

THE AFRICAN ELEPHANT IN BRONZE

WHAT CARL AKELEY, THE AMERICAN,

ACHIEVED—
FOR US!

"AT BAY." A trapped elephant.

From a bronze by Carl Akeley.



dion, are pressing these monarchs of the forest to the outermost corners of their domain.

The elephants are already imprisoned in limited areas, and soon they will have disappeared entirely, lingering as a memory in the minds of those men who love nature's creatures. Nothing, I feel sure, will stop this gradual extermination of our wild animals. Game reserves and natural zoological gardens are but a half-way house on the road to total extinction. Our fauna will go as the fauna of Europe went, and there is only one way in which we can preserve specimens for the generations of the future, and that is by casting them in bronze! Why is it that we are allowing the African elephant to pass away without making any effort to retain an exact likeness of it in its wild state. Our elephant is the king of elephants. He is not only bigger and finer than the Indian, he is also nobler, inasmuch as he will not bend to human domination, he will not stoop to menial work, he will not be tamed.

We left to an American to discover the artistic possibilities of his fine proportions. We left it to an American to cast him in bronze. It was our good fortune that this American was an idealist, and that he was able to read the soul and embody the spirit of the unfettered wild beast in his sculpture. Comparatively few South Africans know of Dr. Carl Akeley, yet he has done more to preserve specimens of African fauna than any other man, and his death is as great a loss to Africa as it is to America. He spent many years in Africa, both as a student of the wild animals and as a hunter. He was a taxidermist as well as a sculptor, knowing that only by thorough knowledge of the anatomy of an animal, as well as skill in

OUR orthodox theories concerning the origin of many things are being rudely upset of late. During recent years the eyes of world-renowned scientists have been fixed upon Africa on account of skulls and skeletons which have been accidentally unearthed. But the layman seems now prepared to believe that almost any locality might have cradled the human race.

In like manner we are being confronted with information concerning the elephant which makes us sit up, as our forefathers sat up when first they heard that the world was round and not flat. "The Inquisitive Elephant's Child" and Jumbo, whom we regarded as inseparable from the Maharajah and all his pomp, evidently do not come from India at all. Their distant ancestor rocked himself to sleep on the banks of the muddy Nile. From there, too, upon indisputable authority, comes

the mastodon, who looks for all the world like Jumbo in Teddy Bear's winter coat, but they are very distantly related, if at all. If they ever had a common grandmother, it must have been a very long time before the Ice Age.

