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“The wheat from all these publications should, from time to time, be winnowed,
and the chaff thrown away.”

—————
Externo robore crescit.

CLAUD.

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FROM THE SPORTING MAGAZINE.

DESCRIPTION OF THE RHINOCEROS.

THE natural history of the rhinoceros is perhaps less understood than that of any other Asiatic quadruped. With its anatomy we have long been sufficiently acquainted; but in regard to its habits, its powers, and many other very interesting points, nothing authentic has hitherto been published. Even now, indeed, we are compelled to rely much on the report of those residing in situations frequented by the rhinoceros, for most of the particulars exhibited, the impenetrable *jungles* in which this animal mostly resides, the unparalleled ferocity of his disposition, his almost invulnerable coat of mail, and the rapidity of his motions, which not only are quicker than those of the elephant, but are accompanied with a vavacity, such as a cursory view of the animal would by no means suggest, all oppose the most formidable obstacles to an intimate acquaintance with him in his wild state.

It is very rarely that the rhinoceros has been found equal to six feet in height; he is ordinarily not more than four and a half, or five. His head is long and clumsy, the eyes small, the ears somewhat resembling those of a calf, or of a deer, and on his nose he bears a horn of from three to four inches long, of a blunt conical form, rather curving towards his forehead. This appears to be his sole weapon. He is a granivorous animal, and has teeth similar to those of horned cattle. His legs much resemble those of an uncommonly stout ox, with which animal his form in general corresponds. His tail is short, and armed with a scanty portion of strong short bristles, rather inclined, like the tails of elephants and wild hogs, to range laterally, but not very conspicuously so. His body is secured from injury by the extreme density of his skin, which in many places is near an inch thick, hanging over him in large wrin-

kles, the one overlapping the other down to his knees, where they appear to discontinue, or to assume a more even appearance, not unlike the scales on the legs of poultry. His whole surface, except the tail is free from hairs.

The rhinoceros is the inveterate enemy of elephants, attacking whenever he can find them single, or at least not protected by a male of great bulk; ripping without mercy, and confiding in his coat of mail to defend him from the puny attacks of the females, as well as to resist the teeth of young males. The apparent bluntness of his horn, which is about as broad at the base as it is high, would appear to render it but an insignificant weapon, and inadequate to penetrate any hard or tough substance. An instance, which I shall quote in this chapter, will however give a competent idea how formidable its powers are, and remove every doubt as to the probability of a rhinoceros being able to cope with elephants. The rhinoceros, as well as the camel, is retromingent, and, like that animal, not only smells extremely rank, but its urine is highly offensive and corrosive. This might perhaps be of no moment, had not the rhinoceros a filthy trick of discharging his water suddenly at such as are behind him, causing great pain and inflammation to the unfortunate by-stander. The lizard and spider are equally obnoxious on this account; especially the former, which may be seen daily in great numbers on the walls and ceilings of the best houses in India; whence they often sprinkle persons below. If the part on which the urine falls be not immediately washed, a blister will soon rise, followed by an excoriation extremely difficult to heal. Camels should be removed as fast as possible from the spot to which they bring a tent to be pitched, else they will stale soon after

being relieved from their burthens, and render the place so obnoxious as to preclude the possibility of occupying it.

The rhinoceros is seldom to be found on the western side of the Ganges, though the jungles there are fully competent to afford abundant shelter; nor indeed has an elephant ever been seen in its wild state but to the eastward, and far distant from the banks of that noble river. It should seem that those animals are partial to the immense tracts of the *surhut*, or tassel grass, which skirt the vast jungles bordering our possessions on that side, and which being composed of lofty forests of *saul* and *sissoo* trees, filled up with various sorts of under-wood, offer an asylum to the ferine species, such as cannot be equalled in any part of Europe, and can be compared only with the prodigious wildnesses of the American interior.

It may serve as a proof how remarkably careful the rhinoceros must be of its young, when it is understood that very few have ever been taken alive. The natives have an opinion, that when wounded, they destroy them; but I never could obtain any satisfactory information on this head; it may, no doubt, be classed among the million of absurdities with which a person, recording all the nonsense current among an ignorant and superstitious race, might swell many an ample volume! Certainly few are seen in the possession of gentlemen; which may be owing to the little pains taken to obtain that which, when obtained, would prove a troublesome and dangerous acquisition. I do not recollect more than three, viz. one with the late worthy collector of *Bhaugulpore*, Mr. Cleaveland, which I believe did not live long; another with Mr. Matthew Day, of *Dacca*; and the third with Mr. Young, of *Patna*. The last used occasionally to walk about the streets, and was for a long time considered perfectly innocent; but, if my information be correct, was latterly found to be vitious,

and was in consequence destroyed. Mr. Day's rhinoceros, which was by far the largest of them all, was kept in a park, into which it was not very safe to venture. What became of it I do not know, but conclude his fate to have been long since decided by his growing vice.

