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Humboldt : 1800

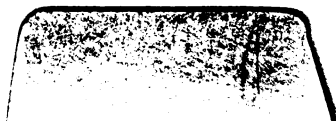
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THE

TRUE CHARACTER OF HUMBOLDT.

ORATION,

DELIVERED AT THE GERMAN HUMBOLDT FESTIVAL IN BOSTON.

BY

KARL HEINZEN.

PUBLISHED BY

THE ASSOCIATION FOR THE PROPAGATION OF RADICAL PRINCIPLES.

ADDRESS:

H. LIEBE, LOCK-BOX 93, INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA.

1869.

Price, 20 Cents.

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WILLIAM N. SEAVER

Sept 2. 1936

"Truth is its own object, but it is of value only for humanity's sake."
HUMBOLDT.

One name only is pronounced to-day—as we may well say—in all parts of the globe. It is the name of a German, who was at home throughout the world, and whom the whole world recognized as its own. Who and what was the mighty man, who, even after his death, can command to such an extent the minds and hearts of mankind more than any wearers of crowns has ever done? He was no king, and yet a ruler; he was no warrior, and yet a conqueror; he was not the founder of a religious creed, and yet a "saviour"; he was not the leader of a revolution, and yet a liberator. He was destitute of all those means, accessories, qualities and distinctions, which are, as a rule, best fitted and most

ERRATA.

- Page 1, line 6, for 'wearers of crowns' read wearer of crowns.
Page 5, line 1, for 'beings' read being.
Page 7, line 18, for 'phenomena be' read phenomena must be.
Page 10, line 2, for 'externally' read eternally.
Page 11, line 22, for 'interpretation forged' read interpretation was forged.

manifesting in this Humboldt-Festival. THIS IS THE GENERAL SIGNIFICANCE of the day, uttered consciously, or unconsciously, by all participants: it is the distinction of the thinking, investigating, knowing, grasping intellect, which before all other distinctions or positions, tends to raise one man above the common level in the eyes of his fellow-men. And if I omit, in connection with this intellect, to point at once to the corresponding sentiment, I do so

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merely because sentiment is a self-evident, simple effluence of the intellect, because volition is the consequence of thinking. To enlighten the mind, to enlarge the knowledge is equivalent to ennobling the sentiment and expanding the heart. Humboldt, the enemy of every species of slavery, he who declared all peoples equally entitled to liberty, embraced with his sentiment the whole of humanity, because with his intellect he embraced the whole of the world.

Four weeks ago pains were taken to remind us of the one-hundredth birthday of another man, who, in times not long by, kept the world busy more than any one else had ever done. The nations lay in the dust before him, and their rulers bowed their knees to him. All that the world could offer to him of might and of means was united in his hands. He created states, as he destroyed them, and gave away countries, as he robbed them— at his pleasure. No will dared to brave him, no intellect was capable of casting a shadow upon him, who was admired and glorified beyond all, whose fame extended to the poles. All that the world is capable of in admiration and in rendering homage, was tendered to him, and if, like Alexander, he had desired to be honored as a God, he would not have been wanting in devotees. And what has become of this mighty and glorified being? The recollection that he crept forth from his mother's womb one hundred years ago would only have occurred to some solitary invalid, who owed to him his crippled limbs, had not a successor, living upon his artificially inflated memory, forced his name, as a false emblem, upon an enslaved nation under the glare of bayonets. The world's conqueror, Napoleon, forgotten or antiquated, and the world's conqueror, Humboldt, honored and living in our memories; the sword condemned and the pen exalted—this fact points to a step forward, which we cannot value high enough or mark intelligibly enough. Indeed we still see the old world, even to-day, bristling with arms—but it is only a last forcible attempt by which the representatives of fading splendors are endeavoring to save themselves from the progressing spirit of humanity. These

old splendors and powers are crumbling inwardly ; the intellectual development has discarded them as a factor, and a demonstration like the Humboldt-Festival makes it patent to all despots, that, in the estimation of the world now-a-day, there are higher values in existence than those which are conferred by power and the halo of fictitious grandeur. May the time soon come, when the calendar of the Universal Republic shall mark no other holidays but those dedicated to the memory of the intellectual liberators and ornaments of humanity !

