

## FUR TRADE OF CANADA.

## NO. V.

If we consider the Beaver in a state of nature, or rather in a state of solitude and dispersion, he appears not, by his internal qualities, to raise above the other animals. He has not the genius of a dog, the sense of an elephant, the craftiness of the fox, but is more remarkable for some singularities of external conformation, than for any apparent superiority of mental faculties. He is the only quadruped furnished with a flat oval tail, covered with scales, which he uses as a rudder to direct his course in the water; the only animal that has his hind feet webbed, and the toes of his fore-feet, which he employs for carrying victuals to his mouth, separate from each other; the only quadruped that resembles the land animals in the anterior parts of his body, and the aquatic animals in the posterior. He forms the link between quadrupeds and fishes, as the bat does between quadrupeds and birds. But these peculiarities would be rather defects than perfections, if the beaver knew not how to derive, from this singular conformation, advantages which render him superior to every other quadruped.

The beavers begin to assemble in the month of June or July, for the purpose of uniting into society. They arrive in numbers, from all corners, and soon form a troop of two or three hundred. The place of rendezvous is generally the situation fixed for their establishment, and is always the banks of waters. If the waters be flat, and never rise above their ordinary level, as in lakes, the beavers make no bank or dam. But, in rivers or brooks, where the waters are subject to risings and fallings, they build a bank, and, by this artifice, they form a pond or piece of water which remains always at the same height. The bank traverses the river, from one side to the other, like a sluice, and it is often from 80 to 100 feet long, by 10 or 12 broad at the base. This pile, for animals of a size so small, appears to be enormous, and supposed an incredible labour. But the solidity with which the work is constructed, is still more astonishing than its magnitude. The part of the river where they erect this bank is generally shallow. If they find on the margin a large tree, which can be made to fall into the water, they begin with cutting it down, to form the principal part of their work. This tree is often thicker than a man. By gnawing the foot of the tree with their four cutting teeth, they accomplish their purpose in a very short time, and always make the tree fall across the river. They next cut the branches from the trunk, to make it lie level. These operations are performed by the whole community. Several beavers are employed in gnawing the foot of the tree, and others in lopping off the branches after it is fallen. Others, at the same time, traverse the bank of the river, and cut down smaller trees, from the size of a man's leg to that of his thigh. These they dress and cut to a certain length, to make stakes of them, and first drag them by land to the margin of the river, and then by water to the place where the building is carrying on. These piles they sink down, and interweave the branches with the larger stakes. This operation implies the surmounting of many difficulties;