

HUMBOLDT'S LETTERS.

I.

HUMBOLDT TO VARNHAGEN.

Berlin, 25th September, 1827.

ALLOW me, my dear friend, to offer you the best copy of my Paper* I have left. The last lines will make you more indulgent towards the rest.

Tuesday.

A. v. HUMBOLDT.

II.

HUMBOLDT TO VARNHAGEN.

Berlin, 1st November, 1827.

You once said something to encourage me in my attempts at giving a vivid and true delineation of Nature (*i.e.*, one in strictest accordance with the results of observation). That your words have left an agreeable impression on my mind, you may perceive by the accompanying slight expression of my gratitude.† I have almost entirely remodelled the “Explanations,”

* “On the principal Causes of the Variation of the Temperature of the Earth’s Surface.”

† A copy of “Aspects of Nature” (*Ansichten der Natur*). In the Third Edition, *The Rhodian Genius*, vol. ii., pp. 297—308.—Tr.

and added the “Rhodian Genius,” which Schiller appeared to fancy.

With kindest regards, yours,
 A. HUMBOLDT.

Strange that Koreff* has never sent me a line to acknowledge all we have been doing for him here.

III.

HUMBOLDT TO VARNHAGEN.

Berlin, 21st November, 1827.

Wednesday night.

As I rely more on your good nature and my own notes—which I followed strictly—than on the report of it taken down by my audience, I herewith send you, my esteemed friend, the whole of the fifth Lecture, together with to-day’s recapitulation of it. You certainly will find no anti-philosophical tendency in it. Make any use of the papers you like—only *no copying for the press*—and be so good as to send them back by Saturday. That the notes were intended merely for my own use, you will perceive from the absence of order in their arrangement. The desire, however, of acting candidly sets me above any anxiety the whisper of vanity can create in me.

A. HUMBOLDT.

These papers (the Lectures) were to have been shown to Professor Hegel, in consequence of a report that had reached him, that Humboldt had allowed expressions hostile to philosophy to creep into them.

* The well-known physician at Paris, one of Rahel’s correspondents. —Tr.

IV.

HUMBOLDT TO VARNHAGEN.

Berlin, 15th April, 1828.

Might I disturb you to-day for a few moments, between a quarter past two and three, to ask for advice in a literary matter. My book is to be called "Entwurf einer Physischen Weltbeschreibung" ("Outlines of a Physical Description of the World"). I wished upon the title to have indicated the special occasion of the *Lectures*, and at the same time to have insinuated that I was giving more than the Lectures contained, and matter of another kind. "From Recollections of Lectures in the years 1827 and 1828, by Al. v. Humboldt," has, I understand, been found absurdly pretentious. I give it up with all my heart; but "Souvenirs d'un Cours de Physique du Monde," "Souvenirs d'un Voyage en Perse," appear to me unobjectionable. How am I to manage the title—"Outlines of a Phys. D., by A. v. H." ("re-written on the occasion of Lectures," or, "partly re-written from Lectures")? All these have a clumsy look. Adverbs are out of place in title-pages. How would it be if I were to add in small print, "part of this work *was* the subject of Lectures, in the years 1827 and 1828?" That's long, and then the verb! "On occasion," is perhaps better. I trust to your ingenuity. I am sure *you* will help me out of this maze.

Yours sincerely, attached and obedient,

A. HUMBOLDT.

Note by Varnhagen.—It was I myself, who had, at the table of Prince Augustus, criticised the first title he mentions; Humboldt had heard of it through Beuth.

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V.

HUMBOLDT TO VARNHAGEN.

Berlin, 3rd April, 1829.

I shall call, that I may thank you in person; that I may enjoy for some few moments the pleasure of your return, and congratulate you on the favourable impression your new official activity* has produced everywhere; and that in the present unfortunate state of my family affairs, I may entreat *pardon* from your highly gifted wife, whose friendship is so dear to me. The King never allows a book to be presented to him,—not even by Prince Wittgenstein. It must take the ordinary course. I will, however, recommend it† very, very strongly to Albrecht.‡ I am done up, and am off in a week.

Friday.

A. HT.

VI.

HUMBOLDT TO VARNHAGEN.

Berlin, 26th April, 1830.

This moment returned from Potsdam, I find your valued letters and delightful present. “Zinzendorf”§ will be a source of great pleasure to me. The book displays as peculiar a character as Lavater or Cardan. The new pietistic fever which *began* (p. 22) to

* Varnhagen was at this time sent as Envoy Extraordinary to Kassel, having been absent from the political arena since 1819, in consequence of the great offence taken by the Court of Berlin at the liberal tendencies displayed by him during his diplomatic position at the Court of Baden from 1816.—TR.

† One of Ranke’s works.

