

various parts of our island, with the drawings, sections, and map in the present volume, will, I trust, facilitate the study of geology, and prove particularly acceptable to those who are entering on these enquiries: at the same time, I flatter myself with the hope, that the original information this work contains, respecting the geology and natural history of England, will secure it a candid reception.—*Edit. of 1813.*

Several have been deterred from the study of geology by the supposed difficulty of learning its attendant science, mineralogy; but an acquaintance with the nice distinctions made by many modern mineralogists, is not necessary to gain a knowledge of the structure and arrangement of the great masses of matter that environ the globe, nor of the substances of which they are composed. He who would gain a useful knowledge of geology, would do well to provide himself with specimens of common rocks, and the simple minerals of which they are composed, and examine their external characters and physical properties, comparing them with the descriptions given by the best mineralogical writers. Fortunately these substances are not very numerous, and he may (without present inconvenience) omit the more rare crystallizations and varieties, so much valued by cabinet philosophers; for here, as in many other instances, the received value is in an inverse ratio of the utility. The pedantic nomenclature, and frivolous distinctions recently introduced into mineralogy, may gratify vanity with a parade of knowledge; but they are unconnected with objects of real utility, or with any enlarged views of nature.

On hearing the various names which mineralogists give to the same substance, and observing the avidity with which each new name is seized, as if it conveyed a hidden charm, the uninitiated might suppose that he was “journeying in the land of Shinar,” and had fallen in company with a set of masons fresh from the tower of Babel, each one calling the same stone by a different name, and glorying in his absurdity. Such frivolities disgust men of sense with the study of an important and interesting science; a science that has for its immediate object the structure of the planet which the Author of nature has destined for our abode, and an acquaintance with the situation of its various mineral productions, subservient to the wants or enjoyments of man in civilized society.

The advice of Cicero to the cultivators of moral science, applies with peculiar force to the geologists and mineralogists of the present day. “In these natural and laudable pursuits, two errors are particularly to be avoided: the first not to confound those things of which we are ignorant with those we know, or rashly to yield our assent without due investigation; the second, not to bestow too much labour and study on obscure, intricate, and unprofitable subjects.”—“*In hoc genere et naturali et honesto duo vitia vitanda sunt: unum, ne incognita pro cognitis habeamus, hisque temere assentiamur (quod vitium effugere qui volet, adhibebit ad considerandas res et tempus et diligentiam.) Alterum est vitium, quod quidam nimis magnum studium multamque operam in res obscuras atque difficiles conferunt, easdemque non necessarias.*”—*Cic. Offic. i. 6.*