

SHOOTING.

THE FIRST SOMALI RHINOCEROS.

WE HAD HEARD of rhinos being about the country everywhere between Hargeisa and Milmil, and actually came across the tracks of one, but had no time to get him, as there was a long stretch of waterless jungle before us, and we had to get across it as quickly as we could.

In sight of the Arussi Galla hills, however, signs of rhinos were plentiful, and, as we were obliged to halt here to send back fifty miles for more water, we lost no time in going after these beasts, which our ignorant coast Somalis declared to be bigger than elephants, and had a holy horror of.

For fifty miles, since we had left the wells, we had been passing through dense brown thorn forest, the overhanging branches tearing open our grass-woven water vessels and letting out half their contents. For fifty miles in front of us there was the same undulating thorny country, with long tracts of red stoneless soil, on which tracking was easy.

My first day was a blank one, as I kept on following old tracks, but on getting back to camp in the evening I found my brother had bagged two fine animals, a bull and a cow. He had got on to fresh tracks immediately on leaving camp, and had followed them for four or five hours, winding in and out amongst the thorn trees. At last he found them in a kind of glade; the bull fell to the 4-bore at eighty yards distance, and the other was brought down as she came, pawing the ground, towards the sound of the shot. Next morning I went to the carcasses, by which some of our men had slept during the night, inclosing themselves in a thorn fence—a protection against lions. These men told us that during the night one or two rhinos had come and walked round the bodies of those lying on the ground, and, on my going to the place to look, I found this to be true. I tracked them up all day, and although I kept on passing places where they had lain down, pawing and scoping up the earth, I never came across them, as something had frightened them. Next day our water came up from the wells fifty miles off, and we had to march on. Shortly after starting, we came across fresh footprints crossing the caravan path, the two side nails clearly defined on each side of the foot. We followed these up, and, after a mile, came on a rhino sleeping under a green bush on the other side of a glade. I got into the middle of the glade and fired the 4-bore at his shoulder; he and another one that I had not seen, then jumped up and charged out to the side of the glade, jumping about here and there, on which I was able to hit them both. They then went off, and we commenced tracking up the one that seemed to be going strongest, trusting that the other would not go far. The pony I was riding had seen the rhinos, and nothing would induce him to move on, so he had to be left behind. After tracking for some time, we saw the first rhino standing in a fortress of dry, impervious thorns, facing us and listening intently, on which he fell to a shot in the head. Leaving some men to bring his head and hide, we returned to track up the other one, and, after a short distance, saw him lying under a bush. He got up and came towards us, but dropped to the first shot. We got both heads and hides, and, loading them on some camels I had kept behind on purpose, we pushed on to overtake the caravan, and caught it up about twenty-five miles further on. Next day my brother, in the same way, got another fine bull, the caravan the same day marching another twenty-five miles out of the rhino district to some wells, where some tribes were watering their flocks. We had got five rhinos—the first ever shot by a European in the country—and our men were delighted. They cut up the hide into pieces about 20in. square, and these they slung on the camels to take to Berbera, and have made into shields—a great prize. These rhinoceros-hide shields are whiter and more transparent than those made from the hide of the oryx. They had to be cut whilst green, as no knife could have cut through the thick hide when dry.

Although these were the first rhinos shot, yet several other travellers had seen their tracks. One party had followed rhino tracks under Bur-dab; another had seen them in the Murrehau country; and Speke, as early as 1855, had come across them, behind Lasgori, in the Warsayli country.

SIXTEENTH.

