

Diversions of an Indian Political

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WITH FRONTISPIECE

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was quite astounding. Unless, however, the laws about protection are tightened, this wonderful country is doomed from a sporting point of view.

Rhinoceros are now practically only found in the country lying east of the Gandak River, known as Chitawan. In this part they have been, and are, very strictly preserved, and anyone that is accorded the privilege of entering the district can still see more of these huge beasts than he could anywhere else in the world. They are the biggest of the rhinoceros family, and, of course, quite a different species to those found in Africa. Van Linschoten, writing so long ago as 1587, gave quite a good description of them :—

“The rhinoceros,” he wrote, “is lesse and lower than the elephant. It hath a short horne upon the nose, in the hinder parts somewhat bigge, and toward the end sharper, of a browne blew, and whitish colour; it hath a snout like a Hog and the skin upon the upper part of his body is all wrinckled, as if it were armed with Shields or Targets. It is a great enemie of the Elephant. Some think it is the right Unicorne, because that as yet there hath none other been found, but onely by heare-say and by the pictures of them. These Rhinoceroses when they will drink the other beasts stand and wait upon them till the Rhinoceros hath drunk, and thrust their horn into the water and then after him all the other beasts doe drink. Their horns in India are much esteemed and used against all venome, poyson and many other deseases likewise his teeth, clawes, flesh, skin and bloud, and his very dung and water and all whatsoever is about him is much esteemed in India, and used for the curing of many deseases and sicknesses, which is very good and most true as I my selfe by experience have found.”

In the old days, rhino shooting used to be considered a very dangerous sport, that is, before H.V. rifles came into use. That famous old sportsman, Sir Jung Bahadur, used, however, often to take his ladies with him when after rhino, till one of them

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was killed through the elephant carrying their howdah being charged and knocked over. Ladies were thereafter barred. Rhino in this country, like other animals, can only be shot from elephants, but elephants staunch to rhino are scarcer than those staunch to tiger. The 'ringing' method cannot be employed, for if these beasts are in a tight place, they will always charge, and will so scatter and demoralise the elephants that their nerves will not recover for months, if at all.

The proper plan is for two or three guns to go together to the rhino ground, which is generally the very thickest tree jungle, or else *narkal*, where the going is marshy. They are located by their unmistakable three-toed tracks, by the crashing of branches, or by their peculiar snorts, which remind one rather of a short burst of machine-gun fire, though less loud and sharp. One does not find them particularly anxious to get right away, and all that is necessary is to manœuvre about to get a clear shot at head or neck. You see the huge uncouth brute vaguely outlined amid the greenery, standing looking at you perhaps twenty yards away. There is nothing to aim at except his nose and horn, or perhaps his chest, all equally futile, even with so heavy a weapon as an H.V. .500 rifle. Nearer you dare not go, as he would charge, which, in the jungle, would probably result in the howdah being swept by branches off your bolting elephant. No elephant will stand to a charging rhino, and very few in such circumstances will stand long enough even to give you the chance of a shot. Well, there you are looking at one another. Then while you are wondering about the next move, perhaps with an astounding snort, whistle or squeal, or a combination of all three, the rhino moves off with a rush, and your elephant, with a pirouette, followed by a few yards' strategic retirement, displays the panicky state of his nerves. It is in a way what one might expect, as an elephant has no means

of defence against a rhino. Against this is the fact that wild elephant and rhinoceros are often found on the same ground. I suppose till the human biped intrudes, they must have little to say to one another.

