

## NATURAL HISTORY.

## ANECDOTES OF AMERICAN HORSES

English and American horses are for the most part derived from the same stock. There are to be sure, in the extensive prairies of the "Far West," a native breed of horses found in a wild state, as there are also in South as well as North America; but these are yet a perfectly distinct race, since those that have been reclaimed so far remain among the various tribes of Indians, and are employed in buffalo hunting, and sometimes in excursions against hostile tribes in the Indian territories.

Though the horse by no means has the appearance of an aquatic animal, yet he has a considerable capacity for swimming, and most horses that are accustomed to it early swim well. In the interior of America, while the country continues new, the rivers being large it is very commonly necessary, when travelling through the country on horseback, to swim your horse across the river. In summer it is all well enough to be mounted on a capable brute, where you fall in with two or three rivers in the day, one or two hundred yards over; but when the water has been cooled down to the freezing point, and the atmosphere is probably many degrees colder, it is past a joke.

Among the many specimens which I have witnessed of the swimming powers of American horses, I do not remember a more perfect one than that I was witness to at "The Ferry," near Fort Erie, in Upper Canada, where the Niagara river is from 700 to 800 yards over, and the current peculiarly rapid, owing to a ledge of shelving rocks over which the water is forced in its escape from Lake Erie. Until the period I allude to, there had been nothing of greater power than a couple of rowers to propel the ferry-boats across this rapid and deep current; but, owing to the increase of population on both sides the river, the parties renting the ferry found it advisable to improve the means of crossing, and consequently had a horse-ferry-boat constructed. This new machine had paddles on either side like those of a steam-boat, which were propelled by the power of a couple of horses constantly moving forward (tread-mill fashion) upon a horizontal moveable platform.

The horses that were employed upon it were of course quite ignorant of the tread-mill business, and from what took place they were apparently not enanoured of their new employment. One of them, a grey cob that had seen some dozen winters, had a singularly knowing look; and, like his companion, belonged to the American or New-York State side of the river, and apparently was strongly attached to it. It seems that it suited the convenience of the owners of the ferry-boat to stable their horses during the night on the Canada side of the river, which arrangement was by no means satisfactory to the republican feelings of the grey cob. This was clearly manifest the very first time that he was inducted into his new quarters, for when the lad who had the care of them brought them from the stable to the river for the purpose of drinking, the grey cast a wistful look across the broad stream, where his wandering eye was no doubt attempting to single out from among the numerous buildings his wonted domicile; and instead of quenching his thirst with a hearty pull at the clear current into which he had entered, he but just dipped his lips in the liquid, heaved a deep sigh—for horses can sigh, and deeply too—and then moved into deeper water, and "sighed and looked again." A friend of mine who was in company with me, and standing close by on the river shore, anticipated what was going to happen, and he scarcely had made the observation before the "faithful grey" had waded mid-rib deep, when he pushed off and commenced swimming to the opposite shore. For a considerable distance he breasted the rapid current bravely, but, in spite of his efforts to make directly across, he was forced downward to an extent fully equal to the breadth of the river. For a while his back and arched neck were visible above the surging water, but before he had gained the farther side little more than his head was in sight, which had the appearance at a distance of a white goose floating on the surface. But he gained his own side of the river in safety, and when he had attained the lofty bank, and halted a moment to shake the water from his dripping mane, a shout or

exultation was heard from those who happened to be on the bank, and who had anxiously witnessed his progress.

But this daring exploit did not immediately release him from his place on the circular and unstable wheel, for the next day he was fastened to the old post, and again the unsteady platform was moving from beneath his feet. For a day or two his groom took care in the evenings, after the toils of the day were over, that he should not have an opportunity of trying the same experiment of swimming across the river; until at length, imagining that he had become perfectly reconciled to a Canada lodging, he again permitted him to go out large to quench his thirst at the stream. But the faithful brute, it appeared, still remembered the "home of his youth," and again he plunged into the eddying waters, and succeeded in reaching the opposite shore in safety. This apparent attachment to his own country or his long-accustomed stable was viewed in so favorable a light by his owner, that he declared the grey cob should never more be put on the wheel, or compelled to seek a lodging in a foreign State.

Few quadrupeds exhibit stronger powers of instinct than the horse, and very few (if any) appear to be gifted with more retentive memories.—I owned a very useful animal, during my residence in Canada, which exhibited this character in a remarkable degree; and among several incidents which occurred to mark it, I will refer to one which I have often thought of since I parted with this my faithful servant, Brown Billy. It is usual, in many parts of the country, at the time of cutting down the forests, to leave standing here and there a tree or two, which are called shade-trees. It is a plan by no means to be recommended, since in the wild forests the trees protect each other from the effects of the raging tempest, and consequently do not take sufficiently secure hold of the ground to withstand the ruthless storm when they come to be exposed singly to its influence. In one of my fields, where Billy occasionally had the privilege of pasturing, were two or three trees of this sort left standing, which served as a shade from the scorching mid day sun, as well as a shelter from the occasional storms that visit this portion of the country during the summer. I one day happened to be looking on when a violent storm of wind and rain—so violent indeed that the pealing thunder which accompanied it could scarcely be heard—came rushing over the adjoining woods, when Brown Billy was not slow in seeking shelter under the largest tree in the field, and with his head in a line with the course of the wind—for instinct taught him the best position to place himself in under such circumstances—he stood completely sheltered from the pealing storm.

He had not, however, been many minutes in this his wonted retreat, when the gigantic tree began to give way, and in a few seconds more it was prostrated with a tremendous crash. Billy no doubt felt the pressure of the ball of the tree, and he must also have heard the rending of the numerous and large roots; at any rate he discovered that a catastrophe was at hand, and out he flew from his standing place as if propelled by a thunderbolt. He did escape; but I am of opinion that he was so near being caught under the mighty wreck that some of the smaller branches struck him in his flight. During the time the storm continued he kept galloping about the field, first in one direction then in another, and when the tempest ceased Billy's alarm was soon having subsided, and for the remainder of the day he never attempted to pasture; but when his fears had somewhat abated, he stood, at a very respectful distance, gazing in apparent bewilderment upon the prostrate monarch of the forest.

During the years that Billy was afterwards occasionally turned into the same field to pasture, he never under circumstances came near the few remaining shade-trees, and what was still more remarkable, if he found any farm stock—cattle or sheep—seeking shelter from the passing storm beneath one of these trees, he might be seen chasing them away in no very gentle manner; and if his looks or actions might be taken as an indication of his feelings, he possessed the power of speech would have been, "Why fools you must be to run the risk of being crushed." *American paper.*