

A RHINOCEROS ON THE RAMPAGE.



WAS lost. That was all that I could feel, and I can tell you the feeling was horrible.

I had ridden out in the morning from my friend Brookes's house to shoot antelopes, and the necessity of scouring a strange country, after a scarce species of game, had led me on, further and further, generally at a rapid pace, till at last I had sighted a drove of antelopes.

It was in the far northeastern corner of the Province of Oude, and the country toward which I had been riding was almost uninhabited for miles, save by the wander-

ing wild beasts of the field.

I had tied my horse to a tree, and commenced to stalk the antelopes with great caution. In order to do this, it was necessary to make a large detour, and that on foot under a hot sun. But I was an ardent sportsman, and the heat affected me but little, compared with the ambition of bagging a rare antelope.

But the animals themselves were very provoking.

Twice I had almost got within shot of them, and well to leeward, when something startled them on the opposite side, and away they went, up-wind, as is the habit of their kind, and were almost out of sight before I had done swearing at the luck.

But I was bound not to be disappointed. I had worked myself into a perfect frenzy of determination. Have one of those antelopes I would, if it took me all day to get within range.

And it *did* take me all day.

I kept steadily to leeward all the time, and plodded on, never recking of the scorching Indian sun that shone down, almost perpendicularly, overhead. As soon as I got closer to the wary game, I resumed my old stalking tactics, gliding from cover to cover with the utmost caution, and at last my efforts were crowned with success.

It was not very far from sunset when this happened.

The country, even to me, almost unobservant of anything but the game, had assumed an unfamiliar aspect. An open, rolling expanse of ground, covered with long, coarse *surpuit* grass, and dotted with patches of scrubby cover here and there, had replaced the jungle around Brookes's solitary shooting-box. About a quarter of a mile ahead of the antelopes, I could see the shimmering of a large sheet of water, and troops of animals were to be dimly descried trooping toward it to drink. It was a veritable hunter's paradise, as far as game went.

But my immediate objects, the antelopes, were at last within gunshot, and I hastened to take advantage of the fact. I rested my gun carefully in the fork of a bush, and waited for an instant for my nerves to become steady. Then I took a long and careful aim at the shoulder of the nearest antelope, and pulled the trigger.

The sharp, whip-like report of the Henry rifle echoed over the silent landscape for miles, almost startling myself, so accustomed had I become to the stillness.

The antelope I had aimed at leaped almost upright in the air, and fell on the grass, kicking convulsively. The rest of the herd started simultaneously, and stood gazing, appalled and bewildered for an instant. I took advantage of their irresolution to reverse the lever of my rifle and fire one more shot. A second antelope fell on its knees; but, being only wounded, leaped up again, and away sped the herd like the wind.

I was triumphant at last.

I advanced to inspect my game, and found that I had shot a very beautiful buck of a rare species. Before I did anything else, I drew my knife, and at once commenced to "gralloch" the animal, in Highland phrase—that is, to disembowel it, so as to render it lighter to carry.

Then for the first time I looked round me.

The country was perfectly strange!

I had hunted all the land for a circuit of twenty miles around Brookes's shooting-box, during the last month, and flattered myself that I knew every foot of it. But I had never been *here* before. Where was my horse?

I had tied him up under a spreading *burghut* tree, where there was ample shade for a circuit of several hundred square feet. Where was that tree? I could surely see it.

I scanned the horizon on all sides.

In vain!

The huge *burghut*, with its stem of nearly a hundred feet in height, had totally disappeared!

Where was I, then?

I looked at the sun. It was within half an hour of setting. I must do something before darkness overtook me, all alone.

But what?

I could not answer the question. I had heard of people, lost on the prairie, or in the jungle, wandering in circles for days without knowing where they were. Was that to be *my* fate?

No. I made up my mind to that. Luckily, I was of a remarkably cool temperament, and little apt to do anything under excitement. I reflected carefully, even as the sun was sinking, and finally resolved to spend the night where I was, and start fresh in the morning.