‡ Secretary to Altenstein, Minister of State for Educational and Ecclesiastical Affairs; formerly Cabinet Councillor under Baron Stein.—TR.

§ A biographical memoir, by Varnhagen, of Count Zinzendorf, the founder of the famous Moravian settlement of Herrnhut.—TR.

rage at Halle has made me smile. Your conclusion of the work is full of dignity and grace. I am delighted to hear that you are kind enough to wish to keep my “*Cri de Pétersbourg*,” a parody delivered before the Court—a hasty two nights’ work, an attempt at flattery without servility—at talking of things as they should be. As you, and my dear old friend your gifted wife, take an interest in all my good fortune, I must tell you that the King is sending me to the Emperor,* during the Session of the Diet. I shall probably travel with the Crown Prince, who is to fetch the Empress to the rendezvous at Fischbach.†

Yours,

A. Ht.

Let us hope Zinzendorf’s letters to the Saviour were more legible than this scrawl!

VII.

HUMBOLDT TO VARNHAGEN.

Berlin, 9th July, 1830.

I trust you, and your excellent and accomplished wife, will allow me on the eve of my departure, to offer you my warmest thanks for your new and highly acceptable present.‡ I was not personally acquainted with the man whose peculiarities you so thoughtfully develope. He was one of those who owe their distinction to their individuality, and attain to greater consequence by their actions than through their writings. Such a character excites my wonder as a curiosity—a

* Nicholas of Russia. The Russian Diet is meant.—Tr.

† A country seat of the King of Prussia, in Silesia.—Tr.

‡ “Memoirs of John Benjamin Erhard, Philosopher and Physician.” By K. A. Varnhagen von Ense. Stuttgart and Tübingen, Cotta. 1830.

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man who fancies that his recollections extend to the first year of his life (the Margravine's estimate was different: *J'étais un enfant très précoce; à deux ans je savais parler, à trois ans je marchais!*), — has, like Cardan, a Familiar in a black cloak,* — soberly makes love to old maids, only to convert them to virtue and literature,—and who looks upon the fate of German professors under German princes as more tragical than that of the Greeks. The “Church Gazette” † will not number him among believers; and the Schimmelmanns, ‡ my friend, will not give you much thanks for a book which recalls the Saturnalia of a sentimental Danish-Holstein mob. I am delighted beyond measure that you are going to take Hardenberg§ in hand—a difficult, but grateful, task, if you can only discriminate between the various epochs, and party spirit will, for once, be quiet. Even in Hegel's case it seems at last, to my great joy, to be silenced in the Academy.

Most gratefully yours,

A. HUMBOLDT.

Friday.

We find the following entry in Varnhagen's Diary, under the above date:—“After the Revolution of July, Alexander von Humboldt said

* Erhard was under the impression, as related in the work of Varnhagen, that he was attended and guarded by a supernatural being who always appeared to him wearing a black cloak or cape. Jerome Cardan, the distinguished physician and astrologer, entertained a similar opinion, as has been also the case with many celebrated persons in ancient and modern times, from Socrates to our own day.—Tr.

† The “Church Gazette” is the ultra-Lutheran paper, edited by Dr. Hengstenberg.—Tr.

‡ The noble family of the Schimmelmanns, one of whom was a Minister of State, were great friends of Humboldt and of the Varnhagen family.—Tr.

§ Hardenberg, Chancellor of State from 1810 to 1822. The memoir alluded to in the text seems never to have been published.—Tr.

to Gans,* who entertained extremely sanguine hopes with reference to the new Government: 'Believe me, my dear friend, my wishes coincide with your own; but I have very feeble hopes. I have watched the change of dynasties in Paris for the last forty years. Each has fallen from its own incapacity. Fresh promises are always ready to take the place of their predecessors; but they never are fulfilled, and the same ruinous course is entered on anew. I have known, and, indeed, in some instances, been intimate with most of the men of the day. Among them were some of distinguished talent and the best intentions, but they did not last. Sometimes they were no better than their predecessors, and often turned out even greater rogues. No Government has as yet kept faith with the people; none has looked on its own interests as of subordinate importance to the public good. Until that happens no power will be permanently established in France. The nation has always been deceived, and now will be deceived again. Then again, too, will it punish these frauds and tricks, and for that it is already ripe and strong.'"

VIII.

VARNHAGEN TO HUMBOLDT.

Berlin, 23rd January, 1833.

Of course it was me your Excellency lately met in the full blaze of a noonday sun. Unfortunately I recognised you too late, as you also were too late in recognising me. Fain would I have hurried after you, but a pace rapid enough to have overtaken you would have been unsuitable in my present state. I wanted at the time to have mentioned to your Excellency a circumstance connected with Baron Bülow,† in London.