The fact that the Liberator, whose memory we celebrate to-day, is a German, may be a source of special gratification to us, although, or rather because, he has become at the same time a citizen of the World. The Germans are an emigrating nation, beyond all others, and their tongue resounds throughout all climes. Not only want and tyranny drive us forth, over the boundaries of our old home—but these are assisted by an inward impulse “after the expansion of our existence,” and it was this impulse also, which accompanied the spirit of Humboldt over land and seas. Thus he became the pioneer not only of science but also of the German nationality, for which he prepared new abodes in the remotest regions, and wherever fate may drive us to—nowhere shall we be unknown as the countrymen of Humboldt. But above all other countries, it was this continent which the great thinker united to Germany by an intellectual tie. Humboldt has justly been called the second discoverer of America. He was the scientific Columbus of the Western hemisphere. What now, if the German intellect in America should aim at becoming *the second discoverer of Humboldt* for the inhabitants of this country? It is pleasant to see and worthy of all credit, that in many places, Germans and Americans are celebrating this festival conjointly, ignoring all national prejudices and eschewing all narrowness of mind in the presence of the universal spirit of science and of cosmopolitan humanity. And yet certain concessions are necessary to enable the consummation of such a union, which, from our point of view, we cannot make. The Germans of Boston had

been invited to join their American fellow-citizens, who had already made the preparations for a Humboldt-Festival, and who have, but a few hours ago, paid their tribute of respect to the man we celebrate, upon this very spot. But we Germans could not consent to forego the honor of a separate festival, since such a festival alone will give us an opportunity to do full justice to the intellect and to the tendencies of the great man. We wish to see Humboldt before us in his true and full character, not only him, before whom even his adversaries will lift their hats. His universal knowledge; his untiring research; the great services rendered by him to science; the enlargement of the field of vision, for which all contemporaries are indebted to his grasping intellect and his penetrating perception; his noble character; his humane disposition—all these are sure of recognition and elucidation, wherever and by whomsoever his memory may be celebrated. Less certain however—and at some of these festivities openly ignored—will be the recognition and establishment of those liberal premises, from which Humboldt started in the exposition of his researches in the domain of natural philosophy, or of that grand final result, to which he was led by them. The enlargement of science is but one phase of the merit due to him; the other phase has to deal with those consequences which proceed from his scientific point of view, those consequences which determine the position assigned to man in nature, as well as the intellectual and moral world in which he moves. No one denies that Humboldt has taught us to know and to survey nature, as far as the means at the command of his times would allow; but full justice will be meted out to him by those only, who will show that he saved the honor, as we might say, and the independence of nature, by divesting her of all extramundane and supernatural influences and accessories, and by repelling from her side all the distorting conceptions of metaphysics and beliefs.

The great dogma and truth which Humboldt lays down as the philosopher and describer of nature is, in other words, this: Nature, the world, the universe, or whatever else we may

call the sum total of all that which has beings is a material unity, which has existed and evolved itself from eternity, in and through itself, in accordance with eternal inward laws, and which rejects everything in the shape of a separate spirit or ruler. There are those who will be horrified by the discovery that Humboldt, who never carried on an open war against belief and religion, and who was even on the best terms with the most prominent advocates of religious views, was an atheist and a materialist. Their horror, if unfeigned, will only prove that they did not understand the great man, or that they did not meditate sufficiently upon that which he professed. As far as we know, Humboldt has never, directly or openly, *avowed* himself to be an atheist or a materialist; he has been content with *showing* himself as such in his writings. In deference to the associations and surroundings amongst which he had grown up, and amongst which he remained until his end, he submitted to outward restraints which did not harmonize with his convictions; as semi-diplomat, an indulgent, humane man of the world, he was even weak enough to make apparent concessions to the belief of others, by the use of phrases which could be misconstrued by means of a forced interpretation. The maxim which he adhered to in social intercourse, and which he himself has laid down in a letter to Varnhagen, was this: "Truth is due to those only in life whom we esteem highly." Varnhagen was one of those whom he esteemed, and in a private letter, addressed to him as early as the year 1837, he remarks that he had "sometimes discussed, if not quarrelled," with his brother Wilhelm, whom in all other respects he valued very highly, because Wilhelm had, in one of his essays, arrived at the result "that God rules the world, and history is nothing but the endeavor to trace these eternal, mysterious decrees." "This result," says Humboldt, "is certainly analogous to the primeval feelings of mankind, as they have found utterance in all languages. My brother's essay is the commentary (developing, interpreting, praising) of this

undefined feeling. It is in this very same way that the physiologist creates for himself so-called vital powers for the purpose of explaining organic phenomena, since his knowledge of the physical powers at work in that which we call unorganic nature, does not suffice to explain this living play of organisms. But does this prove the existence of vital powers?"

