

for an essay on the question whether England and France had ever been joined together. The subject caught Desmarest's fancy, he made some investigations, sent in an essay and carried off the prize.

Cuvier, in his *Éloge*, remarks on the strong contrast between the way in which Desmarest approached his task and that in which Buffon, who had aroused public attention to these subjects, was accustomed to deal with them. The young aspirant to fame, then twenty-eight years of age, allowed himself no hypothesis or theory. He would not travel beyond the positive facts and the inferences that might be legitimately deduced from them. Dealing with the correspondence between the material forming the opposite cliffs of the two countries (which had already been pointed out by Guettard), and with the form of the bottom of the shallow strait, he passed on to consider the former prevalence in England of many noxious wild animals, which could not have swum across the sea, and which man would certainly have taken care not to introduce. From a review of all the considerations which the subject presented, he drew the inference that a neck of land must once have connected England and France, and that this isthmus was eventually cut through by the strong currents of the North Sea.

This essay, so different in tone from the imaginative discourses of Buffon, attracted the attention of D'Alembert, and led him to seek the acquaintance of its author. The friendship of this great man was itself a fortune, for it meant an introduction into the most learned, intelligent, and influential society of the day.