

THE BABYHOOD OF WILD BEASTS

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ILLUSTRATED FROM PHOTOGRAPHS



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CHAPTER VI

BABY RHINOS

DID you ever look at an old Indian Rhino dressed in his coat of mail like a knight of old, and think that he is the funniest looking antique you ever saw?

He has an old warrior's spirit, too. He is ready to charge at a second's notice anything that threatens the lady of his choice or his own peace of mind, and annihilate the offender with a thrust from his terrible sword. Such are the ways of this gallant soldier. Captain Rhino is every inch a military man. Cowardice is an unknown quantity to him, while action, strength and bravery are his chief characteristics. Thus fortified, he wages deadly warfare on marauders and enemies.

Nature created him with a sword on his nose: so he was properly equipped with a suitable weapon from the start. His thick, hairless skin lies on his massive body in huge folds like plate

armour, and looks like a coat of mail. When dried, the skin is used for shields and other implements of warfare.

His head is massive and set with small pin-like eyes which are not particularly useful as far as their seeing powers are concerned.

His sense of smell is so keen that he depends on it to locate an intruder rather than on his eyesight, which is limited in comparison. His feet are round and massive with short toes bound together, each toe being encased in a hoof-like nail. The central or third toe is the largest, but the weight of the great body is supported by a thick sole pad.

All told, Captain Rhino is a formidable looking customer, and a fellow we wouldn't care to encounter on a dark night. He has the speed of a race horse, which is remarkable for such a cumbersome creature.

One baby at a time is customary in Rhino families. Baby Rhino is a jolly little chap, full of pranks, playful, affectionate and fond of tricks. He makes a fine pet and since prehistoric days has been kept in captivity. I don't think they

could be successfully domesticated. They are too temperamental for that sort of thing.

Life is full of joys to the little baby Rhino. Wallowing in the soft black mud during the hot days, rising with father and mother at dawn and breakfasting on twigs, shrubs and sweet green grass is delightful and when the sun gets too hot, to wander through the dark cool forest and get acquainted with the wonderful sights and sounds of that leafy, mystical world.

The baby precedes his mother when out for a walk, mother Rhino encouraging him by a gentle push with her horn.

The eminent scientist, Karl Schilling, tells of a baby Rhino he captured in Africa. The baby was brought up by an African goat, was sweet tempered and affectionate and loved his foster mother; the little creature was so gentle he travelled the entire distance from the interior of Africa to the coast on foot. They travelled by night and rested by day to avoid the fierce glare of the sun.

