

Leaves from the Book of Nature.

No. 3.

THE CANADIAN PORCUPINE.

Erethison dorsatus. (LINNÆUS.)

THIS very shy and retiring animal still exists in numbers in our Province. His bones found in the kitchen middens, mixed with shells, prove he varied the diet of those ancient fish-eaters, who have left these their only marks on our shores. A very large specimen, at Staudigl's Saloon, measured, when dead:—Total length, 25 inches; length of tail, 8 inches; length of hind paw to tip of nail, $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches; length of quills, nearly 3 inches. The general color was black, though a few long hairs tipped with white gave it a greyish appearance. It was covered with spines from the forehead over the back, upper surface of the arms, legs and tail; under surface of the arms and legs and belly had no spines, but were covered with dusky hair. These spines were covered and concealed by coarse hair, except on the back of the head, the lower half of the back and all the upper surface of the tail. In these parts the spines or quills, white with black tips, lay in thick parallel rows, like the teeth of a fine ivory comb. In figure he has a short blunt head, ears buried in hairs, an eye sad, dull, yet very expressive, a short neck, and a very arched back. His arms and legs are very strong. The first time I met with him, was on the borders of Lake Rosignol. Our stock of provisions was scarce; our Indians hungry. He was knocked over, scorched in the fire, scalded in a pot of hot water, scraped, cooked and eaten in half an hour. Years afterwards I came upon one on the southern slopes of the Dalhousie hills; his high, awkward gallop, with his back arched and bristling, and rattling with quills, was soon stopped by a stout stick held on him, and I made him a captive and deposited him in a barrel. The next day my pet was installed in a pen of boards. For several days he kept his head buried between his fore legs, and always presented his arched and bristling back towards me, his tail moving backwards and forwards. I tempted him with hemlock and spruce, potatoes, fresh raspberries, tender lettuce, and soon won his confidence. He now was smooth in my presence, never put himself in armed array, sat up on his hind legs, and used his fore paws in holding food to his mouth. Having a collar bone, he used his paws, with the palms upward, as we use our own hands, not like squirrels, who use the backs of their paws for the same purpose. His great dull eyes were all the time casting shy, sad, but most expressive glances at me; once he escaped into a young willow tree, and sat, gathering in with his hairy paws and eating the tender shoots; the tree got a trimming that ten years afterwards might be seen in its growth. My pet soon attracted the neighbors; first the idle school boy, from the village school hard by, who soon found the means, by poking soft pine sticks at him, to get a crop of quills sticking in the soft wood. I had to protect his temper from these attacks. Next Indian Molly, coming with soft moccasined foot on her begging rounds, (most graceful of mendicants, taking her dole of fish or meal with that proud humility that made you her vassal, and she a forest born princess receiving her dues,) peeping over the pen, says: "Indian people keep porcupine." "Do they, Molly; and where do they keep them?" "Oh, keep them in camp, run in and out, never go woods again, just like little dog." "And what did they eat?" "Oh, me don't know, spose eat everything, eat bread, eat potatoes, eat meat, and drink soup too," says Molly. Here was a chapter of natural history, just fresh from the forest. My old neighbor, Bombardier Telfar, who having served Her Majesty in every quarter of the globe had chosen our village as his final resting place, (he has long since got his freehold of church-yard mould,) now leans his well-brushed jacket of artillery blue over the pen, and says: "When we lay in the