

SKETCHES AT HOME AND ABROAD

CRITICAL EDITIONS IN EARLY AMERICAN LITERATURE

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**SKETCHES
AT HOME
AND ABROAD** N. P. WILLIS

A Critical Edition of Selections from the
Writings of Nathaniel Parker Willis

Edited by
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Birdsall, Tony Bradford, Lindsay Dalrymple, Samuel
Gilbert, Shurice Gross, Marissa Marangoni, Jeremy
Sayers, Jen St. Clair, Abby Stiegemeier, and Carrie
Tangenberg



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Contents

Preface	vii
<i>Jon Miller</i>	
I. Sketches at Home and Abroad	
Philip Slingsby, Esq.	3
Pedlar Karl	5
Niagara—Lake Ontario—The St. Lawrence	
I. Niagara	22
II. Lake Ontario	30
III. The St. Lawrence	37
The Cherokee's Threat	40
F. Smith	57
Scenes of Fear	
I. The Disturbed Vigil	76
II. The Mad Senior	78
III. The Lunatic's Skate	82
Incidents on the Hudson	94
Tom Fane and I	102
Larks in Vacation	
I. Driving Stanhope Pro. Tem.	115
II. Saratoga Springs	121
III. Mrs. Captain Thompson	131
A Log in the Archipelago	141
Love and Diplomacy	155
The Madhouse of Palermo	164
II. Contextual Essays	
The Critical Reception of Inklings of Adventure	179
<i>Samuel L. Gilbert</i>	

Niagara Falls and Other Watering Holes	182
<i>Jen St. Clair</i>	
Willis in Recent Scholarship	184
<i>Lindsay Dalrymple</i>	
Higher Education in the Nineteenth Century	187
<i>Marissa Marangoni</i>	
“Scenes of Fear” and Poe’s Literary Criticism	189
<i>Carrie Tangenberg</i>	
Portraits of the Insane in Poe and Willis	192
<i>Shurice Gross</i>	
N. P. Willis’s Antebellum Bachelor Narrative	194
<i>K. E. Birdsall</i>	
Beauty and Nature in Willis’s <i>Inklings of Adventure</i>	199
<i>Tony Bradford</i>	
Counterfeiting in Antebellum America	202
<i>Alyssa Berthiaume</i>	
Willis and Stagecoach Travel in the 1830s	204
<i>Sara Bennett</i>	
Willis and a Gentleman’s Travels in the Mediterranean	207
<i>Sara Bennett</i>	
Courtship and Marriage in Antebellum America	209
<i>Abby Stiegemeier</i>	
“The Madhouse of Palermo” and Samuel Tuke	212
<i>Jeremy Sayers</i>	
Bibliography	215

Preface



This edition presents short fiction by the popular antebellum American author Nathaniel Parker Willis (1806–1867). These sketches are collected from his 1836 work, *Inklings of Adventure*, which was published in London and New York. Since this edition does not include the complete contents of *Inklings*—several longer works are omitted—we present it here as *Sketches at Home and Abroad*, a title that Willis’s *New-York Mirror* often used as a heading for his frequent contributions.

Inklings first appeared in London. Within a few months, the London publisher, Saunders and Otley, also published the book in New York. The London edition is larger—three volumes, not two—and better prepared. The New York edition corrects a few errors from the London edition, and it Americanizes the spelling of some words. But it also introduces new errors, makes many slight and perhaps careless changes in punctuation, and presents foreign words in a provincial style, without diacritics.

This edition is the work of twelve graduate students and myself, the professor who taught their “Poe and Hawthorne” seminar in the English Department of The University of Akron during the second five-week summer session of 2008. For many years I had experimented with obscure texts and editing assignments in undergraduate- and graduate-level American literature courses, and early in the summer of 2008 I decided to see what would happen if I attempted to orchestrate a series of research and editing assignments that could come together as a coherent whole. I chose

Willis mainly because this would take place in a summer course, and I wanted to work with shorter works that had some of the spirit of summer vacation. Willis also works very well in courses devoted to Poe and Hawthorne. As the student writing at the back of this edition suggests, the works of Poe and Willis are better when read together.

