, his relative is the ill-bred curmudgeon who shambles his heavy-footed way through life quite regardless of the feelings of anyone but himself. Some varieties add to this the vice of cowardice. Two or three times M. Benant and his friend Windsor Earl tried to shoot the Sumatran rhinoceros, and on each occasion he ran away from them, not even turning when he was hit; and it is even said that this species will flee from a good-sized dog. This is all the more curious in that he is generally of solitary habits, and it is when alone that most wild beasts are disposed to be aggressive.

This particular kind is fonder than most of his family of wallowing in the mud, a propensity which sometimes brings him to an untimely end at the hands of the Malays. Often by the close of the wet season the rhinoceros has encased himself in a small mountain of clay, and, as this hardens, the creature can only hope to free himself from this unpleasant coat of mail by the wear and tear of time. While he is thus hampered, a group of Malays will follow his slow movements, wait till he falls asleep, and then, with the atrocious cruelty of their race, will hem him in on all sides with rice-straw and dry wood, to which they set light; flaming brands and faggots are then thrown on him till he is completely buried in a huge fire, and so is cooked, just as our gipsies at home roast a hedgehog,



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clay and skin coming off together when the roast is "done."

The rhinoceros of Cochin China is especially fleet of foot, and is no less fierce than the African animal. When to excessive speed you add enormous strength and a horn long enough and sharp enough to go straight through the body of a horse and pierce a man on the other side, you have one of the most dangerous antagonists that the earth affords ; and it is not to be wondered at that twentieth-century sportsmen have ground for complaint of the prevailing scarcity of these unpleasing animals.

But when Lieutenant White, U.S.N., whose elephant-trapping experiences have been related, was travelling through Cochin China in the forties, the hunter had not far to look for game of this sort ; often it came to hand before he was ready, as once happened to Mr. White. His horse had suddenly gone lame, and Mr. White, who had thus been obliged to fall out from a boar-chase in which he had been engaged with some other travellers, was walking the animal back to the village from which he had started. On emerging from the forest, he came on to a wide stretch of grass-ground, skirted by a cane-plantation, and dotted over with large, wide-spreading bushes.

Soon he noticed that one of these bushes, which lay on his right front, was moving in a most unaccountable fashion ; there was little wind, yet the bush rocked and heaved as though a storm were tearing at it. Curious as to this phenomenon, the American touched his off-bridle with the intention of approaching the spot ; but, instead of obeying, the horse suddenly stood stock still, a tremor passing through the whole of his body. White used the



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our very gently ; the horse snorted, but would not stir, and, on his bridle being jerked sharply, broke out into a frightened neigh, and the rider could see the sweat start from the terrified beast's withers. Willing to humour him, he pulled the other rein, and, seemingly delighted at this concession, the animal started forward at a brisk canter, quite forgetful of his lameness.

Thus they came abreast of the moving bush about thirty yards away from it, and White half reined up, and turned to look at the cause of the mysterious motion. What he saw was a single-horned rhinoceros, presumably asane with rage, goring and tearing and tossing the innocent bush till there promised to be very little of it left by the time his anger was appeased. Badly mounted as he was, the sailor had no desire for closer acquaintance with such a companion ; so, as the horse seemed to have got the better of his lameness, he let him choose his own pace, and they moved on again at a smart trot. But now, either what little wind there was changed, and so carried the scent towards the rhinoceros, or else that furious beast heard the sound of the departing hoofs ; for suddenly the lieutenant was conscious of a vibration of the ground, and, turning his head, saw that the rhinoceros, evidently aware that any two sides of a triangle are together greater than the third side, was coming in a straight line towards the beginning of the road which the hunted man was hoping to reach—and at such a rate that only at full gallop could a horse outrun him.

No longer hesitating about using the spur, he worked the horse up to the top of his speed ; but it was like turning up the wick of an exhausted lamp : the gallop endured for a bare minute, then the poor brute stumbled, slowed,



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and, sweating at every pore, settled down to a despairing hobble, yet pricking up his ears and panting as the sound of the lumbering footsteps drew nearer. White had now rather more than half a minute in which to make up his mind as to his course. His gun, loaded in both barrels, was slung across his shoulder ; but, though he was far better in the saddle than the majority of sailors, as well as a remarkably good shot, he had had but little experience in firing from horseback, and was too much a man of the world to risk experiments at such a time.

One of two things he must certainly do, and that quickly : either turn the horse adrift, and rely for his salvation on his own legs and aim, or else face his pursuer, wait for his charge, and dodge it, repeating the manœuvre till the enemy tired down or gave up the game. Consideration for the horse led him to the second decision, and, disregarding his beast's fright, he swung him round on his haunches, and, standing up in the stirrups, awaited the rush of the rhinoceros.

It came quite soon enough, and it was only by a short twelve inches that he avoided it. But the savage monster was able to pull up and turn much more quickly than the rider had allowed for ; and he had scarcely swung his horse round a second time before the rhinoceros was on him again. This time the horse, soaking with perspiration and lather, and fascinated by fear, could not or would not move. In vain the lieutenant drove the spur-rowels in, and in his frenzy of excitement struck the creature with his clenched fist across the crest. The poor wretch stood quivering till the horrible horn was within an inch of his chest ; then, too late, he rose, shrieking, on to his haunches ; there was a ghastly, sickening concussion, and White,



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Knowing too well what had happened, kicked his feet free of the stirrups, and slid to the ground in a sitting position, the poor horse's death-scream ringing in his ears the while. Stiff and aching, he struggled to his feet and snatched his gun, just as the rhinoceros disengaged his horn from the belly of the dead beast.

"I'll make you pay for this," gasped the young sailor, ready in his fury to fight the murderer hand to hand if need were. His arm shook with rage as he took aim, but the ball nevertheless did all that was required of it; it caught the rhinoceros under the shoulder, piercing the skin just where it was tenderest, and the animal dropped on his knees, bellowing and foaming at the mouth, and while the American was still debating as to whether a second shot was called for, the brute rolled over dead.