

remains evidently unchanged ; and, in like manner, we may suppose the general condition of the globe, immediately before and after the period when our species first began to exist, to have been the same, with the exception only of man's presence.

The modifications in the system of which man is the instrument, do not, perhaps, constitute so great a deviation from previous analogy as we usually imagine ; we often, for example, form an exaggerated estimate of the extent of our power in extirpating some of the inferior animals, and causing others to multiply ; a power which is circumscribed within certain limits, and which, in all likelihood, is by no means exclusively exerted by our species. \* The growth of human population cannot take place without diminishing the numbers, or causing the entire destruction, of many animals. The larger beasts of prey in particular give way before us ; but other quadrupeds of smaller size, and innumerable birds, insects, and plants, which are inimical to our interests, increase in spite of us, some attacking our food, others our raiment and persons, and others interfering with our agricultural and horticultural labours. We behold the rich harvest which we have raised by the sweat of our brow, devoured by myriads of insects, and are often as incapable of arresting their depredations, as of staying the shock of an earthquake, or the course of a stream of lava.

A great philosopher has observed, that we can command nature only by obeying her laws ; and this principle is true even in regard to the astonishing changes which are superinduced in the qualities of certain animals and plants by domestication and garden culture. I shall point out in the third book that we can only effect such surprising alterations by assisting the development of certain instincts, or by availing ourselves of that mysterious law of their organization, by which individual peculiarities are transmissible from one generation to another. †

It is probable from these and many other considerations, that as we enlarge our knowledge of the system, we shall become more and more convinced, that the alterations caused by the interference of man deviate far less from the analogy of those effected by other animals than is usually supposed. ‡ We are often misled, when we institute such comparisons, by our knowledge of the wide distinction between the instincts of animals and the reasoning power of man ; and we are apt hastily to infer, that the effects of a rational and irrational species, considered merely as *physical agents*, will differ almost as much as the faculties by which their actions are directed.

It is not, however, intended that a real departure from the antecedent course of physical events cannot be traced in the introduction of man. If that latitude of action which enables the brutes to accommodate themselves in some measure to accidental circumstances, could be imagined to have been at any former period so great, that

\* See ch. 42.

† See ch. 36.

‡ See ch. 38, 39, 40, 42.