

# LIFE WITH THE HAMRAN ARABS

AN ACCOUNT OF

A SPORTING TOUR OF SOME  
OFFICERS OF THE GUARDS IN THE SOUDAN  
DURING THE WINTER OF 1874-5

BY

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SURGEON, COLDSTREAM GUARDS

*WITH PHOTOGRAPHS*

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stand some chance of being so. Cumming has unfortunately sprained his shoulder by the great recoil of his twelve-bore rifle, when firing a hardened ball, and it is so swollen that he will probably be crippled for some days.

*Feb. 4.*—This has been a very busy day for the Arabs, owing to the quantity of meat brought into the camp yesterday. A few have devoted their time to cutting up the hide of the hippo into long strips, to be ultimately converted into whips (koorbatches), whilst others have prepared the segments of the rhinoceros' hide previous to being sent to the village for conversion into the much coveted shields, or have cut up the remnant into sandals.

Excepting the pleasure of killing such big game, the Arabs have in fact all the advantage, for there is nothing of these animals worth bringing home as trophies beyond a specimen shield, the teeth of the hippo, and the horns of the rhinoceros. Ugly as these last-named are, there will be some satisfaction in keeping them, as they have at least an imaginary value in this country, and might consequently prove very useful in the future as presents. In Cairo they realise from six to ten pounds each, according to their size.

Their value is due to an Arab superstition of their complete power to nullify the injurious effects of any poison drunk out of them when converted into cups; so when an Arab is the fortunate possessor of one, he has no fear of drinking anything a stranger may give him.

Its supposed miraculous powers do not, however, end here, for if a man has been poisoned, a draught of water from one of these cups, with a little of the horn scraped into it, is considered almost equally efficacious. The rhinoceros of this part of Africa is a nearly black smooth-skinned animal, double horned, though bearing no comparison in this respect to one of its prototypes in Southern Africa ; but, on the other hand, it is a much larger animal, and, according to report, infinitely more savage. Cumming and myself remained in camp, purporting to have a quiet day ; but the Fates willed it otherwise, for whilst at our unusually late breakfast there was a sudden call to arms, every Arab rushing off frantically for his sword or spear, whilst Emanuel, Albert, and Bob shouted to us to bring our rifles. For a moment we thought that we were attacked by the Basé, but the cry from Albert of ' a lion ! a lion ! ' as we ran up to the place where they were assembling settled that point. Here we found everyone laughing excepting one unfortunate Arab, who with far more expression of stolid indifference than of pain depicted in his face, held up to our view a horribly mangled hand ; and then we were told that he thought he would like to see how our large spring trap worked, which we keep set at night, by touching it with a stick, and he certainly did have a practical lesson that he is not likely to forget soon. His yells were the cause of the sudden alarm amongst his friends, who thought he



*Ward and Co., Naturalists,*

*158, Piccadilly.*

RHINOCEROS (*R. Kellou*).

5000

had been seized by a lion ; and though we should have considered the jaws of either highly objectionable, they seemed to think very little of the mechanical ones, and after witnessing the performance of plastering and bandaging, they quietly resumed their occupations. The trap caught his hand right across the centre, and though the flesh on both sides is much lacerated, there is no evidence of any bones being crushed, which is astonishing, for from the great strength of this trap, requiring two men to set it, one would have expected that the hand would have been completely severed by it.

Nothing important killed to-day. Coke tracked his wounded rhinoceros for several miles, and at last caught sight of him amongst some thick bushes. For a moment it turned as if to charge, but again went on its way unchecked by another ball from the ten-bore, which Coke does not think penetrated his thick hide. Vivian saw a lion, but could not get a shot at it.

*Feb. 5.*—An unlucky day for Vivian and Coke, for both were on separate rhinoceros tracks converging to the same wood, and, by singular ill-luck, as Coke had a close shot at his animal Vivian was drawing so near to his own that the report made it start off and only gave him a hurried shot, and neither were successful. Shooting in these closely-packed mimosa-woods, though the branches are dry and leafless, is very unsatisfactory, as the probabilities are great that a ball will be stopped or

fly, and, besides, he has then to catch it. In one of my feeble attempts at this, I have been told, exciting sport, I caused considerable astonishment to the natives, as they watched me rushing about with my outstretched net after a butterfly that had a strong objection to visiting its interior, and I soon came to the conclusion that it was cruel work destroying the lives of such innocent and beautiful creatures.

