

NATURAL HISTORY.

THE ASS.

The domestic ass, supposed to be derived from the wild Hymar of the desert and the horse of Asia, enter at a remote period into the circle of human economic establishments. The first mentioned, as might be expected, resided in the same regions where the dawn of civilization commenced, and gifted with inferior powers of resistance, is presumed to have been subjugated several ages before the second, because we find it repeatedly indicated in the Pentateuch before the horse is noticed, such as in the sacrifice of Abraham; in his visit to Egypt, where he received presents of Abimelech; and in the spoils of Shechem, where Asses are numbered with other cattle, but the horse is not mentioned. Yet that noble animal, by nature provided by greater physical capabilities, with more intelligence, and more instinctive tendencies for adapting his existence to the circumstances of domestication in every region, is in his servitude grown larger, more adorned, more acute, and more educational than in a state of nature; while the ass in similar circumstances, has degenerated from his pristine character becoming, even in the greater part of Persia, smaller in stature, less fleet, less intelligent, and by his own impulses less the associate of man. When the horse, from thorough domesticity, is again cast upon his own resources, he resumes his original independence, provides for his own safety and that of the herd under his care, without altogether losing his acquired advantages; the ass, on the contrary, although never a spontaneous associate in his domestication, is nowhere known to have again become wild, or to have sought his freedom with a spirit of persevering vigilance; and in cases where by accident he has found himself in freedom, he has made no energetic efforts to retain it, nor recover qualities that restore him to the filiation of the Hymar or the Kulan. When emancipated, he becomes, without effort, the prey of the lion, the tiger, the hyæna, or the wolf, and in America he had been known to succumb under the beak of a condor. It is evident that the difference in the relative conditions of the two species, is, with regard to the ass, not entirely referable to human neglect and want of kindness, but in part, at least, must be ascribed to inferior sensibility and weaker intellectual power, both being alike evinced by the hardiness of his hide, by his satisfaction with coarser food, and his passive stubbornness.

THE COURAGE, MEMORY, AND AFFECTIONS OF THE HORSE.

It is asserted that horses with a broad after-head and the ears far asunder are naturally bolder than those whose head is narrow above the fore-lock some are certainly more daring by nature than others, and judicious training in most cases makes them sufficiently staunch. Some, habituated to war, will drop their head, pick at grass in the midst of fire, smoke, and the roar of cannon; others never entirely cast off their natural timidity. We have witnessed them groaning, or endeavouring to lie down when they found escape impossible, at the fearful sound of shot, sharpnel-shells, and rockets; and it is most painful to witness their look of terror in battle, and groans upon being wounded. Yet many of the terrified animals, when let loose at a charge, dash forward in a kind of desperation that makes it difficult to hold them in hand; and we recollect at a charge, in 1794, when the light dragoon troop-horse was larger than at present, and

the French were wretchedly mounted, a party of British bursting through a hostile squadron as they would have passed through a fence of rushes.

Horses have a very good memory; in the darkest nights they will find their way homeward, if they have but once passed over the same road. They remember kind treatment, as was manifest in a charger that had been two years our own; this animal had been left with the army, and was brought back and sold in London; about three years after we chanced to travel up to town, and at a relay, getting out of the mail, the off wheel horse attracted our attention, and upon going near to examine it with more care, we found the animal recognizing its former master, and testifying satisfaction by rubbing its head against our clothes, and making every moment a little stamp with the fore feet, till the coachman asked if the horse was not an acquaintance. We remember a beautiful and most powerful charger belonging to a friend, then a captain in the 14th dragoons, bought by him in Ireland at a comparative low price, on account of an impetuous viciousness, which had cost the life of one or two grooms: the captain was a kind of Centaur rider, not to be flung by the most violent efforts, and of a temper for gentleness that would effect a cure, if vice were curable: after some very dangerous combats with his horse, the animal was subdued, and it became so attached, that his master could walk anywhere with him following like a dog, and even ladies mount him with perfect safety. He rode him during several campaigns in Spain, and on one occasion where, in action, horse and rider came headlong to the ground, the animal making an effort to spring up, placed his forefoot on the captain's breast, but immediately withdrawing it, rose without hurting him, or moving, until he was remounted. When we saw him he was already old but his gentleness remained perfectly unaltered; yet his powers were such, that we witnessed his leaping across a hollow road from bank to bank, a cartway being beneath, and leaping back without apparent effort.

DURATION OF A HORSE'S LIFE.

The life of horses extends naturally from twenty-five to thirty years; cases have occurred of individuals attaining the age of more than forty; and in countries where they are not tasked by constant over exertion, the period of existence is usually between nineteen and twenty-one. But in England the destruction of these noble animals is excessive: the value of time with a commercial people, incessantly urges into activity both mental and corporeal, has demanded rapidity of communication, and spread a universal taste for going fast; the fine roads have permitted horses to be subjected to more than they can draw; betting, racing and hunting are pursued by persons whose animals are not constructed for such exertions, and violent usage in groom stable-boys, and farm-servants is so common, that few reach the age of fifteen years, and all are old at ten.

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