

SECOND VIEW OF NATURE.

INDIVIDUALS, whatever their kind or number may be, are of no value in the universe. Species are the only existences in Nature; for they are equally ancient and permanent with herself. To form a distinct idea of this subject, we shall not consider species as a collection or succession of similar individuals, but as a whole, independent of number and of time, always active and always the same; a whole, which has been reckoned one in the works of creation, and, therefore, constitutes only a unit in Nature. Of all these units, the human species holds the first rank: The others, from the elephant to the mite, from the cedar to the hyssop, are in the second and third orders. Though different in form, in substance, and even in life, each retains its proper place, subsists by itself, defends itself against the others, and the whole together represent animated Nature, who supports, and will continue to support herself in the same manner as we now behold her. A day, a year, an age, or any given portion of time, constitutes no part of her duration. Time itself relates only to individuals, to beings whose existence is fugitive. But the existence of species is constant; their permanence produces duration, and their differences

rences give rise to number. Let us consider species in this light; let us give to each an equal right to the indulgence and support of Nature. To her they are all equally dear; for, on each of them, she has bestowed the means of subsisting, and of lasting as long as herself.

Let us now suppose the species to change places with the individual. We have already seen what Nature is in relation to man; let us next consider in what light she would appear to a being who represented the whole human species. In the spring, the verdure of the fields revives, the buds and flowers expand, the bees recover from their torpid state, the swallow returns to our land, the nightingale chants the song of love, the ram frisks, the bull lows with desire, and all animated creatures are eager to join and to multiply their species; we have then no idea but that of reproduction and the increase of life. On the other hand, when the dark season of cold and frost approaches, animated beings become indifferent, and even avoid each other; the inhabitants of the air desert our climates, those of the water lose their freedom under vaults of ice; many animals grow torpid, and dig retreats for themselves in the ground; the earth hardens, the plants wither; and the trees, deprived of their foliage, bend under loads of snow and hoar-frost; every object excites the idea of languor and annihilation. But these ideas of renovation and destruction, or rather

these images of death and life, however great and general they appear, are only individual and particular. Man, as an individual, thinks in this manner: But the being whom we have substituted for the species, thinks and judges in a manner more sublime and general. In this alternate destruction and renovation, in all these successive vicissitudes, he perceives only permanence and duration. The season of one year is to him the same as that of the preceding, the same as that of millions of ages. The thousandth animal, in the order of generation, is the same to him as the first. In fine, if man lived for ever, if all the beings which surround him existed in the same manner as they do at present, the idea of time would vanish, and the individual would become the species.

Why should we not consider Nature for a few moments, under this new aspect? In truth, man comes into this world enveloped in darkness. The mind being equally naked with the body, he is born without knowledge and without defence. He brings nothing with him but passive qualities. He is obliged to receive the impressions of objects on his organs; the light shines long on his eyes before he can recognise it. At first, he receives every thing from Nature, and makes her no returns. But, as soon as his senses have acquired strength and activity, as soon as he can compare his sensations, he reflects upon the universe; he forms ideas, and

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retains, extends, and combines them. Man, especially when he has been instructed, is not a simple individual: He represents, in a great measure, the whole human species: He begins with receiving from his parents the knowledge which had been transmitted to them from their fathers: Thus, by means of the divine arts of writing and printing, the present age is, in some measure, identified with those that are past. This accumulation, in one man, of the experience of many centuries, extends the limits of his being to infinity. He is no more than a simple individual, born, like other animals, with the capacity of attending to present sensations alone: He is nearly the being we supposed to represent the whole species. He reads what is past, sees the present, and judges of the future; and, in the torrent of time, which carries off and absorbs all the individuals of the universe, he perceives that the species are permanent, and Nature invariable. The relations of objects being always the same, to him the order of time appears to be nothing. In his eyes, the laws of renovation only counterbalance those of permanence. A continual succession of similar beings is, in effect, equivalent only to the perpetual existence of one of these beings.