*March 5.*—Vivian has been very fortunate in finding a rhinoceros standing under a big mimosa in otherwise open ground, and so well concealed was he that both Mohamed and himself walked almost up to the tree before observing him. Seeing probably that there was no chance of escaping quietly from his hiding-place, he allowed Vivian to walk round him for a side-shot, and this, though well-directed, produced no apparent effect beyond making him give a loud whiff. A second shot from the ten-bore with six drachms of powder was more than even a rhinoceros could bear quietly, and out he came at Vivian, but with a very feeble attempt to show fight, and then a third bullet dropped him dead. Vivian has a very good gun-bucket, made of leather, which is suspended by two straps from the saddle on the off side, in such a direction that when the stock of a gun rests in it the muzzle points upwards behind the right arm, and after a little practice the gun comes to hand most readily. This pattern bucket is specially described by

Messrs. Lord and Baines in their valuable book entitled 'Shifts and Expedients of Camp-life,' and it is used, according to them, by the Hottentots.

This book, though rather bulky for a traveller with light baggage, is so full of practical hints that it well repays a careful study; whilst Galton's 'Art of Travel' is more valuable as a pocket companion, in containing much useful information in a condensed form. A petition from the Arabs for a hippo, as they are in want of fat, induced me to pay a visit to a pool, where, at the expense of two cartridges from the express, I was able to carry out their wishes.

The worst of killing a hippo is that the day is over so far as having your hunter is concerned, for he at once returns to the camp to announce the joyful news and bring the men back to the pool, where, by the time they arrive, the body is found floating, and then he must preside over the cutting-up performance. On this occasion I remained at the pool to note the time of floating, and it occurred in just under an hour and a half. To my surprise, the Arabs hesitated to swim out to the hippo as it floated in the middle of the big pool, from fear of crocodiles; but after a great deal of shouting and splashing with stones four of the boldest entered the river, whilst the others kept up the shouting and stone-throwing, and having fastened one end of a rope round a leg, they returned safely to shore with the other, and then all joined

heartily in hauling the monster to the bank. Having already made a careful study of the after-proceedings on such occasions, I preferred leaving my friends to their own strange devices, and, after finding a good place of concealment under some overhanging nabbuks along the bank, awaiting the arrival of any antelope. I very speedily came to the conclusion that there were many less pleasant ways of spending the hottest part of the day than this, although amongst the numerous visitors on each side of me, as well as on the opposite bank, not one arrived of sufficient importance to tempt me to disturb the peaceful gatherings. It was a pretty sight to watch the gazelle or ariel coming to drink. At first one or two timidly descend the covered way, and after listening attentively and looking well around them to be sure that the coast is clear, they make a short step forward over the dry bed, and then, with increased confidence, scamper down to the water's edge. This becomes the signal for the others, and down they come in rapid succession until almost within reach of the desired goal, where they may moisten their parched tongues, when the displacement of an extra loose pebble causes a panic and the rapid disappearance of the whole herd. It is only, however, to lie in ambush close by for a few minutes, until it is discovered that it was a false alarm, and then gaining wisdom by their mistake, they advance more boldly to the river. Here they linger but for a few moments



to have their fill, and then lose no time in returning again to obscurity. The gazelle are frequently seen by the river-side, and probably drink two or three times a day ; but the large antelope, such as the méhédéhet, tétel, and koodoos, so far as we have observed, invariably come to the river in the afternoon, and the tétel are frequently found there with the ariel. Maāriffs are so rarely seen that it is difficult to say when they leave their distant haunts in the high ground, but Vivian's was found soon after midday drinking, and mine was also near water at the same time. We often hear the buffaloes come down the bank two or three hours after sunset, and this is supposed to be about the time that all large animals visit the river, the rhinoceros being the latest arrival.

However wrong their religion may be, it cannot be said of our people that they neglect their prayers, for, not only at sunrise and sunset, but five times a day do they pray, this being the orthodox number, and when 'at home' it is probably within the mark, so frequently are they seen at their devotions, standing like statues, with faces turned to the East, whilst muttering some passages of the Koran, or kneeling down and burying their foreheads in the dust. Mohamed's and Essafi's religious performances are sometimes a little inconvenient, for if we have taken the trouble to rise specially early to be off before sunrise, it is not pleasant to have to halt

day hunting in vain for rhinoceros. Returning home, Essafi suddenly dashed off at his horse's best speed in the direction of some vultures swooping about so far off that I could barely see them. Upon arriving at the place round which they were rapidly collecting we found a dead rhinoceros, and recognised it as the one I wounded the day before yesterday and tracked to within a few hundred yards of where it was lying. Essafi says that, directly he saw the vultures, he was sure he would find it there. Some camel-men belonging to another hunting expedition, under Jali, have paid us a visit on their way home, and report having been attacked by the Basé, who rushed down upon them from their hills as they passed along the valley of the river near here, and demanded half the produce of their spoil, consisting of the hides and tusks of three elephants; but they were ultimately content with the present of a third portion. This modesty scarcely agrees with the general character given of our black-skinned neighbours. We hear that they are a much darker race than the Hamrans, and have quite different features. Hadji Basheer, dressed in his best attire—slightly the worse for wear, though very picturesque in its patchiness—and mounted on one of our chargers, paid the Arab camp a very early visit, full of determination to impress upon the hunters the power he wielded, and to claim his own, his long-lost child; but his energies were wasted, for the donkey was

