

ADVENTURES
AMONG
WILD BEASTS

ROMANTIC INCIDENTS & PERILS
OF TRAVEL, SPORT, AND EXPLORATION
THROUGHOUT THE WORLD

BY

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"ADVENTURES IN THE GREAT DESERTS," "ADVENTURES IN THE GREAT
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WITH TWENTY-FOUR ILLUSTRATIONS

PHILADELPHIA
J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY

LONDON: SEELEY & CO. LIMITED

1909

CHAPTER XVII

TAPIR AND RHINOCEROS HUNTING

the hyrax, the tapir, and the rhinoceros.—Mr. Elliott's attempt to catch a hyrax.—A plucky little beast.—The tapir a prehistoric animal.—The Asiatic variety.—M. Benant's adventure.—Trying to catch a baby tapir.—Reckoning without the mother.—Flight.—Tapir *versus* Malay.—A timely shot.—The Asiatic rhinoceros.—A cowardly variety.—Roasting the Sumatran rhinoceros.—Another adventure of John White's.—The danger of possessing a lame horse.—An angry rhinoceros.—Pursued and overtaken.—A narrow escape.—Death of the horse.—And of the rhinoceros.

MORE or less intimately connected with the elephant are the rhinoceros, the tapir, and a remarkable little creature of which very little seems to be known—the hyrax. Each of these animals has a representative in either the South or the West, but here we shall discuss only those specimens which are found in the Eastern portion of the earth.

At first glance the hyrax would seem to have no more in common with the elephant than we have, for he is a soft-coated little thing, scarcely the size of a hare; yet the modern zoologists, following in the wake of Cuvier, tell us that he undoubtedly is very nearly related to the rhinoceros, etc. The Eastern variety of hyrax is found in Syria and round about the Red Sea, and most probably is the "coney" frequently mentioned in Holy Scripture.

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Mr. C. B. Elliott, the traveller in Palestine, occasionally came across families of these little things, burrowing in the hills or among the ruins of ancient Eastern cities, and not unnaturally mistook them for a kind of earless or short-eared rabbit.

Once—and only once—he endeavoured to catch one. He ran him down from the mouth of a burrow into a narrow defile, which, curving round the foot of a hill, came to an abrupt end two hundred yards farther on at the bottom of a low precipice. Mr. Elliott hailed this precipice with delight, for he was bound now to have the hyrax in a *cul-de-sac*, unless the little thing tried to scale one of the two steep banks on either side of the pass, and this was very improbable.

Finding at length that he had come to the end of his tether, the fugitive did not turn to bay as most hunted beasts would do, but, with his back turned to his pursuer, hopped from right to left, now and then pushing his nose under a huge stone, as though hoping to find shelter there. His would-be captor stood watching him three feet away, expecting every moment that the creature would at least turn and endeavour to dodge between his legs. But the “coney” still gave no other sign of knowing that he was “wanted” than before; and, tired of watching these evolutions, Mr. Elliott made a grab at him.

But he had not allowed for the animal's possessing quite an elephantine sense of smell; as he stretched out his hand, the little head suddenly turned, the hyrax made a sideward spring, and bit his thumb to the bone.

Mr. Elliott was neither a veterinary surgeon nor a game-keeper, and did not know how to collar a vicious animal; he was, moreover, short-tempered, which a hunter of wild

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beasts has no right to be ; and, carried away by his feelings, he snatched his hand free again, and aimed an angry kick at the offender. In an instant the formidable teeth were through his trousers, into his calf and out again, striking, rather than tearing, the flesh painfully.

Ready now to laugh at himself for being frightened or outwitted by such a contemptible foe, he stooped over the animal, but was soon glad to spring erect again ; for the hyrax immediately raised his head with the obvious intention of driving his powerful little teeth through the nose or chin of his opponent. Foiled in this benevolent attempt, the hyrax still showed no sign of turning to flee, but stood looking, half inquisitively, half defiantly, at the disturber of his peace. Mr. Elliott grew to like the position less and less, and at length drew several paces back, and the victorious animal, seeing a way of escape, suddenly darted between the explorer's feet and scuttled back towards his burrow.

