

more than the superabundant part of his food. The beaver which inhabits the water, and feeds upon fish, has a tail covered with scales; and the flesh of the otter, as well as of most aquatic fowls, is of a fishy nature. It may therefore be presumed, that animals which live constantly upon one kind of food will, in time, imbibe a tincture of its aliment; and however strong the original impression of nature may be, a kind of transformation will take place by an assimilation contrary to the first. In this case the nourishment no longer assimilates entirely to the form of the animal, but the animal assimilates in part to the form of the nourishment, as is seen in the horns of the stag and the tail of the beaver.

The horns, then, are but an excrescence, a part foreign to the body of the stag, and only esteemed as an animal substance because it grows from him; it is in reality a vegetable production, since it retains all the marks of that vegetable from which it derives its origin, and resembles the branch of a tree in the manner it grows, expands, hardens, dries, and separates; for it falls off spontaneously, after having acquired its full degree of solidity, like a ripe fruit from the branch. The very name given to this production in the French language