

NATURAL HISTORY.

Horses: the Equidae or Genus Equus of Authors. By Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Hamilton Smith.

NON-APPRECIATION OF GOOD BREEDS BY THE ROMANS.

In a host of some thirty writers, poets, philosophers, and amateurs, among whom some few seem to have understood what points a good horse should possess, none felt the importance of improving the breeds they had upon fixed and sound principles; none saw in them more than objects of parade, luxury, war, or draught, that might be bought, like a murrhine vase, for money; more anxious for the reputation of rhetoricians than for the acquirement of facts, they were busied in the manner more than the matter of what Greek authority had stated, never once correcting an error, supplying a new observation, or discovering a misstatement; they believed in all the absurdities foreign horse-dealers thought proper to invent, or their own idlers gossipped into omens: such was the case with Cæsar's horse, which they gravely relate had human fore feet, and was an infallible sign of his coming fortunes; and what was at best a malformation, it appears, was rendered important by a statue of the animal set up in public. They believed that bay horses were the best to hunt lions, slaty ash colour to attack a bear, and black to pursue a fox and other wild animals. Vegetius asserts that they were constantly the dupes of dealers, who passed off indifferent horses for steeds of high foreign breed. There exist, indeed, a few fragments of the writings of veterinarians, which the policy of the government attached to the army, and these contain some of the most valuable information relating to horses the ancients have left; but the Roman Italian cavalry was despicable, though individually brave; for seated on pads or inefficient saddles, loaded with heavy armour and weapons, in all real actions they were obliged to dismount, and could only oppose equally inefficient enemies, pursue or escape, without vigour or celerity; they never were able to cope with the Parthians, or face the Sarmatae, excepting by means of their foreign auxiliaries, Numidians, Germans, or Asiatics; in general they acted only under cover of the legions, and Cæsar himself was so indifferent a cavalry general, that the celebrated Prussian hussar officer, Warney, has ridiculed his dispositions, where cavalry are concerned, with justice."

CARELESSNESS RESPECTING BREEDS IN THE EAST.

"Attention and selection in breeding is only casual when immense herds of horses occupy pastures of interminable surface; where, from the absence of human interposition they retain the instincts of independence: under such circumstances, the resident proprietors, little valuing individual animals, and do nearly all their domestic work in the saddle; they cross rivers by holding their horse's tails or fastening them to rafts or boats, convey themselves and families to the opposite shores, sometimes several miles distant. They marry on horseback their council meet on horseback, and declarations of war, treaties of peace or alliance, are dated from the stirrup of the Sovereign."

VALUE OF HORSES IN ANCIENT ENGLAND.

In a document of the year 1009, we find the relative value of horses in this kingdom, directing,—if a horse was destroyed or negligently lost, the compensation to be demanded was thirty shillings; a mare or colt, twenty shil-

lings; a mule or young ass, twelve shillings; an ox, thirty pence; a cow, twenty four pence; a pig, eightpence.

"In the laws of Hyweldda, Sovereign of Wales, dated a few years before this period, a foal not fourteen days old is valued fourpence; at one year and a day, forty-eight pence; and at three years, sixty-pence: this refers evidently to the native horses, for there it is ordered to tame them with the bridle and rear them as pulfreys or serving-horses, but the war horse is not mentioned. When completely broken in the value rose one hundred and twenty pence, but if left wild or an unbroken mare, was worth only sixty pence."

A HORSE'S CONFIDENCE IN HIS RIDER.

The confidence of a horse in a firm rider and his own courage is great, as was conspicuously evinced in the case of an Arab possessed by the late General Sir Robert R. Gillespie, who, being present on the race course of Calcutta, during one of the great Hindu festivals, when several hundred thousand people may be assembled to witness all kinds of shows, was suddenly alarmed by the shrieks of the crowd and informed that a tiger had escaped from his keepers; the Colonel immediately called for his horse, and grasping a boar spear which was in the hands of one among the crowd, rode to attack this formidable enemy: the tiger, probably, was amazed at finding himself in the middle of such a number of shrieking beings, flying from him in all directions, but the moment he perceived Sir Robert, he crouched with the attitude of preparing to spring at him, and that instant the gallant soldier passed his horse in a leap over the tiger's back, and struck the spear through. The horse was a small gray, afterwards sent home by him a present to the Prince Regent. When Sir Robert fell at the storming of Kalungar, his favourite black, charger bred at the Cape of Good Hope, and carried by him to India, was at the sale of his effects competed for by several officers of his division, and finally knocked down to the privates of the 8th dragoons, who contributed their prize-money to the amount of £500 sterling, to retain this commemoration of their late commander. Thus the charger was always led at the head of the regiment on a march, and at the station of Cawnpore was usually indulged with taking his ancient post at the colour stand, where the salute of passing squadrons was given at drill and on reviews. When the regiment was ordered home, the funds of the privates running low, he was bought for the same sum by a relative of ours, who provided funds and a paddock for him, where he might end his days in comfort; but when the corps had marched, and the sound of trumpet had departed, he refused to eat, and at the first opportunity, being led out to exercise, he broke from his groom, and galloping to his ancient station on the parade, after neighing aloud, dropped down and died.

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