

LOITERINGS OF TRAVEL.

BY N. P. WILLIS. 3 VOLS.

Mr. Willis indulges a fantastic humour in the choice of titles. First he gave us 'Pencilings by the Way,' next 'Inklings of Adventure,' and now we have 'Loiterings of Travel,' and all these are pretty much of the same caste, discovering the same sprightly and feathery manner of description, the same high and heedless spirits, the same hasty surface-painting and illogical argumentation on character, individual and national, and the same drawing-room, box-lobby, concert-room, street-lounging, merry-making, picture-gallery, window-balcony, dinner-table, piano-chattering soul of smart gossip, small talk, and butterfly passion.

Mr. Willis's books are lively, pleasant books, superficial as they are and reprehensible as they are, on many accounts. Wherever he goes he takes notes, and makes books upon his entertainers and his friends. It is nothing to the purpose that they are good natured books, or that nobody cares whether they are good natured or not; the practice is a blameable one, offensive to our English tastes, and not to be tolerated even for the sake of the amusement of the Americans, for whose enjoyment, as it were, and for the uses of posterity, Mr. Willis assures us he writes such things.

"For myself, however, I am free to confess that no age interests me like the present; that no picture of society since the world began, are half so entertaining to me as that of English society in our day; and that, whatever comparison the living great men of England may sustain with those of other days, there is no doubt in my mind that English social life, at the present moment, is at a higher pitch of refinement and cultivation than it was ever here or elsewhere since the world began—consequently, it, and all who form and figure in it, are dignified and legitimate subjects of curiosity and speculation. The Count Mirabel and Lady Bellair of D'Israeli's last romance, are, to my mind, the cleverest portraits, as well as the most entertaining characters, of modern novel-writing; and D'Israeli, by the way, is the only English author who seems to have the power of enlarging his horizon, and getting a perspective view of the times he lives in. His novels are far more popular in America than in England, because the Atlantic is to us a century. We picture to ourselves England and Victoria as we picture to ourselves England and Elizabeth. We relish an anecdote of Sheridan Knowles as we should one of Ford or Marlowe. This immense ocean between us is like the distance of time; and while all that is minute and bewildering is lost to us, the greater lights of the age and the prominent features of society stand out apart, and we judge of them like posterity. Much as I have myself lived in England, I have never been able to remove this long perspective from between my eye and the great men of whom I read and thought on the other side of the Atlantic. When I find myself in the same room with the hero of Waterloo, my blood creeps as if I had seen Cromwell or Marlborough; and I sit down afterwards to describe how he looked, with the eagerness with which I should communicate to my friends some disinterested description of these renowned heroes by a contemporary writer. If Cornelius Agrippa were *redivivus*, in short, and would show me his magic mirror, I should as soon call up Moore as Dryden—Wordsworth or Wilson as soon as Pope or Crichton.

"This is a great ado, you will think, O kind and considerate preface-reader, about a very small portion of the book; but other productions of mine in this vein having been reviewed as 'scandal,' I wish you to grant me that nothing ill-natured or reproachful—no scandal, in other words—could possibly spring out of the spirit in which I have written. As I said in a former preface, my first 'Pencilings' of living men and manners, were written for my country-people only, and only they, I presumed, would ever hear of or be interested in them. They were sketched in the warmest admiration of the men of genius and the phases of society described. They had no pretensions. I would gladly have kept them on the other side of the water. But after five years, the book is still selling in fresh editions in England; and I am fated, very much against my will, to be best known out of my own country by my hastiest and most trivial productions. I trust it will not always be so."

Whether Mr. Willis is best known out of his own country or in it, is nothing to the point. It may be that he is best known in his country; but it is clear that he thinks he knows a great deal of this country, and yet he commits a variety of egregious blunders concerning us and our society, which, were they worth the correction, might be easily set to rights; such, for example, as his representation of the way in which foreigners are treated here. But all these things may be left to time, and these volumes may be commended for the agreeable summary qualities they possess, without much endangering the reputation of the national character, which they almost invariably flatter, and rarely depict with gravity.

From Mudie's Domesticated Animals.

THE USE OF ANIMALS.

In many parts of the British Colonies, Canada especially, the people have actually lost their land from want of domesticated animals. The soft land from which the timber has just been cleared, yields one crop or two by simply turning or scratching the surface, but it is too tender for bearing the full action of the sun and the atmosphere, from which it has been previously concealed for ages; and the soil of which it consists being in great part composed of

leaf mould and other very light matters, very speedily loses its fertility, and becomes a wilderness of annual weeds, in which not even the coarsest of the pasture grasses can find substance to germinate. Whereas if, by any means, the very same surface could be left with a partial shade of trees over it, and made a pasture for sheep or cattle, according as might be most suitable, it would acquire firmness to maintain its place, and fertility sufficient to repay the labour of cultivation, with an ample increase.

