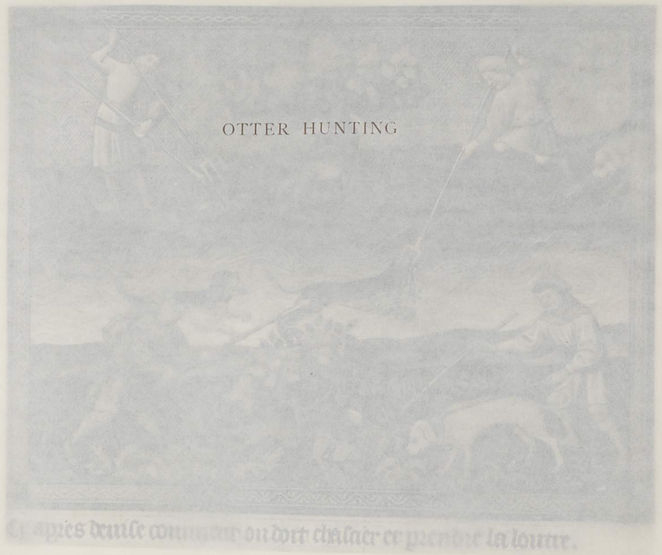
CAP. XI.—OF THE OTERE AND HIS NATURE

OTIRE is a comoun beest inow and þerfore me nedeþ nat to telle of his makynge she lyueth wiþ ffisshe and dwelleþ nye þe Ryuers and ny þe poondes and *stangkes*[1] and somtyme she fedeþ hur wiþ gras of þe medowes and abiden gladly vndir þe rootes of trees nye þe Ryuerse and goon in her fedyng as doþ anoþere beest to þe gras only in þe newe gras only in þe new[2] gras tyme and to þe fissh as I haue said. They swymmeþ in waters and in reuers and som tyme dyueþ vndir þe watir whan she wole and þerfore no fissh may eskape hure þat she ne it taketh but it be to greet. He dooþ greet harme namely in poondes and in stangkes for a couple of oters without moor shal wel destroy of fissh a poond or a greet stank, and þerfore men hunten hem. þei goon in her loue in tyme þat ferettis don and so þei þat hold ferettis in her houses may wel knowf the tyme þerof þei beren her whelpes as long as þe ferettis and som tyme more and some tyme las þei welpen in hooles vnder þe trees ny þe Ryuers men hunte at hym wiþ houndes by grete maistrie as I say here aftir[3] and also men take hem oþer while in Ryuers wiþ smale cordes as men do þe fox withe nettis and with oþer gynnes. She hathe euel bityng and venomes and of hure strength defendithe hure myghtely fro þe houndes. And whan she is take with nettis but men be þere anon she alto rendyth hem hem (*sic*) with her tethe and delyuereþ hure self out of hem, lengere wil I make no mencioun of hure ne of hure nature for þe huntyng at hure is þe best þat men may see of hure sauf only she haþ a foot as a goos for she haþ a litel skyn from þat oon cle to þat other and she haþ non hele, sauf þat she haþ a litel lompe vnder þe foot and men clepen þe steppes or þe marches of þe Otere as men clepe þe trace of þe hert, and his fumes tredeles or spraintes[4] þe otere dwelleþ but a litel in oo place for whan she gooþ soor affrayed[5] ben þe fisshe. Somtyme she shal swyme vpward and dounwarde sechyng þe fisshe a myle or ii but it be in a stanghe. *Theremenant of his nature I remitte to Milbourne*[6] *þe king otere hunte. As of al oþer vermyn I speke nat þat is to say of mar-*

CHAP. II.—THE OTTER AND HIS NATURE

AN otter is a common beast enough and therefore I need not tell of his making. She liveth on fish and dwells by rivers and by ponds and stanks.[1] And sometimes she feedeth on grass of the meadows and bides gladly under the roots of trees near the rivers and goes to her feeding as do other beasts to grass, but only in a new grass time, and to fish as I have said, she swimmeth in waters and rivers and sometimes diveth under the water when she will, and therefore no fish can escape her and that she cannot take unless it be too great a one. She doth great harm specially in ponds and in stanks, for a couple of otters without more shall destroy the fish of a great pond or great stank, and therefore men hunt them. They go in their love at the time when ferrets do, so they that keep ferrets in their houses may well know the time thereof, they bear their whelps as long as the ferrets and sometimes more and sometimes less. They whelp in holes under the trees near the rivers. Men hunt them with hounds by great mastery, as I shall say hereafter.[3] And also men take them at other times in rivers with small cords as men do the fox with nets and with other gins. She has an evil biting and venomous and with her strength defends herself mightily from the hounds. And when she is taken with nets unless men get to her at once she rendeth them with her teeth and delivers herself out of them. Longer will I not make mention of her or of her nature, for the hunting of her is the best that men may see of her, save only that she has the foot of a goose, for she has a little skin from one claw to another, and she has no heel save that she hath a little lump under the foot, and men speak of the steps or the marches of the otter as men speak of the trace of the hart, and his fumes tredeles or spraints.[4] The otter dwelleth but little in one place, for where she goeth the fish be sore afraid. Sometimes she will swim upwards and downwards seeking the fish a mile or two unless it be in a stank.

Of the remnant of his nature I refer to Milbourne[6] the king's otter hunter. As of all other vermin I speak not, that is to say of martens and pole cats for

[1] Stanks, *i.e.*, pools or ponds. See Appendix: Stanks.
[2] Clerical error. "Only in the new grass" is repeated twice.
[3] The author of "Master of Game" does not say anything more hereafter about the otter.
[4] See Appendix: Excrements.
[5] Frightened or scared.
[6] In the Shirley MS. the name is spelt Melbourne. In Priv. Seal 674/6456, Feb. 18, 1410, William Melbourne is valet of our otterhounds. See Appendix: Otter, Hunt Officials.