

less predatory and voracious than those of the larger quadrupeds; for the spiders on the land, and the crustacea in the sea are but representatives of the lions and tigers of the forest, displaying an equally ferocious and insatiable rapacity. Other families, again, generally of still smaller size, are designed for a parasitic existence, their organs being fitted only for imbibing the blood or juices of other animals.

No sooner is the signal given, on the death of any large animal, than multitudes of every class hasten to the spot, eager to partake of the repast which nature has prepared. If the carcass be not rapidly devoured by rapacious birds, or carnivorous quadrupeds, it never fails to be soon attacked by swarms of insects, which speedily consume its softer textures, leaving only the bones.* These, again, are the favourite repast of the Hyena, whose powerful jaws are peculiarly formed for grinding them into powder, and whose stomach can extract from them an abundant portion of nutriment. No less speedy is the work of demolition among the inhabitants of the waters, were innumerable fishes, crustacea, annelida, and mollusca, are on the watch to devour all dead animal matter which may come within their reach. The consumption of decayed vegetables is not quite so speedily accomplished; yet these, also, afford an ample store of nourishment to hosts of minuter beings, less conspicuous, perhaps, but performing a no less important part in the economy of the creation. It may be observed that most of the insects which feed on decomposing materials, whether animal or vegetable, consume a much larger quantity than

* So strongly was Linnæus impressed with the immensity of the scale on which these works of demolition by insects are carried on in nature, that he used to maintain that the carcass of a dead horse would not be devoured with the same celerity by a lion, as it would by three flesh flies (*Musca vomitoria*) and their immediate progeny: for it is known that one female fly will give birth to at least 20,000 young larvæ, each of which will, in the course of a day, devour so much food, and grow so rapidly, as to acquire an increase of two hundred times its weight: and a few days are sufficient for the production of a third generation.