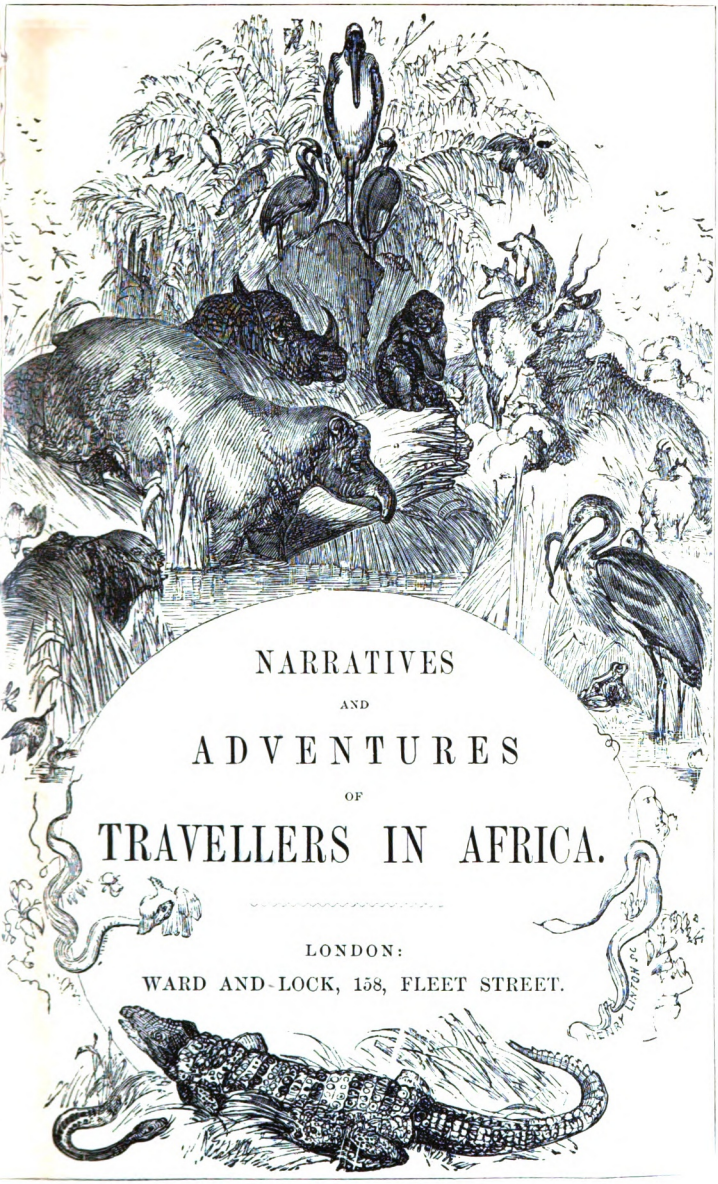


NARRATIVES

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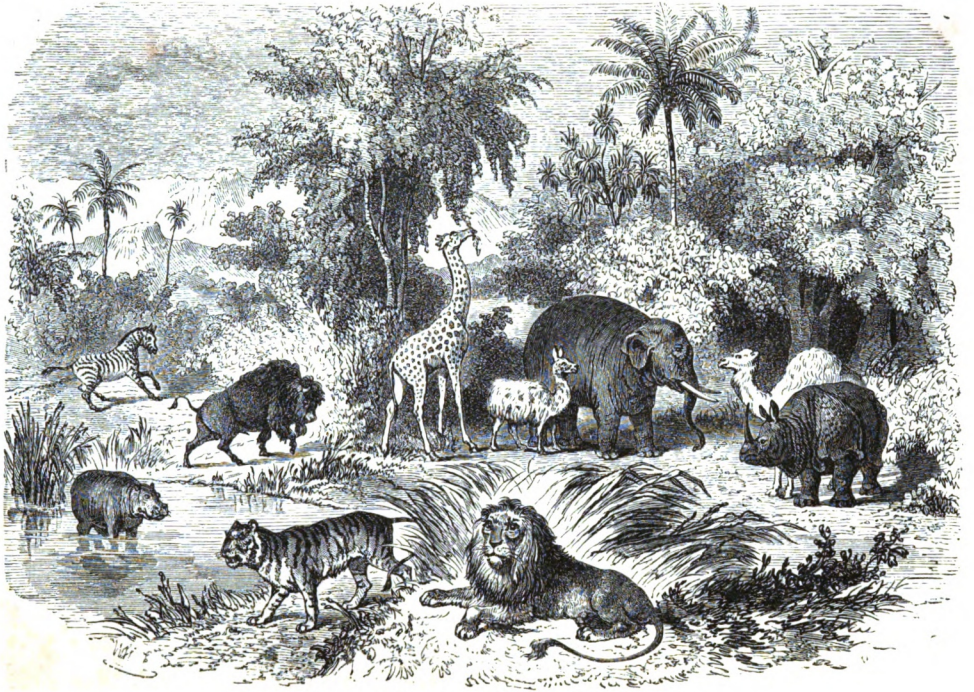
ADVENTURES