The rhino will not go far before he stands again, and the rest depends on circumstances. If you can get a shot below the ear he will sink down so instantaneously dead that he will not roll over. You can then realise his huge bulk, with the aid of a tape. A moderately big male shot by the writer measured five feet nine at the shoulder. It took eight carts to bring him to camp. As to a rhino's carcass, in the Nepal Terai, the Tharus, like vultures, seem to assemble from nowhere. They sop up the blood on rags. When dried, the water in which the rag is dipped is a specific against cholera. The urine, also an important item in the *materia medica* of the jungle—heaven knows for what ailment—is caught in bottles, or any vessel handy, while of the meat, not a gristly shred is left, for it is all eaten. Regarded as a sport, rhino shooting cannot be ranked very high, but when you see the huge carcass stripped clean by these jungle-dwellers, every scrap (and drop) to be used, not only for food but for medicine, love-making and the casting out of devils, one cannot but feel the glow of benevolence that accompanies a truly virtuous deed. One evening our own menu included roast peafowl, *sambur* marrow on toast and rhino's tongue. The latter is not as disagreeable as it sounds, though I cannot praise it further.

The male may be recognised from the female by his shorter and thicker horn, worn blunt by combats, in which it is said that rhinos kill one another. The longer and sharper female's horn has a more unpleasant appearance, and this sex, especially when they have a calf at heel, display more gratuitous truculence. My wife and I once had a stand in an open space as if a broad ride had been cut in the

forest. A few elephants were being put through to move a tiger towards us. A man posted up a tree signalled a tiger towards our left front, but he had not come out when we heard a rhino crashing just in front of us, and shortly afterwards a female pushed her head out of the jungle and came slowly out. She had a calf with her. Seeing our elephant, she stood looking at us not twenty-five yards away. We looked at her. A rhino's face, I may remark, is totally without expression, like a lump of wood. Our elephant also stood and looked. I had no wish to shoot, and we remained like that for what seemed a considerable time. I would have given a good deal for a camera. Then she suddenly tossed her head and came at us at a lumbering gallop. An elephant can be marvellously quick under such circumstances. Next moment a man, flung violently about in a howdah on a bolting elephant, hatless, only concerned to hold on to the howdah rail with one hand and his rifle with the other, was being adjured to shoot! Shoot indeed! The rhino having chased us headlong for forty or fifty yards, to our relief turned off into the jungle. Our elephant had fortunately kept to the open, or our plight would have been sad. We returned to our stand, and the elephant was just picking up my hat to give me, when the tiger in two bounds crossed the ride. I did shoot, but the bullet that sped knocked the dust up somewhere behind his tail. That elephant had a very good reputation with rhino, and I took the first opportunity of asking the *mahout* to account for his somewhat ignominious flight.

"Nay, sahib," he said, "Mangal Pershad behaved well. Did he not stand? But he expected your honour to shoot, and when you did not shoot, he felt himself without support and fled."

His explanation was, I am sure, quite correct. Poor Mangal felt he had lost his human backing and his nerve gave way.

The scene in the wonderful jungles of Chitawan I love best to recall, occurred one evening during a return towards camp. We had been out all day. The elephants were strung out in a long line, the *mahouts* hurrying them along at their ridiculous best pace to reach the tents before darkness fell. We were tired and dusty. The sun was setting, turning to gold the tips of the *sal* trees on the high *dhamar* to our right, while on the other hand, over the open stretch of sand, reeds and river, a light mist was rising from the water, almost concealing the line of forest on the far bank. A chill had fallen on the air. Jungle fowl were calling, peafowl were already fluttering up to their perches on the high cotton-trees. Somewhere quite close by a *kakar* was barking persistently. Turning a bend in the forest path, we came to a sort of natural clearing, a grassy lawn making a bay in the forest. In the middle of this stood a huge rhinoceros. He looked like a monstrous image of clay. With his grotesque shape, long boat-shaped head, his folds of riveted armour, it was as if a monster of some bygone age had been aroused from the slime and a sleep of thousands of years. The leading *mahouts* halted their elephants on seeing him. I had no desire to shoot and all shouted to scare him away. He just turned his great head, but otherwise would not stir, so we filed tremulously by, so near one could almost have hit him with a stone. Looking back from the next turning, the huge grey image was still standing immovable in the gloom.