We prepared our text by consulting photocopies of a second American edition from my collection alongside printouts from digital reproductions, created and delivered by Google Books, of other 1836 editions now belonging to Oxford University, Harvard University, and the New York Public Library. We also consulted the original periodical publication of these sketches in the *New-York Mirror*, looking both at print copies and digital reproductions delivered by ProQuest's collection of digitized microfilm available through their American Periodical Series online database. Before the end of their session, the students created, corrected, compared, edited, and double-checked a complete text of these sketches with help from one another and myself.

Pleased with the results, we submitted the manuscript to The University of Akron Press; though positive, peer review called for substantial revisions, mainly to the organization of the material and the notes on the text, which I performed over the course of 2009. During this time, I also went over the complete text several more times, comparing it with our sources, to produce what I believe to be an excellent text for general readers as well as scholars. Our editorial policy was not intrusive, but no one text of Willis's sketches seemed particularly authoritative, so there was no strong reason to adhere closely to one edition over another. From these multiple sources then, we offer a text that follows the originals with the correction of all obvious typographical errors and consistent, American spellings in cases where words were spelled variously from page to page within editions. A few words that were consistently printed in a British spelling were left this way. Orthography was not so settled in antebellum America and Willis, like many American writers, did what he liked to do (or lived with the sometimes inconsistent work of editors and compositors). The original text includes many foreign words and phrases that are spelled incorrectly; the New York printers, for example, clearly did not have the ability to print with diacritics. While the mangled spellings add to the delightfully ostentatious comedy of these worldly flourishes, after much discussion we decided to correct these foreign words and phrases as best we could. Our goal has been to present a text that is free from distracting and obvious errors while preserving some of its hurried, affectedly cosmopolitan, and characteristic idiosyncrasy.

Each sketch is glossed by notes written collaboratively by one student and myself. As part of their research and writing contribution to this edition, each student submitted a batch of notes, or at least some suggestions for notes. As I reviewed the text throughout 2009, however, I edited and corrected all the notes, as necessary, and I wrote dozens of additional notes. As graduate students in a Fall 2009 seminar on "Scholarly Editing and Publishing," Melissa Cigoï, Elizabeth Corrao, Shane Fliger, Kim Hackett, Jacob Lauritzen, and Jeremy Sayers also provided valuable feedback on the quantity and quality of these notes. We attempted to gloss passages as needed for a basic comprehension of Willis's meaning. Given the aggressive allusiveness of Willis's short fiction, however (it is not clear that any one reader is supposed to "get" all his literary memories and cultural references), there may inevitably be missing notes for some readers.

The essays in the appendix to this edition are condensed versions of substantially longer essays written by the students for the Summer 2008 "Poe and Hawthorne" seminar. In "The Critical Reception of *Inklings of Adventure*," Samuel L. Gilbert examines the contemporary reviews of William D. Gallagher and Edgar Allan Poe. In "Niagara Falls and Other Watering Holes," Jen St. Clair sketches the early history of those resorts and finds parts of Willis's sketches that appear to have been founded on fact. Lindsay Dalrymple summarizes Willis's much more recent critical reception in "Willis in Recent Scholarship," and Marissa Marangoni describes some of the historical background for Willis's college tales in "Higher Education in the Nineteenth Century." Carrie Tangenberg applies some of Poe's published thinking about literary artistry to Willis's fiction in her "'Scenes of Fear' and Poe's Literary Criticism." The representation of mental illness is studied by Shurice Gross in "Portraits of the Insane in Poe and Willis." K. E. Birdsall considers the bachelorhood of Slingsby in light of recent scholarly studies in "Willis and the Antebellum Bachelor Narrative." Tony Bradford writes about nineteenth-century conceptions of beauty and nature and Willis's treatment of the same in "Beauty and Nature in *Inklings of Adventure*." Alyssa Berthiaume explains the popular anxiety about counterfeiting reflected in Willis's tales in "Counterfeiting in Antebellum America." In a pair of essays, Sara Bennett describes antebellum travel. "Willis and Stagecoach Travel in the 1830s" helps to explain the sketch set on board a stagecoach, "Mrs. Captain Thompson," and "Willis and a Gentleman's Travels in the Mediterranean" examines the historical accuracy of the passage described in "A Log in the Archipelago." Like St. Clair, Bennett finds evidence that Willis worked with accurate

facts about places and modes of travel. Abby Stiegemeier's "Courtship and Marriage in Antebellum America" provides some much-needed clarity on this subject, given that so much antebellum literature (such as Willis's "Love and Diplomacy") represents courtship and marriage practices as bound by rules that historians know to have been archaic even for antebellum America. In "'The Madhouse of Palermo' and Samuel Tuke," Jeremy Sayers compares Willis's varied writings, over many years, that drew from his experience visiting this famous asylum.