The tapir, as may be seen from a glance at a portrait of him, is closely related to the elephant, the pig, and the horse, and, next to the hyrax, is to zoologists the most interesting of the group ; for, like the marsupials, he seems almost to have no business on the earth nowadays. He is prehistoric, and absurdly out of date—behind the times altogether, in fact. If, having the elephant, we can dispense with the services of the mastodon or the mammoth, we could equally do without the tapir, now that we have got used to a revised edition of him in the horse.

The truth is that, where natural man is concerned, we often find a sort of implied treaty with those of the lower animals that are not required for food, personal adorn-

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swing like a gigantic pendulum, and then to lose his gait altogether, and fall half stunned to the ground.

In France M. Benant had seen a prostrate dog maul by a wild-boar, and the tapir's next proceeding was horrible reminder of that experience ; for she gripped the Malay between her forefeet, battered his body with her snout, and at last, opening her mouth, seized his hip in her powerful jaws. The pain seemed to rouse the native to his senses again, for with a stupendous effort he wrenched his *kris* free from his girdle.

Shivering to think of how little use this unwieldy weapon would be at such close quarters, the Frenchman threw aside his fears, reloaded his gun, and ran back to the fray almost as hard as he had run from it. And not too soon for at sight of the moving arm of the Malay the tapir let go his hip and seized him by the elbow so fiercely that he screamed out with the pain. Reckless now of his own safety, and conscious of the uncertainty of his aim, the impetuous Frenchman did not stop till the muzzle of his gun almost touched the furious animal's eye ; then he fired, and seldom has a tapir been killed at so close a range. M. Benant thus got two dead animals instead of one living one, and saddled himself with a heavy surgeon's bill for his guide.

When an artist wishes to paint a rhinoceros, it may be noticed in nine cases out of ten that he chooses a particular variety for his subject, and the result is that most of us have grown up in the belief that the rhinoceros is a beast that wears a skin at least three sizes too large for him. Now, this is to paint the evil one blacker than he is ; for, when we come to the facts, the skin of the animal is not at all a bad fit, excepting that of



AN INFURIATED MOTHER

The tapir is credited with an amiable and gentle disposition, but when M. Benant shot a young one the mother charged furiously. The zoologist took to his heels, and his Malay servant tried to climb a tree, but the brute was upon him before he succeeded, and knocked him down and mauled him badly before M. Benant shot it.

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the Indian species, which certainly does lie in generous holds.

If "handsome is as handsome does" be not always true, the opposite is certainly the case where the rhinoceros is concerned, no matter whether he hails from Africa, India, or the Eastern Archipelago; and if the elephant be the gentleman of the forest, his relative is the ill-bred curmudgeon who shambles his heavy-footed way through life quite regardless of the feelings of anyone but himself. Some varieties add to this the vice of cowardice. Two or three times M. Benant and his friend Windsor Earl tried to shoot the Sumatran rhinoceros, and on each occasion he ran away from them, not even turning when he was hit; and it is even said that this species will flee from a good-sized dog. This is all the more curious in that he is generally of solitary habits, and it is when alone that most wild beasts are disposed to be aggressive.

This particular kind is fonder than most of his family of wallowing in the mud, a propensity which sometimes brings him to an untimely end at the hands of the Malays. Often by the close of the wet season the rhinoceros has encased himself in a small mountain of clay, and, as this hardens, the creature can only hope to free himself from his unpleasant coat of mail by the wear and tear of time. While he is thus hampered, a group of Malays will follow his slow movements, wait till he falls asleep, and then, with the atrocious cruelty of their race, will hem him in on all sides with rice-straw and dry wood, to which they set light; flaming brands and faggots are then thrown on him till he is completely buried in a huge fire, and so is cooked, just as our gipsies at home roast a hedgehog,

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clay and skin coming off together when the roast is "done."

The rhinoceros of Cochin China is especially fleet of foot, and is no less fierce than the African animal. When to excessive speed you add enormous strength and a horn long enough and sharp enough to go straight through the body of a horse and pierce a man on the other side, you have one of the most dangerous antagonists that the earth affords ; and it is not to be wondered at that twentieth-century sportsmen have ground for complaint of the prevailing scarcity of these unpleasing animals.

