

order to harmonise the facts of Nature with what was supposed to be the divine truth revealed in the Bible. A favourite mode of escape from the difficulty consisted in denying that the fossils ever formed part of living creatures. The old notion, first suggested by Theophrastus, was revived, to the effect that there exists within the earth a plastic force by which imitative forms are produced, resembling those of true organisms, but in reality as inorganic in origin as the plant-like forms made by frost on window-panes. The fossils were regarded as simply mineral concretions, and were described as *lusus naturae*, mere freaks of Nature, *lapides sui generis*, *lapides figurati*, "figured" or "formed" stones.¹ Some writers, unable to detect the action of any such formative agency in the earth itself, supposed that the occult influence came from the stars.

There were many observers, however, who could not gainsay the evidence of their own senses, and who recognised that either we must believe that the minute and perfectly-preserved organic structures in the fossils could only have belonged to once living plants and animals, like those which possess similar structures at the present day, or that the Creator had filled the rocks of the earth's crust with

¹ The earliest account of these objects accompanied with illustrative plates was that of the distinguished Conrad Gesner (1516-1565) *De rerum fossilium, lapidum et gemmarum figuris*, 1565. He had no very clear idea as to the origin of these objects, some of which he thought might be remains of plants or animals, while others he regarded as more probably produced by some inorganic process, as minerals and ores are formed.