

CHAPTER XXXVI.

WHETHER SPECIES HAVE A REAL EXISTENCE IN NATURE —
continued.

Limits of the variability of species — Species susceptible of modification may be altered greatly in a short time, and in a few generations; after which they remain stationary — The animals now subject to man had originally an aptitude to domesticity — Acquired peculiarities which become hereditary have a close connexion with the habits or instincts of the species in a wild state — Some qualities in certain animals have been conferred with a view of their relation to man — Wild elephant domesticated in a few years, but its faculties incapable of farther development.

Variability of a species compared to that of an individual. — I ENDEAVOURED, in the last chapter, to show, that a belief in the reality of species is not inconsistent with the idea of a considerable degree of variability in the specific character. This opinion, indeed, is little more than an extension of the idea which we must entertain of the identity of an individual, throughout the changes which it is capable of undergoing.

If a quadruped, inhabiting a cold northern latitude, and covered with a warm coat of hair or wool, be transported to a southern climate, it will often, in the course of a few years, shed a considerable portion of its coat, which it gradually recovers on being again restored to its native country. Even there the same changes are, perhaps, superinduced to a certain extent by the return of winter and summer. We know that the Alpine hare (*Lepus variabilis*, Pal.) and the ermine, or stoat (*Mustela erminea*, Linn.) become white during winter, and again obtain their full colour during the warmer season; that the plumage of the ptarmigan undergoes a like metamorphosis in colour and quantity, and that the change is equally temporary. We are aware that, if we reclaim some wild animal, and modify its habits and instincts by domestication, it may, if it escapes, become in a few years nearly as wild and untractable as ever; and if the same individual be again retaken, it may be reduced to its former tame state. A plant is sown in a prepared soil, in order that the petals of its flowers may multiply, and their colour be heightened or changed: if we then withhold our care, the flowers of this same species become again single. In these, and innumerable other instances, we must suppose that the species was produced with a certain number of qualities; and, in the case of animals, with a variety of instincts, some of which may or may not be developed according to circumstances, or which, after having been called forth, may again become latent when the exciting causes are removed.

Now, the formation of races seems the necessary consequence of such a capability in species to vary, if it be a general law that the offspring should very closely resemble the parent. But, before we