

the bosom of the primeval ocean, or stalked with gigantic strides across antediluvian plains, and whose scattered remains bear fearful testimony of the convulsions of a former world, certain it is that, at the present day, the whales of the northern seas are the most colossal of the living animal structures existing on the surface of this planet.

A cursory survey of the organization of the tribes belonging to this semi-amphibious family, will impress us with the resemblance they bear to fishes; for they present the same oval outline of the body, the same compact form of the trunk, which is united with the head without an intervening neck; the same fin-like shape of the external instruments of motion, and the same enormous expansion and prolongation of the tail, which is here also, as in fishes, the chief agent in progression. With all this agreement in external characters, their internal economy is conducted upon a totally different plan; for although constantly inhabiting the ocean, their vital organs are so constructed as to admit of their breathing only the air of the atmosphere, and the consequences which flow from this difference are of great importance. The necessity of aerial respiration compels them to rise, at short intervals, to the surface of the water; and this air, with which they fill their lungs in respiration, gives their bodies the buoyant force which is required to facilitate their ascent, and supersedes the necessity of a swimming bladder, an organ which is so useful to fishes.

With the intent of diminishing still farther their specific gravity, nature has provided that a large quantity of oily fluid shall be collected under the skin, a provision which answers, also, the purpose of preserving the vital warmth of the body. A great accumulation of this lighter substance is formed on the upper part of the head, apparently with a view to facilitate the elevation to the surface of the spiracle, or orifice of the nostrils, which is placed there.\*

Another peculiarity of conformation, in which the cetacea

\* The substance called *Spermaceti* is lodged in cells, formed of a cartilaginous substance, situated on the upper part of the head of the *Cachalot*.