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William MacGillivray

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The Travels and Researches of Alexander von Humboldt

In 1832, William MacGillivray published this abridged version of the explorer and naturalist Alexander von Humboldt's Personal Narrative of Travels to the Equinoctial Regions of the New Continent During the Years 1799-1804, which had appeared in a seven-volume English translation between 1814 and 1829. MacGillivray's edition, intended for the general public, also includes Humboldt's accounts of his explorations of the Ural Mountains and Caspian Sea. Humboldt became a major figure in physical geography as a result of his arduous five-year trip to explore Central and South America. This book offers a brief biographical sketch of the scientist and covers his exciting journeys from the Island of Tenerife across the Atlantic Ocean to Caracas, and up the Orinoco River by canoe. Humboldt fights mosquitoes in dense rain forests and climbs Andean peaks in Peru without mountain gear, taking detailed notes at every stage.

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*Being a Condensed Narrative of his Journeys
in the Equinoctial Regions of America, and in
Asiatic Russia; Together with Analyses of his
More Important Investigations*

WILLIAM MACGILLIVRAY



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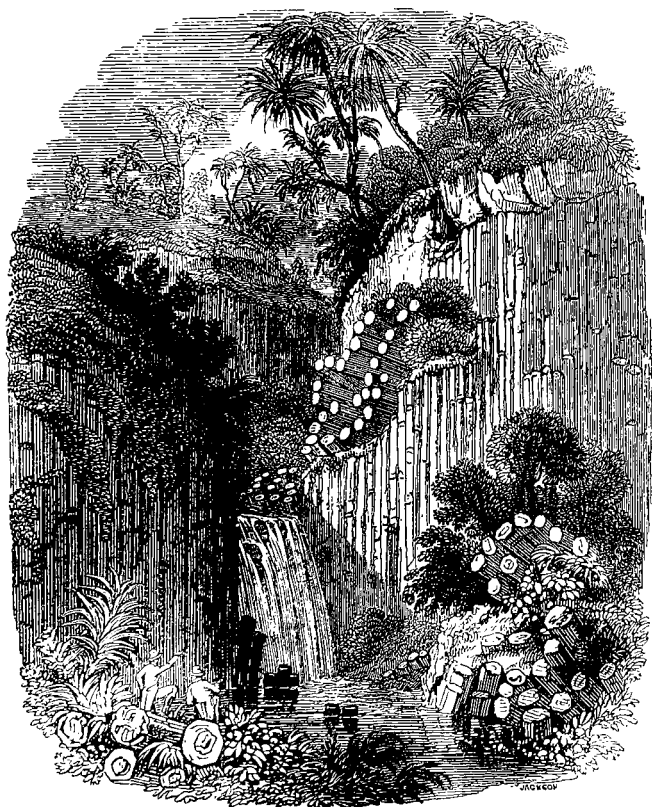
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THE
TRAVELS AND RESEARCHES
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ALEXANDER VON HUMBOLDT:

BEING A CONDENSED
NARRATIVE OF HIS JOURNEYS
IN THE
EQUINOCTIAL REGIONS OF AMERICA,
AND IN
ASIATIC RUSSIA;
TOGETHER WITH
ANALYSES OF HIS MORE IMPORTANT
INVESTIGATIONS.

BY W. MACGILLIVRAY, A. M.,

Conservator of the Museums of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh, Member of
the Natural History Societies of Edinburgh and Philadelphia, &c.

WITH A PORTRAIT OF HUMBOLDT BY HORSBURGH, A MAP OF THE ORINOCO
BY BRUCE, AND FIVE ENGRAVINGS BY JACKSON.

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PREFACE.

THE celebrity which Baron Humboldt enjoys, and which he has earned by a life of laborious investigation and perilous enterprise, renders his name familiar to every person whose attention has been drawn to political statistics or natural philosophy. In the estimation of the learned no author of the present day occupies a higher place among those who have enlarged the boundaries of human knowledge. To every one accordingly whose aim is the general cultivation of the mental faculties, his works are recommended by the splendid pictures of scenery which they contain, the diversified information which they afford respecting objects of universal interest, and the graceful attractions with which he has succeeded in investing the majesty of science.

These considerations have induced the Publishers to offer a condensed account of his Travels and Researches, such as, without excluding subjects even of laboured investigation, might yet chiefly embrace those which are best suited to the purposes of the general reader. The public taste has of late years gradually inclined towards objects of useful knowledge,—works of imagination have in a great mea-

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sure given place to those occupied with descriptions of nature, physical or moral,—and the phenomena of the material world now afford entertainment to many who in former times would have sought for it at a different source. Romantic incidents, perilous adventures, the struggles of conflicting armies, and vivid delineations of national manners and individual character, naturally excite a lively interest in every bosom, whatever may be the age or sex ; but, surely, the great facts of creative power and wisdom, as exhibited in regions of the globe of which they have no personal knowledge, are not less calculated to fix the attention of all reflecting minds. The magnificent vegetation of the tropical regions, displaying forests of gigantic trees, interspersed with the varied foliage of innumerable shrubs, and adorned with festoons of climbing and odoriferous plants ; the elevated table-lands of the Andes, crowned by volcanic cones, whose summits shoot high into the region of perennial snow ; the earthquakes that have desolated populous and fertile countries ; the vast expanse of the Atlantic Ocean, with its circling currents ; and the varied aspect of the heavens in those distant lands,—are subjects suited to the taste of every individual who is capable of contemplating the wonderful machinery of the universe.

It is unnecessary here to present an analysis of the labours of the illustrious philosopher whose footsteps are traced in this volume. Suffice it to observe, that some notices respecting his early life introduce

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the reader to an acquaintance with his character and motives, as the adventurous traveller, who, crossing the Atlantic, traversed the ridges and plains of Venezuela, ascended the Orinoco to its junction with the Amazon, sailed down the former river to the capital of Guiana, and after examining the Island of Cuba mounted by the valley of the Magdalena to the elevated platforms of the Andes, explored the majestic solitudes of the great cordilleras of Quito, navigated the margin of the Pacific Ocean, and wandered over the extensive and interesting provinces of New Spain, whence he made his way back by the United States to Europe. The publication of the important results of this journey was not completed when he undertook another to Asiatic Russia and the confines of China, from which he has but lately returned.

From the various works which he has given to the world have been derived the chief materials of this narrative ; and, when additional particulars were wanted, application was made to M. de Humboldt himself, who kindly pointed out the sources whence the desired information might be obtained. The life of a man of letters, he justly observed, ought to be sought for in his books ; and for this reason little has been said respecting his occupations during the intervals of repose which have succeeded his perilous journeys.

It is only necessary further to apprise the reader, that the several measurements, the indications of the

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thermometer, and the value of articles of industry or commerce, which in the original volumes are expressed according to French, Spanish, and Russian usage, have been reduced to English equivalents.

Finally, the Publishers, confident that this abridged account of the travels of Humboldt will prove beneficial in diffusing a knowledge of the researches of that eminent naturalist, and in leading to the study of those phenomena which present themselves daily to the eye, send it forth with a hope that its reception will be as favourable and extensive as that bestowed upon its predecessors.

EDINBURGH, *October* 1832.

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