

sumption of food during periods of inaction. The same kind of admiration is strongly excited when we contemplate the powers of insect life, in the creation of which the Author of Nature has been so prodigal. A scanty number of minute individuals, to be detected only by careful research, are ready in a few days, weeks, or months, to give birth to myriads, which may repress any degree of monopoly in another species, or remove nuisances, such as dead carcasses, which might taint the air. But no sooner has the destroying commission been executed than the gigantic power becomes dormant—each of the mighty host soon reaches the term of its transient existence, and the season arrives when the whole species passes naturally into the egg, and thence into the larva and pupa state. In this defenceless condition it may be destroyed either by the elements, or by the augmentation of some of its numerous foes which may prey upon it in the early stages of its transformation; or it often happens that in the following year the season proves unfavourable to the hatching of the eggs or the development of the pupæ.

Thus the swarming myriads depart which may have covered the vegetation like the aphides, or darkened the air like locusts. In almost every season there are some species which in this manner put forth their strength, and then, like Milton's spirits, which thronged the spacious hall, "reduce to smallest forms their shapes immense"—

————— So thick the airy crowd  
Swarm'd and were straiten'd; till, the signal given,  
Behold a wonder! they but now who seem'd  
In bigness to surpass earth's giant sons,  
Now less than smallest dwarfs.

A few examples will illustrate the mode in which this force operates. It is well known that, among the countless species of the insect creation, some feed on animal, others on vegetable matter; and, upon considering a catalogue of eight thousand British Insects and Arachnidæ, Mr. Kirby found that these two divisions were nearly a counterpoise to each other, the carnivorous being somewhat preponderant. There are also distinct species, some appointed to consume living, others dead or putrid animal and vegetable substances. One female, of *Musca carnaria*, will give birth to twenty thousand young; and the larvæ of many flesh-flies devour so much food in twenty-four hours, and grow so quickly, as to increase their weight two hundred-fold! In five days after being hatched they arrive at their full growth and size, so that there was ground, says Kirby, for the assertion of Linnæus, that three flies of *M. vomitoria* could devour a dead horse as quickly as a lion\*; and another Swedish naturalist remarks, that so great are the powers of propagation of a single species even of the smallest insects, that each can commit, when required, more ravages than the elephant. †

Next to locusts, the aphides, perhaps, exert the greatest power over the vegetable world, and, like them, are sometimes so numerous

\* Kirby and Spence, vol. i. p. 250.

† Wilcke, Amœn. Acad. c. ii.