

THE CANADIAN OTTER.

THIS otter, which is much larger than ours, and ought to be found in the north of Europe, as well as in Canada, affords me an opportunity of enquiring whether it is the same animal with the *latax* of Aristotle, which, he remarks, is much larger and stronger than the common otter. But the ideas he gives of it correspond not entirely with this large otter; and, finding that it was perfectly similar to the common otter, except in size, I thought it was not a particular species, but a simple variety: And, as the Greeks, and especially Aristotle, were careful not to give different names but to distinct species, we are persuaded, that the *latax* is another animal. Besides, as the otters, like the beavers, are generally larger, and have finer and blacker hair in America * than in Europe, this otter of Canada ought to be longer and blacker than the French otter. But, on considering what the *latax* of Aristotle might be, I conjectured that it was the animal mentioned by Be-

* The otters of North America differ from those of France by being commonly longer and blacker. They are of different shades, and some of them are as black as jet; and these last are desired and in greatest request; *De Script. de l'Amérique Septentr. par DuRoi, tom. II. p. 280.*

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lon, under the name of the *sea-wolf*. I shall, therefore, relate what Aristotle has said of the *latax*, and Belon of the *sea-wolf*, that the reader may have an opportunity of making the comparison *.

In this passage, Aristotle mentions six amphibious animals; and, of these six, we know only three, the common seal, the beaver, and the otter. The other three, namely, the *latax*, the *fatherion*, and the *satyrion*, remain unknown, because they are only pointed out by their names, without any description. In this case, as in all those where no direct induction can be derived from a knowledge of the object, we must have

* Sunt inter quadrupes ferasque, quæ visum ex lacu et fluvio petant; at vero a mari nullum, præterquam vitulus marinus. Sunt etiam in hoc genere fiber, fatherion, satyrion, lutris, *latax* quæ latæ lutra est, dentesque habet robustos, quippe quæ noctu quæ latæ lutra est, dentesque habet robustos, quippe quæ noctu plerumque egrediens, virgulta proxima suis dentibus ut ferro præterquamque egrediens, virgulta proxima suis dentibus ut ferro præcedat; lutris etiam hominem mordat, nec desistit, ut ferant, nisi esset fracti crepitum senserit. Lutaci pilus durus, specie later pium vituli marini et cervi; *Arif. Hist. Anim. lib. viii. cap. v.*—
The *sea-wolf*: * As the English have no land-wolves, Nature has furnished them with an animal that frequents the shores of their coast, which makes so near an approach to our wolf, that, if it did not prefer fishes to sheep, we would reckon it to be the very same, whether we consider its size, its hair, its head (which is always large), or its tail. But as this animal (the remarks) lives only on fishes, and was unknown to the ancients, it seems to be no less singular than the double-lived animals mentioned above; for which reason, I have given a figure of it; *Belon de la Nature de Poiss. p. 18.* Note, The figure is on p. 19. and resembles the hyæna more than any other animal; but it could never be the hyæna; for he is not amphibious; neither does he live on fishes; and, besides, he belongs to a different climate.

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recourse

recourse to the mode of exclusion; but this mode can never be employed with success, except when we know nearly the whole subject. For example, from long study, I believe that I am acquainted with nearly the whole quadruped tribe. I know that Aristotle could have no information concerning those which are peculiar to the continent of America. Of the quadrupeds, I likewise know all those which are amphibious: From these I, in the first place, strike off all those which belong to America, as the tapir, the caribai, the ondatra, or musk-rat, &c. There remain only the amphibious animals of our own continent, which are, the hippopotamus, the walrus or sea-cow, the seals or sea-calves, the sea-wolf of Belon, the beaver, the otter, the sable, the water-rat, the Muscovy musk-rat, the water shrew-mouse, and, if you choose, the ichneumon, which some authors have regarded as an amphibious animal, and called it the *Egyptian otter*. From this number, I retrench the walrus or sea-cow, which being found only in the northern seas, was unknown to Aristotle. I likewise retrench the hippopotamus, the water-rat, and the ichneumon, because he mentions them elsewhere under their proper names. Lastly, I retrench the seals, the beaver, and the otter, which are well known, and the water shrew-mouse, which is too similar to the land one to have ever received a separate name. There remain,

main, then, the sea-wolf of Belon, the sable, and the Muscovy musk-rat, for the *latax*, the *fatberion*, and the *satyrion*. Of these three animals, the sea-wolf of Belon alone is larger than the otter: Hence it alone can represent the *latax*; and, consequently, the sable and the Muscovy musk-rat must represent the *fatberion* and the *satyrion*. These conjectures, which I believe to be well-founded, are not, however, of the number of those which time can elucidate, unless some Greek manuscripts, hitherto unknown, shall be discovered, where these names are employed, and new explanations given of them.