

THE WHITE RHINOCEROS.

By H. A. BRYDEN.

THE recent arrival of Mr. R. T. Coryndon from Matabeleland has considerable interest for naturalists. He has brought with him the entire skins and skeletons of two specimens of the great white rhinoceros, a species now in the last throes of extinction, which are now being exhibited in London. How rare the white rhinoceros has become may be gauged from the fact that for years Mr. Selous—that most enthusiastic hunter-naturalist—has been endeavouring to procure a specimen for the Natural History Museum without success. No white rhinoceros has ever been shown alive in Europe, although its black congener is pretty well known; and hitherto the species has been represented only by a few of the immensely long fore-horns and one complete head. There is another complete head in Cape Town Museum—the head of the last ever shot by Mr. Selous—from which the accompanying illustration was photographed. No better instance of the alarming rate at which the great fauna of the world are being exterminated can be furnished than the case of the white rhinoceros. Like many other South African animals, the white rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros simus*, first discovered by Dr. Burchell in 1812), had a singularly restricted habitat. Its modern range has invariably been between the Orange River and the Zambesi, and it has never been found north of the latter river. It is possible—nay, even probable—that, prior to the beginning of this century, this enormous terrestrial mammal—the greatest of known creatures next to the elephant—wandered in the great grassy plains of



HEAD OF WHITE RHINOCEROS SHOT BY MR. F. C. SELOUS.
(From the Cape Town Museum.)

Bushmanland (a continuation of the Kalahari Desert), just south of the Orange River. Native tradition has it so. But at all events Europeans have never found this rhinoceros south of that river. Burchell and other travellers found the great beast roaming the plains of Bechuanaland and the adjacent countries in vast numbers. Dr. Andrew Smith during his scientific expedition, sent out by the British Government in 1835, saw as many as between 100 and 150 rhinoceroses—black and white—not far from his wagons, in one single day. Cornwallis Harris and other African travellers had similar experiences of the plentifulness of both species. But rhinoceroses are as a rule pretty easily slain. They are sluggish and possess poor eyesight, and trust for their protection mainly to their sense of smell. Often they were shot dead while fast asleep in their midday siesta. Gordon Cumming, Andersson, and scores of other hunters of the middle of this century used to shoot them in large numbers as they came to drink by night at desert pools and fountains. During the dry season there were collected at these scant watering-places all sorts of animals from an immense area of country, and night shooters made proportionately big bags. Oswald and Vardon killed in one season eighty-nine black and white rhinoceroses: Andersson some sixty in a similar period. This sort of thing, which was carried on by all hunters, European, Boer, and native, whenever opportunity occurred, could not last

for ever; and, than the wanton and wasteful slaughter of those days, there are now to be found very few black rhinoceroses south of the Zambesi; while the white rhinoceros is, if not already quite extinct, just on the point of extinction.

It has been well known to South African hunters for the last few years that the last representatives of this great mammal would be found, if anywhere, in some remote and difficult country in a corner of North-east Mashonaland. Here Mr. Coryndon and his friend Mr. Ayres found three or four specimens last year, out of which they succeeded in securing two. The skins and skeletons were preserved with infinite trouble, and will now, thanks to Mr. Coryndon's energy and care—decorate the collections of the Natural History Museum and of the Rothschild

Museum at Tring. Thus, just on the verge of its extinction, the only two complete specimens of this interesting mammal have been rescued for future generations.

The white rhinoceros differed mainly from its black cousin (*Rhinoceros bicornis*), the common African rhinoceros, in its much greater size and bulk, its enormously long fore-horn, immense and disproportionate head, and square blunt upper lip. The black rhinoceros, which feeds upon bushes and shrubs, has a pendent or prehensile upper lip. The white rhinoceros, which fed always upon grasses, and therefore needed no prehensile lip, can be at once and easily distinguished by this striking difference in the upper lip. The length of the fore-horn was sometimes enormous—there are instances in which a measurement of 4 ft. 6 in. has been recorded; sometimes the horn projected almost laterally from the snout in true unicorn fashion. The bulk of this mighty beast was immense. A mature specimen stood 6 ft. 6 in. in height and measured 15 to 16 ft. in length, and weighed, probably, some four tons or more. Even the African elephant, from the comparative shortness of its body, although standing much taller, bulked scarcely larger than the white rhinoceros. Although usually harmless and inoffensive, when roused or wounded this rhinoceros was a dangerous foe. Mr. Oswald, the friend and companion of Livingstone, had an extraordinary escape from the charge of one of these monsters, which attacked his horse, drove its fore-horn clean through the body, and tossed horse and rider over its head. The horse, of course, was killed; Mr. Oswald himself escaped with a wound and a terrible shaking. Although called white, this rhinoceros varied little in colour from its black relative. In both the colour is a dirty brown; the "white" rhinoceros being, however, a trifle paler.

There can be little doubt that this rare and interesting quadruped, if not already shot out, will within the next two years have become quite exterminated. It will then share the same unhappy pre-eminence attained by another African species—the now extinct Quagga. In captivity the daily food allowance of a rhinoceros seems to be "one truss of straw, three-quarters of a truss of clover, one quart of rice, half a bushel of bran, and twenty to twenty-four gallons of water." The photograph from which the illustration is furnished was taken by my friend Mr. J. E. Yates and myself in Cape Town some three years since.