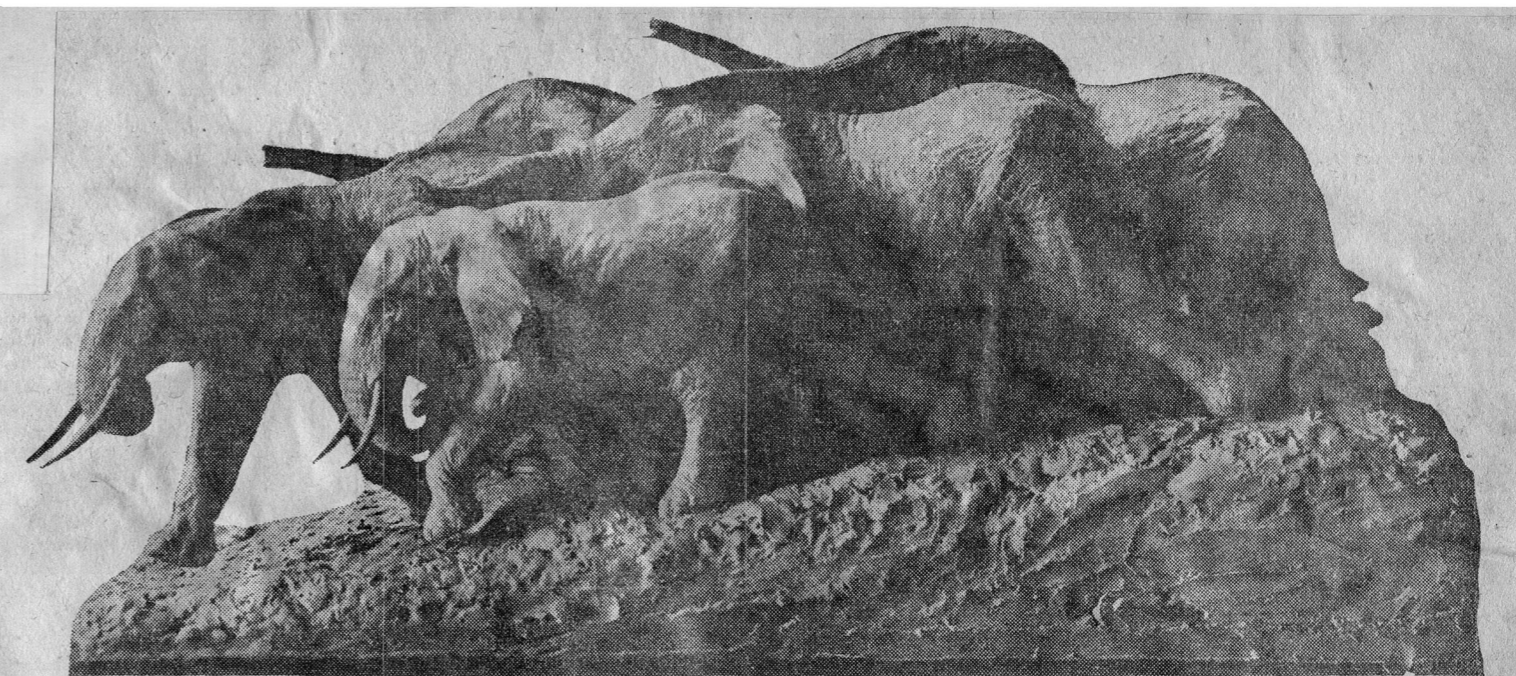
The mastodon was evidently possessed of a great "wanderlust," and set out on a long and tedious journey northwards, through Europe and thence to America, whereas his second cousin, the elephant, preferred the Equatorial regions; and although he also left home, he went no further than India and Africa. The mastodon has disappeared with the paradactyl. The elephant, however, is still with us, though not, I am afraid, for very long, for unfortunately there are hunters who are sportsmen in name only, and they, together with the slow and deliberate march of human civilisa-

tion, can a skin be stuffed so that it looks "real," which means that the beholder can, by looking at the exhibit, picture the animal in its natural environment. Dr. Akeley was the inventor of a special type of cinema camera for photographing wild animals—the type used by Mr. Martin Johnson for a number of the scenes in "Simba," that marvellous film at present being shown in South Africa.

A life dream of Dr. Akeley's was to construct an African Hall, in which should be exhibited all the different kinds of African game in their correct setting so that the beholder could see what they really looked like when at home. With this object in view, he approached the directors of the Natural History Museum in New York, who immediately decided that such a collection would indeed be an asset to any museum, especially if made under the direction of a man like Dr. Akeley. For some time Dr. Akeley laboured at his task, then the world war broke out. During these years nothing could be done, but as soon as possible after peace had been declared expeditions were organised to collect material for the hall.

The American is thorough in all his undertakings, for not only are the best procurable specimens of every variety of game and wild animal being collected, but the best available artists accompanied one of the expeditions, so as to be able to give a true representation of African scenery in the backgrounds which are to be made for the different exhibits. The hall is far from completed yet, but the work is progressing well. Quite a number of the men who worked under Dr. Akeley are busy on it, so that it is hoped that the final production will be as he planned it. Dr. Akeley died a few years ago in Central Africa, where he was buried in surroundings which had become dear to him.

It is, of course, a piece of irony that South Africans must travel to New York if they wish to see a really fine collection of specimens of their own fauna. Why has no such undertaking been started in a



"THE CHARGING HERD." Another study in bronze by Carl Akeley, who had almost unique opportunities of observing wild animals in their natural surroundings.

South African museum? The explanation of all big American undertakings is invariably, "Oh, the Americans have the dollars!" From which statement, one could almost draw the conclusion that they just

scooped the American specimens off Broadway. It needed more than dollars to get together the collection. And the African Hall is but one of their hundreds of big undertakings of this sort. Surely we

could accomplish one collection really well done, and at much lower cost one would think. The occasion does not often arise in our country to adorn a big building with sculpture. In the new station it

did arise, but instead of the public insisting on the elephants at the entrance it calmly allowed them to be "scrapped" as so much unnecessary expenditure!

GERARD MOERJYK.