



CANADIAN BEAVERS.

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BY THE EDITOR.

Every Canadian boy and girl should know all about the beaver, the emblem of their country—and a very good emblem it is; and a very good motto is "Busy as Beavers" for all Canadians, old or young. Certainly the beaver is a very industrious fellow, and we need not be ashamed of him upon our country's crest. For so small an animal he accomplishes very remarkable works.

The average beaver is about two feet six inches long, and its tail is about a foot longer. It will weigh from thirty to sixty pounds. Its fore legs are small, but the hind legs are large and strong, and its feet are webbed to the very claws. It is an awkward animal on land, but just let it dive into the water, and it is as active, as graceful, and as much at home as a bird in the air or a fish in the sea.

The most remarkable part of the beaver is its broad, flat, scale-covered tail. It is used as a paddle in swimming, as a trowel and hammer for building, as a support when its owner sits up, and it can strike such a violent blow as to be heard half a

mile off. In this way the old sentinel beaver, who is on guard, gives warning of the approach of an enemy, when splash! every tail disappears, and solitude reigns again. The tail is a great favorite with Indians and hunters, and, when it can be obtained, occupies an important place in their feasts.

The most remarkable constructions of the beaver are the dams and lodges which they build. They are made in order to secure a sufficient depth of water to be secure against freezing in winter. Having selected a spot for their village, or cluster of houses, they proceed to cut down the trees with which to build their dam. They always cut down those up the stream, so that they may float down with the current. They have no cutting instruments but their broad, flat, sharp teeth, but with these they will bite off great chips, and in a very short time cut down a tree, eight or even ten inches through.

They select trees that lean over the water, and having felled them, they trim off the branches, and cut them into lengths eight or ten feet long. These are floated to the site of the proposed dam, where they are built into their place with mud and

stones, till a broad and solid wall is made. Where the current is gentle, the dam is carried straight across; where it is swift, the dam is built with an angle or convex curve up the stream. The little architects exhibit as much science in their construction as could the most skilful civil engineer.

The beavers' houses are built of the same material, a chamber being left in the middle, the only entrance to which is by an opening under the water. The roof is made very thick to resist the attacks of the wolverine, or glutton, next to man the most deadly enemy of the beaver. The food of these hard-working mechanics consists of the bark of the aspen, willow, birch, poplar, and alder, of which it lays up in the summer a stack near its lodges.

The beaver once swarmed all over Canada and the northern United States, and the traces of the beaver dams and beaver meadows may still in many places be seen. But the implacable war of the trapper and fur trader has banished him to the remote regions of the north and north-west. For over 300 years this warfare has been waged, and the trade in beaver skins was one of the great inducements to the exploration of this continent. Tadousac, Quebec, Three Rivers, Montreal, Frontenac, Fort Rouille (Toronto), and Detroit were the great fur-trading posts, of which Albany and New York were for many years the jealous rivals. Beaver skins were used instead of money—one skin being an equivalent for a two-dollar bill—rather an inconvenient sort of currency to carry in one's purse. The pelts, as they were called—hence the word peltries,—were used for making beaver hats—those fuzzy-looking things worn by Uncle Sam in the comic pictures—which used to be the favorite head-gear of the dandies of Paris and London. With the substitution of silk for the shiny black hats now worn, the beaver's occupation was gone, and he was allowed, for a time, to live a quiet life. Their fur has, of late, been in demand in Europe for trimming dresses, coats and gloves, and forthwith a war is renewed in the far wilds of Canada against the poor beaver. So is the world bound together by the ties of commerce.

The beavers are caught by steel spring traps, like huge rat traps, chained to a marked tree. An Indian or white trapper will visit fifty or sixty traps in a circuit of thirty or forty miles, and will catch one hundred or one hundred and fifty beavers in a season. In 1854-1856, the Hudson Bay Company sold in London 627,655 beaver skins. No wonder the beaver is getting scarce. Skins have varied from \$1 to \$8 apiece. At one time in the last century they were such a drug in the market that an immense stock was burned at Montreal to make the rest worth exportation. The beaver once flourished in Europe, but is now extinct.