

in which they live, however, become very shallow during the summer, and sometimes almost dry up. Even in winter, very often, they are not sufficiently deep to escape being frozen down to the very bottom. So the animals get over the difficulty by damming them up in a very ingenious way. First of all they cut down two or three tall trees on the margin of the river, choosing those which lean towards the stream, so that when they fall they will lie across it. This they do by gnawing through the trunks with their chisel-like teeth, working perseveringly round and round until at last the weakened stems give way. They then remove the bark, which serves them for food, and proceed to fell a number of other trees in the same manner. These they cut up into logs of about five or six feet long, which they arrange in position against the trees that have previously fallen, fixing them in their places partly by means of branches and partly by plastering them firmly together with quantities of mud, until a solid bank has been formed, stretching right across the river. Some little idea of the extraordinary industry of the animals may be gathered from the fact that these dams are sometimes as much as a couple of hundred yards long, while they vary in thickness from three or four feet at the top to twelve or fourteen at the bottom. Beavers are very sociable creatures, and a large number always work in concert together; and by the time that their dam is finished, a wide and deep pool has been formed, which never dries up in summer, and never entirely freezes during even the hardest of winters.

Then follows a very curious consequence. The trees all round this artificial lake are cut down by the beavers, the surrounding soil becomes wet and spongy, and before very long peat is formed, so that what was once a forest becomes a bog. These peaty morasses are commonly known as "beaver-meadows"; and the strangest fact concerning them is that their traces are often left behind them for thousands upon thousands of years—so that even now we find unmistakable signs of the work of beavers which lived and died in the ages of the distant past.

But, besides making dams, beavers also construct what are called "lodges"—habitations, that is, in which they sleep by day and also bring up their young. These "lodges" take the

form of great circular mounds, and are made by piling logs and branches together and plastering them over with mud. The walls are extremely thick—for although the mound may be twenty feet in diameter, the dwelling chamber in the middle is seldom more than six or seven feet across, and perhaps three feet in height. A rather deep ditch runs round it, and opens into the stream, so that the beavers can escape if a passing bear should break open their home in the hope of obtaining a meal.

During the summer-time, however, the animals will sometimes leave their lodge and journey for some little distance up or down the river; but early in autumn they always return, and set busily to work to repair their dam and to lay up a store of winter food. Not that they are idle in winter; far from it. Even when the surface of the river is frozen thickly over, they may still be seen swimming beneath the ice; and the native hunters take advantage of these occasions, and kill the animals in a very curious way. When they catch sight of a beaver they strike a heavy blow with a club on the ice exactly above it. The animal is stunned by the shock, rolls over on its back, and is dragged out through a hastily cut hole before it has time to recover its senses.

Oddly enough, there are always two or three beavers in a colony which decline to work with the rest, and are driven away by their fellows in consequence. These lazy animals, which are known as "terriers" by the hunters, live by themselves in holes in the banks of the river, and only cut down just as much wood as is necessary in order to obtain food. They make no dams, they build no lodges; but they pay the penalty for their idleness, for they are trapped far more often than their industrious fellows, who live and work in society.



BEAVERS AT WORK.