

into the air. When ready to take flight, it stands, as it were, on tip-toe, supporting itself by its tail. Its fore-legs are then applied so closely to the breast as to be invisible, whence the ancients called it *Dipus*, or biped;* having taken their spring they alight upon their fore-feet, and, elevating themselves again, they are off so rapidly, that they seem to be always, so to speak, upon the wing. They use their long tail to support themselves when they recover from their leaps, giving it the curvature of the letter S reversed, thus, *∞*. When their tail has been shortened at different lengths, it has been found that their leap is diminished in the same proportion; and when it was wholly cut off they could not leap at all.

We see, in one order of the *Birds*,† the *Waders*, a remarkable disproportion of the legs to those of the rest of the class; they look as if they walked upon stilts, whence the name of the order, so disproportionally long are their legs to those of the generality of birds. I have before noticed the use of these legs to them in flying,‡ but the principal object of this structure is to enable them to prey upon aquatic animals, fishes, worms, and the like. Whoever is in the habit of frequenting estuaries and other waters, will generally see some of these birds, as herons and bitterns, standing in them, where shallow, and ever and anon dipping their heads, and then, emerging, swallow their capture. The design of this structure must be obvious to every eye, namely, to qualify these birds of prey to assist in keeping within due limits the population of the various

* Herodot. Melpom. § 192. Ed. Reizii.

† It is to be observed in general, with respect to the Class of *Birds*, that the conspicuous part of their legs is not the *shank*, which is chiefly covered by muscle and feathers, but is formed of the tarsal and metatarsal bones united into one.

‡ See above, p. 122.