

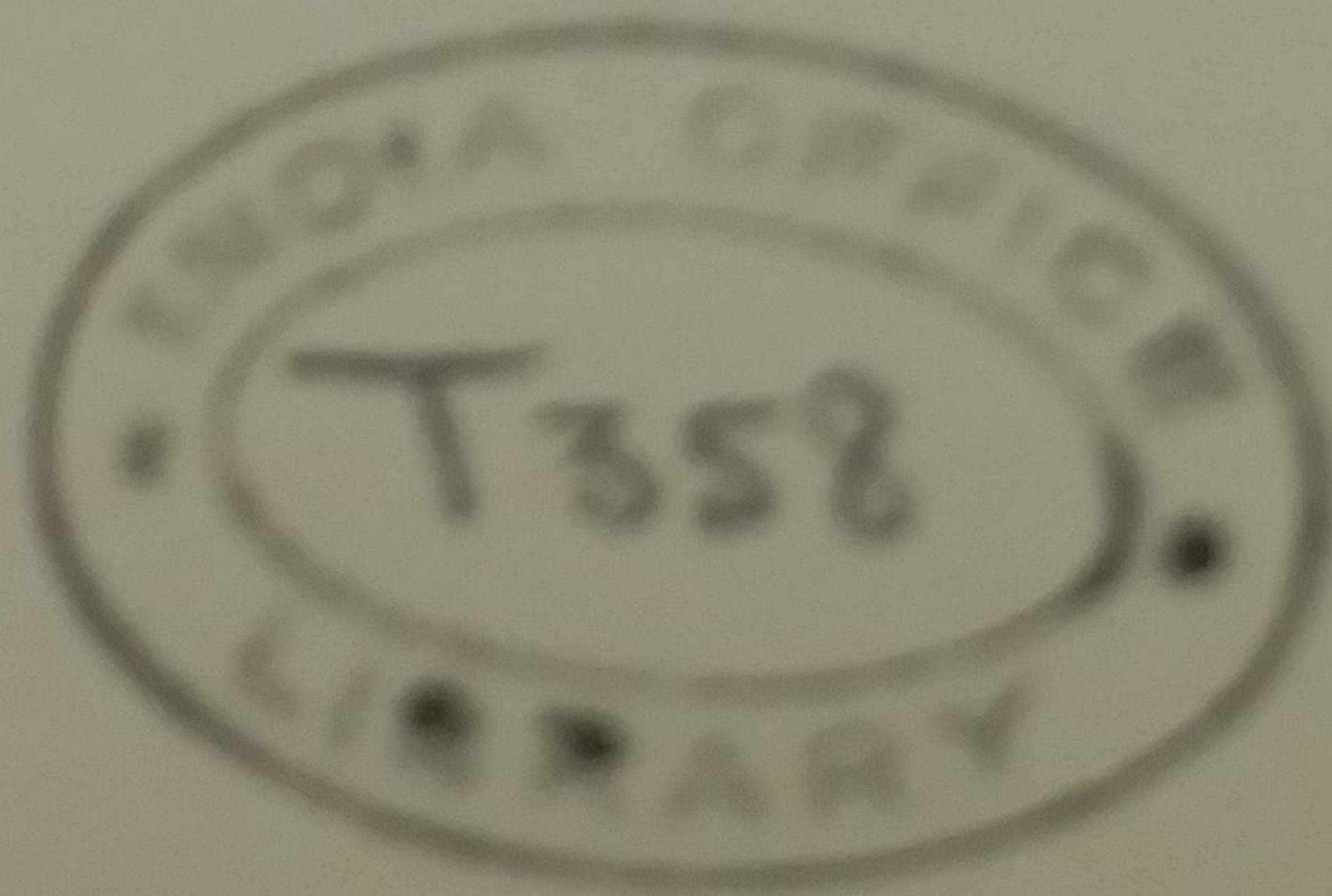
SHIKAR IN HILLS AND JUNGLES

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With several photographic illustrations



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CONTENTS

| | <i>Page</i> |
|---------------------------------|-------------|
| THE RHINOCEROS | 1 |
| MY RHINOCEROSSES | 7 |
| TIGER-SHOOTING IN RINGS | 17 |
| A PECULIAR ANIMAL | 24 |
| A LEOPARD ON A PALM TREE | 31 |
| MY SECOND RECORD TIGER | 36 |
| MY 95TH TIGER | 43 |
| SHOOTING IN THE HILLS | 49 |
| MY 103RD TIGER | 63 |

SHIKAR IN HILLS AND JUNGLES.

