

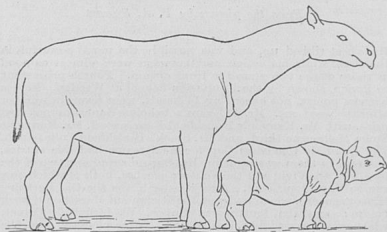
THE NATURALIST

A COLOSSAL EXTINCT RHINOCEROS

DURING the past 20 years or so palæontologists have been looking expectantly towards Central Asia, wondering what interesting extinct beasts will be yielded by collecting expeditions in that vast and almost unexplored tract of the earth believed to have been the cradle of the human race. Shortly before the war Mr. Forster Cooper discovered in the Bugti Hills, Baluchistan, the remains of two genera of the Rhinoceros family, one represented by fairly complete skulls, clearly indicating the former existence there of an animal about the size of a large modern rhinoceros: the other, and more interesting of the two, by neck vertebræ and limb bones evidently belonging to a species as large as an elephant. To the latter he gave the name *Baluchitherium osborni*. The scanty material at that time available did not, however, admit of a confident restoration of this colossal beast, but in 1922 the Third Asiatic Expedition Collection, sent out by the American Museum of Natural History, made some remarkable finds in Central and South-eastern Mongolia. Amongst these were some bones, probably of Miocene age, similar in size and other particulars to those of the *Baluchitherium* discovered by Mr. Forster Cooper, and the osteological treasure in this case was a nearly complete skull which, supplementing what was previously known of the limb bones, enables us to imagine with tolerable accuracy the appearance, size and habits of this animal.

Piecing the evidence together, Prof. H. F. Osborn has recently given us an outline restoration, with a sketch of an Indian rhinoceros set alongside and drawn to scale, thus dramatically demonstrating the enormous size of *Baluchitherium*. A copy of this sketch of *Baluchitherium*, omitting the bones, shows that apart from size the animal differed from a modern rhinoceros very markedly in its relative proportions, particularly in the smallness of the head, the great length of the neck, the shortness of the body as compared with its depth and the greater length and slenderness of the legs. The head and neck together were nearly 12ft. long, so that although the animal stood between 13 and 14ft. at the withers, thus surpassing by about a couple of feet a large African elephant, it could reach the ground with its muzzle and stretch up to a height of eighteen or more feet to browse on the foliage of trees. Modern rhinoceroses have a big, heavy head, a remarkably short neck, and a very long body carried on short thick legs, the size and shape of the head and the shortness of the neck being correlated with the dermal nasal horns characteristic of these animals. It may seem a contradiction in terms to speak of a hornless rhinoceros; but it has long been known that many of the extinct members of this family were without these weapons; and *Baluchitherium* was one of them. Hence the nasal bones were long and slender and were overlapped beneath by the long upper jaw which carried at the end a pair of stout canine-like incisor tusks; and Prof. Osborn thinks that the presence of these tusks, associated with its great bulk and probably with a thick defensive hide insured the beast against the attacks of all possible contemporary creatures.

Although it must be freely conceded that so far as identification is concerned these and other remains of fossil animals could not have fallen into more capable hands than those of the



BALUCHITHERIUM

A gigantic Miocene rhinoceros from Central Asia, and a common Indian rhinoceros set side by side for comparison. (Copied from a sketch by Prof. H. F. Osborn, American Museum Novitates, May 25th, 1923.)

palæontological staff of the American Museum of Natural History, it is nevertheless a thousand pities that lack of enterprise and interest in our own country, it can hardly be lack of funds, prevents the organisation of expeditions to secure similar material for our national museum.

R. I. Pocock.