DOMESTIC RABBITS—THE BEAVER AN ARCHITECT.

period from a few individuals. The female, or doe rabbit, has frequently no fewer than seven litters of young ones within a year, and generally each litter consists of six or seven rabbits. The common grey wild rabbit is well known as an article of food. Its skin is also used in the manufacture of hats and other articles of dress. A great number of dead rabbits are brought from Belgium and Holland, chiefly by way of Ostend, for the London market. These are a larger species than the English kind. Tame rabbits are often kept for amusement by boys. They are generally white and black. Fancy rabbits are those whose ears, instead of being fixed in an upright position on each side of the head, lap over, or lop, as it is called; and according to the way in which the ears fall, either in a horn-lop, an oar-lop, or in the perfect lop, is the rabbit considered valuable. These tame rabbits are much larger than the wild kind. Rabbits feed chiefly on grass, which they nibble off very closely with their sharp teeth; they are also fond of most vegetables, such as carrots, turnips, &c., and of bran and corn. They do not require to drink; and too much moisture in their food is injurious to them, rendering them liable to a disease called the "rot."

THE BEAVER.

The beaver (Plate xiii., d) may truly be called a remarkable animal, and has been often cited as an instance of the marvellous instinct with which certain creatures have been endowed. In some animals this instinct appears most wonderfully in the ingenious manner of procuring food; in others it manifests itself, as in the hare and fox, in the numerous stratagems the creature employs in escaping from danger: in the beaver it is most strikingly shown in the marvellous skill with which he constructs his dwelling. Not content with a mere burrow or form, like the rabbit and hare, or with a nest on a bough or on the ground, like the thrush or the swan, nothing short of a village, built on what is to him a navigable river, will suffice for the beaver; and truly admirable and worthy of study is the labour he will undergo, and the expedients he will adopt, to fashion his village to his liking.

The beaver is about two feet long and a foot high. Its head is round, its fore legs short, the hinder legs long, and the hind feet webbed. The colour of the beaver is a light brown. Its broad singularly shaped tail is covered with a horny skin, in fish-like scales, and is used by the beaver as a rudder in swimming. The sharpness of the beaver's teeth is very remarkable. The little creature can gnaw through the trunk of a tree by perseveringly working with these formidable instruments. Its food is chiefly berries and the bark of young trees. The home of the beaver is in North America, though anciently it also inhabited some parts of Europe.

In the autumn a community of two or three hundred beavers will make systematic preparations for building their village. They invariably choose the side of a lake or stream; and if the water is too shallow for their purpose, or makes them fear that they will be "frozen out" in the winter, they proceed, with the skill of engineers, to deepen it. Just as a stream is dammed up in the neighbourhood of a mill to husband and regulate the water supply, do the beavers construct a dam, sometimes more than a hundred feet long, to keep the water at a proper level. This dam is made of branches of trees, gnawed from the stems by the little architects' sharp teeth, and laid along in lines, with clay and stones intermingled, to render the bank impervious to water. At the base this dam is twelve feet thick, but gradually narrows towards the top till it is only three feet across at the edge. Near the dam, the beavers build their bell-shaped huts, which are inhabited by from a dozen to thirty beavers each, and rise to a height of six feet above the water. The careful beaver also lays in a stock of branches and strips of bark for winter provisions; and takes care, moreover, to construct a curious place of refuge—a