

ONE summer day, when I was a boy at one of our great public schools, I was sitting in a secluded corner of the playing fields waiting for roll-call. I was reading a copy of THE WIDE WORLD MAGAZINE, and for a space forgot all about the tranquil English country-side; in fancy I was transported to the depths of savage Africa. I had come across an account of a rhinoceros hunt in the Masai country, and it fired my blood. Thenceforth I longed for the day when I, too, could pit myself against the black African rhino, that "two tons of bad temper."

In due course I left school and obtained an appointment in the Forest Service of the Federated Malay States. After four years' duty I obtained eight months' leave, and at last got a chance to fulfil my long-cherished desire to go big-game hunting in Africa.

Six weeks later found my party—consisting of myself, my Chinese boy, a Mnyamwezi gunbearer, a Wanderobo tracker, a Swahili cook (who also acted as interpreter), fourteen Tanganyika porters, and an ox-wagon—trekking across the Southern Masai Reserve, through a vast sea of yellowing grass broken here and there by low rock-strewn hills covered at their bases with dense thorn-scrub. A passing Indian trader gave me news of a notable rhino near a kraal called Bardamet. The beast carried mighty horns, he said, and frequented some thick bush close to a water-hole, whence it was wont to charge out upon chance passers-by. We camped by the spring—a bare two inches of dirty water—and before turning in sat listening spellbound to the weird night noises. We could hear the barking of baboons and the unearthly laughter of hyenas, dominated occasionally by the nerve-shattering roaring of lions, the terror

# My First Rhino



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As a schoolboy an article in THE WIDE WORLD MAGAZINE fired the Author with an ambition to shoot a rhino. Years afterwards he was able to gratify his desire, and here relates how he did it. Mr. Bell duly bagged No. 1, but a No. 2, whose presence was quite unsuspected, very nearly bagged him!

of the wild, which caused in its turn a multitude of other animal sounds such as the frightened snorts and neighing of stampeding zebras, the reverberation of galloping hoofs, and the sharp alarm-call of the bush buck.

Arising in the chill preceding the dawn, breakfast was hastily cooked and rapid preparations made for a day in the bush. Rhino scrub is largely composed of "wait-a-bit" thorn trees, which tear one's clothes and greatly impede progress, besides keeping one's nerves on edge, for it is impossible to move as silently as is desirable, and the only way to penetrate it is to creep along the rhino's own runways. Entering the bush, we cast about for tracks, and it soon became evident that this was a regular stamping-ground for rhinos—a kind of fortress to which they retired to

pass the heat of the day.

Presently the Wanderobo, with a click of the tongue, drew attention to a sure sign of the close proximity of a huge rhino; the soil of yesterday's sleeping-place had been raked over with forefoot and horn, indicating a tendency to linger at ease in the vicinity. From this point the tracks led up hill, and after nearly an hour's cautious following—worried considerably by a persistent little "honey guide" bird which kept fluttering along in front of us, betraying our position—we heard a snort like escaping steam and a heavy crashing. We could see nothing, however, owing to the almost impenetrable cover. Eventually the bush thinned and we emerged on a stony hillside where the ground was iron-hard, and here we lost the tracks.

The Wanderobo circled for an hour, nose to the ground, and in spite of countless checks eventually picked up the line.

An enormous footprint at the edge of a large patch of formidable thorn-bush indicated clearly that the rhinoceros had sought



sanctuary in very dense cover, which we should penetrate at our peril. The tracker stripped off his loin-cloth and sandals, so as to be able to slip to one side like a shadow should trouble occur, and crawled off in front, covered by his long-bladed spear. Suddenly he heard the faintest "churring," the alarm-note of rhino tick-birds (which do sentry-duty for their host in return for their daily food), and a dull heavy rustle, indicating that the rhinoceros was just in front, its suspicions already aroused.

Thereupon the tracker implied by quite unmistakable signs: "I've completed *my* part of the job. You carry on, sir; I'm for a rear seat in *this*." Forthwith he crawled behind me.