THE RHINOCEROS.

THE rhinoceros in a wild state is found only in Africa and Asia; but it is believed to have been a denizen of Europe also in pre-historic days. Perhaps there was a time when it wallowed in the swamps of England, while still her savage inhabitants lived in caves and sylvan dens, painted their bodies and dressed themselves in grotesque animal skins. Perhaps the rhino then was larger than what it now is—but time has taken away from its size and stature, and has confined its habitation only to Africa and Asia.

The African rhino possesses two horns and a smooth skin, while the Indian has only one horn with its skin on the sides above its front and hind legs raised into shield-like folds. A smaller type of the Indian rhino is to be found in Burmah and Java. The Sumatran rhino, like the African, has two horns with its skin less folded. The Africans designate the kinds of rhino found in their

jungles as "Black" and "White"; but in reality both are equally blackish or grayish-black in appearance. It is simply a myth to say that such a thing as a white rhino exists. Only a certain type of the grayish-black African rhino appears white in the bright light of the sun, and hence the mistake of calling it white.

The rhino is a vegetarian, subsisting on leaves of trees and grass—but its vegetable food cannot prevent it from becoming a very fierce adversary at times. In its savageness, when excited, it has perhaps no peer in the world, particularly if it happens to be a bad-tempered specimen. The very sight of a human being is sufficient to throw it at times into a fit of uncontrollable anger. And if the man is a *Shikari* and tries to have a shot at it, it will often charge him with a savageness unequalled in animal life and a swiftness which may outpace the swiftest horse ever used by a *Shikari*-rider. It is then so terrible to behold and so savage in its ferocious activity. It will often unsaddle its adversary and mercilessly trample him down, goring him to death with its sharp-cutting horn, or tearing him to pieces with its canines. This sort of terrible attack depends upon provocation; but even without any apparent cause, it may be seen at times to rage against some tree in the jungle, dashing

itself in all fury against it and frantically rubbing its body against the rough trunk. People say that it is subject to occasional fits of itching, and that it becomes a mad infuriated brute then, raging and acting like what we have described above. But it is a terrible sight to see two rhino bulls fighting and shaking the neighbourhood with the dreaded sound of striking horns, sound like that of two stony mounds jarring against each other.

The chief means of defence of a rhino is its strange horn which, quite unlike the horns of other animals, is not of bone, but is a dense and solid fibrous mass, grown up from its skin, particularly from its strange and ugly snout which is so tough and enormous in appearance. Its skin is generally very thick and tough, and Nature has endowed it with four hard shield-like folds at its sides above its front and hind legs. Thus armoured, the rhino can resist formidable attacks from adversaries. In fact, neither the tiger nor any other ferocious wild beast can harm it, but it can, if it so likes, disable and bring its adversaries down. It is only the well-aimed rifle shot that it cannot resist, though even then its tough and thick skin may baffle the skilled *Shikari* for some time. The most vulnerable point in a rhino's body is just below the eyes; and when a bullet finds its place there,

the monster is hopelessly disabled, kneeling down at first as if stunned and then rolling down with its back to the earth and its four legs raised straight towards the sky.

But leaving aside men, it has to face the onslaught of tiny insects also. The flies in large numbers get into the enormous folds of its skin and molest it from there. This makes it very restless and compels it to wallow in muddy water like a swine, and bespatter its body with mud. This it does to kill the numerous flies that molest it. And there is a small jungle bird that is always found near about the habitat of a rhino or having a place on its back, making a hearty meal of the tiny insects that make it restless. And the monster never resents the bird's presence on its back, for the latter always brings it relief from the attack of flies, and in cases of approaching danger, utters a shrill cry of warning to its friend. This is generally known as the Rhinoceros Bird.