But when Lieutenant White, U.S.N., whose elephant-trapping experiences have been related, was travelling through Cochin China in the forties, the hunter had not far to look for game of this sort ; often it came to hand before he was ready, as once happened to Mr. White. His horse had suddenly gone lame, and Mr. White, who had thus been obliged to fall out from a boar-chase in which he had been engaged with some other travellers, was walking the animal back to the village from which he had started. On emerging from the forest, he came on to a wide stretch of grass-ground, skirted by a cane-plantation, and dotted over with large, wide-spreading bushes.

Soon he noticed that one of these bushes, which lay on his right front, was moving in a most unaccountable fashion ; there was little wind, yet the bush rocked and heaved as though a storm were tearing at it. Curious as to this phenomenon, the American touched his off-bridle with the intention of approaching the spot ; but, instead of obeying, the horse suddenly stood stock still, a tremor passing through the whole of his body. White used the

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our very gently ; the horse snorted, but would not stir, and, on his bridle being jerked sharply, broke out into a frightened neigh, and the rider could see the sweat start from the terrified beast's withers. Willing to humour him, he pulled the other rein, and, seemingly delighted at this concession, the animal started forward at a brisk canter, quite forgetful of his lameness.

Thus they came abreast of the moving bush about thirty yards away from it, and White half reined up, and turned to look at the cause of the mysterious motion. What he saw was a single-horned rhinoceros, presumably insane with rage, goring and tearing and tossing the innocent bush till there promised to be very little of it left by the time his anger was appeased. Badly mounted as he was, the sailor had no desire for closer acquaintance with such a companion ; so, as the horse seemed to have got the better of his lameness, he let him choose his own pace, and they moved on again at a smart trot. But now, either what little wind there was changed, and so carried the scent towards the rhinoceros, or else that furious beast heard the sound of the departing hoofs ; for suddenly the lieutenant was conscious of a vibration of the ground, and, turning his head, saw that the rhinoceros, evidently aware that any two sides of a triangle are together greater than the third side, was coming in a straight line towards the beginning of the road which the hunted man was hoping to reach—and at such a rate that only at full gallop could a horse outrun him.

No longer hesitating about using the spur, he worked the horse up to the top of his speed ; but it was like turning up the wick of an exhausted lamp : the gallop endured for a bare minute, then the poor brute stumbled, slowed,

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and, sweating at every pore, settled down to a despairing hobble, yet pricking up his ears and panting as the sound of the lumbering footsteps drew nearer. White had now rather more than half a minute in which to make up his mind as to his course. His gun, loaded in both barrels, was slung across his shoulder ; but, though he was far better in the saddle than the majority of sailors, as well as a remarkably good shot, he had had but little experience in firing from horseback, and was too much a man of the world to risk experiments at such a time.

One of two things he must certainly do, and that quickly : either turn the horse adrift, and rely for his salvation on his own legs and aim, or else face his pursuer, wait for his charge, and dodge it, repeating the manœuvre till the enemy tired down or gave up the game. Consideration for the horse led him to the second decision, and, disregarding his beast's fright, he swung him round on his haunches, and, standing up in the stirrups, awaited the rush of the rhinoceros.

It came quite soon enough, and it was only by a short twelve inches that he avoided it. But the savage monster was able to pull up and turn much more quickly than the rider had allowed for ; and he had scarcely swung his horse round a second time before the rhinoceros was on him again. This time the horse, soaking with perspiration and lather, and fascinated by fear, could not or would not move. In vain the lieutenant drove the spur-rowels in, and in his frenzy of excitement struck the creature with his clenched fist across the crest. The poor wretch stood quivering till the horrible horn was within an inch of his chest ; then, too late, he rose, shrieking, on to his haunches ; there was a ghastly, sickening concussion, and White,

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Knowing too well what had happened, kicked his feet free of the stirrups, and slid to the ground in a sitting position, the poor horse's death-scream ringing in his ears the while. Stiff and aching, he struggled to his feet and snatched his gun, just as the rhinoceros disengaged his horn from the belly of the dead beast.

"I'll make you pay for this," gasped the young sailor, ready in his fury to fight the murderer hand to hand if need were. His arm shook with rage as he took aim, but the ball nevertheless did all that was required of it; it caught the rhinoceros under the shoulder, piercing the skin just where it was tenderest, and the animal dropped on his knees, bellowing and foaming at the mouth, and while the American was still debating as to whether a second shot was called for, the brute rolled over dead.