I could have no lack of food, for I had killed an antelope, and there was plenty of water out yonder. I took the two hind-quarters of the antelope and the skin of the whole body, and walked toward the lagoon.

Just as the sun set, the moon rose, and cast her light aslant over the surface of the placid waters.

On my side of the lagoon there seemed to be but few animals, but on the opposite shore I could see herds of the graceful axis deer, with its branching horns and spotted hide, and stolid buffaloes coming down to drink.

I made my preparations to pass the night under a spreading *peepul* tree, not far from the water, and soon made myself comfortable, like an old campaigner.

Being a smoker, I was never without matches, and one of these was soon employed to kindle a fire. Dry wood was in abundance, where every bush was almost burnt up, and I soon had a savory broil of slices of antelope-venison for supper.

I can assure you I made an excellent supper, too. The long jaunt I had had during the day had given me a ravenous appetite, and it was not until I had put away three or four pounds of venison that I was content to cry "enough."

For my beverage there was the broad lagoon, and in default of any drinking utensil whatever—even my hunting-cup remaining on the saddle with my horse—I was fain to imitate the example of the animals, and quench my thirst on all fours.

But to a thirsty man water is welcome under any form, and I made no objection.

Supper over, I pulled out my cigar-case and lighted a cheroot, after which I sat down under the *peepul* tree to reflect on my position.

It was not so bad yet. I had plenty of ammunition, and the country was full of game. I could surely live well enough till I found my way back to Tom Brookes's house.

As I thought of the ammunition, I suddenly remembered that I had left my pouch on the saddle! I started. I could

not help it. I had not a round left, except what was in the rifle. But that was my old "Sweet Sixteen," and I had loaded her up in the morning. I remembered that.

I had fired away two shots, consequently I had fourteen left!

Fourteen shots between me and death! Well, it ought to be enough. I had heard of men saving themselves on one. Anyway, it was of no use to cry over spilt milk. I had got into a scrape, and I must keep cool to get out of it.

As I was immersed in these reflections the moon had risen gradually, and by this time was shining clear and bright, and quite high in the sky, I thought that I had better go to bed. My couch was of the simplest. It was only the skin of the antelope which I laid under me to break the chill of the ground. The night felt cold, from the contrast to the heat of the day, but I could not help myself, so I dragged the skin close to the embers of the fire, and soon fell asleep, lulled by its pleasant warmth.

How long I had slept I know not, but the moon was almost perpendicular when I awoke, and it was as bright as day. A sudden harsh scream was the cause of my rousing up. I knew it well.

It was the trumpet of an elephant!

Instinctively I bounded to my feet, and looked around me in consternation. I was in the midst of a herd of wild elephants!

The danger of my position flashed on me in an instant. The wild elephant is a dangerous brute at the best of times, but at night, and in herds, he tramples over everything, and feels more at home and free from danger than in the day, apparently.

But these elephants did not seem to be aware of my presence. They were evidently excited about something else, and had not observed me, asleep in the shadow of the *peepul*.

They were rushing about in the open ground, most of those I could see being females, as I knew by the absence of tusks, and some sort of contest seemed to be going on among them. What it was I could not see at first.

At last a chorus of trumpeting and vicious, pig-like squeals broke out from the centre of the moving mass, and I saw the female elephants scatter right and left in dismay.

Then I discerned a terrible conflict.

A huge bull elephant rushed forward, with his trunk curled up tightly behind the long, formidable tusks, out of harm's way, striving to pierce a strange antagonist.

A long, low, uncouth-looking beast, of some five feet in height at the shoulder, and shaped much like an immense hog, was running at full tilt at the old elephant.

The short, upright horn on the snout, the contour of the animal, and the loose folds of skin that covered his ribs, proclaimed that most dangerous of all animals, the Indian rhinoceros.

If it had been alone and I had met it, I should have counted myself lost, such is the sullen and vindictive nature of this horrible beast. It is the only animal known that will attack man habitually, wherever met, and all the other wild beasts of India fear and avoid it.

