

the eventually reported the present with one more satisfactory—to Mrs Wallace, at least."

## THE LAST OF THE UNICORNS.

A wondrous brute, which only within the present century emerged from the region of myth into that of scientific knowledge, has within the past year gone into the realm of history. Reports from South Africa declare (according to the "New York Tribune") that the last white rhinoceros has been killed, and that its skeleton, hide, and horns are now being shipped to England to enrich the Natural History Museum. Thus the largest of modern quadrupeds, excepting the elephant, becomes extinct, along with the beautiful quagga, the dodo, the great auk, and other noteworthy members of the animal kingdom which have vanished from the world before the rapacity of man.

The white rhinoceros demands some special obituary notice, partly because of his extraordinary physical characteristics, and partly because of the part he and his kin have played in legend and in heraldry. Every schoolboy, as Macaulay would say, is familiar with the conventional figure of the unicorn, a sort of horse-shaped brute with a single straight horn protruding from its forehead. And every schoolboy has probably been told that there never was such a creature, save in imagination, which is doubtless quite true. Yet modern science not only destroys some old-time beliefs, but vindicates others, and shows many a grotesque fairy tale to have a basis of solid fact. Shakespeare reported not a myth but truth in speaking of the poison which the toad distils. Midsummer madness and moon madness are recognised as facts by the latest science. And if we man ever saw in life the lind-worm and the griffin of Teutonic legend, we need only to look into a paleontological museum to find their prototypes. So with the unicorn. For ages its only known habitat was on a coat of arms. True, the ancients had written of it as real; but were they not notorious liars? Herodotus, for example, with his story of a race of dwarfs in the region of the Mountains of the Moon, and near the sources of the Nile, was the very Prince of Lies; until Mr Stanley rediscovered those very dwarfs in that very region, and Emin Pasha sent some living specimens of them to Europe. The one-horned beast was similarly discredited, until an actual one-horned rhinoceros was found in India and Sumatra, when folk began to revise their syllabus of repudiated legends.

Still the Asiatic rhinoceros was a poor sort of creature for such historic fame, and it was not until the opening of the present century that the unicorn was fully identified with the uncouth pachyderm. At that time Burchell discovered, in the region of South Africa between the Orange and Zambesi rivers, the stupendous creature known as *Rhinoceros simus*, or, in common phrase, the white or one-horned rhinoceros. This animal was not at all like the heraldic unicorn. But it was of heroic mould, and it wore on its forehead, or on its snout, one enormous horn, long, sharp, and powerful. Huge and unwieldy as it was, it was swift of foot; in temper it was choleric; in valour it was fearless. Wherefore the classic legends and the medieval heraldic designs stood at the last approved. The unicorn was at last materialised. Not did the remoteness of its habitat debar such identification. That very region was the ancient land of Ophir, familiar to King Solomon and to the Phœnician merchants. But at any rate the great white one-horned rhinoceros was shown by Burchell to be a reality; though, indeed, neither white nor, strictly speaking, one-horned. Its colour was a dirty grey, almost verging on mouse-colour. And it had two horns, though one was so small as to be scarcely perceptible; a mere hump with a tuft of stout bristles, three or four inches high. The other real horn was from three to four feet long, thick, and tufted about with bristles at the base, and curving and tapering gracefully to a hard, sharp point. This might have been a formidable weapon in a battle, though the rhinoceros usually dealt with its foes by trampling them under foot, and used the horn as a rod of guidance for its young.

The full grown white rhinoceros was nearly seven feet high at the shoulders, and from fourteen to sixteen feet long, and thus in bulk surpassed every other modern quadruped except the elephant, which it almost rivalled. Its head was three or four feet long, and held very low, its chin being normally only a few inches from the ground. Its truncated muzzle was a foot and a half broad, and designed to facilitate the cropping of grass, the sole food of the creature. The brain, placed just beneath the long horn, was scarcely as large as that of a man. The eyes were very small, and so set as to have a remarkably limited range of vision. For this reason the animal, when either pursuing or pursued, invariably ran in a straight line, and thus was easily dodged. In habit the white rhinoceros was usually more dull, slow, and wallowing than its black, two-horned kinsman. But, like the latter, it was singularly stubborn and perverse, and subject to sudden and causeless fits of the most violent fury. It would at times, for no conceivable reason, bar the passage of a road with the persistence of the Greeks at Thermopylae; or bound from its lazy wallowing and pursue some inoffensive passer-by with the utmost manifestations of ferocious wrath. It was, however, little feared by the natives, who easily avoided its straightforward charges and drove their heavy assegais into its sides with deadly effect. The Zulus and Matabeles called it the *Mchocho*, and greatly prized its flesh for food, its hide for whips and shields, and, above all, its horn for the handle of the battle-axe. When killed the giant creature did not fall upon its side, but sank down upon its knees and hams, doubling its short legs beneath it.

This giant unicorn was gregarious, and Burchell found it in vast droves all through the Bechuanaland country. Many years later Captain Harris found it still numerous, encountering scores in the course of a day's ride. But as the number of European hunters increased the number of these great brutes decreased, and when firearms came into general use among the natives the work of destruction went forward at a fearful pace. Of dull perception and sluggish habits, the white rhinoceros fell an easy prey to the Bechuanas and Matabeles, who slaughtered thousands merely for their horns and for their humps, which were a favourite article of food. A few years ago the animal was believed to be extinct. Then a group of six was discovered in a swamp in Mashonaland. These have now all been killed, and there is no reason to suppose that a single specimen remains alive. No one who has not visited South Africa has ever seen a white rhinoceros, since no living specimen was ever taken out of that country for exhibition. No complete skeleton, nor entire hide, even, has ever found its way to Europe or America, and we are therefore, in the curious situation of having more satisfactory relics of some prehistoric animals than of one of the greatest and most interesting of our own time. The skeleton and hide of one of the last killed are, however, said to be under shipment to England, where they will form an impressive memorial of one of the greatest creatures that have vanished from earth before the destructive power of man.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS.
To the Editor: I have a question about the...

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What will happen to the...

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OUR DRAUGHTS COLUMN.

Table with 4 columns and 10 rows of numbers, likely a draughts board layout.

THE GREAT GAME OF CHINA.

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THE AUTHOR OF "AN AFRICAN FARM."

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THE GAME OF CHESS.

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MADAME PATTI'S PROUBEST MOMENT.

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WIT AND HUMOUR.

Wit and humour are essential to life...

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