Trying in vain to still the sledge-hammer thumping of my heart, I tested the wind with a handful of dust, and then tiptoed on alone, cursing the tell-tale rhino birds and fearful lest the fickle breeze should veer and betray me. Half blinded with perspiration, and bent almost double to avoid contact with the bayonet-like spikes of the *sansivera* grass, I crawled slowly along a foot-wide game track, with impenetrable bush to right and left. My nerves, needless to say, were on edge, for the merest snapping of a twig might spoil everything.

Dead ahead could be seen two large ears cocked forward; for the rest, nothing was

visible save a perfect barbed-wire entanglement of thorny undergrowth. There was no target as yet, though the temptation to fire and end the long strain was strong upon me. Forward I went again till at last, at seven yards' range (as subsequently measured) it was possible to make out a huge rhino standing in the narrow alleyway and staring hard at me. Taking aim at the base of the ear and mechanically checking the wobbling of the rifle, I squeezed the trigger and the huge brute crashed in its tracks. The terror of Bardamet had ceased from troubling!

What a magnificent prize he was—a creature nearly twelve feet in length! Since this was the first time I had set eyes on a rhino outside Regent's Park, I was greatly impressed at its stupendous bulk. In the African wilds, however, one must learn to be constantly on guard. I was not yet out of the wood, and made a big mistake in thinking that all was now over. Up ran Akida, the gunbearer, wreathed in smiles. I passed him my .450 rifle to reload, and he gave me my small bore .270 Mannlicher, but, like an idiot, did not inform me that he



"An ominous black bulk sped straight at me."



had failed to refill its magazine. Suddenly, with an awesome whistling scream like a runaway locomotive, up charged a second rhino. He came at me like a bolt from the blue, and when he was eight yards from me I fired, hitting him in the neck. He staggered somewhat, but the little Mannlicher had no stopping-power at such a close range, and once more the rhino came on. Ejecting the empty shell, I pulled the trigger again, but, to my horror, the result was a mere click—the rifle was empty!

