

In this deviation from a general law we find a very beneficial accommodation to the wants of man : for had it been the property of water to become more and more condensed as it approached the point of congelation, one of the consequences would have been that lakes and rivers, instead of becoming gradually frozen from the surface towards their bed, would almost in a moment have become one solid mass of ice : and the evil that would be produced by such an effect may be conjectured, by considering that whenever a long protracted and severe frost has thickened to an unusual extent the superincumbent stratum of ice, the difficulty of breaking through this stratum, in order to arrive at the water beneath, is proportionally increased, and sometimes becomes practically insuperable.

It will be interesting to trace the steps by which this providential law of nature is manifested : and the whole process is easily rendered intelligible to any one who will simply bear in mind these three points, namely, that the average temperature of lakes and rivers is during the heat of summer more or less above the 40th degree of Fahrenheit's scale ; that water itself at about the 40th degree is of its greatest density ; and that under all common circumstances it freezes, or becomes solid, at the 32d degree. If we suppose then the temperature of a pool or lake to equal at any given moment the 50th de-