This is the manner in which Humboldt expresses himself confidentially, and only confidentially.

But in spite of all the restraints imposed by prudence, he has never upon any important occasion avowed himself a professor of the views of a discarded faith, and whenever he appears as the man of thought and of science, i.e., in his writings, he has invariably, although mildly and sometimes indirectly, transmitted his true convictions to posterity in words and in teachings which can not be misinterpreted.

Humboldt was favored and honored in all the "high" and "highest" circles of society; he was even the intimate friend and counselor of an over-pious king. How great must have been the temptation to him to follow the example of so many other great learned men, and to deny his own views, or to renounce them entirely! But he has not, like others, consented to *degrade natural science, by making her a hand-maiden of theology*; he has not even hidden his convictions from the god-believing king, whom, in his thankfulness, he saved from oblivion by dedicating to him his "Cosmos," that book in which he does not even once use the word "God" as expressive of his own belief, and it will be part of the task which we have set to ourselves for this festival to condense these convictions, as expressed in the book just mentioned, into as short a space as possible. Is it conceivable and possible for a writer, who undertakes a description of nature, believes in a god, and dedicates his description to a king who shares his belief, not to make use of so opportune an occasion for the purpose of picturing the world as the work of a divine creator and ruler, and to deduce from it his omnipotence and wisdom? But even if,

for some reason or other, he should avoid this impossible task, is it conceivable or possible that he should lay down a principle and advocate views in unmistakable words which are the direct contrary? No, it is not possible. Let him who would gainsay this impossibility listen to Humboldt's own words, and let him endeavor to give to them a theological meaning:—

“The main impulse (in the search after knowledge) was given to me,” says Humboldt, in his preface to his “Cosmos,” “by the desire to comprehend the phenomena of all corporeal things in their connection, and *nature as a unity, moved and animated by internal laws.*” In the same way he speaks in another place of the “*existence of nature according to internal and eternal laws.*”

Now, then, how can that which has its own internal and eternal law, and which exists according to this law, have a law-giver and manager, existing independently and outside of it? It must, on the contrary, be subject to an internal necessity, according to which all phenomena be the natural consequences of existing causes, and all that which enters into being must be the consequence of that which is. Humboldt defines this law, which at the same time self-evidently does away with all teleology, in the plainest and exactest terms when he says: “The description and the history of the world stand upon the same empirical ground; but the thoughtful treatment of both, a judicious arrangement of the phenomena of nature and of historical events, *imbue us deeply with the belief in an old internal necessity, which rules all the actions of intellectual and material powers in circles, which are eternally renewing themselves, and which are only periodically expanding or contracting. They lead (and this necessity is the essence of nature, it is nature herself in both the spheres of her existence, the material and the intellectual) to perspicuity and simplicity of views, to the finding of laws which are the final aim of earnest research in empirical science.*”

Here, then, he does not only displace the ruling wisdom and omnipotence of the faithful by the authority of necessity, but

he also declares that the discovery of the laws, according to which this necessity rules, is the final aim of earnest research in empirical science. This empirical science, however, is to him the only real and standard science upon which it devolves to bring to the test all abstract thinking, and all philosophy. All that which does not harmonize with it he declares, indirectly, to be nothing but chimera. "The sum total of all empirical knowledge," he says, "and a philosophy of nature, developed in all its parts, cannot be antagonistic to each other, if the philosophy of nature, according to its promise, is the rational conception of all the *real* phenomena of the universe," i.e., if it does not lose itself in metaphysical and spiritualistic phantasies.

But if now the objection should be raised here that he recognizes an intellectual power in nature by distinguishing between a material and an intellectual sphere of nature,—a distinction which is evidently made for the sake of clearness alone,—he repels this objection unequivocally in other passages, for instance, when he says: "The intellectual is not antagonistic to nature, but it is contained therein." It is also self-evident that this "intellectual sphere" cannot be conceived of as separable and independent, as, according to the passage previously quoted, it is subject to the general necessity which is "the essence of nature."