OF

TRAVELLERS IN AFRICA.

LONDON:
WARD AND LOCK, 158, FLEET STREET.

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ANIMALS OF SOUTH AFRICA.

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HUNTING THE RHINOCEROS.

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CHAPTER XVIII.

HUNTING THE RHINOCEROS.

Peculiarities of the African Rhinoceros—A huge Animal shot—Cooking of the Legs and Feet—The Three Perils of Mr. Andersson—Most marvellous Escape.

THE African Rhinoceros differs materially from that of India, in the appearance of his skin, which is devoid of the large folds and wrinkles of that species, having merely a slight plait across the shoulders, and some fainter wrinkles on the sides. It is, also, when compared with the Indian animal, comparatively smooth, having no hair on any part of it, except at the edge of the ears, and the extremity of the tail.

A rhinoceros shot by Campbell's party was eleven feet long; six feet in height; four feet broad; three feet from the tip of the nose to the ear; the circumference of the body about eleven feet. The skin was dark brown, resembling tanned leather, about an inch in thickness, and smooth, without hair. The front horn was about fourteen inches long, the other considerably shorter.

The natives were delighted by the sight of so huge a carcase. Four different parties began to cut it up, each carrying portions to their respective heaps as fast as they could. Some being more expeditious than others excited jealousy, and soon caused a frightful uproar. Twenty tongues were bawling at one time, one of which seemed sufficient to deafen an ox. Not a word was spoken in jest, all were deeply serious. Some severe strokes with sticks were dealt among them by the leaders of the parties. But now a circumstance occurred which instantly produced silence and

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amazement. A Mashow happening to pierce through the animal's side with his knife, the fixed air rushed out from the swollen carcase with great noise and violence. The



HEAD OF A RHINOCEROS.

terror thus produced soon, however, subsided, and in less than an hour every ounce of the rhinoceros was carried off.

The legs and feet were cooked by a singular process. As the ants' nests are composed of hard clay, several of

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them were dug up by the people early in the morning, and their populations destroyed. The space thus obtained was filled up with lighted fuel till the bottom and sides within became red hot. The embers of the wood were then removed, the leg or foot of the rhinoceros introduced, and the door closed up with heated clay and embers. Fire was also made on the outside over the nests, and the flesh was allowed to remain in it for several hours. Food cooked in this way is highly relished by all the tribes.

Mr. Andersson, though anxiously desirous to reach a distant spot, seemed not very well prepared for the journey. "My leg," he says, "had in some degree recovered its strength; but, unobserved by me, it had received a somewhat ugly twist. Little George first drew my attention to the fact: 'Sir,' said he, 'your leg has grown crooked.'

"'Crooked!' echoed I, somewhat angrily. 'What do you mean?'

"'Only,' he wickedly replied, 'the calf is nearly where the shin ought to be.'

"The boy's remark was not without foundation, but in time the leg assumed its proper shape.