Let us see what our author says on another use of trees and hedges; we take it from a valuable disquisition on the subject.

USE OF PLANTATION OR HEDGE-ROWS.

If the cultivator come and seat himself upon the margin of the forest, he may, by skilful management, extend his dominion both ways; but if he shall destroy the natural balance, by attacking the forest and clearing it *en masse*, and before his skill and the assistance of his browsing animals have brought a firm grassy sod upon a considerable portion of the naked surface, the winter is sure to invade him, and paralyze, if not destroy, his cultivation.

The arid plain, or semi-desert, for that is the real character of all plains, which are neither ploughed nor pastured, and which are naked of timber, always has an army ready for these invasions; and the innumerable squadron of this army ride on every wind and defy every opposition which man can make to them. They consist of the winged seeds of the Compositæ, one of the most numerous and productive families of plants, and the family which, in the natural order, ranks next to the heaths and other flowering plants of the absolute desert. These are the thistles, the marigolds, the mug-worts, the groundels, and an endless list of others, the seeds of which are, in one or another of the species, always on the ground, and ready to take possession of every unoccupied spot of ground. Upon poor soils in the neighbourhood of the moors, one or other of these plants, and not unfrequently a host of them together, divide the value of the sowed fields with the farmer, and take full possession of the naked patches and the fallows. To root them out or turn them down by the plough, is at best but a temporary relief; for the wind carries the seeds over very long distances; and as some of them are in season during nearly the whole season of vegetation, the weeds, as they are called, make their appearance in every field the surface of which has been left bare of vegetation for even a few weeks. The most remarkable invasion by these plants is that by the Canadian thistle, which has taken complete possession of the rich lands along the north shore of Lake Ontario, and has actually driven the settlers and their cultivation a good many miles inland. No such invasion as this has taken place in Britain; but there once were many and there still are a few, indeed we fear not a few, places in the British Islands, where one or other of these plants lords it over the corn and gives to the field its prevailing character; and if a garden is but neglected for a year or two, its flowering and ornamental plants will be found extinct, or nearly so, and their places occupied by these invaders.

The grand, and indeed the only defence which man can have against the attack of these formidable enemies upon a newly-cleared or a badly-cultivated district, is to call in the aid of the forest, and plant them out. A dead hedge, if tall and close enough, will be use for a time, until the belt of planting shall have risen to a greater height than that to which those winged reeds are carried. Generally speaking, this height is not very great, for the motion of the seeds is usually a combination of rolling and flying. But they can get over a much greater height of solid wall than of hedge or plantation of any kind. The wind, when it beats against a wall, is turned upward, in the full force of its current and elasticity jointly; and therefore it carries seeds and other light substances along with it; whereas the hedge or planting stifles the elasticity, admits the wind partially, and filters it from those light and winged substances, thereby affording a far more efficient defence against the invasion by the desert.

Upon Mr. Mudie's more ample topic, natural history, we must give one extract—

THE LEAP OF THE ANTELOPE.

The small footing of rock upon which the little elastic animal can stand is perfectly astonishing; such as we would hardly suppose to afford sufficient clutch for the gripe of an eagle, all powerfully as that most majestic of birds anchors itself upon the pinnacle, and braves the utmost fury of the tempest. There is no clutching power in the hooved feet of the mountain antelope, but the walls of their hoofs are sharp, and almost as hard as flint; their tendons are as cords of steel; and their muscles are almost disembodied motion—such is their energy in proportion to their size. The four feet are brought close together on the point of the rock, as if they formed a disc like that on the under part of those fishes which adhere to the rocks by a pectoral sucker, and find their food in security, despite the turmoil of the rapidly-racing waters. So does the mountain antelope poise itself on the pinnacle of the crag, with an instinctive management of the centre of gravity; but yet a management so perfect that the most prolonged and elaborate study of man cannot come up to it. When the animal wishes to spring, which it can do for many feet and alight with perfect safety upon another craggy point, it bends the joints of its legs pretty equally; but as the projecting angle of the hind ones is backwards, and that of the fore-ones forwards, the bending prepares them for very different portions

