

But seeing the great improvement within recent times in our cattle and sheep, and especially in our pigs; seeing the wonderful increase in weight in our poultry of all kinds during the last few years; he would be a bold man who would assert that perfection has been reached. It has often been said that Eclipse never was, and never will be, beaten in speed by any other horse; but on making inquiries I find that the best judges believe that our present race-horses are fleetier.⁶⁵ The attempt to raise a new variety of wheat more productive than the many old kinds, might have been thought until lately quite hopeless; but this has been effected by Major Hallett, by careful selection. With respect to almost all our animals and plants, those who are best qualified to judge do not believe that the extreme point of perfection has yet been reached even in the characters which have already been carried to a high standard. For instance, the short-faced tumbler-pigeon has been greatly modified; nevertheless, according to Mr. Eaton,⁶⁶ "the field is still as open for fresh competitors as it was one hundred years ago." Over and over again it has been said that perfection had been attained with our flowers, but a higher standard has soon been reached. Hardly any fruit has been more improved than the strawberry, yet a great authority remarks,⁶⁷ "it must not be concealed that we are far from the extreme limits at which we may arrive."

No doubt there is a limit beyond which the organisation cannot be modified compatibly with health or life. The extreme degree of fleetness, for instance, of which a terrestrial animal is capable, may have been acquired by our present race-horses; but as Mr. Wallace has well remarked,⁶⁸ the question that interests us, "is not whether indefinite and unlimited change in any or all directions is possible, but whether such differences as do occur in nature could have been produced by the accumulation of varieties by selection." And in the case of our domestic productions, there can be no

⁶⁵ See also Stonehenge, 'British Rural Sports,' edition of 1871, p. 384.

⁶⁶ 'A Treatise on the Almond Tumbler,' p. i.

⁶⁷ M. J. de Jonghe, in 'Gard.

Chron.,' 1858, p. 173.

⁶⁸ 'Contributions to the Theory of Natural Selection,' 2nd edit., 1871, p. 292.