

water, of the utmost importance in the economy of nature, and which, perhaps, almost more than any thing else, indicates design ; since, like the composition of the atmosphere, this property of water constitutes an exception, as it were, to a general law, expressly directed to a particular object. We have mentioned that it is a general law, that all bodies, in every state of aggregation, expand by heat and contract by cold : now water forms a marked exception to this law. Like other bodies, water continues to contract on the removal of heat, till its temperature comes down to within a certain distance ( $7^{\circ}$  or  $8^{\circ}$ ) from its freezing point. At this distance, water begins again to expand, and the expansion continues till it becomes ice ; at which moment of freezing, a sudden and considerable expansion takes place. Hence, the specific gravity of ice, is decidedly less than that of water ; and the solid necessarily swims on the surface of the fluid. The importance of this anomalous property of water, is so great, that it is doubtful whether the present order of nature could have existed without it ; even although every thing else in the world had remained the same. For instance, were it not for the comparative lightness of ice ; this solid, instead of beginning to be formed at the *surface* of water, would have begun to be formed at the *bottom* ; as the colder water, from its greater specific gravity, would