Again, as little as Humboldt recognizes a law-giving and guiding power outside of and above nature, just as little does he admit a *creative* power which is said to have existed before nature. He even mocks at the faith in such a power by the following remark: "According to an ancient Indian myth, an elephant upholds the earth; he, again, to save him from falling, is supported by a gigantic tortoise. *What the tortoise rests upon* is a question which the faithful bramin is not permitted to ask." Translating this passage into Christian language, it reads thus: "Whom your Creator is created by is a question which you do not ask, or are not permitted to ask."

But Humboldt does not rest satisfied with insinuations and suggestions. He speaks of "the created, as that is generally termed which is or is becoming." He says explicitly: "We have neither conception, nor experience of a creation proper, as an act, or of an origin, as 'a commencement of being after not being.'" Another passage runs thus: "In the poverty of our knowledge of a genesis, and in the *figurative language* which is intended to hide this poverty, we call *the historical phenomena of changes* in the organisms new creations." The following quotation will also serve to show the preceding passage in its proper color. "The dogmatic views of past centuries continue to live only in the prejudice of the people and in certain professions, which, in the consciousness of their weakness, are fond of veiling themselves in darkness."

Still more significant are those words which, with his own hand, he wrote underneath his photograph, published in Berlin. Here he opposes the view which the enthusiastic youth takes of nature to that of the mature man. "The youth," says he "wanders through nature searching, and in awful expectancy, as through the sublime domain of God." Later, the man learns to survey the knowledge he has gained, and to compare the results he has reached. The next aim is then" (these are Humboldt's own words) "*to discover the law* in the whole of nature. Slowly, although generally at a late hour, *the long-nourished dreams of symbolizing myths disappear before the scientific efforts to comprehend nature.*" Is it possible that by these "dreams" and "myths" he could have understood anything else but those which he ascribes to the expectant youth in contrast with a scientific comprehension of nature?

But with especial emphasis does he discard that creative and ruling power, which is said to be above nature, in as far as he vindicates to the natural sciences—I again quote his own words from "Cosmos"—"a higher standpoint, seen from which *all things and all powers reveal themselves as a natural unity, animated from within.* Nature is not a dead aggregate" (in which case, as I will interpolate here by explanation, she would be in need of

animation from without)—“she is, to use Schelling’s expression, the holy, externally creating *primeval* power of the world, *which evolves and produces all things out of herself.*” Where then does this only primeval power of nature, which produces everything out of itself, leave room and occupation for another primeval power?

For the purpose of making a completely clean sweep of mysticism in the domain of natural sciences, Humboldt furthermore does away with the so-called vital powers, which he had already condemned in the previously-quoted letter to Varnhagen and in which he had formerly believed. He recants this belief, which he had formerly laid down in the “Genius of Rhodus,” distinctly and at some length in his “Views of Nature” and moreover confirms this recantation by this following passage in his “Cosmos :” “The *myths of imponderable matters and of proper vital powers in each organism* complicate and cloud the views of nature.”

Therefore no creator, no ruler, no teleology, no organic vital powers in nature, and yet — a believer in a God?

The passages, which have been quoted, and to which many others might still be added, must perfectly convince all those who are capable of judging, that Humboldt was, in the true sense of the word, an atheist and a materialist. Well informed people in Germany have long since been aware of this fact and indeed not only from his writings but also from his life. Shortly after his death, the “Ausland,” a paper of conservative tendencies, but well informed and of weight in scientific matters, which is published by Cotta, praised him in an article, in which his toleration was especially extolled and it was put down to his credit “that he had not used the weapons of his knowledge in controversy, like Galileo” for the purpose of forcing his belief upon others, but that he “left the beliefs and opinions of others untouched.” “This toleration, which found its source in the most beautiful feeling of humanity”—continues the “Ausland”—“enabled him to maintain his intimate intercourse with Frederic William IV., for it was no secret to this pious prince that he had to deal with an atheist, or if this should sound too harsh, with a materialist.”

If this assertion had not been true, would it not have been looked upon by the pious court circles in Berlin, as a wicked aspersion cast upon his pious majesty, a sort of lese majesty? But the truth was well known in Berlin. All were silent, and no one dared to provoke evidence by contradicting the assertion.

