

Were we to limit our enquiry to the bones of the arm and hand in man, no doubt we should soon discover their provisions for easy, varied, and powerful action ; and conclude that nothing could be more perfectly suited to their purposes. But we must extend our views to comprehend a great deal more,—a greater design.

By a skeleton, is understood the system of bones, which being internal, gives the characteristic form to the animal, and receives the action of the exterior muscles. This system belongs, however, only to one part of the animal kingdom, that higher division,—the animalia vertebrata,* which includes the whole chain of beings, from man to fishes.

The function the most essential to life is respiration ; and the mode in which this is performed, that is to say, the manner in which the decarbonization of the blood is effected through its exposure to the atmosphere, produces a remarkable change in the whole frame-work of the animal body. Man, the mammalia, birds, reptiles, and fishes have much of the mechanism of respiration in common ; and there is a resemblance through them all, in the texture of the bones, in the action of the muscles, and in the arrangement of the nerves. They all possess the vertebral column or spine ; and the

* See the Classification at the end of the volume,—also the first of the ADDITIONAL ILLUSTRATIONS.