



ELEPHANTS CLOSING IN

The cow had been shot by Lord Ratendone, and the capture of the calf is in progress

## CAPTURING A NEPAL RHINO

### A Gentle Art with a Very Ungentle Quarry

**A**LTHOUGH by nature unaggressive and retiring, the rage of a rhinoceros once roused strikes terror to the heart of even that rajah of the forests, the tiger. There can be no better proof of this than the fact that his favourite resort, where alone he is now to be found in considerable numbers, is the Chitawan reserve in the Nepal Terai, which literally swarms with tigers in search of food. But, in spite of this, young rhinoceroses walk these same forests beside their mothers unscathed and unharmed. A maternal rhino in defence of her young will defeat and disable two tigers attacking together.

Elephants, too, are powerless against the enormous weight, heavily armoured body, horn and teeth of the rhinoceros.

Sad to relate, however, this immunity does not extend to modern weapons and modern hunters, and it has been necessary to introduce legislation for the preservation of his genus in Bengal, where it is said that their numbers have been reduced to 40 or less. A century or so ago the rhinoceros roamed all over the forests of the Nepal and Sikkim Terai, and the Emperor Baber has noted in his memoirs that in his day it was known at Peshawar.

From the evidence of ancient seals, it would seem, too, that at the time of the Mohengo Dara civilisation it was found in the Indus Valley. Nowadays the animal is almost entirely confined to the Nepal Terai and the Assam plains, but its numbers are rapidly dwindling owing largely to superstitious beliefs connected with the peculiar "horn" with which both males and females are endowed.

#### A VALUABLE HORN

The horn of the rhinoceros is a small and easily portable article, which fetches a price ranging from 150/- downwards according to size. The powdered horn is highly prized as a tonic and medicine in China, which appears to be the principal market, but, in addition, there is an old and firmly established belief that poison, if placed in a cup made of the horn, will immediately cause it to fall to pieces.

Among the superstitions attaching to the rhinoceros in Nepal, that connected with the sacred ceremony of the "Shradha" is the best known. The object of this ceremony is to establish communication with departed family spirits, *i.e.*, father, grandfather and so on. It is performed in a solitary place with sacred associations such as on the banks of the Ganges or, if that be impossible, in a cow house, but not in a temple or place of worship.

In the usual way some preparatory fasting and

purification are necessary, and an offering of rice is then made by casting it in the Ganges personally or vicariously by hand of a Brahmin.

The ideal offering, however, is the warm blood of a rhinoceros drawn from the stomach immediately after death. Such an offering is believed to be especially welcome, and even to confer absolution in respect of sins committed before death. Obviously it is rarely possible to make such an offering, but failing that, one from a vessel made of rhino hide, particularly from the stomach shield, has great efficacy.

There are still, however, some reserves, and chief among these the famous Chitawan reserve, where in the Nepal Terai wild elephant, tiger and rhinoceros roam freely in their ancient haunts. This is the famous reserve of the Maharaja of Nepal, which might almost be termed the hunting ground of kings. His Majesty the King Emperor and His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales have shot in this reserve as guests of the Nepal Government, and the total bag on the former occasion was 37 tigers, 18 rhinoceros and 4 bears.

King Edward also shot here as Prince of Wales. In capturing a young rhinoceros the following method is usually followed: The mother rhinoceros and calf having been marked down, it is in the first place necessary to shoot the mother. Without

this nothing can be done, as no elephants will stand before a charging rhinoceros, and, if surrounded, she would merely charge and break the ring, thus enabling the calf to escape behind her.

On the other hand the calf will not immediately leave its mother when shot, but remains in the vicinity, for a shorter or longer period according to age, thus affording an opportunity to the hunters to surround her. This, however, is only the beginning of the operation, as even a large calf is capable of breaking a ring of elephants. The next step, therefore, is the construction, round the body of the mother rhino, of a powerful circular stockade, which may be as much as 100yds. or more in diameter with only a single "neck" or exit of perhaps 30yds. or 40yds. in length.

On the inner side of this stockade a trench some 3ft. in depth and breadth is dug in order to prevent the rhino calf from charging and probably breaking the barrier. When completed the place resembles a small strongly entrenched and barricaded camp in the heart of a savage enemies' country.

As the work progresses the number of these elephants is continually reinforced by those withdrawn from outside the completed portion of the stockade until, if the operation is so far successful (by no means always the case), the formation resembles the figure 8.

#### INTO THE BOTTLE-NECK

It is likely that some determined rushes by the calf will drive back the line in places, and the issue remains in doubt until, in the course of his frenzied rushes, he discovers the apparently unguarded neck of the "bottle" and dashes through into the stockaded portion. Immediately the whole line of elephants advances and closes up the neck, and simultaneously the bodies of men on either side commence work feverishly on closing the trench and stockade across the open neck. In the meantime the rhino calf, in all probability, again comes across the body of its mother which immediately arrests his attention. He clearly thinks she is asleep, and he will run round her and prod her in vain efforts to awaken her while the work of closing the neck of the stockade proceeds apace.