The skin of the rhinoceros is much valued, and often sells for a great price. It is in estimation according to its thickness, and to its clearness when freed from the fleshy membranes within; as also in proportion to the polish it will take. That from the shoulder, is more prized; a shield made of it will resist a leaden bullet, which, for the most part, flattens on it as when fired against a stone. An iron ball, however, from a smart piece, will generally penetrate, and such is invariably used by those who make a livelihood by selling the skin and tallow of this animal; the latter being considered by the natives as infallible in removing swellings and stiffness from the joints. We find, that in our enlightened portion of the globe, innumerable articles are sold as genuine, supposed to be imported from distant soils, but which are not adequate to the production of a tenth part of our own expenditure; if such be the case amid the thousands who possess a knowledge of chymistry and of commerce, what must be the extent of the imposition among a people utterly ignorant of all science, who neither read nor travel to reap information, and whose superstitious bigotry can scarcely be equalled! Were all the shields and all the grease sold as genuine, absolutely so, the whole breed of the rhinoceros must have been long since extirpated.

The *shecarries*, or native sportsmen, who lie in wait for the rhinoceros, are ordinarily furnished with *jals*, or heavy matchlocks, such as are commonly appropriated for the defence of mud forts, and may be properly classed with the arquebuss of former times. They carry balls from one to three ounces in weight; and

having very substantial barrels, are too heavy to fire without a rest. Many have an iron fork of about a foot or more in length, fixed by a pivot not far from the muzzle, which being placed on a wall, in a bush, or eventually on the ground, serves to support it, and enables the *sheccarrie* to aim with great precision, which he seldom fails to do. It has been found, that in the defence of some mud forts, in *Bundelcund* especially, the besieged have exhibited most astonishing dexterity in this particular, rarely failing to hit their object in the head, or near the heart, though at very great distances. All the fire-arms made in India for the use of the natives have small cylindrical chambers, and are mostly of a very small bore. They impart a wonderful impetus to the ball.

To the power of an iron ball, discharged from a *jinjal*, even the rhinoceros must submit; though sometimes he will carry off one or more balls, and wander many hours before he drops. The aim being taken from a tree, or from some inaccessible situation, in which the *sheccarrie* feels himself secure, and a steady cool sight can be taken, rarely proves incorrect. Levelling with precision at the eye, the thorax, or under the flap of the shoulder, all of which are principal objects, he generally inflicts a fatal wound. The rhinoceros now becomes desperate; roaring, snorting, stamping, and tearing up the ground both with his horn and his feet, as bulls are wont to do, butting at trees, and at every object that may be within his reach. The cautious *sheccarrie* awaits with patience for his last gasp; sensible that, while a spark of life remains, it would be highly imprudent to venture from his state of safety, or to approach the ferocious prey. Oxen are ordinarily used to drag the carcass away, which is the common mode of conveyance, horses not being employed in India, except for riding, among the natives, and because elephants and horses, are so afraid of

even a dead rhinoceros, as to render it peculiarly difficult to induce their approach within either sight or smell of one. Elephants that have been long taken, and which in all probability may have in some measure forgotten their old enemy, do not in general evince such extreme dread; though when they do venture, it is always with very evident distrust, and after much evasion.

One very striking peculiarity attends this animal; viz. that it invariably goes to the same spot to dung, until the heap becomes so high as to render further increase inconvenient; when a fresh spot is chosen, usually on a small opening in the midst of a heavy jungle. These heaps, while they serve as beacons to warn other animals, which no doubt are also guided by the scent, and other instinctive circumstances, to a knowledge of their dangerous vicinity, afford to the *sheccarrie* an opportunity of making certain of his object. Much caution is necessary in approaching the purlieus of these extraordinary piles. The rhinoceros is endowed with a remarkably quick sense of smelling, and is said to be extremely crafty in stealing sight through the cover to surprise whatever may unfortunately come near his haunt. We have the more reason to wonder at such conduct, when we consider that the rhinoceros is not carnivorous, and that nature, has enveloped him with such a complete armour against the attacks of the whole brute creation: probably, were we able to analyze the subject completely, we should find that such destructive sallies are only made by females having young, and resulting from a jealousy, of which many other animals participate considerably.

The *sheccarrie* may, however, unless he examine the dung, be under a mistake, though he will not be very grievously disappointed; for the *souboor*, or elk, has the same habit of dunging the piles. These animals grow to an immense size, and their skins are very valuable, being when

properly prepared, at least as soft as sheep-skins, and very strong. The males are nearly black having tanned points, and carrying broad, heavy horns: the does are more of a mouse or roan colour, and of an inferior size to the buck. Elks are not very common in India, as they keep most on the frontiers, in the heavy jungles already described; they are also to be seen occasionally to the westward, in the hills stretching from *Midnapore* to *Chunar*. Though the elk cannot be compared with the rhinoceros for mischief, and will, on the contrary, like all their deer species, rather retire from, than meet approach, except in the rutting season, when bucks are generally very vicious, yet he is not always passive, being sometimes known to attack without the least provocation.