not Jarrone, and he had to return discomfited. He has been much more resigned of late to his loss, and is gradually transferring his affections to the goat; and a charming goat she is, for already she is on the most friendly terms with everyone, and finds in our biscuits a special inducement to pay us a visit regularly at breakfast and dinner. Besides supplying us with four cups of milk every morning, she never fails during the day to have a smaller quantity in store when called upon, and comes up to Albert to be milked with great willingness. She is left quite loose at night, and has a remarkably good idea of what constitutes safety, by sleeping amongst the camels, where she finds protection from her special night enemies, the hyænas. Nothing will induce her to go to the river to drink, although we are within a few yards of a very shallow place, so great is her fear of crocodiles; and when thirsty, she will not allow Albert any rest until he gives her some water in a basin. The Arabs never allow their goats to drink at the river, owing to the crocodiles, but make small pools for them near its margin, which they fence round with a low mud wall. The baboons have a thorough appreciation of the cunning of their natural enemies the crocodiles, and before coming down to drink make a very careful survey of the river from a high bank or from the overhanging branches of the trees, and always prefer dipping their noses into a little hollow made by the hoof of a rhinoceros or hippo.

They often can be seen by day moving in troops along the banks, a few fine old gentlemen with long manes marching one behind the other majestically in front, whilst the rest follow in general disorder—mothers carrying their little ones on their backs; and from the amount of screaming and screeching we sometimes hear amongst the general community, it is evident that rows are not uncommon in the family circle of our Darwinian brethren. They pay us the great compliment of taking a lively interest in our proceedings when they pass near our camp, provided that they are separated from it by the river.

There is at the present moment (6 P.M.) a tremendous storm over the Abyssinian hills, and we are having the benefit of the thunder and lightning, the latter being very vivid. Some very ominous-looking clouds are creeping onwards towards us, but the Arabs say that there is no chance of the storm reaching us so early in the year.

No reference has been made to the pearly whiteness of our Arabs' teeth, and it deserves a passing notice, universal as it is amongst Eastern races, for the Hamrans have their own way, at least so they think, of producing this satisfactory condition. It is simple enough, as it merely consists of rubbing the teeth when chance offers with the smoothly-cut end of a twig of some small tree now in the green state, the fibres of which gradually get separated in the rubbing process, and converted

big eyes and long necks there is little chance of getting the best of them in a stalk, however much a favourable wind may curtail the powers of one special sense. The rhinoceros woods are a little nearer the river, say from three to four miles, and here also are the buffaloes frequently found, though they are not so particular about making long journeys from the river before settling themselves down in the shade for their daily nap during the great heat. Rhinoceros have a curious habit of depositing their manure in the same place, and consequently, in some much frequented woods, large mounds of it are found along their chief thoroughfares.

*March 9.*—Lions were especially entertaining last night, so at an early hour this morning we went in different directions in search of their tracks, and after a time a distant roar, heard by both parties, drew us towards the same point. Essafi very soon found a fresh track there, and followed it with his usual energy, and he certainly never seems so happy as when on a good track. One moment he turned round to specially point it out, exclaiming 'kebeer,' meaning a big lion; farther on, to keep up my interest in the performance, he showed me a place where the lion had scratched up the ground, saying 'gheean' (hungry), and so we progressed until our path joining another, he pulled up, and with a most disappointed expression of face pointed out the fresh and well-known track of the Vivian boot. It was quite

We then waited quietly for all evidence of breathing to cease, and after sundry prods at it with a stick without its showing any signs of life, we were on the point of descending from our perch, when a convulsive spasm turned the body over to the edge of the pool, and in an instant it disappeared into the jaws of a crocodile, which without doubt had for some time taken a very considerable interest in our proceedings. I regret losing it as a specimen, for it was far larger than I had imagined the hyæna was ever found, and even than Essafi had previously seen. Possibly it saved one of us having a more intimate acquaintance with the watchful crocodile. Arabs will never stand near the edge of a pool, from fear of being switched in by the tail of a crocodile, and wonderful stories they tell of how women and children fall victims in this way to its cunning. The mail for Kassala left to-day ; in other words, Hadji Basheer started on horseback for the great capital with our letters, and if in two days' stay there he will find sufficient time to recite his grief to his friends on the loss of Jarrone, we calculate upon his return in ten with our long expected budget of letters and newspapers. Hadji is a title he has obtained by a visit to Mecca.

