


Pierre Jean François Turpin (1775-1840)

Observations sur la famille des cactées...

Thanks to **Andreas Wessner** who lent the original book.

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Turpin was essentially a botanical illustrator and secondarily a botanist. Together with Pierre Antoine Poiteau, he participated in more than 300 descriptions of plants, but only one description was authored by Turpin alone, and it is devoted to the famous "*Echinocactus eyriesii*" (Now *Echinopsis*). The original article was published in two parts in "Annales de l'Institut de Fromont" in 1830 (pages 64-84 and 132-164). The present file has been made from a reprint 76 pages long including the 3 beautiful plates.

Turpin made very accurate observations and illustrations, but the scientific interpretations and concepts deduced from his observations are often debatable — not to say nonsensical — even when considered in the context of the epoch¹⁾. This is illustrated by lengthy discussions and harsh criticisms of other authors up to page 52. On the other hand, the description of "*Echinocactus eyriesii*" (Pages 58-62) and the explanations of the plates (pages 65-69) are of great value. Turpin also commented on the brownian motion of pollen grains suspended in water and observed under the microscope (page 31 and 59), that had been discovered by the Scottish botanist Robert Brown three years earlier, in 1827.

Spelling may be surprising to the reader: it is typical of the beginning of the XIXth century with terms that are reminiscent of the XVIIIth century.

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¹⁾

Many of Turpin's concepts illustrate the "epistemological obstacles" described by G. Bachelard in 1934 in his book "La formation de l'esprit scientifique". In this respect, Turpin's considerations on *osmosis* (Footnote 1, page 16), on the law of "*extension vitale et rayonnante*" (Footnote 1, page 17), and on *stomata* (Footnote 2, page 49) are illustrative. The unscientific approach culminates in some

philosophical and theological considerations in pages 36-41.

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