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**In an elephant corral, and  
other tales of West African  
experiences**

**Nassau Robert Hamill**

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**Author: Nassau Robert Hamill**

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**In an Elephant Corral**

*And Other Tales of  
West African Experiences*







# In an Elephant Corral

*And Other Tales of  
West African Experiences*

BY

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NEW YORK  
THE NEALE PUBLISHING COMPANY

1912

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# IN AN ELEPHANT CORRAL

## I

### THE TRANSFORMED MATRICIDE

When I removed, in 1865, from Corisco Island to Benita, fifty miles north on the mainland, among the many night-voices (more numerous than those of the Island) was one which, by its plaintiveness, struck me as most distressing. So much so, that for some time I thought that residence there would be unendurable. It came early in the evening, in only certain seasons of the year, and did not continue all night. On the night air the voice arose low and sad, and, swelling in a gradual crescendo for several seconds, as gradually sunk in a diminuendo of several seconds, like a long drawn-out sigh, an "Ah"! of grief. The cry was probably at a mating-season.

When I asked the Benita people what it was, they persisted in saying that it was a Snail, though

none of them admitted ever having seen it in the act of making the sound. I laughed at them. "Have you ever seen it making that sound?" "No." (Indeed it would be impossible to see it in the act; for it cried only at night, or in the dusk of the afternoon.) "How do you know, then, that it is a Snail?" "Our fathers told us so." "Do you know any one who himself has seen it?" "No." So I suggested, "Is it not a bird?" "No." "Or is it not a monkey or lemur?" "No."

That conversation I have repeated with hundreds of natives in the subsequent forty years. They all insisted that it was a Snail. Some of them showed me a common snail, quite as large as one's fist, called Kâ. I did not believe that that was the creature. For the ordinary Kâ was common on Corisco Island; and I had not remembered hearing that voice there; only on the mainland. It is very often heard at Libreville in the Gaboon. It often seemed to be only a few hundred yards distant. Never in an open place. Always in low grounds, and in dense clumps of palm trees and other thickets. Just such places as the Kâ is accustomed to inhabit. But such places are not desirable spots to investigate in the dark. There are there certain biting Ants, and