What purposes, then, are served by this vast train of generations, this immense profusion of germs, many thousands of which are abortive for one that succeeds? Does not this perpetual propagation

propagation of beings, which are incessantly destroyed and renewed, uniformly exhibit the same scene, and occupy neither more nor less of Nature? From whence proceed those alterations of life and death, those laws of growth and decay, all those individual vicissitudes, and all those reiterated representations of one and the same thing? They are derived from the very essence of Nature, and depend on the first establishment of the universal machine; the whole of which is fixed and stable; but each of its parts being capable of motion, the general movements of the celestial bodies have produced the particular motions of this terrestrial globe. The penetrating forces by which these immense bodies are animated, by which they act reciprocally upon each other at a distance, animate at the same time every particle of matter; and this mutual propensity of all the parts toward each other, is the first bond of beings, the principle of confidence and permanency in Nature, and the support of harmony in the universe. The great combinations give rise to the smaller relations: The motion of the earth on its own axis having divided the portions of duration into day and night, all its animated inhabitants have their times of light and of darkness, of waking and sleeping. The action of the senses, and the motions of the members, which constitute a great part of the animal economy, are related to this first combination. Would there be senses alive

to light in a world where perpetual darkness reigned?

The inclination of the axis of the earth producing, in its annual motion round the sun, considerable changes of heat and cold, which we call *seasons*, all vegetables have also, either totally or partially, their seasons of life and of death. The fall of the leaves and fruits, the withering of herbs, and the destruction of insects, depend entirely on this second combination. In climates where it does not take place, the life of vegetables is never suspended, and every insect completes its peculiar period of existence. Under the line, where the four seasons make but one, the earth is always covered with flowers, the trees are in perpetual verdure, and Nature enjoys a continual spring.

The particular constitution of animals and of plants is relative to the general temperature of the earth, and this temperature depends on the situation or distance of the earth from the sun. If removed to a greater distance, our animals and plants could neither live nor vegetate. The water, the sap, the blood, all the liquors, would lose their fluidity: At a smaller distance, they would vanish and dissipate in vapour. Ice and fire are the elements of death; temperate heat is the first germ of life.

The living particles diffused through organized bodies are related, both by their activity and number, to the particles of light, which strike
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and penetrate all matter with their heat. Wherever the rays of the sun can heat the earth, its surface is covered with verdure, and peopled with animals. Even ice itself, as soon as it dissolves into water, seems to be fecundated. This element is more fertile than that of the earth: From heat it receives motion and life. The sea produces, every season, more animals than the earth sustains: But it produces fewer vegetables. Hence all the animals which inhabit the ocean, by not having, like those on the land, a permanent stock of vegetable substances to support them, are under the necessity of feeding upon each other; and to this combination their immense multiplication is to be referred.

Every species having been originally created, the first individuals served as a model to their descendants. The body of each animal or vegetable is a mould, to which are assimilated indifferently the organic particles of all animals or vegetables which have been destroyed by death or consumed by time. The brute particles, which formed part of their composition, return to the common mass of inanimated matter. But the organic particles, whose duration is permanent, are resumed by organized bodies: They are first extracted from the earth by vegetables, then absorbed by animals which feed upon vegetables, and thus serve for the expansion, support, and growth of both. By circulating perpetually from body to body, they animate all
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organized beings. The stock of these living substances is always the same. They vary only in form, or in difference of appearance. In fertile ages, during the times of the greatest population, the whole surface of the earth seems to be covered with men, domestic animals, and useful plants. But, during the period of famine and depopulation, the ferocious animals, noxious insects, parasitical plants, and useless herbs, resume, in their turn, dominion over the earth. These changes, so sensible to man, are perfectly indifferent to Nature: The silk-worm, so precious to us, is to her only the caterpillar of the mulberry tree. Though this caterpillar, which ministers to our luxury, should disappear, though the plants which nourish our domestic animals should be devoured by other caterpillars, though others should threaten with destruction the substance of our corns before the harvest, in fine, though man and the larger animals should be starved by the inferior tribes, Nature would not be less full, nor less alive. She protects not one at the expense of another; she equally supports the whole. But, with regard to individuals, she knows not number, and views them only as successive images of the same impression, as fugitive shadows, of which the species is the substance.

There exists, therefore, in the earth, air, and waters, a determined quantity of organic matter which nothing can destroy, and, at the same time, a determined number of moulds capable

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of assimilating it; and these moulds are perpetually annihilated and renewed. This number of moulds, or individuals, though variable in every species, is, upon the whole, always the same, always proportioned to the quantity of living matter. If this matter were redundant, if it were not at all times equally occupied, and entirely absorbed by the moulds which already exist, it would form others, and produce new species. Being alive, it never remains without action; and its union with brute matter is sufficient to constitute organized bodies. It is to this great combination, or rather to this invariable proportion, that Nature owes her form and consistence.