*March 11.*—Vivian has severely wounded a rhinoceros, but without any practical result ; returning home he had a long stalk after a herd of buffaloes, and succeeded in killing a fine bull. Essafi and myself went to an island

below Emhagga, specially to search for lions, as it had not been recently visited ; and directly after our arrival there, when walking in a path through some high grass, Essafi suddenly pulled up and whispered 'daābee ;' for a few seconds I could see nothing, until my eyes rested upon the face of a lion flat on the ground confronting us in our path and exactly the colour of the grass, whilst no other portion of him was visible. The distance between us being only from ten to fifteen yards, I fired, and then beyond a portion of the face becoming hidden by the grass no movement occurred, so I knew he must be dead ; but Essafi thought otherwise, and to please him I fired again at the only part visible, the nose. As I did so, another lion stepped over the dead body and disappeared, to my great annoyance, for I had foolishly omitted to reload before firing the second shot, and consequently lost the chance of bagging a brace. The first bullet (express) struck the forehead and smashed the skull, and the second entering below the eye passed out under the chin. It proved to be a splendid male, as to size, though not grand-looking from being almost entirely devoid of mane, as lions frequently are in this country. From nose to tip of tail it measured nearly ten feet (115 inches), and from shoulder to extreme point of paw, forty-five inches. When opened it was found to be as fat as a prize ox, and every atom of this valuable commodity was carefully collected and brought home with the skin

and head by Ibrahim and the Arab, who were sent out on camels for this purpose. Though the Arabs do not eat the fat, they find it very useful in many other ways.

*March 12.*—A hyæna paid our tent a visit in the night, and stayed for a few moments at the foot of Vivian's bed, but retired very quickly on his stretching out an arm for his revolver. After shooting two ariel for the larder, and whilst waiting for my luncheon on the liver, &c., of one *à l'Arabe*, I amused myself with the small kites. These, with the black and white crows, are always the first birds to be seen at such an entertainment, and the former are so courageous that they will even brush past us with their wings to pick up a piece of meat. My chief occupation was throwing bits into the air, which the kites seldom failed to catch in a claw before reaching the ground, so accurate were they in their swoops. The next to arrive are the vultures, soon to be followed by the Marabou storks, which from a region far beyond the reach of human vision keep constant watch over the movements of their friends beneath them. Twelve Arabs, headed by an old man named Ali, have arrived here from Gwayha, hunting as for a wild animal a young female slave who has recently escaped from Ali. They have tracked her from their village to this point step by step, where she stopped to drink, and beyond this they are afraid to go, fearing that they may fall into the hands of the Basé, her



pointed it out to Ranfurly. When first attacked, he was just beginning to have excellent sport, and in his anxiety to make up for all the lost time before his arrival on the Settite, he would not give in, and the two last days, before he was compelled to do so by prostration, he devoted to rhinoceros-shooting in the distant woods, and thus greatly over-fatigued himself by long exposure to the broiling sun. Yesterday, Arkwright brought him to this camp to place him under Emanuel's nursing, and it was then thought advisable to send for me without delay. He is very cheerful, and is now lying comfortably in his patent hammock near us, and joining in the general conversation ; and Cumming has fortunately had an amusing story to tell us of his day's experiences with the rhinoceros under the leadership of the renowned 'Jali.'

'Jali,' like the rest of his people, singular as it may be, is not above a bribe, and by an offer from Cumming which almost amounted to promising whatever he chose to ask, besides half the spoil, he has agreed to remain with him as his hunter until his final departure from the country. With the assistance of the veteran to-day a rhinoceros was in course of time found, which patiently submitted to receive four or five balls from the twelve-bore rifle, and then falling down apparently dead they walked up to him. Rejoiced at his success, as it was his first rhino, Cumming sat on the body to contemplate

his prize and examine the bullet-holes, until suddenly a convulsive movement passing through its huge frame, made him spring off his comfortable seat, and with Jali beat a speedy retreat. At the same moment the rhinoceros also sprang up, and to their mutual astonishment went off at a gallop, and on being again found required another shot before he finally succumbed. Arkwright and Ranfurly had wonderfully good sport during their stay at Emhagga. The former killed a lioness on four successive days, and finding them all asleep had no trouble in despatching them. His previous experience of that portion of the river was probably the chief cause of his success, for he knew where to look for them. Ranfurly has been equally lucky with rhinoceros, killing two in one day, and another at night when watching for them by the river's side.

Though I could not see Vivian before my hasty departure yesterday, I expect to find him to-morrow evening at our old camp near here, Hel-Egheeme, as we had decided upon returning to-morrow, owing to the total absence of game lower down the river.

*April 4.*—A slight improvement is apparent in the condition of Ranfurly. Men were out to-day searching for my valuables, and though they have not found them they will be sure to do so to-morrow, with their marvellous powers of tracking, stimulated by backsheesh, and, if necessary, they will go the whole distance. The loss