

## A RHINOCEROS HUNT.



EARLY writers who first saw or heard of the huge animal which we style rhinoceros were much puzzled what to make of it. They gravely discussed whether or not it was the unicorn, and it was also conjectured that it sharpened its horn upon stones or other convenient objects, for the purpose of inflicting dire wounds upon its foes, just as *paterfamilias* sharpens his knife upon a steel before attacking the savoury joint. The "armed rhinoceros," as Shakespeare called it, is well protected by nature. It is—despite its vast bulk—capable of running at an extraordinary pace, which it will maintain for hours over almost any kind of country. It is possessed of a giant's strength, and will not hesitate, as occasion may offer, to use it tyrannously like a giant. And, moreover, it is furnished with a weapon of assault of so terrible a character that the strongest and fleetest of animals will show it fight only as a last resort. This dreadful weapon is the horn that grows in the middle of its head above the nose; many species being supplied with a second that projects immediately behind the first. Elephants have been found dead, with their bodies wounded in front, or with the detached horn securely fastened in the ribs. But besides being so well equipped for purposes of offence, the rhinoceros is also provided with a good armour of defence in its hide, which is so tough that for long it was believed that no bullet could pierce it; though we now know, on the authority of several expert hunters, that bullets hardened with solder or other material will find lodgment in the animal's body.

Sir Samuel Baker has faced death in many forms, and it need not surprise us to learn that he viewed a rhinoceros chase with the ardour and calmness of a skilled sportsman—on the one hand, respecting the huge unwieldy brute as a foeman worthy of his steel, and, on the other, determined to bring it down if he possibly could. "A stern chase," it is said, "is always a long chase," and this Sir Samuel proved in one of the most exciting hunts which took place while occupied in his Nile explorations. Along with a party of Arabs, he was returning home one day when his attention was directed to a couple of rhinoceroses asleep among some bushes. Sending his "aggageers," or huntsmen, a short distance off, Baker dismounted and

entrusted his horse to Suleiman, his attendant. He then walked, gun in hand, to the spot where the two big beasts were slumbering, but when within thirty yards of them, they all of a sudden jumped to their feet, and one of them charged straight at him. Sir Samuel at once fired, and though it had no other result, his doing so caused the assailant to turn, and both animals made off at a tremendous pace, followed in hot pursuit by the "aggageers," who were speedily joined by Baker and Suleiman. The two rhinoceroses were running neck and neck about ten yards ahead of the foremost Arab. Including Sir Samuel, there were seven hunters all tearing as fast as their horses could carry them, after the prey. The long hair of the Arabs flying in the wind, their drawn swords, and their cries of rivalry, made up a scene of most intense excitement. Keeping up their speed with great gameness the rhinoceroses always managed to lead their pursuers by a few yards over open country or through low bush land; and after a couple of miles had been covered no sign of flagging could be detected in them, though now the terrific pace had begun to tell upon the horses, and some of the hunters were falling behind. Arrived at the summit of a ridge Sir Samuel saw, a mile ahead, at the foot of the slope a dense thorny jungle where, could they reach it, the rhinoceroses would be safe. The soil was sandy, but firm and suited to the hunters. "Now or never" was the motto of all parties. The prey pushed at their utmost speed, for the goal was well in view, but the number of chasers had been reduced to four. Then another horse succumbs, but its rider with desperate pluck tries to maintain the chase on foot, and runs abreast of the party for a hundred yards or so, but he, too, is compelled to give way. As they near the jungle the rhinoceroses at length begin to show signs of distress, snorting as they gallop along. Only two hundred yards more, however, and they will be safe; and the remaining horses are just tired out when the rhinoceroses also fall into a mere trot. One of the Arabs by dint of nearly superhuman effort, pushes ahead and is at their heels. Leaning forward with sword raised, the blade flashes in the sun as it swoops down upon the hindmost rhinoceros, which fortunately for it, at the same moment disappears into the jungle, bearing a deep wound from the keen sword of the enterprising "aggageer." Sir Samuel confessed he had been fairly beaten. His Arabs told him that the rhinoceros was a very difficult animal to hunt, as it could only be encountered at close quarters



after having been thoroughly exhausted by a long and exhausting chase. It could even run well on three legs, if the fourth happened to be disabled. On another occasion, the details of which must not detain us now, the tables were completely turned upon Sir Samuel and his men, for the rhinoceros faced round upon its pursuers, and, instead of being hunted, became the hunter, and made its would-be chasers bolt at the top of their speed.

As if the rhinoceros could not take very good care of itself, it finds guardian protectors in some small grey birds that invariably attend it. They are always on the outlook, and seldom fail to rouse their huge friend in time to enable it to escape from danger. It fully understands the warning cry, and after carefully looking around it generally runs off in safety. Gordon Cumming states that he has hunted a rhinoceros for miles, and that some of these birds have accompanied it to the last. Perched on its side and back, as each shot told on

the animal's shoulder, they flew upward about six feet, uttering their alarm-note, and then returning to their post. Sometimes the low hanging boughs of trees swept them off its back, but they always resumed their position, indeed, remained with it all night. "I have often," writes Cumming, "shot these animals at midnight when drinking at the fountains, and the birds, imagining they were asleep, remained with them till morning, and on my approaching, before taking flight, they exerted themselves to their utmost to awaken Chukuroo (as the natives call the rhinoceros) from his deep sleep.

Though it is not easy to affect any interest of a more than ordinary sort in this ugly and fickle-tempered monster of the South African swamps, one feels inclined to hope for the sake of the little birds that as a rule their well-meant efforts to guard their thick-skinned patron from harm are crowned with success. Still, give it a fair field and no favour, and the rhinoceros will render a very good account of itself.

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