But the Nepal rhino, in some respects, differs materially from its more formidable African brother. The former is, as a rule, gentle and harmless, letting human beings pass by unnoticed unless it develops a sudden consciousness of approaching danger and becomes frightened for its life or receives a galling bullet-wound. Then it will charge with

all its native savageness ; and a most formidable charge it generally is. But unprovoked, it walks the teeming Terai fields like a domesticated animal, chased away from there by farmers who catch hold of its tail and belabour it with heavy *Lathis*. This sort of treatment the brute is accustomed to and does not resent. Very often the farmers light torches whose flare frightens it away. But the reason why such a heavy and dreadful-looking monster can be tackled and driven away so easily by farmers, is not a secret to those who are acquainted with its ways. It can always charge an enemy in a straight line and takes time to turn from its straight course. So, a man can easily defeat its attack if he places himself a little to this side or that out of its course. And when once it has gone ahead, the man can catch hold of its tail from behind and belabour it as much as he likes, for the monster cannot turn back with ease. And because of the hard shield-like formations at its sides, it cannot kick with its hind legs like an elephant. So a pursuer is safe. But the case of a *Shikari* mounted on an elephant or a pony, who has to face the monster, rifle in hand, is quite different. He stands in the monster's front and has to brave the ferocious anger of the animal charging for life. So, his successful movements in a moment of stress must

necessarily depend to some extent upon those of the animal he is seated on, and to a great extent upon his own presence of mind and promptness of decision and execution.

In Nepal, the rhino is known to ease itself from day to day at one particular, selected spot, until a sufficient quantity of dung accumulates there, when it is compelled to shift to some other suitable site. I cannot say whether it is true of the African rhino also; but my personal experience is limited only to the Nepal rhino about which I can speak with certainty. Another peculiar thing about the rhino is that in its pairing posture it is seen to stand for four or five days at a stretch, the cow rhino below and the bull above. The cow rhino receives its mate in a standing posture just as buffaloes do; but unlike other animals, the twain remain in the coupling posture for four or five days together; and in this condition the cow rhino every now and then gathers sufficient grass in its mouth from below and passes it on to its mate to feed it. Such a strange sight reminds one of the inscrutable workings of the One Universal Mind, which shapes and, in its providence, provides for the maintenance of its infinitely varied creation.

MY RHINOCEROSES.

THE Hindu *Shastras* regard the blood and meat of the rhino as very sacred to the manes of departed ancestors. They say that the soul of a dead person becomes satisfied for ever if his *Varshik Sharadh* is performed with rhino meat and if *Tarpan* (offering of water to a departed soul) is performed with its blood. It was, therefore, quite natural for me, being a Hindu and having all the religious feelings of a Hindu, to long for rhino-shooting. But to get a rhino in these days in British India is not an easy affair, as the animal seems to be almost vanishing from our country. Of course, a few can still be found in Assam, though a *Shikar* of rhinoceroses is now almost an impossibility in India.

In view of all these difficulties, I approached the Maharaja of Nepal (H. H. Maharaja Sir Chandra Shamsheer Jung Bahadur Rana) to allow me to shoot a rhino once, particularly as he was always very kind to me. Nor was I defeated in my expectation, for he readily gave me permission to go to the Thori jungles (near Bhikhna Thori Railway Station on the B. & N.-W. Railway) and shoot a couple of rhinoceroses. Of course, he might have permitted me to shoot in the Morung jungles

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8

which border on Purnea, but the number there is so small that, in order to save the species from extinction in that part of Nepal, the Government of the country have strictly prohibited rhino-shooting. Even in other parts of Nepal, no *Shikari* is allowed a rhino which, owing to its dwindling number, is considered a royal game. Having very kindly given me permission to shoot a couple of rhinoceroses in the Thori jungles, H. H. ordered his own elephants to go out for my shoot. This was in the month of March 1920.

Accordingly, I went to Bhikhna Thori in March 1920, and from there to Baghahi, 12 miles north from the Railway Station where I had my first camp. We had peculiarly bad weather the very night we arrived there. There was a heavy storm and it came down in torrential rains. But the weather cleared up the next morning; and I was glad to be informed of a solitary rhino bull about two miles away from my camp. A Nepali officer who had been kindly sent by H. H. to be present with me in my shoot, sent a man ahead on a trained elephant to locate the rhino; and the man, after having located it, remained near the spot and sent words to me to come with a couple of elephants. Having received the news, I made for the place in all haste and saw the elephant, that had gone ahead, silently watching