

result of the observations of above thirty years, but we find in it no facts in support of his theory additional to those already mentioned, for the greater portion of it is occupied with many details on the medical uses and other applications of coral which have no relation to the question at issue. It seems at first to have excited considerable attention among the members of the Royal Society, but Peyssonnel's endeavours were doomed ever to be unfortunate, for whatever favour his theory was likely to receive here was nipt in the bud by the opposition of Dr Parsons, a naturalist of considerable eminence, and an active member of the society. The analysis of Peyssonnel's treatise was read in May 1752, and in June of the same year, Dr Parsons read his answer,* which savours much of the supercilious dogmatism of a sceptical philosophy. He does not pretend that he had tested the doctrine of Peyssonnel by any experiments or observations, nor does he question his veracity, but he chose to consider the animals observed by Peyssonnel in the coral and madrepores as merely accidental settlers which had nothing to do with their growth,—occupants of mansions prepared for them by more active entities,—there being no “seeming power, proportion, and stability” in the polypes to render them capable of performing such works as they were thought to have done. “And indeed it would seem to me,” says the learned doctor, “much more difficult to conceive, that so fine an arrangement of parts, such masses as these bodies consist of, and such regular ramifications in some, and such well-contrived organs to serve for vegetation in others, should be the operations of little, poor, helpless, jelly-like animals, rather than the work of more sure vegetation, which carries on the growth of the tallest and largest trees with the same natural ease and influence, as the minutest plant.”

The mineral theory also found at this period its latest advocate. Henry Baker, during his numerous microscopical enquiries, had become familiar with the beautiful and regular “vegetations” which many salts and earths assume in their crystal-

* A Letter from James Parsons, M. D. F. R. S. to the Rev. Mr Birch, Secr. R. S. concerning the Formation of Corals, Corallines, &c. For an account of Dr Parson's writings see Hall. Bib. Bot. ii. 340; and there is a short biographical notice of him in Phil. Trans. abridg. viii. 692.