

only among them, but among the beasts of prey: certain species, perhaps, which had the weakest footing in the island may thus be annihilated.

We have seen how many distinct geographical provinces there are of aquatic and terrestrial species, and how great are the powers of migration conferred on different classes, whereby the inhabitants of one region may be enabled from time to time to invade another, and do actually so migrate and diffuse themselves over new countries. Now, although our knowledge of the history of the animate creation dates from so recent a period, that we can scarcely trace the advance or decline of any animal or plant, except in those cases where the influence of man has intervened; yet we can easily conceive what must happen when some new colony of wild animals or plants enters a region for the first time, and succeeds in establishing itself.

Supposed effects of the first entrance of the polar bear into Iceland. — Let us consider how great are the devastations committed at certain periods by the Greenland bears, when they are drifted to the shores of Iceland in considerable numbers on the ice. These periodical invasions are formidable even to man; so that when the bears arrive, the inhabitants collect together, and go in pursuit of them with fire-arms — each native who slays one being rewarded by the king of Denmark. The Danes of old, when they landed in their marauding expeditions upon our coast, hardly excited more alarm, nor did our islanders muster more promptly for the defence of their lives and property against the common enemy, than the modern Icelanders against these formidable brutes. It often happens, says Henderson, that the natives are pursued by the bear when he has been long at sea, and when his natural ferocity has been heightened by the keenness of hunger; if unarmed, it is frequently by stratagem only that they make their escape.*

Let us cast our thoughts back to the period when the first polar bears reached Iceland, before it was colonized by the Norwegians in 874; we may imagine the breaking up of an immense barrier of ice, like that which, in 1816 and the following year, disappeared from the east coast of Greenland, which it had surrounded for four centuries. By the aid of such means of transportation a great number of these quadrupeds might effect a landing at the same time, and the havoc which they would make among the species previously settled in the island would be terrific. The deer, foxes, seals, and even birds, on which these animals sometimes prey, would be soon thinned down.

But this would be a part only, and probably an insignificant portion, of the aggregate amount of change brought about by the new invader. The plants on which the deer fed being less consumed in consequence of the lessened numbers of that herbivorous species would soon supply more food to several insects, and probably to

* Journal of a Residence in Iceland, p. 276.