of the leap which the animal is to take. The extension of the fore legs, by bringing back the joints which answer to the wrists in man, tends to throw the body upwards, and the instant that this has freed the anterior hoofs of the rock, the whole animal, in its hind legs and its back, acts like a bended bow, and discharges itself from the tips of the hind hoofs with such velocity, that if it were to impinge upon a pion it would fell him to the ground. Instinct leads it to suit the exertion to the distance it has to go, of which the same instinct enables it to take measure by the eye; and by this means, when it arrives at the point on which it intends to alight, the momentum of the leap is exhausted, and it alights in safety and is again instantly balanced. Among the motions of animals, varied and curious as they are, there are not many equal to this, whether in energy, in rapidity, or in certainty. In fact, the whole mechanical process is performed as quick almost as thought; and although one is in the most favourable situation for viewing it, all that can be seen is the transfer of the bounding animal from crag to crag.

SHELLEY.

ESSAYS, LETTERS FROM ABROAD, TRANSLATIONS AND FRAGMENTS. BY PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY. EDITED BY MRS. SHELLEY.

The first volume is occupied with a Defence of Poetry; an unfinished Essay on the Athenians; a translation of the Symposium of Plato; a paper on Love; a Fragment of Fancy concerning the Coliseum; the first four chapters of a romance on the subject of the Assassins; imperfect Essays on the Punishment of Death, on Life, and on a Future State; sundry Metaphysical and Moral Speculations; notes on Plato's Republic, and a Translation of Plato's Ion. The second volume is chiefly devoted to letters. It opens with the brief "Journal of a Six Weeks Tour and Letters from Geneva" which was published many years ago by Shelley himself. Some extracts follow from a journal kept at Geneva, and the rest of the volume, excepting a paper of remarks on some of the statues in the gallery of Florence, is occupied with Letters from Italy. The greater number of these are addressed to Mr. Peacock, the witty and thoughtful writer of "Headlong Hall." Leigh Hunt's have been already published. Mr. and Mrs. Gisborne, the latter a friend of Godwin, and Mrs. Shelley herself, are the principal remaining correspondents. The last letter is to Mrs. Shelley, and bears date only a very few days before the sudden close of the poet's brief and passionate life.

We have read the volumes with intense and painful interest; and while we have found nothing in them unworthy of the great literary name of Shelley, we have found much that vindicates the assailable points in his character; that excuses the spirit in which his most mistaken opinions were formed; that expresses a nature as gentle, as brave, and generous, as ever walked the earth.

He has carried his speculations too much into his verse, and his verse too much into his speculations. The result is that there is too much of the world in the one and too little of it in the other. It was not till the eve of his disastrous death that he seems to have discovered this error. It pervaded the "Prometheus Unbound" and was nowhere visible in "The Cenci." He plainly confessed, indeed, on the publication of the latter noble tragedy, that his writings till then had been too much in the nature of visions. He died when twenty-nine, at the very time he had discovered the error of his literary life, and had shown, in one memorable instance, how nobly he was prepared to redeem it. That was the flash before the darkness. Yet what a career may be said to have opened on him then. There were questionless consolations in his death, even for those who loved him. He had already lived in those twenty-nine years, a life longer than the majority of those whose "hearts as dry as summer's dust burn to the socket." He said himself, we believe, a few days before his life was quenched so suddenly, that if he died on the morrow he would have lived to be older than his father, who is living still.

Hope is strong.

Justice and Truth their winged child have found.

A passage in one of the letters from Italy has curious reference to what we have been urging.

"O, if I had health, and strength, and equal spirits, what boundless intellectual improvement might I not gather in this wonderful country! At present I write little else but poetry, and little of that. My first act of Prometheus is complete, and I think you would like it. I consider poetry very subordinate to moral and political science, and if I were well, certainly I would aspire to the latter, for I can conceive a great work, embodying the discoveries of all ages, and harmonizing the contending creeds by which mankind have been ruled. Far from me is such an attempt, and I shall be content, by exercising my fancy, to amuse myself, and perhaps some others, and cast what weight I can into the scale of that balance, which the Giant of Arthegall holds."

How beautiful is the touch that follows, in describing Rome.

"In the square of St. Peter's there are about three hundred fettered criminals at work, hoeing out the weeds that grow between the stones of the pavement. Their legs are heavily ironed, and some are chained two by two. They sit in long rows, hoeing out the weeds, dressed in parti-coloured clothes. Near them sit or saunter, groups of soldiers, armed with loaded muskets. The iron discord of these innumerable chains clanks up into the sonorous air, and produces, contrasted with the musical dashing of the fountains, and the deep azure beauty of the sky, and the magnificence of the architecture around, a conflict of sensations allied to mudness."