As the laws of Nature, regarding the number, support, and equilibrium, of the species, are fixed and permanent, she would uniformly exhibit the same appearances, and, in all climates and times, would be absolutely and relatively the same, if her complexion did not vary almost infinitely in individual forms. The impression of each species is a figure, the principal features of which are engraven in characters which can never be effaced. But all the accessory shades and touches are greatly diversified; no individual has a perfect resemblance to another; no species exists without a number of varieties. In the human species, which bears the strongest marks of divinity, the impression varies from white to black, from small to great, &c. The

Laplander, the Patagonian, the Hottentot, the European, the American, and the Negro, though sprung from the same parents, have by no means the familiarity of brothers.

All species, therefore, are subject to individual differences: But the constant varieties, which are perpetuated through successive generations, belong not equally to every species. The more dignified the species, its figure is the more fixed, and admits of fewer varieties. The multiplication of animals being inversely proportional to their magnitude, and the possibility of differences being in the direct proportion to the numbers they produce, there must necessarily be more varieties among the small than the large animals, and, for the same reason, a greater number of species which make a near approach to each other. In large animals, the unity of the species is more fixed, and the distance which separates them is also more extended. How many varieties and neighbouring species accompany, follow, or precede the squirrel, the rat, and other small quadrupeds, while the majestic elephant walks alone, and without a peer, at the head of the whole!

The brute matter, of which the mass of the earth is composed, is a virgin or untouched substance, that has undergone no alterations. But the whole has been more than once put in motion, and disturbed by the hand of Nature. The globe of the earth has been penetrated by fire,

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and afterwards covered and disordered by water. The sand which fills the interior parts of the earth is a vitrified matter. The thick beds of clay which cover its surface, are only the same sand decomposed by the operation of the waters. Granite, free-stone, flint, and all the metals, are nothing but this same vitrified matter, the particles of which are united, condensed, or separated, according to the laws of their affinity. All these substances are perfectly inanimate: They exist, and will continue to exist, independent of animals and vegetables. But there are many other substances, which, though they appear to be equally inanimate, derive their origin from organized bodies: Marble, limestone, chalk, and marl, are composed of the spoils of shells, and of those small animals which, by transforming the water of the sea into stone, produce coral, and all the madrepores, the varieties of which are numberless, and the quantity almost immense. Pit-coal, turf, and other substances, also found in the superior strata of the earth, are nothing but the residue of vegetables more or less corrupted and consumed. In fine, there are other substances, though fewer in number, such as pumice-stones, sulphur, the scoriz of iron, asbestos, and lava, which have been thrown out by volcanoes, and produced by a second action of fire upon the original matters. To these three great combinations may be re-

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ferred all the relations of brute matter, and all the substances of the mineral kingdom.

The laws of affinity, by which the constituent particles of these different substances separate from each other, in order to unite among themselves, and form homogeneous masses, are the same with that general law by which the celestial bodies act upon one another. Their exertions are mutual, and proportioned to their masses and distances. Globules of water, of sand, or of metal, act upon each other in the same manner as the earth acts upon the moon: And, if these laws of affinity have hitherto been regarded as different from those of gravity, it must be ascribed to the confined views we have taken of the subject. Figure, which, in the celestial bodies, has almost no effect upon their mutual action, because the distance is immense, has great influence when the distance is very small. If the earth and moon, instead of a spherical figure, were both short cylinders, and equal throughout in their diameters, their reciprocal action would not be sensibly altered by this difference of figure, because the distance of all the parts of the moon from those of the earth would be very little changed. But, if these same globes were cylinders of great extent, and placed near each other, the law of their reciprocal action would appear to be very different; because the relative distances of their parts would be greatly varied. Hence, whenever figure becomes a principle in distance,

distance, the law seems to vary, though, in fact, it remains always the same.

