

Cuvier says of the Plesiosaurus, "that it presents the most monstrous assemblage of characteristics that has been met with among the races of the ancient world." This expression should not be understood in a literal sense; there are no monsters in Nature; in no living creature are the laws of organisation ever positively infringed; and it is more in accordance with the general perfection of creation to see in an organisation so special, in a structure which differs so notably from that of the animals of our own days, the simple development of a type, and sometimes also the introduction of beings, and successive changes in their structure. We shall see, in examining the curious series of animals of the ancient world, that the organisation and physiological functions go on improving unceasingly, and that each of the extinct genera which preceded the appearance of man, present, for each organ, modifications which always tend towards greater perfection. The fins of the fishes of Devonian seas become the paddles of the Ichthyosauri and of the Plesiosauri; these, in their turn, become the membranous foot of the Pterodactyle, and, finally, the wing of the bird. Afterwards comes the articulated fore-foot of the terrestrial mammalia, which, after attaining remarkable perfection in the hand of the ape, becomes, finally, the arm and hand of man, an instrument of wonderful delicacy and power, belonging to an enlightened being gifted with the divine attribute of reason! Let us, then, dismiss any idea of monstrosity with regard to these antediluvian animals; let us learn, on the contrary, to recognise, with admiration, the divine proofs of design which they display, and in their organisation to see only the handiwork of the Creator.

Another strange inhabitant of the ancient world, the *Pterodactylus* (from *πτερόν*, a wing, and *δάκτυλος*, a finger), discovered in 1828, made Cuvier pronounce it to be incontestably the most extraordinary of all the extinct animals which had come under his consideration; and such as, if we saw them restored to life, would appear most strange and dissimilar to anything that now exists. In size and general form, and in the disposition and character of its wings, this fossil genus, according to Cuvier, somewhat resembled our modern bats and vampyres, but had its beak elongated like the bill of a woodcock, and armed with teeth like the snout of a crocodile; its vertebræ, ribs, pelvis, legs, and feet resembled those of a lizard; its three anterior fingers terminated in long hooked claws like that on the fore-finger of the bat; and over its body was a covering, neither composed of feathers as in the bird, nor of hair as in the bat, but probably a naked skin; in short, it was a monster resembling nothing that has ever been heard of upon earth, except the dragons of romance and heraldry. More-