"I determined, before finally leaving Kobis, to devote one more day, or rather night, to the destruction of the denizens of the forest. But the adventure nearly terminated fatally; and the night of the 15th of July will ever be remembered by me as one of the most eventful epochs of my life; for, in the course of it, I was three several times in the very jaws of death, and only escaped destruction by a miracle.

"From the constant persecution to which the larger game had of late been subjected at Kobis, it had become not only scarce but wary; and hearing that elephants and rhinoceroses still continued to resort to Abeghan, I forthwith proceeded there on the night in question. Somewhat incautiously I took up my position—alone, as usual—on a

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narrow neck of land dividing two small pools; the space on either side of my skärm* being only sufficient for a large animal to stand between me and the water. I was provided with a blanket and two or three spare guns.

"It was one of those magnificent tropical moonlight nights, when an indescribably soft and enchanting light is shed over the slumbering landscape; the moon was so bright and clear that I could discern even a small animal at a considerable distance.

"I had just completed my arrangements, when a noise, that I can only liken to the passage of a train of artillery, broke the stillness of the air; it evidently came from the direction of one of the numerous stony paths, or rather tracks, leading to the water, and I imagined it was caused by some wagons that might have crossed the Kalahari. Raising myself partially from my recumbent posture, I fixed my eyes steadily on the part of the bush whence the strange sounds proceeded; but for some time I was unable to make out the cause. All at once, however, the mystery was explained by the appearance of an immense elephant, immediately followed by others, amounting to eighteen. Their towering forms told me at a glance that they were all males. It was a splendid sight to behold so many huge creatures approaching with a free, sweeping, unsuspecting, and stately step. The somewhat elevated ground whence they emerged, and which gradually sloped towards the water, together with the misty night air, gave an increased appearance of bulk and mightiness to their naturally giant structures.

"Crouching down as low as possible in the 'skärm,' I waited, with beating heart and ready rifle, the approach of the leading male, who, unconscious of peril, was making straight for my hiding-place. The position of his body,

* A "skärm" is a small inclosure, six or eight feet in diameter, the walls (usually consisting of loose stones) being about two feet in height.

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however, was unfavourable for a shot; and, knowing from experience that I had little chance of obtaining more than a single good one, I waited for an opportunity to fire at his shoulder, which is preferable to any part when shooting at night. But this chance, unfortunately, was not afforded till his enormous bulk towered above my head. The consequence was, that, while in the act of raising the muzzle of my rifle over the 'skärm,' my body caught his eye, and, before I could place my piece to my shoulder, he swung himself round, and, with trunk elevated and ears spread, desperately charged me. It was now too late to think of flight, much less of slaying the savage beast. My own life was in imminent jeopardy; and seeing that, if I remained partially erect, he would inevitably seize me with his proboscis, I threw myself on my back with some violence; in which position, and without shouldering the rifle, I fired upwards at random towards his chest, uttering, at the same time, the most piercing shouts and cries. The change of position, in all human probability, saved my life; for, at the same instant, the trunk of the enraged animal descended precisely on the spot where I had previously crouched, sweeping away the stones (many of a large size) that formed the fore part of my 'skärm' like so many pebbles. In another moment his broad fore-feet passed directly over my face.

"I now expected nothing short of being crushed to death. But, imagine my relief, when, instead of renewing the charge he swerved to the left, and moved off with considerable rapidity—most happily without my receiving other injuries than a few bruises, occasioned by the falling of the stones. Under Providence, I attribute my extraordinary escape to the confusion of the animal caused by the wound I had inflicted on him, and to the cries elicited from me when in my utmost need.

"Immediately after the elephant had left me I was on my legs, and snatching up a spare rifle lying at hand, I

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pointed at him as he was retreating, and pulled the trigger; but, to my intense mortification, the piece missed fire. It was a matter of thankfulness to me, however, that a similar mishap had not occurred when the animal charged; for had my gun not then exploded, nothing, as I conceive, could have saved me from destruction.

