

author when he laid it before the Academy, with the benevolent intention doubtless of shielding him from the scorn and ridicule that might possibly be the lot of one who had ventured to contradict the observations of an Italian Count, and to oppose the established belief; * and he immediately afterwards read, before the same academicians, an essay of his own, in which he opposed the theory of Peyssonnel with numerous objections, and attempted to explain the growth of coral in accordance to the admitted principles of vegetable physiology.†

The memoir in which Peyssonnel originally proposed his doctrine does not appear to have been published: the only account I have seen of it is contained in the essay of Reaumur just alluded to. He maintained that what Marsigli had described as the blossoms of coral, were true animals or insects analogous to the Actiniæ or sea-anemonies; that the coral was secreted in a fluid form by the inhabitant Actiniæ, and became afterwards fixed, hard, and changed into stone; and that all other stony sea-plants, and even sponges, are the work of different insects, particular to each species of these marine bodies, which labour uniformly according to their nature, and as the Supreme Being has ordered and determined. Reaumur remarks, that these opinions were not entirely the offspring of fancy: it would have been more candid and just had he said they were simply the convictions of a practical naturalist, who had long and patiently studied the productions in question, in their native sites on the coasts of France and of Barbary. Peyssonnel had seen the polypes of coral and of the madrepores; he recognized their resemblance to the naked animal flowers; he had witnessed their motions,—the extension of their tentacula, and the contraction and opening of the oral aperture; he ascertained, that, unlike flowers, they were to be found the same at all seasons;

* “ L'estime que j'ai pour M. Peyssonnel me fit même éviter de la nommer pour l'auteur d'un sentiment qui ne pouvoit manquer de paroître trop hasardé.”
—Reaumur.

† Observations sur la formation du corail, et des autres productions appellées Plantes pierreuses. Par M. de Reaumur.—“ Il prend pour une Plante l'écorce grossiere et sensible du corail, tres-distincte de ce que nous appellons corail, et de plus une autre écorce beaucoup plus fine, et que les yeux ne distinguent point de la vraie substance coralline qu'elle revêt; et tout le reste du corail, presque toute la substance coralline n'est qu'une pierre sans organisation.”—Hist. de l'Acad. Roy. des Sc. 1727. p. 51. and more particularly his own memoir in the same vol. p. 380.