Finally, it is completed and the rhino calf is hemmed into a space covered with high grass and possibly dense undergrowth, but surrounded on every side by a ditch, a strong stockade and, outside, a circle of elephants and men.

An assaulting party then advances, trampling the undergrowth and cutting it down with their kukris. Sooner or later the calf charges out, usually in short rushes. The section of the line so attacked stands firm until the last possible moment attempting to throw the net forward so as to entangle the unwieldy animal in its rush before they themselves retreat hastily out of range. This manoeuvre is not easy of execution, and it not infrequently happens that the assaulting party are hurled back to their starting point. On one occasion, indeed, when the stockade and trench had not been constructed with sufficient care, the animal was able to break through, and dashing aside the elephants escaped into the forest—never to be seen again. A bitter disappointment after several hours of hard work.

If successfully carried out, however, the calf sooner or later entangles itself in the net, whereupon



COMPLETING THE STOCKADE

The rhino calf has been driven back to its dead mother

# CARTRIDGES OF YESTERDAY

## Sorrows of Youth Mirrored in the Glass of Time

TIME is a great healer. Wounds that seemed so piercing in early youth that one felt they would proclaim themselves for ever, like so many Calais in the heart of Mary Stuart, gradually lose their sting, till finally they become almost forgotten. But every now and then some jolt of memory brings them suddenly back, and with a vividness such that we savour the quality of our youthful anguish without feeling the hurt of it. And thus it happened to me the other day.

We were out "pottering" early in September and had stopped for lunch, guns were unloaded, pockets emptied of cartridges, and each man was adjusting himself to that area of Mother Earth least likely to impinge harshly upon him. And then my host came up and said: "They say there's a runner down in that field. Will somebody go over." So I went. It was a field of roots. I didn't find the runner (to cut a long story short), but as I crossed the field there rose in front of me a brace and a half of partridges, brethren, possibly, of the alleged runner, and a hare got up from almost under my feet. And that's how it all came back to me as clearly as if it were yesterday.

Now we are told that a boy's first trout, or his first day's hunting, or his first day's shooting, should be among the most joyous memories of his life. We even elaborate the theme with age. Not only were they golden days, but we—the child the father of the man we expect you to understand—even in our virgin attempts decidedly distinguished ourselves.

I wish I could say it was so in my case. My first trout was caught on a bitterly cold day, and immediately afterwards I fell in and got water in my waders (which were big enough for two of me), and was sent home. I wept. I would have you know that I was very young. My first hunt was on a leading rein. It was entirely ruined for me by the fact that a younger neighbour was not on a leading rein, and that our coachman (may wild asses dance over his grave—it afterwards transpired that he drank) insisted on bringing me home almost from the meet. On the first occasion off the leading rein, my shaggy little pony got very hot and rolled in front of the whole hunt in a field of seeds. Everybody was very nice about it, but the shame of that moment. Who can describe it?

My first shoot was little better. I had been born and bred in a house where shooting was talked incessantly. But my father had ideas of his own. "It ruins boys' shooting to start them too young. Their guns seldom fit them, and I have seen many boys of twelve shaping brilliantly with a 20-bore, and then do nothing more in life." I don't say I agree with him, but I have seen its truth in a number of cases. I was to be allowed to start at fifteen. Meanwhile, from the age of five, I had stood with the guns and walked with the beaters.

When I was fourteen I went to stay with an uncle. It was early September, and they were to shoot the next day. He asked me if I would like to take a gun. Would I like—. "Was I used to a gun?" he asked. "Yes," I answered in one heroic lie. After all, I was nearly fifteen, and I am sure that

that Committee of Ripon, Selous and Peter Hawker who keep the Elysian Game Book, are even now pleading with the recording angel to have the incident expunged from my sheet.

I was given an old hammer gun. I remember remarking on it, for I was inclined to look down on anything but hammerless ejectors. My uncle laughed. "Oh," we're all old-fashioned here—like Lord Ripon." I knew quite enough about Lord Ripon to be thoroughly and rightly squashed. I remember when I got back to school the next half, I tried it on one of the more dashing of my contemporaries, his father had a grouse moor and a deer forest and one of the best partridge beats in England, and he was our oracle of shooting. Now he lives in South America and never, I believe, lets a gun off.) "Of course I use hammer guns—like Ripon," I told him. The remark fell flat. My prestige was not enhanced.

Next day I woke with the sun. Nine-thirty would never arrive. Now it comes all too soon. The starting-point was reached. I was duly cautioned and sent to the outside. We spread out across a large field of roots. I held my gun practically in the shoulder. At any moment I was prepared for anything. If a covey of great Auks had risen to those roots I would have had a shot at them. We wheeled. A covey rose on the left. Three birds down. A moment's pause and we move on. Another covey on the left, then one in the centre, but even to my sanguine temperament not within my compass. It was obviously a pict. I was sent here because I wasn't safe. I was being "taken for a wa-a-lk" (I knew my Bromley Davenport).

What were those two-three-four heads bobbing in front? If I had been Colonel Hawker's pointer I could hardly have stiffened more sharply. Up got the covey. Up went my gun. The air was thick with brown balls. Off went my gun, whither I knew not, nor quite why, and off went the covey, every feather of it.