As an instance of the extremely savage disposition of the rhinoceros, I shall adduce a memorable circumstance which occurred about the close of the year 1788. Two officers belonging to the troops cantoned at *Dinapore* near *Patna*, went down the river towards *Monghyr* to shoot and hunt. They had encamped in the vicinity of *Derriapore*, and had heard some reports of a *ghendah*, or rhinoceros, having attacked some travellers many miles off. One morning, just as they were rising, about day break, to quest for game, they heard a violent uproar, and on looking out, found that a rhinoceros was goring their horses, both of which, being fastened by their head and heel ropes, were consequently either unable to escape or to resist. The servants took to their heels, and concealed themselves in the neighbouring *jow* jungles, and the gentlemen had just time to climb up into a small tree, not far distant, before the furious beast, having completed the destruction of the horses, turned his attention to their masters! They were barely out of his reach, and by no means exempt from danger; especially as he assumed a threatening appearance, and seemed intent

on their downfall. After keeping them in dreadful suspense for some time, and using some efforts to dislodge them, seeing the sun rise, he retreated to his haunt; not, however, without occasionally casting an eye back as with regret, at leaving what he wanted the power to destroy.

This well-known instance is more illustrative than a myriad of details from the natives, to establish the cruel disposition of the rhinoceros: it is, I believe, the only fact which has been completely ascertained within many years, if ever before, in proof of the wanton attacks in which the rhinoceros indulges. In this, its natural antipathy to the elephant is not considered; possibly there may be some motive for its conduct towards that animal. The incident just described may be deemed the more curious, as it has been scarcely ever known that a rhinoceros has appeared on the western banks of the Ganges; to which it was probably carried by some inundation, perhaps of an island in the *Gogra*, and landed promiscuously, wherever it found means to escape from the violence of the current.

In the former part of this number, when adverting to the horn of the rhinoceros as a powerful weapon, I mentioned, that an instance would be furnished of its powers. In explanation, I have to inform the reader, that one of the horses destroyed was saddled, and was killed by a stroke of the horn; which not only penetrated completely through the saddle flap, and padding, but fractured two ribs, leaving a wound through which a small hand might pass into the horse's lungs. The rhinoceros in question continued for some time to infest the country, rendering the roads impassable; but, a handsome reward being offered, he was shot by an adventurous *shecarrie*, with a *jinjal*, or wall piece, that carried a large iron ball; not, however, before many travellers and villages had fallen victims to his ferocity. I was informed that he was upwards of six feet high at the shoulder.

It does not appear that the rhinoceros does much damage to the cultivation near the confines of those large jungles in which he is usually found: nor do I ever hear of their being seen in herds: pairs have frequently been observed. Nor have we any document whereby to guide our opinion regarding the period of gestation, or the number of the young; which, from the various points to be considered, we may perhaps be right in fixing at unity. Were it otherwise we should see the species over-running every part of the country, and occupying every sufficient cover; for we have no evidence, nor in truth any reasonable conjecture, as to any natural enemy existing, sufficiently powerful to thin their numbers. It has already been shown that the elephant, which is the only animal that could be placed on a par with the rhinoceros, so far from being its superior, is rather compelled to resort to defensive measures.

Many assert, that herds of elephants, in which there are females having young calves, will not hesitate to stand bravely against the rhinoceros; and this is so conformable to the ordinary course of nature, which dictates to each mother to defend its progeny, that we may assent thereto without any violence to our understanding; but there our coincidence should stop, and by no means join with such as do not hesitate to assure us, that such herds rather seek than avoid their enemy. This is carrying the matter too far; it is subverting the wisest of nature's laws, which prompts to self preservation. It could hardly be supposed that a mother, with a babe at the breast, would seek that danger which, if single, and bereft of the object of her affection, she

would use every means to avoid. We should as soon expect to see an ewe seeking for a wolf, because she had a lamb.

Although the rhinoceros appears to subsist in this wild state on grass, leaves, and occasionally on corn, yet when domesticated he will not thrive unless in a good paddock, and well fed once or twice daily with rice or cakes; and it is peculiar that, under such circumstances, he loses the habit of dunging in a pile. I should be inclined to suspect that this anomaly originated from the want of a mate. Both the rhinoceros and the elephant, at certain seasons, become extremely lustful; or, in the language of Hindostan, they are *must*. This applies only to the males; which however tame at other times, during a week or ten days, or often for a longer period, discharge an offensive matter from the apertures of the temples, and are extremely unruly. While in this state, a male elephant is generally quite unfit for every capacity in which he is ordinarily employed, and should be approached with extreme caution, even by his own *mohout*. It sometimes happens, that after being mounted, he cannot for fear of his life descend again; and many a *mohout* has been obliged to sit for several days and nights together on his elephant. Some have been taken off by the elephant's trunk; but that member is so extremely tender, that a smart stroke or application of the point of the *hankus*, or guiding iron, seldom fails to put a stop to such attempts. The very look of a *must* elephant chills the blood. I should think a rencontre between an elephant and a rhinoceros, both in that state, must be highly interesting.