In each case, these short essays were imagined as critical introductions to particular sketches. There is one for each story included in this edition, and they appear in the same order as the stories themselves. These short scholarly essays seek to inform the modern reader of some critical and historical contexts that might help us to understand and interpret the individual stories. They also supply information that should be of use to readers interested in other antebellum American authors. Far from exhausting the possible approaches to Willis's fiction, they sketch only a few of the many contexts in which Willis's popular fictions could be studied.

Jon Miller

**SKETCHES
AT HOME
AND ABROAD**

Philip Slingsby, Esq.



It is now many years since I first knew the gentleman whose name stands at the head of this chapter. The papers which are to follow will record some of the passages of his life—taken partly from a rambling note-book of his own, and filled out by what additional details I have gathered from his conversation. Though my name stands in the title-page of this book as the author, I can only take to myself that share of the praise or blame which may attach to it as a literary composition.

From my observation of Mr. Slingsby, and from the slender experience of the world which has fallen to my share, I am persuaded that he, and most other men, may be said to possess two characters. One is real, the other ideal. In the great proportion of men the ideal character, (usually a heroic and romantic one,) is stifled by a youth of care, and lies quite dormant, or, pent till its impulses are ungovernable, it becomes paramount in some striking action late in life, and is called eccentricity, or insanity. In others there is a never-ceasing struggle between the real and the ideal, or the latter obtains the supremacy, stamping the man as he finds opportunity or not, a dreamer or a hero. The supposed difference between men consists, frequently, I am persuaded, more in the different qualities predominant by education or circumstances.

Most of those who know Slingsby would define him as a worldly, careless man, with more susceptibility than feeling, some talent, and more self-confidence. The reverse of his shield, seldom shown, presents a chivalresque temperament, the most reckless love of adventure, warm

household affection, and an intense idolatry of the beautiful, that has made him by turns devout and voluptuous, by turns giddy and poetical. With a perversity, arising, perhaps, from being unappreciated in his youth, he cautiously conceals his better qualities, and takes a pleasure in referring their accidental sparkles to chance or calculation. He professes rather worldly sentiments in conversation, and confesses to have no ambition beyond luxurious leisure, and no confidence in mankind. Behind this stalking horse he watches his true game with unsuspected vigilance and success. Adventure, excitement and the passionate and dramatic materials of romance, are sown more thickly in the common walks of society, than is known to the unwatchful and the sordid. Following the slightest lead, almost culpably regardless of consequences, bold, sympathizing, and impassioned, he is revealed, as by a secret magnetism, to spirits like his own, and beneath the mask of a trifler, and in the trodden thoroughfare of the world, leads a life of varied and ever-renewing romance.

There is a vein of complaint against the world in these papers, which I cannot well reconcile to the uniform gaiety and *insouciance* for which my friend's ordinary deportment is remarkable. With a fair share of success in pleasing, (as will appear in the reading of his adventures,) his claim to good looks, it must be acknowledged, has never been put forward even by the most partial of his friends. This parsimony of nature, and the rebuffs in his love which it has possibly occasioned, have, I am led to suspect, rankled more sorely in his mind than his pride would suffer him to betray to the common eye. Hence, possibly, those passages in which he rails against love and friendship; and hence, (I must be permitted to premonish the reader,) some slight exaggeration which I trust my friends will find in my own portrait, drawn, in these otherwise veracious pages, under the name of Forbearance Smith. I owe some portion of his devoted attachment, I doubt not, to the consolatory contrast afforded him by my own slighter pretensions in this particular.

It will be seen, by many marks in the narratives which follow, that they are not the work of imagination. The dramas of real life are seldom well wound up, and the imperfectness of plot which might be objected to them as tales, will prove to the observant reader that they are drawn more from memory than fancy. It is because they are thus imperfect in dramatic accomplishment, that I have called them by the name under which they have been introduced. They are rather intimations of what seemed to lead to a romantic termination than complete romances—in short, they are *inklings of adventure*.