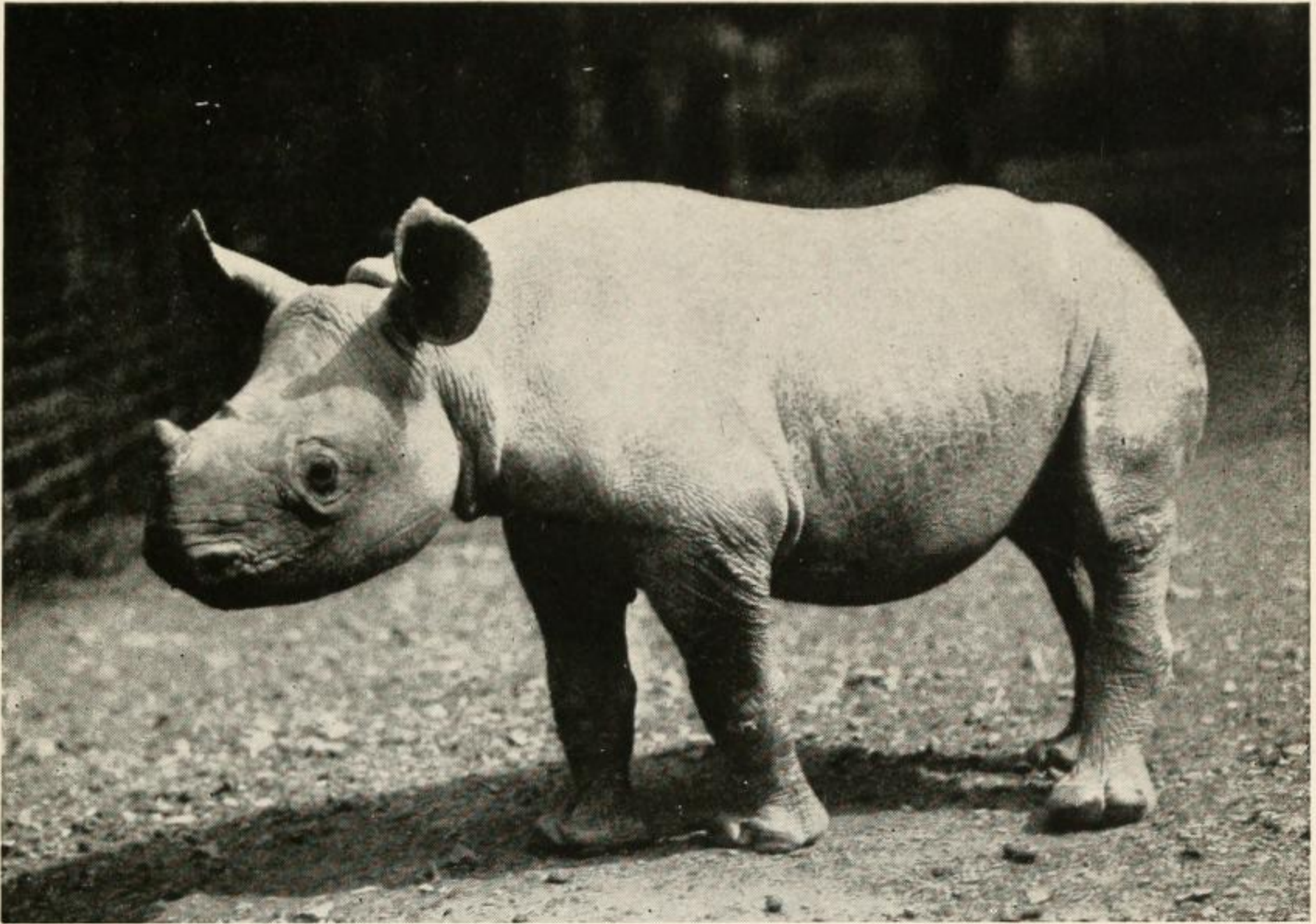
After reaching port, the baby Rhino accompanied by his goat nurse, was shipped to Ham-

burg, Germany, for Carl Hagenbeck's zoological gardens. They arrived safely and were the delight of the visitors. When displeased, the little Rhino voiced his protest by shrill squeals and fought wickedly. The Rhino's disposition is sluggish and inoffensive. He browses like a goat and does not graze as do cows and sheep. He is extremely keen of smell. When scenting an enemy, they immediately prepare for the offensive. With a snort, old Rhino makes off with the speed of a race horse, with loud puffs and deep, laboured grunts he covers ground like a locomotive; and woe betide the intruder if the old warrior catches him.

The strength of the Rhino is phenomenal. He breaks down thickets and small trees in his travels like straws. Rocks don't bother him in the least, and he travels splendidly over rough ground.

A favourite position of the huge beast is sitting on its haunches for relaxation and observation. He looks like some giant hog of old in the position. Poison insects are troublesome to this great pachyderm (thick-skinned animal).

The sting of the tsetse fly is deadly to him.



Courtesy of the New York Zoological Society

The baby, white, square-nosed African Rhino is just sprouting his nose horn and looks proud of his achievement. He never will have a "coat of mail" suit, but his horn will be a longer and more formidable "sword" than his Indian cousin's.