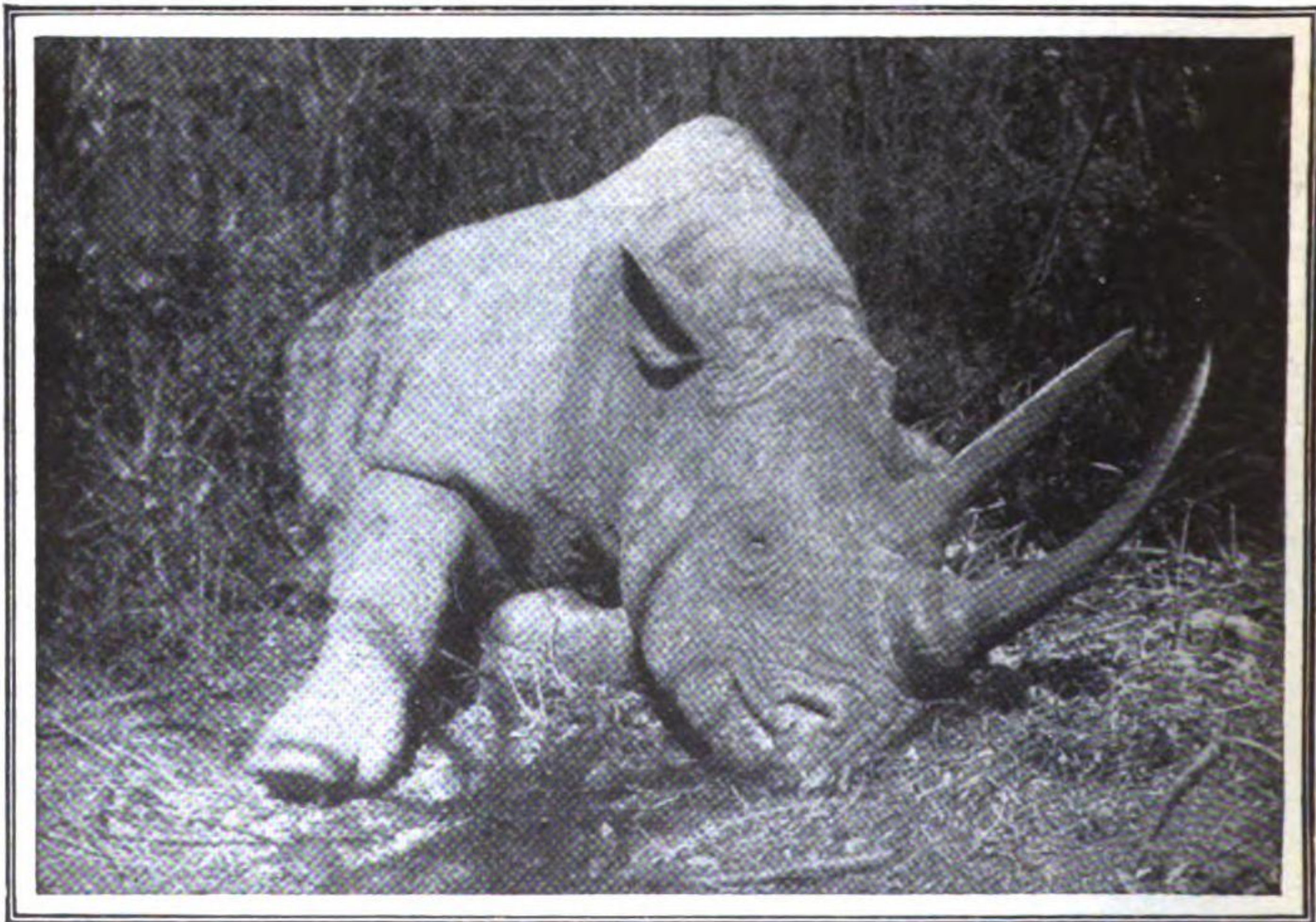
I was dimly conscious of the rapidly-retreating footsteps of the gunbearer, and heard the words, "The *Bwana* is done for!" Then an ominous black bulk sped straight at me. Dropping the useless rifle, I turned in a flash and fled headlong down the narrow track, the pounding tread of doom dinning in my ears. I swerved like a footballer into a side-track, in a supreme effort to dodge; and

breeches. Had the foot been a bare two inches to the left it would have put an abrupt termination to the trip by crushing my knee to pulp.

To my unspeakable relief the rhino failed to realize that I was now completely at his mercy, for he continued his charge without wheeling, and dashed away out of sight, still snorting furiously. We were not quite rid of him yet, however, for in his subsequent mad gallop he passed the *syce*, on the edge of the bush, leading my riding-mule. The mule, with a terrified squeal, lashed out and caught the luckless *syce* on the leg, causing a bad gash which took many weeks to recover.

Several days afterwards I passed the fresh tracks of this same rhino; he had apparently suffered no serious effects from the bullet wound in the neck. Long may he live, for he was as game as they make them!

Slowly disengaging myself from the painful bed of thorns, and retrieving my helmet and



**The Author's first rhino. The front horn was twenty-six and a half inches long, the rear one nineteen and a half inches.**

then, seeing the great brute almost on top of me, suddenly threw myself flat amongst the spiky aloes just an inch or two clear of the game run. Instantly I became aware of an enormous mass blotting out the sunlight above me; then down came the brute's left forefoot, just catching me on the inside of the left knee as I lay sprawling on my back, bruising the flesh and ripping open my riding

rifle, I called up the men, and we went back to admire the dead rhino. It was a cow and a regular beauty, with very good horns (cow rhino horns are longer and thinner than the bull's), the front horn being twenty-six and a half inches long, the rear one nineteen and a half inches long. I was told later that it was the finest rhino shot in the Southern Masai Reserve for several years.