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NATURAL HISTORY.

Sport of the Otter.—The disposition of the Otter is singular and interesting. Their favorite sport is sliding, and for this purpose, in winter the highest ridge of snow is selected to the top of which the otters scramble, where, laying on the belly, with the fore feet bent backwards, they give themselves an impulse with the hind legs, and swiftly glide head foremost down the declivity, sometimes for the distance of twenty yards. This sport they continue apparently with the keenest enjoyment, until fatigue or hunger induces them to desist. In the summer this amusement is obtained by selecting a spot where the river bank is sloping,has a clayey soil, and the water at its base is of considerable depth. The otters then remove from the surface, for the breadth of several feet, the sticks, roots, stones and other obstructions, and render the surface as level as possible. They climb up the bank at a less precipitous spot, and starting from the top, slip with velocity over the inclining ground, and plump into the water to a depth proportioned, to the weight and rapidity of motion. After a few slides, the surface of the clay becomes very smooth and slippery, and the rapid succession of the sliders show how much these animals are delighted by the sport, as well as how capable they are of performing actions which have no other object than that of pleasure or diversion.

THE SEAS BOTTON.

The bottom of the basin of the sea seems to have inequalities like those of the surface of the continents. Were it dried up, it would present mountains, valleys, and plains. It is covered almost throughout, by an immense quantity of estaceous animals, or those who have shells, intermixed with sand and grain. The bottom of the Adriatic Sea is composed of a compact bed, of shells, several hundred feet in thickness. A celebrated diver, employed to descend into the Strait of *Me*ssina, saw there, with horror, enormous polypi attached to the rocks, the arms of which, being several feet long, were more than sufficient to strangle a man. In many seas, the eye perceives nothing but a bright, sandy bottom, extending for several hundred miles without an intervening object. But in others, particularly in the Red Sea, it is very different: the whole body of this extensive bed of water is, literally speaking, a forest of submarine plants and corrals, formed by insects for their habitation, sometimes branching out to a great extent. Here are seen the madropores, sponges, mosses, sea mushrooms, and various other things, covering every part of the bottom. The bed of many parts of the sea, near America, presents a very different, though a very beautiful appearance. There it is covered with vegetables, which makes it look green as a meadow; and beneath are seen thousands of turtle, and other sea animals, feeding thereon. There are some places of the sea where no bottom has yet been found, still it is not bottomless. The mountains of continents seem to correspond with what are called the the abysses of the sea. The highest mountains do not rise above 25,000 feet: and, allowing for the effects of the elements, some suppose that the sea is not beyond 30,000 feet in depth. Lord Mulgrave used, in the Nothern Ocean, a very heavy sounding lead, and gave out along with it cable rope to the length of 4,980 feet, without finding bottom. But the greatest depth ever sounded was by Captain Scoresby, who, in the Greenland Seas, could find no bottom with 12,000 fathoms or 72,000 feet of line. According to Laplace, its mean depth is about two miles, which supposing generally received estimates to be correct, as to the proportion the extent of the water bears to the dry land on the earth's surface, would make about 200 millions of cubic feet of water.

BIOGRAPHY.

JAMES FERGUSON.

James Ferguson, an ingenious philosopher and astronomer, was born in 1710, at Keith a village in the shire of Banff, in Scotland. His parents being poor, he was placed out as a servant to a farmer, who employed him in keeping sheep; in which situation he acquired a surprising knowledge of the stars, and his abilities being discovered by some neighbouring gentlemen, one of them took him to his house, where he learnt decimal arithmetic and the rudiments of algebra and geometry from the butler. From a description of the globes in Gordon's grammar, he made one in three weeks sufficiently accurate to enable him to work problems. He afterwards made a wooden clock and a watch, on which he was employed by some of the gentry in repairing and cleaning clocks; and having a taste for drawing, he earned something by drawing patterns for ladies work. He next began to draw portraits with Indian ink, by which he supported himself creditably some years. In 1743 he came to London, where he published some astronomical tables and calculations, and gave lectures in experimental philosophy, which he repeated with success throughout the kingdom. In 1754 he published a brief description of the solar system, with an astronomical account of the year of our Saviour's Crucifixion, 8vo.; also an Idea of the *Ma*terial Universe, deduced from a Survey of the Solar system. But his greatest work is his "Astronomy explained upon sir Isaac Newton's Principles, and made easy to those who have not studied *Ma*thematics." It first appeared in 1756, 4to. and has been several times reprinted in 8vo. On the accession of the present king, to whom he had read lectures, *Mr.* Ferguson obtained a pension of fifty pounds a-year. In 1763 he was elected a fellow of the Royal Society, without paying the admission fee, or the annual subscriptions: the same year appeared his Astronomical Tables and Precepts, 8vo. In 1767 he published Tables and Tracts relative to several Arts and sciences, 8vo. Besides these works he was the author of Select *Me*chanical Exercises: the Young Gentleman and Lady's Astronomy; an Easy Introduction to Astronomy; an Introduction to Electricity; the Art of Drawing in Perspective made easy; and several tracts and papers in the Philosophical Transactions. He died in 1776. *Mr.* Ferguson was a man of unassuming manners, meek, innocent and religious.