Let us finally glance at the point of view from which Humboldt judged the effluence of a belief in God—religion and its representatives. He wrote to Varnhagen in December, 1841: "Bruno (meaning Bruno Bauer) has discovered a *pre-adamite convert* in myself. I wrote many years ago: "All positive religions offer three distinct parts: a moral essay, the same throughout and very pure, a geological chimera, and a *myth or a little historical romance. This last element acquires the greatest importance.*" Returning the well known book of Strauss, he writes to Varnhagen in the year 1842: "We can learn from this book the whole religious history of the times in which we have lived, especially the priestlike cunning, with which people accommodated themselves, after Schleiermacher's fashion, to all outward forms of Christian myths, or to the peculiarities of others, 'partook of the communion-cup,' allowed themselves to be buried with an accompaniment of court-equipages (like Schleiermacher), while a so-called philosophical interpretation forged for every myth." In the same letter he indulges in pleasantries about his friend's belief in immortality in the following manner: "I pardon him (Strauss) for his apparently but small faith *in the blue things on the other side of the grave*, and perhaps I do so, because it is so much more pleasant and agreeable to be surprised, when one's expectations are not very highly wrought. For you, happy man, it is no surprise."

Occasionally Humboldt, otherwise so tolerant, will turn upon the religious sentinels of Zion, with a sharpness and unmercifulness quite remarkable. One day General von Gerlach, the well known pietist and favorite of Frederic William IV., endeavored to corner him at the royal table, by asking the question: "Your Excellency probably goes to church very often now-a-day?"

Humboldt answered immediately: "You are very kind. You desire to show the way to me, by which I can make my fortune." Things were then in Berlin as they are now: the hypocritical pietist makes his fortune, and the way through the church does not lead to heaven alone, but to offices and to the flesh-pots of Egypt. As a matter of course it is different in this Republic!

Upon another occasion, Humboldt characterized the pious seekers after fortune in this manner:—He possessed a living chameleon, of which he said that it was the only animal, which could at the same time look upward with one eye and downward with the other. The "parsons" only were capable of imitating this trick, since they "keep one eye looking towards heaven, while the other is looking towards the good things and the advantages of this earth."

We will be charitable enough upon this occasion not to form our judgment according to the testimony of Humboldt, and if any of the colleagues and fellows of those, whom, with unwonted severity, he terms "parsons" (German, *Pfaffen*), participate in the festivities of this day, we will presume that they are disposed to become thoughtful in view of the example set by the great philosopher of nature, and that they are willing to follow in his footsteps. They have so often assured us, that only *half* thinking and *half* knowledge leads away from faith, but that the *whole* of these leads back to it. Very well, then! Let us hope that Humboldt, the all-knowing and all-thinking, may induce them to reconsider their assertion! If any man was ever fit to serve as a test of this assertion, it certainly was that man, at whose celebration they have assisted to-day. Let them turn, like Humboldt, to the source of all truth, to nature, if it is truth which they care for, and let them put the weight of scientific facts and of rational conclusions into the balance, against the weight of dogmatic precepts and of the phantasies of belief. But, if even by this process, their present convictions should not be altered, they will at least be forced to answer the question, whether mere condemnation and persecution are the means of refuting the searching intellect and of

destroying the results of the life-long study and thought of one of the greatest minds of the human race. And, indeed, condemnation and persecution, without examination and refutation, have so far been the only weapons with which the liberating spirit has been met in this free country, that spirit which found its impersonation in Humboldt, and still finds it in thousands of those congenial to him. Let us couple the homage, which we are offering to this spirit to-day, with a protest against that light-shunning narrow-mindedness, which closes the ear cowardly against its reasons, and which believes that it must and can banish it by ignorant attacks and by means of coercion. What would those say, who are celebrating Humboldt's name, without examining his thoughts, what would they say to the discovery, that the consequences of their tendencies and of their laws must of necessity remand this honored man from the shining pedestal of fame upon which they have placed him into the dark cells of their prison? Boston Music Hall is but a few steps away from the Boston Court-hall. It would be far easier for a puritanical accuser, than for a German radical, to represent the author of "Cosmos" as an atheist. If this state intended to solemnize a truly noble Humboldt celebration, there would be no nobler way of doing it than by abolishing the disgraceful law which would have threatened the veritable Humboldt, and does now threaten all those who share his views with an imprisonment of two years. It does not matter whether this mediæval law, to which nearly all educated Germans and, first of all, the ornaments of modern science are amenable, it does not matter whether it is executed or not—its simple existence is a shame for Massachusetts, which stands at the head of the intellectual development of this great Republic. What does intellectual development mean without truth—the whole truth? But the whole truth can subsist only where it is upheld by full liberty, and full liberty only where it is upheld by the whole truth. There is no dangerous truth in the world; why then should it be necessary to guard society against it? It is quite conceivable that the rulers "by the grace of God" should guard their protector by

