

erties no less curious than important in relation to the affections of light in its passage through such substances. Thus, in every point of view, additional importance became added to this character; and the study of the crystalline forms of bodies in general assumed the form of a separate and independent branch of science, of which the geometrical forms of the mineral world constituted only a particular case. Mineralogy, however, as a branch of natural history, remains still distinct either from optics or crystallography. The mineralogist is content, and thinks he has performed his task, if not as a natural historian, at least as a classifier and arranger, if he only gives such a characteristic description of a mineral as shall effectually distinguish it from every other, and shall enable any one who may encounter such a body in any part of the world to impose on it its name, assign it a place in his system, and turn to his books for a further description of all that the chemist, the optician, the lapidary, or the artist, may require to know. Still this is no easy matter: the laborious researches of the most eminent mineralogists can hardly yet be said to have effectually accomplished it; and its difficulty may be appreciated by the small number of simple minerals, or minerals of perfectly definite and well-marked characters, which have been hitherto made out. Nor can this indeed be wondered at, when we consider that by far the greater portion of the rocks and stones which compose the external crust of the globe consists of nothing more than the accumulated *detritus* of older rocks, in which the fragments and powder of an infinite variety of substances are mingled together, in all sorts of varying proportions, and in such a way as to defy separation. Many of these rocks, however, so compounded, occur with sufficient frequency and uniformity of character to have acquired names and to have been usefully applied; indeed, in the latter respect, minerals of this description far surpass all the others. As objects of natural history, therefore, they are well worthy of attention, however difficult it may be to assign them a place in any artificial arrangement.