* Edward Gans born 1798, died 1839; Professor of Law at the University of Berlin, and representative of the Hegelian School of Philosophy. He enjoyed a great reputation for conversational power.—Tr.

† Baron Bülow was the son-in-law of Wilhelm von Humboldt, and Prussian Minister in London from 1827 to 1841. He is called here *daring* by Varnhagen, because, contrary to his instructions, he cultivated the friendship of the Whigs, and especially of Palmerston; the danger alluded to was his impending recall, and replacement by Bunsen.—Tr.

*B †

The news was fresh at the time, from a perfectly reliable source, and probably new even to you. It was an expression of the King's to the effect that the danger in which that daring ambassador was involved might be considered as blown over. Since then your Excellency has had the news from all sides, and my story is out of date.

At last we Prussians have got a general popular representation, or rather we have had it this long while, only we did not know it. My Lord Bishop Eylert* has opened our eyes and spoken the great word first—a second Mirabeau that, in lucidity of thought and boldness of expression. I can fancy not only the “Rittersaal,” but the whole Schloss, trembling as those mighty words thundered in the Assembly,—“The representation of the whole nation, of all estates and interests is—the “Ordensfest” (Chapter Anniversary!)† I bow with reverence and admiration before this colossal audacity this new, unheard-of combination, whereby the miserable Institutions which hitherto have passed current as the representative Institutions of Europe, whether as Parliaments, Chambers, States-General, Cortes and the like, were hurled back again into their nothingness. I have heard the orator only through the dumb mouth of the “State Gazette.” But your Excellency was doubtless present, and you surely pity me, and say as of old was said when a speech of Demosthenes was read, “Oh, if you had only heard the man deliver it!” To have witnessed the approving smile, the gracious satisfaction, and the cheerful glances of the as-

* Rulemann Friedrich Eylert, an evangelical bishop and author of a “Life of Friedrich Wilhelm III.”—Tr.

† The Ordensfest was the anniversary meeting of the Chapters of the Orders of the Black and Red Eagle.—Tr.

tounded audience must still further have heightened the effect.

Oh, our Protestant parsons! They are speeding on a goodly road, and bid fair to yield in nothing to their Catholic brethren, even in the days when priestcraft was fullblown! A canting black-coat, such as this, makes us the laughing-stock of Europe. Constitution or no Constitution, granted or denied, does not for the moment trouble me, but that the fellow should try to palm off this "Ordensfest" upon us as a substitute for it,—is a piece of impudence that deserves to be rewarded with the madhouse or the gaol. And yet there's not a song, a street-ballad, or a caricature to lash such unseemliness! All is still!

And now, as it is time for bed, I will lay me down, wishing pleasant dreams to you and to myself.

With the deepest respect, &c., &c., &c.

V.

(Compare A. v. Humboldt's Note to Rahel of 1st Feb. 1833.)

IX.

HUMBOLDT TO RAHEL.

Berlin, 1st February, 1833.

That I answer you thus early, dear madam, bodes no good. In this country, if anything is to come to maturity, it must last for fourteen months. There is then hope for it. The letter, which I beg of you not to leave in your friend's hands, will tell you all. At first, all was kind and interested attention, both when I spoke and when I wrote; but this morning the very charming drawings were returned. The word that is underlined* might leave me still some hope, but I

* Underlined in the letter to which allusion is made.—Tr.

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prefer deceiving myself to deceiving others, and the decision of Beuth's* character, with whom alone in this matter the decision rests, forbids all hope. That I have advocated most actively the views *you* entertain needs no proof. That ought to be with you an historical *credo*. Oh, that you could give me a word of consolation as to my dear friend Varnhagen, the only polished pillar of the literature (in the nobler acceptation of the term) of our Country, "since," as says the bishop *with the drawn sword*, "the most *distinguished* talents, as such, deserve no distinction." There is nothing to wonder at in such a thing being said; but what is especially sad in it, appears to me to be the baseness of the society in which one lives here, and which is not even excited by such unworthy statements. Guard carefully, *both of you*, your better nature.

A. H.

X.

HUMBOLDT TO VARNHAGEN.

Berlin, 3rd February, 1833.

I am infinitely grateful and deeply affected by your beautiful letter. Grace and euphony of language ought always, as here, to accompany grace of manner. My brother, who was here for two days, but mostly at the beck and call of princes,—who have the privilege of asking without being denied,—commissions me to tell you, my dear friend, how sensible he is of your flattering offer; but he is so much engaged in printing his quarto, on the Asiatic languages akin to the San-

* Peter Christian Wilhelm von Bouth, Privy Councillor, Director of the Department of Commerce, Trade, and Public Buildings of the Ministry of Finance from 1821 to 1845.—Tr.