But for the present the attention of the rhinoceros was fully engaged. Besides the old bull now charging at him, another younger one was skulking around to take him in the rear, and a third lay close by, with his entrails gushing out of a frightful wound inflicted by the deadly horn.

As I looked, the old bull elephant made his charge, that seemed as if it would carry everything before it.

But the rhinoceros, with surprising agility for a creature of such unwieldy appearance, leaped actively to one side, and running around, tried hard to get in at the unprotected flank of the elephant. The latter, as if simply threw his hind-

quarters around, and received the pig-like brute on his tusks. But, deprived of the impetus of his charge, he was unable to pierce the tough hide of the rhinoceros, which is thick enough to turn a leaden bullet at close quarters.

Then the two stood head to head for some minutes, the rhinoceros striving to wriggle his way between the forelegs of the elephant, to use his horn with effect. The elephant, on his part, strove hard to pin the rhinoceros to the earth, but in vain.

Presently I noticed the second elephant. He was charging, and close to the rhinoceros. The latter saw him too, and suddenly broke away from his first antagonist, rushing to meet the second. The young bull charged gallantly, but he was not up to the tricks of his wily antagonist. The rhinoceros swerved, as he came, and the excited elephant missed his mark, lumbering past in vain effort. Not so the rhinoceros. As quick as thought he rushed in at the unguarded side of his heedless foe, and I could see him working away at the elephant's side, like a pig rooting. The elephant gave a hoarse roar of pain, and tried to turn, but the active rhinoceros was too quick for him, and he fell down, helpless and dying.

And now came the turn of the old bull. Cautious and wary, he watched his opportunity, and suddenly rushed at the rhinoceros from the side. The latter, owing to his engrossment with his other enemy, and his somewhat defective vision, did not see him till too late.

The great bull elephant thundered on like an avalanche, and in an instant more the terrible tusks, nearly seven feet in length in the clear, as I judged, were buried in the side of the redoubtable rhinoceros.

A shrill squeal of pain from the latter, and he tried in vain to extricate himself. The battle was over. He had slain two elephants, and died game himself.

I cannot tell you the absorbing interest with which I had watched this curious conflict. True, I was an unwilling spectator, for I did not dare to move out of the shadow of the tree, for fear of attracting notice. Now, however, an idea struck me.

Excited and furious as the old bull elephant was, it was probable that the flush of his victory might make him tenfold more dangerous to me.

The battle had moved so close to me, during the vicissitudes of its varying fortune, that the last elephant, in his fall, had almost brushed the foliage of a bush I stood behind.

My resolution was taken in an instant. I must kill the old bull, or be killed myself, almost inevitably. He was not ten feet from me, and striving to pull clear from the body of the rhinoceros, which he had pinned into the very ground.

I ran round the fallen elephant, and before the bull elephant could draw clear, I stood almost touching his temple with my rifle.

One flash! It was enough! Struck through the brain, the old bull dropped instantaneously, and I was safe!

The female elephants, panic-stricken at the noise and the flash, scattered in all directions in dismay.

In five minutes I was alone!

I was not further disturbed that night. In the morning I began my search for my horse, and by following back my own trail at last found him, considerably gaunted by his long fast.

Starting on a search for my host's mansion, I soon came across some shikkarees, who had been sent to look for me, and we revisited the scene of my strange experience of the night before.

I was the richer by three handsome pairs of tusks for my adventure, but for long after I would start up in my sleep, expecting to be again aroused by the sight of another such strange fight.



A RHINOCEROS ON THE RAMPAGE.—"THE RHINOCEROS RUSHED IN AT THE UNGUARDED SIDE OF HIS FOX, AND I COULD SEE HIM WORKING AWAY AT THE ELEPHANT'S SIDE, LIKE A FIG ROOTING. THE ELEPHANT GAVE A HOARSE ROAR OF PAIN.—SEE PAGE 438.