From this principle, the human intellect may advance one step farther, and penetrate deeper into the operations of Nature. We are ignorant of the figure of the constituent particles of bodies. Water, air, earth, metals, and all homogeneous substances, are unquestionably composed of elementary particles, which are similar among themselves, but whose figure is unknown. Posterity, by the aid of calculation, may disclose this new field of knowledge, and ascertain, with considerable precision, the figure of the elements of bodies. They will take the principle we have established as the basis of their reasoning: *All matter is attracted in the inverse ratio of the square of the distance; and this law seems to admit of no variation in particular attractions, but what arises from the figure of the constituent particles of each substance; because this figure enters as an element or principle into the distance.* Hence, when they discover, by reiterated experiments, the law of attraction in any particular substance, they may find, by calculation, the figure of its constituent particles. To make this matter more clear, let us suppose, that, by placing mercury on a perfectly polished surface, we find, by experiment, that this fluid metal is always attracted in the inverse ratio of the cube of the distance, we must investigate, by the rules of false position, what figure gives this expression; and this

figure will be that of the constituent particles of mercury. If, from these experiments, it appeared that the attraction of mercury was in the inverse ratio of the square of the distance, it would be demonstrated that its constituent particles are spherical; because a sphere is the only figure which observes this law, and, at whatever distance globes are placed, the law of their attraction is always the same.

Newton conjectured, that chemical affinities, which are nothing but the particular attractions we have mentioned, were produced by laws similar to those of gravitation. But he seems not to have perceived, that all these particular laws were only simple modifications of the general law, and that they appeared to be different, only because, at very small distances, the figure of atoms which attract each other has a greater influence upon the expression of this law, than the mass of matter.

Upon this theory, however, the intimate knowledge of the composition of brute matter solely depends. The basis of all matter is the same; and the form of it would likewise be the same, if the figure of its constituent particles were perfectly similar. One homogeneous substance cannot differ from another, but in proportion to the difference of the figures of their primitive particles. A body, of which all the particles are spherical, ought to be one half specifically lighter than another whose particles

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are cubical; because the first, by touching each other only in points, leave intervals equal to the spaces they occupy, while the cubical particles unite without leaving the smallest void, and, consequently, form a matter one half heavier than the first. Though figures may be infinitely varied, they seem not to be so numerous in Nature as might be imagined; for she has fixed the limits of gravity and levity. Gold and air are the two extremes of density. All the figures admitted by Nature, therefore, are comprehended between these two terms; and all those which would have produced heavier or lighter substances have been rejected.

When I speak of figures employed by Nature, I mean not that they are necessarily, or even exactly, similar to those geometrical figures which exist in our imagination. We make laws by supposition, and we render them simple by abstraction. There are, perhaps, neither exact cubes, nor perfect spheres in the universe. But, as nothing exists without form, and as, according to the diversity of substances, the figures of the elements are different, some of them must necessarily approach to the sphere, the cube, and all the other regular figures which we have conceived. The precise, the absolute, the abstract, which so often present themselves to our minds, can have no real existence, because all objects are related, differ only by almost imperceptible shades, and are allied by proximation. In

the same manner, when I mention one substance as being entirely full, because it is composed of cubical particles, and another of being only half full, because its constituent particles are spherical, I speak only comparatively, and mean not that such substances really exist; for we know from experience, that, in transparent bodies, such as glass, which is both dense and heavy, the quantity of matter is very small in proportion to the extent of the intervals; and it might be demonstrated, that gold, which is the densest species of matter, contains more vacuities than substance.

The consideration of the powers of Nature is the object of rational mechanics; that of sensible mechanics is only a combination of particular powers, and is reduced to the art of constructing machines. Necessity and convenience have at all times insured the culture of this art. The ancients excelled in it as well as the moderns. But rational mechanics is a science invented in our days. All philosophers, from Aristotle to Descartes, have reasoned like the vulgar upon the nature of motion. They have uniformly mistaken the effect for the cause. They knew no force but that of impulsion, to which they attributed the effects of other forces, and referred to it all the phenomena of the universe. If the notion had been plausible, or even possible, this impulsion, which they regarded as the sole cause, must at least have been a general effect, which equally

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belonged to all matter, and which continually exerted itself in all places, and at all times. The opposite was daily demonstrated to them. Did they not perceive, that, in bodies at rest, this force had no existence; that, in projected bodies, it subsisted but a short time, and was soon destroyed by resistance; that, to renew it, a fresh impulse was necessary; and that, consequently, so far from being a general cause, it was only a particular effect, produced by more general effects?

