CANIS DINGO, Blumenb.

The Dingo.

Canis Dingo, Blumenb.—Shaw, vol. i. pl. 76.—Gray, List of Spec. of Mamm. in Coll. Brit. Mus., p. 57.
——familiaris, var. Australasiæ, Desm.—Benn. Gard. and Menag. of Zool. Soc. del., vol. i. p. 51, with fig. Chrysæus Australiæ, Lieut.-Col. Hamilton Smith in Jard. Nat. Lib. Dogs, vol. i. p. 188. pl. 10.

"Whether the numberless breeds of dogs, which are the companions of the human race in every region of the globe, were originally descended from one common stock, and owe their infinite varieties solely to their complete domestication, the modifications by which they are distinguished having been gradually produced by the influence of circumstances,—whether, on the contrary, they are derived from the intermixture of different species, now so completely blended together as to render it impossible to trace out the line of their descent,—and whether on either supposition the primæval race or races still exist in a state of nature, are questions which have baffled the ingenuity of the most celebrated naturalists. Theory after theory has been advanced, and the problem is still as eagerly debated as ever, and with as little probability of arriving at a satisfactory conclusion. In the investigation of this difficult subject, however, as in the search after the philosopher's stone, many curious facts have been brought to light which would otherwise in all probability have remained buried in obscurity; and the causes which are continually operating to produce a gradual change of character, both in outward form and in intellectual capacity, among the brute creation, have received considerable elucidation. It is thus that theories, however erroneous in themselves, are frequently made subservient to the advancement of science, by the important facts which are incidentally developed by their authors in the ardour of their zeal for the establishment of a favourite hypothesis."

Such are the words of the late Edward Turner Bennett at the commencement of his paper on the history of the Dingo in "The Gardens and Menagerie of the Zoological Society delineated." Agreeing with Mr. Bennett in the impossibility of arriving at a satisfactory conclusion on the subject, I feel that I cannot close the present work without giving a figure and description of an animal which forms so prominent a feature in the fauna of Australia. It may be expected also that I should myself have formed some opinion as to its claim to be regarded as indigenous or otherwise; and if this opinion should be at variance with those of some Australian zoologists who have lately written on the subject, I may state that it has not been formed without due consideration. Without going into the probable origin of this particular race of dogs, or offering reasons why it should not be considered as indigenous, I may briefly state that I believe it has followed the black man in his wanderings from Northern Asia through the Indian Islands to Australia, the southern portion of which country appears to be its boundary in this direction; for I believe it has never been found in Van Diemen's Land in the wild or semi-wild state in which it occurs on the Australian continent. From what I saw of the animal in a state of nature, I could not but regard it in the light of a variety to which the course of ages had given a wildness of air and disposition; indeed it appeared to have all the habits of a skulking low-bred dog, and none of the determined air and ferocity of disposition of the wolf or jackal: in confirmation of this opinion, I may cite the facility with which the natives bring it under subjection, and the parti-colouring of its hairy coat; for although the normal colouring is red or reddish sandcolour; black, or black and white, individuals are not unfrequently seen; and that this variation in the colouring is not due to crossing with the domesticated races introduced when the country was first discovered, is proved by the following passage in the Appendix to "Collins's Voyage," a work published soon after the colonization of New South Wales, where he says, "the dogs of this country are of the jackal species; they never bark, are of two colours, the one red, with some white about it, the other black: some of them were very handsome." The existence of parti-coloured Dingos is still further confirmed by Mr. Gilbert's note on the animal, as observed by him in Western Australia: "The Dingo is very common over all parts of this colony. There are a very great number of varieties, varying from reddish brown to black, white, light brown, and black and white." Now, on the other hand, it may be affirmed that late geological discoveries will set aside the idea of its being a mere variety and tend to prove that this dog existed in Australia even prior to the aborigines; for it is said that a skeleton of a Dingo has been discovered at Warnamborl, beneath a bed of volcanic ash; but I believe no fossil remains have yet reached this country. The following letter on the subject has been kindly transmitted to me by Mr. Gerard Krefft, a gentleman to whom I am indebted for a beautiful drawing of the head, and an entire figure of the animal

sketched either from life or immediately after it was killed:—

"In reply to your inquiry about the Australian Native Dog, I beg to state that it is proved without a doubt, as far as my own judgment goes, that the Dingo is an original inhabitant of the Australian continent. There is now, at the Museum in Melbourne, a fossil skull, found with other animal remains in a cave at