### "PICK YOUR BIRD"

"Keep calm," I said to myself, "keep calm," and then quoting some forgotten tag "Swing with them." My calm became icy. My swing that of a javelin-casting Greek. But my bag remained nil. I was hot with shame. But nobody seemed to notice. As lunch approached we had, I suppose, got about ten brace, none of which were mine. From time to time I noticed, not without satisfaction of a negative sort, that I was not the only person who was missing, and from time to time, the keeper, an old friend, would exhort me to "pick my bird." This, of course, was just what I was not doing. I was browning them as shamelessly or, rather, as ignorantly as I could. Miss followed miss. Rage followed disappointment and turned to sullen despair, and finally, just before lunch, I drank of the dregs by pursuing a rabbit with my gun in half a circle down the line only to be prevented from firing by a roar of protest, to be followed by sharp words and few and a very pressing threat that if it happened again I would be sent home.

We stopped for lunch. I was asked if I had got anything. "I don't think so," I replied in the tone of voice expecting the answer no. And then my old friend, my friend now as then—the keeper, came and said there was part of a covey in the next field. "Perhaps Master R. would go over?" I went. I was sent. For my heart was leaden. I went into the field with the keeper and one of the beaters. He showed me the exact patch (we were back in the big root field where we had started), where the birds were down. It was a broken covey, and we hadn't gone far before I saw a little head bob. Shall I shoot him sitting? I thought. I repeat I was well brought up really; disappointment accounts for the rest. Then I turned round and saw all the guns and most of the beaters gathered round a gate watching me. That finished it. Had they gone on with their lunch, I might have got something.

At that moment a hare got up. Up went the covey. My brain was numb, but a faint message pulsed to it to the effect that a hare was a bigger target than a partridge, and that two barrels would be more likely to hit him than one. I closed one, if not two, eyes, I levelled my gun, I fired both barrels together, missed the hare, staggered to the recoil and fell flat on my back.

It would have taken a very understanding party indeed to have refrained from the roar of laughter which went up from the gate. It was by no means the worst moment of my life; but it was, I think, the most acutely miserable.

And now I am writing in the *Field* about it. Time is a great healer. R. M.

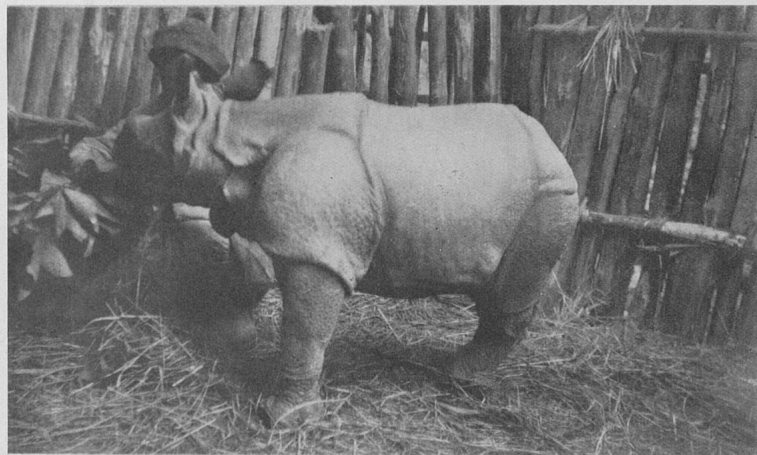


THE STOCKADE IN POSITION ROUND THE DEAD RHINO AND CALF

the whole of the attacking party hurl themselves upon it (with the noose and slip knot party to the fore) and a terrific struggle ensues. Eventually his lips and feet are firmly secured and tied together with numerous strands of rope until the unfortunate animal is left trussed and impotent, and the last stage of the operation can be undertaken. This consists in building a strong stockade round his prone body, allowing sufficient space for him to stand up when loosed from his bonds but not to gather sufficient momentum to break it down by charges of his massive body. The stockade completed, it remains to untie the animal, a ticklish job, requiring both nerve and agility, which is entrusted to a few selected men.

The young rhinoceros is tamed with surprising ease. The day following his capture he will greedily lap up milk from a bottle out of a man's hand, and within another day or so it is possible to feed him with sugar and even to enter his restricted quarters in the stockade. The task of carrying him to the nearest railway station on the Indian border—a distance of possibly 30 miles or 40 miles—is in itself a labour of Hercules, and calls into play all the qualities which make the Nepalese among the finest weight-carrying porters in the world. To men, however, who consider the transport over the high passes to Kathmandu of the heaviest motor cars as part of the day's work, the removal of even a four-year-old rhino is no insuperable undertaking.

A special strongly constructed cage is built, the animal transferred into it and carried by 80 to 100 coolies by slow stages to the railway, and so to his new life in one of the zoological gardens of India, Europe or America where, it is not surprising to learn, he is very highly valued. D.



FOUR DAYS AFTER CAPTURE

Inside its cage and fairly docile, yet with plenty of kick left in him for occasions!