penal laws ; but where the “ grace ” has been abolished, it is but natural that he also should be left to his fate, from whom it is said to emanate.

What significance would this festival have, if all those who participate in it to-day, were to honor in Humboldt, not only the great man of learning and the great natural philosopher, but also the enlightener and liberator of minds? They would declare by this fact that civilized mankind had at last discarded the tyrannizing superstition, which has, until now, filled nature with horrors and the breasts of men with a fanatical religious hatred towards each other ; that the human intellect is sovereign and that there exists no other in the world to which it must defer ; that nature, of which man is the free son, offers herself up to him as the willing object of his investigations, and that she does not oppose him as a menacing power, ever ready to humiliate him ; that in her laws, which are in harmony with the laws of his reason, he is bound to recognize the only guide for his actions, and that in her immeasurable domain no aims can be hidden, to which he must sacrifice his own, although there may still be many enigmas, which require solution ; that the highest to which man can aspire is not an ideal, or a condition outside the sphere of his knowledge and his life, but that it is his ownself and his own perfection upon this earth, and that, finally, the general sway of the untrammelled reason and of free humanity must be the last and noblest aim of mankind.

Now then, if these are the consequences which grow out of the philosophy of Humboldt, and which we must apply to the intellectual and moral efforts of mankind—and they are recognized by all his followers and fellow thinkers ;—if it is true that the genuine and the noblest humanity is the fruit of that “ atheism ” and “ materialism, ” which has been so often decried—what then shall hinder mankind, not only to celebrate Humboldt, but also to think and to reason like Humboldt, after it has, for so long a period, made fruitless experiments with faith and with spiritual humility? And if the Americans needed the Germans for the

purpose of discovering the true Humboldt, and if they are forced to recognize in him, whom they hold so high, a true representative of German intellect—then indeed may this intellect, and the language in which it expresses itself, expect to find, in the interest of humanity, a more careful consideration and a higher valuation, than it has so far found, in consequence of the general almost exclusively material tendencies, and of a state of mind which is devoted only to that which promises immediate pecuniary profit. Let them consider what Humboldt himself says of the spirit prevailing here. “In the United States,” thus he writes to Varnhagen in 1854, “there has indeed sprung up a good deal of love for me, but everything there offers to me the sad sight that liberty is only a mechanism in the element of utility, but little ennobling there, or quickening the intellect and the affections, which ought to be the object of political liberty. Consequently apathy in regard to slavery.” Well, slavery has since been abolished by force of circumstances, not on account of its evil, but because it had ceased to be “useful” and was in every way beginning to be mischievous. But that there exists a species of *intellectual* slavery, much more degrading and pernicious than bodily slavery, since it is the mother of all others, is a truth far more thoroughly understood by the countrymen of Humboldt, than by the majority of their American fellow-citizens, which latter do not only look upon every species of intellectual stupefaction with the same apathy with which they used to look upon slavery, but who will even willingly subsidize it, if for some momentary party or other aim, it should appear “useful” to them. The “usefulness” of intellectual slavery will revenge itself as bitterly in times to come as the “usefulness” of bodily slavery has already revenged itself.

The motto chosen for my discourse was a sentence by Humboldt regarding *truth*. I am of opinion that we cannot honor his memory more fitly than by allowing that light which we have kindled at his flame to send its rays freely in all directions, even if his own weaknesses should be lighted up thereby. As an astronomer, Humboldt observed not only the sun’s lustre but also