"During this incident, the rest of the elephants retreated into the bush; but by the time I had prepared my skärm, they reappeared with stealthy and cautious steps on the opposite side of the pool, though so distant that I could not fire with any prospect of success. As they did not approach nearer, I attempted to stalk them, but they would not allow me to come to close quarters; and after awhile moved off altogether.

"Whilst pondering over my late wonderful escape, I observed, at a little distance, a huge white rhinoceros protrude his ponderous and misshapen head through the bushes; and presently afterwards he approached to within a dozen paces of my ambuscade. His broad side was now fully exposed to view, and, notwithstanding I felt a little nervous from my conflict with the elephant, I lost no time in firing. The beast did not at once fall to the ground, but from appearances I had every reason to believe he would not live long.

"Scarcely had I reloaded when a black rhinoceros (a female, as it proved) stood drinking at the water; but her position, as with the elephant in the first instance, was unfavourable for a good shot. As, however, she was very near me, I thought I was pretty sure of breaking her leg, and thereby disabling her; and in this I succeeded. My fire seemed to madden her; she rushed wildly forward on three legs, when I gave her a second shot, but apparently with little or no effect. I felt sorry at not being able to end her sufferings at once; but as I was too well acquainted with the habits of the rhinoceros to venture on pursuing her under the circumstances, I determined to wait patiently for day-

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light, and then destroy her with the aid of my dogs. But it was not to be.

"As no more elephants or other large game appeared, I thought after a time it might be as well to go in search of the white rhinoceros, previously wounded; and I was not long in finding his carcase; for my ball, as I supposed, had caused his almost immediate death.

"In heading back to my skärm, I accidentally took a turn in the direction pursued by the black rhinoceros, and by ill luck, as the event proved, at once encountered her. She was still on her legs, but her position, as before, was unfavourable; hoping, however, to make her change it for the better, and thus enable me to destroy her at once, I took up a stone and hurled it at her with all my force; when, snorting horribly, erecting her tail, keeping her head close to the ground, and raising clouds of dust with her feet, she rushed at me with fearful fury. I had only just time to level my rifle and fire before she was upon me; and the next instant, whilst instinctively turning round for the purpose of retreating, she laid me prostrate. The shock was so violent as to send my rifle, powder-flask, and ball-pouch, as also my cap, spinning in the air; the gun, indeed, as afterwards ascertained, to a distance of fully ten feet. On the beast charging me, it crossed my mind that unless gored at once by her horn, her impetus would be such (after knocking me down, which I took for granted would be the case) as to carry her beyond me, and I might thus be afforded a chance of escape. So, indeed, it happened; for having tumbled me over (in doing which her head, and the fore part of her body, owing to the violence of the charge, was half buried in the sand), and trampled on me with great violence, her fore-quarter passed over my body. Struggling for life, I seized my opportunity, and as she was recovering herself for a renewal of the charge, I scrambled out from between her hind legs.

"But the enraged beast had not yet done with me.

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Scarcely had I regained my feet before she struck me down a second time, and with her horn ripped up my right thigh (though not very deeply) from near the knee to the hip: with her fore-feet, moreover, she hit me a terrific blow on the shoulder near the back of the neck. My ribs bent under the enormous weight and pressure, and for a moment, I must, I believe, have lost consciousness—I have at least very indistinct notions of what afterwards took place. All I remember is, that when I raised my head, I heard a furious snorting and plunging amongst the neighbouring bushes. I now arose, though with great difficulty, and made my way, in the best manner I was able, towards a large tree, that was near at hand, for shelter; but this precaution was needless. The beast, for the time at least, showed no inclination further to molest me. Either in the *mêlée*, or owing to the confusion caused by her wounds, she had lost sight of me, or she felt satisfied with the revenge she had taken. Be that as it may, I escaped with life, though sadly wounded, and severely bruised, in which disabled state I had great difficulty in getting back to my skärm." For other most remarkable adventures, we must refer the reader to Mr. Andersson's recent and valuable volume.

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