Now, a general effect is what ought to be called a cause; for the real cause of this effect can never be known to us; because all our knowledge is derived from comparison; and an effect being supposed general, and belonging equally to all matter, we can compare it to nothing, and, of course, can know it only by the fact. Hence attraction, or gravity, being a general effect common to all matter, and demonstrated by the fact, it ought to be regarded as a cause, and to it should be referred all other particular causes, and even that of impulsion, since it is less general and less constant. The difficulty is to perceive how impulsion can be an effect of attraction. If we reflect on the communication of motion by impulse, we will be persuaded that it can only be transmitted from one body to another by elasticity, and that all the hypotheses concerning the communication

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of motion in hard bodies, are mere fancies, which have no existence in Nature. A body perfectly hard or perfectly elastic, is a creature of imagination. Neither the one nor the other really exist; because nothing exists absolutely or in extreme, and the idea of perfection is only the absolute or extreme of a thing.

If there was no elasticity in matter, there could be no impulsive force. When we throw a stone, the motion which it acquires is communicated to it by the elasticity of the arm. When a body in motion meets another at rest, how can we conceive that the one should communicate motion to the other in any other manner than by compressing the spring of the elastic particles it contains, which, by recovering itself immediately after compression, gives to the whole mass the same force that it received. We cannot comprehend how a perfectly hard body should admit this force, or receive motion. Besides, the inquiry is useless, as no such body exists. All bodies, on the contrary, are endowed with elasticity. Experiments on electricity prove that its force is elastic, and belongs to matter in general. Though, therefore, no other elasticity existed in the interior parts of bodies but that of this electrical matter, it would be sufficient for the communication of motion; and, consequently, to this great spring, as a general effect, the particular cause of impulsion must be ascribed.

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Now, if we reflect upon the mechanism of elasticity, we shall find, that its force depends on that of attraction. To obtain a clearer perception of this subject, let us suppose the most simple spring, a solid angle of iron, or of any other hard substance: What will be the result of compressing it? We oblige the parts adjacent to the top of the angle to bend, or to separate a little from each other; and, the moment the pressure is removed, they approach each other as formerly. Their adhesion, from which the cohesion of bodies results, is well known to be an effect of their mutual attraction. When the spring is pressed, this adhesion is not destroyed; because, though the particles are separated, they are not so far removed from each other as to put them beyond their sphere of mutual attraction. Of course, as soon as the pressure ceases, this force is again exerted, the separated parts approach, and their spring is restored. If, on the other hand, by a pressure too violent, they are removed beyond the sphere of their attraction, the spring breaks; because the compressing force has been greater than that of cohesion, or than that of the mutual attraction which keeps the particles together. Hence elasticity can exert itself only in proportion to the cohesion of the particles of matter, that is, in proportion as they are united by the force of their mutual attraction; and, consequently, elasticity in general, which alone can produce impulsion, and the impulsion itself,

are owing to the force of attraction, and depend on it as particular effects on a general effect.

However clear these ideas appear to me, I expect not to see them adopted. The people never reason but from their sensations; and natural philosophers judge from their prejudices. All these must, therefore, be set aside, and very few will remain to form a proper judgment. But this is the fate of Truth; she is content with a few admirers, and is always lost in a crowd: Though at all times august and majestic, she is often obscured by fantastic notions, or totally effaced by brilliant chimeras. This, however, is the manner in which I view and understand Nature; and perhaps she is still more simple: A single force is the cause of the phenomena exhibited by brute matter; and this force, when combined with that of heat, produces those living particles on which all the effects of organized bodies depend.

The GIRAFFE, or CAMELOPARD*.

THE camelopard is one of the most beautiful and largest quadrupeds: Without being noxious, he is at the same time extremely useless. The enormous disproportion of his legs, of which those before are double the length of those behind, prevents him from exercising his powers. His body has no stability; he has a staggering gait; and his movements are slow and constrained. When at liberty, he cannot escape from his enemies, nor can he serve man in

* The camelopard has short straight horns, covered with hair, truncated at the end, and tufted with hair. In the forehead, there is a tubercle about two inches high, resembling a third horn. The height, from the crown of the head to the soles of the fore-feet, is seventeen feet, and that from the top of the rump to the bottom of the hind-feet, only nine: The length of the body is seven, and from the withers to the loins, only six feet. The fore-legs are not longer than the hind-legs; but the shoulders are of a vast length, which give the disproportionate height between the fore and hind parts. The horns are six inches long. The head is like that of a stag. The neck is slender and elegant, and on the upper side there is a short mane. The ears are large, and the tail long, with strong hairs at the end. The colour of the whole animal is a dirty white, marked with large, broad, rusty spots; *Priestley's Synopsis of Quad.* p. 20.

Giraffe, a word derived from *Giraffa*, *Siraphab*, *Zarabab*, the name of this animal in the Arabian language, which has been