the spots upon its surface. Even the faults of great men are instructive. The admiration of their excellences must not blind us to their failings ; and the truth, which recognizes no authority, must not be silenced even by an authority. If a feeling of regret mingles with the homage which we are offering to the intellect of Humboldt, it is this—that we cannot offer the same homage to the strength of his character. And it is so much the more our duty to give expression to this regret as it concerns a weakness to which so many great intellects have been exposed. We cannot concede the privilege of denying their true tendencies, or of keeping them secret, for the sake of outward restraints or advantages, to those who are best enabled to benefit mankind by reason of their endowments. The courts of princes have ever been the centres of attraction for great intellects, who, in spite of the superiority of their judgment, found an excuse for debasing themselves to the level of subjects and of tools in the hands of powerful idols, in the admiring submissiveness of the masses. The pretence that by thus acting they gained the opportunity of influencing those in power cannot serve as an excuse, for their princely patrons have invariably used them as ornaments to their courts, and as a means to attain their own ends. This is true above all of the poets. Did princes ever look upon the muses in another light than in that of intellectual mistresses? The great poets willingly abandoned their muses. Goethe, the great poet and small minister, who reverently bowed his luminous face before every knave whose breast was decorated with an order, from the tyrant Napoleon down to the tyrant Metternich,—Goethe felt himself happy and honored whenever an opportunity offered for prostituting his genius by solemnizing some court festival. And the great Schiller, who succeeded in obtaining a pension from a prince, disgraced himself, in spite of his revolutionary tendencies, by extolling kingcraft : —

“Poets and kings should e'er go hand in hand,
Since both upon the heights of life they stand.”

Would not both of our great poets be doubly great if their

principles had kept them aloof from the air of courts; and if, in obedience to the promptings of their nature they had maintained their character as independent men?

Men of science and of philosophy, however, have abased themselves no less than poets. History even exhibits a whole line of *court-philosophers*; but, in spite of all “cunning of the idea,” not one of them has succeeded in making a philosopher out of a man “by the grace of God,” all the way from Plato, who tried the power of philosophy in Sicily, or from Aristotle, who tried the same thing in Macedon, down to Hegel and Schelling, who demonstrated its adaptability in Berlin.

And what did Humboldt gain, he who, with the man of science did not only unite the philosopher but also an admixture of the poet? What did he gain by honoring with his friendship a king who showered distinctions upon him, with the view of making a name for himself? Did the favors, which his influence secured to talents now and then, to poor pensioners, and partly to science, counterbalance one cringing bow, by which the republican-minded cosmopolitan subjected himself to the tyrannically-minded king, the exact thinker to the confused romanticist, the humane atheist to the odious pietist? How proud a figure would not the author of “*Cosmos*” be had he recognized the earthly divinities no more than the heavenly! And does it not strike you, as if you saw a brand of infamy upon a noble face, when you find recorded “in deepest devotion” upon the first page of that celebrated book, the name of the man who driven into imbecility by the three-fold exertions of the tyrant, the pietist, and the drunkard, washed “his royal face” with maccaroni-soup, under the eyes of “the vicar of God upon earth”? The intellectual hero, who conquered for himself the key of the universe, should have disdained to be distinguished by the key of the royal chamberlain. Not for the purpose of accusing him shall we couple such reflections with our expressions of esteem, but we shall do so as a warning, and with a feeling of sorrow. He has himself felt, and has borne witness to, the sacrifices which his false posi-

tion imposed upon him. In his letters he laments "the sultry evening air," which made his existence in the atmosphere of the court uncomfortable towards the evening of his life. Yet, he who will allow the sun of "grace" to shine upon him has, properly speaking, no right to complain of the vapors it generates. The Nemesis which does not lose its quickness of sight even in the midst of these gloomy vapors has indeed prepared for him the same fate which called forth his derision in the case of the parson Schleirmacher, namely, "to be buried with an accompaniment of court equipages."

"We owe the truth to those only whom we esteem highly." If this principle is correct, then we certainly do owe the truth to the man whose achievements have to-day called forth our reflections. And this debt we shall pay partly by combatting his principle. We should confine the effect of truth to but very few opportunities if we uttered it only in the presence of those whom we esteem highly; and if we were forced to bid it be silent just at those times, when to proclaim it would be most necessary. To men less noble than Humboldt his principle would serve as a welcome shield to cowardice and hypocrisy, and these have already pretexts enough for playing their pernicious game. No, let us not wait for an opportunity to tell the truth, until an opportunity offers to be filled with regard. *Confidence*—if *this* be the sense of Humboldt's remark—we do owe indeed to those only who deserve it: but *the truth* we owe to the whole world!



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