

## THE WHITE RHINOCEROS (RHINOCEROS SIMUS).

SIR,—Mr Lydekker's recent "Notes on Rhinoceroses Ancient and Modern," have been extremely interesting to me, as no doubt to other readers of the *Field*. More especially his notes on the white or Burchell's rhinoceros, a species now unhappily extinct, or all but extinct, are for naturalists full of a melancholy interest.

The enormous white rhinoceros, distinguished mainly from its black cousin of Africa by its vaster size, its more sluggish habits, its prolonged forehorn, immense head, and blunt upper lip, adapted so evidently to its grass eating habits, is now, I fear, from the reports of Mr F. C. Selous and other hunters, extinct, or on the verge of extinction. The beautiful true quagga (*Equus quagga*), another very interesting form, has been (as I pointed out two or three years back) the first to disappear from the once crowded natural game preserves of Southern Africa. The monstrous white rhinoceros seems destined to stand second on the list of a vanished fauna.

After coming down country last year, I stayed some few weeks at Cape Town, during which time—thanks to the kindness of Mr Roland Trimen—my friend Mr G. E. Yale and I photographed several natural history specimens in the Cape Town Museum. Among these was the head of the last white rhinoceros brought down country. This head belonged to an animal shot after much trouble and search by Mr Selous in Mashonaland some ten years since; and, it is undoubtedly the last (almost the only specimen) now left to us of an exceedingly rare and singular form. The forehorn is not so straight or so prolonged as in some specimens obtained in bygone years, when this animal wandered over nearly all South Africa; but, on the whole, the head is a good and a typical one. Mr Lydekker gives the extreme recorded length of such a horn as 57in. over the curve. This is an excellent specimen, undoubtedly, and will now probably never be beaten. Yet in the old days, when *Rhinoceros simus* abounded, and every chief's ambition was to possess a long kerrie or staff fashioned from the forehorn of this beast, some of extraordinary measurement must have been in existence. There are still here and there in South Africa, in remote places, such kerries, but they are scarce, and the traders and hunters have had the pick of them. Probably at this day in England, in forgotten places and remote corners, some of these staffs are lying away in forgotten obscurity.

It has been the fashion to assume, since Cornwallis Harris's day, that the white rhinoceros was never found south of the Orange River. Undoubtedly in modern times (seventy or eighty years past) it was not; but there has always been a tradition, supported by Barrow and other travellers, that the mighty quadruped once wandered and fed in the open grassy wastes of Great Bushmanland, as well as in the country north of the Orange River. This tract is very similar in character to the open plains of the South Kalahari and other adjacent districts; the Orange River at certain seasons is easily fordable, and there seems to be no sound reason, other than a purely captious geographical distribution, why the white rhinoceros should not have formerly grazed in this part of Cape Colony.

The enormous bulk and height of this animal may be partly gauged if it be remembered that specimens were formerly slain standing more than 6½ft. high, measuring between 18ft. and 19ft. in length, and possessing a bulk in proportion to these measurements. Even the African elephant is dwarfed by comparison, although of course standing much higher at the shoulder.

Notwithstanding its vast bulk, the white rhinoceros could display upon occasion immense quickness and speed, as the great hunter and companion of Livingstone, Mr Oswell, and others can testify. As far as can be at present learned, the white rhinoceros has been exterminated, even in its last strongholds in North-east Mashonaland. In Ngamiland and the North Kalahari region, where formerly it was plentiful, it has been, as I ascertained while hunting in that direction in 1890, finished for some years past. It seems to be quite clear that no specimen has ever been known north of the Zambesi.

Probably the head of Mr Selous's last specimen is also absolutely the last relic of the once abundant *Rhinoceros simus*. It is, indeed, a thousand pities that no complete skin of the entire animal has ever been brought to Europe.

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