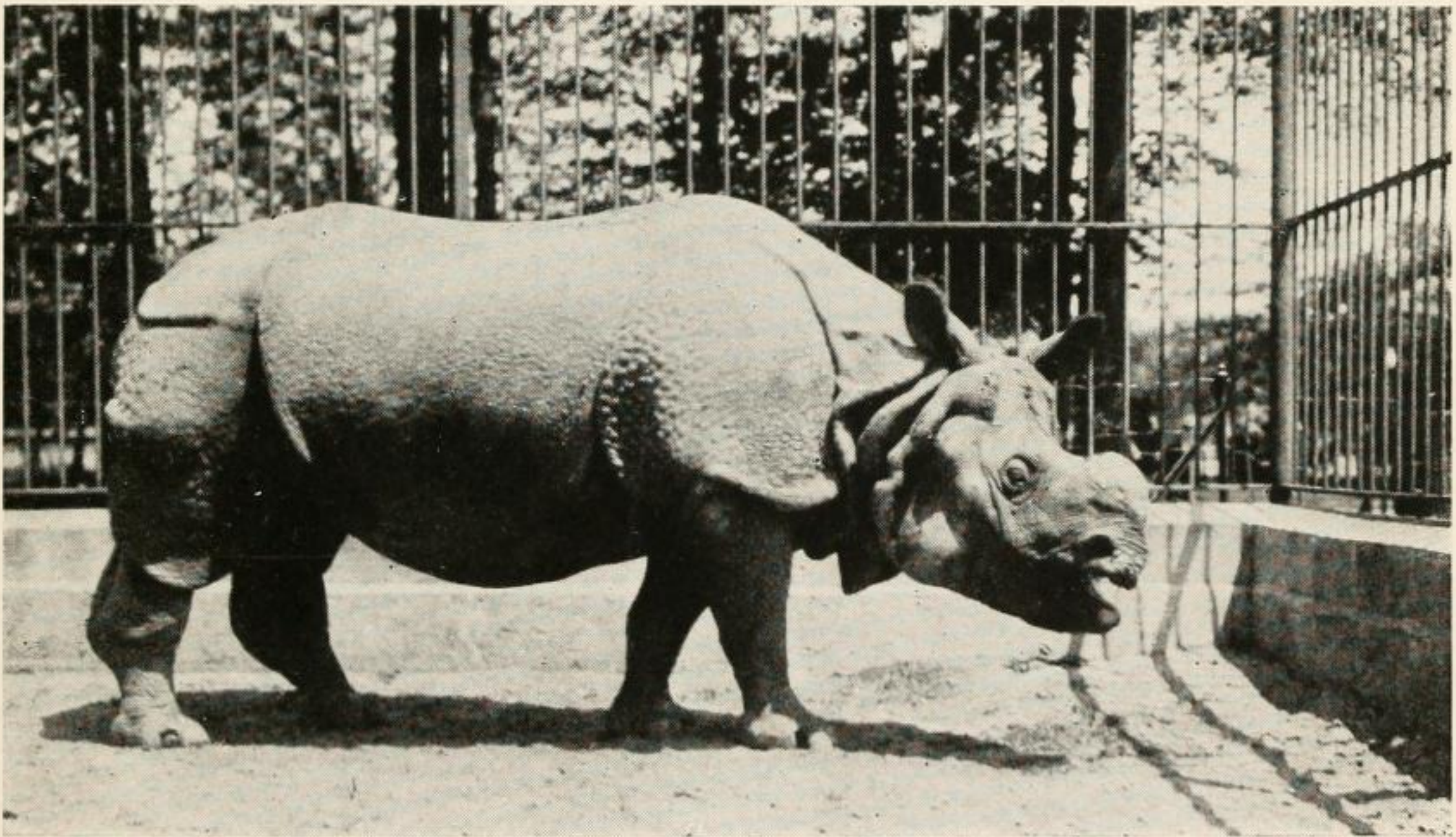


Photo by A. W. Schaad

This Indian Rhino, distinguishable in his "coat of mail" suit, became so "sassy" that he was deprived of his eighteen-inch horn by the judicious use of a saw. It took eight men and two hundred feet of stout manila rope to do the trick. Now he is a sadder but wiser Rhino.

There is no better fighter than old Rhino. Even the young will charge when danger threatens.

The only way to capture a baby is to kill the mother first; but the baby often surprises the slayer by charging like an infuriated demon. Baby Rhino is no coward. He is ready to avenge his mother without hesitation. His courage is splendid and we *must* respect him.

The Rhinoceros is a relic of another age. There are five species of Rhinoceros—three are Indian and two are African.

The Indian species differ from the African in having the skin arranged in folds and in keeping the incisor teeth through life and having but one nose horn (except the Sondiac). The feet of all species are alike.

The Indian Rhino is the largest of the Asiatic species. Some of them range from five to five and one-half feet high and ten to eleven long. The single nose horn rarely exceeds one foot. The skin is hairless and thick.

The Java Rhino is smaller, lightish grey in colour and found from Burmah to Bengal, Java and Borneo.

Ranging over the same territory, except Java, is the Sumatran or Sondiac Rhino, two horns, a rough blackish coat, covered with a coat of long, thin, bristling hair.

The African species consists of the common white, and the white square nosed, long horned varieties and the black, horned, and black long lipped. Lions and leopards give this old veteran a wide berth. No creature cares to encounter him when it can be avoided.

So we'll say good-bye to our gallant old warrior and hope he'll be spared to us down through the ages to come.