82.

John Herschel an Humboldt.

Collingwood, 21. Dec. 1843.
Hawkhorst. Kent.

My dear Baron,

It is now a considerable time since I received your valued and most interesting work on Central Asia, which I should have long ago acknowledged, but that I was unwilling and indeed unable in proper terms to thank you for so flattering and pleasing a mark of your attention, till I had made myself at least in some degree acquainted with the contents. This however the continued pression of occupations which leave me little time and liberty for reading has not yet allowed me to do otherwise than partially — and in fact is a work of such close research that I despair of ever being able fully to master all its details. In consequence, I have hitherto limited myself chiefly to the Climatological researches in the third volume and especially to the memoir on the causes of the flexures of the Isothermal lines which I have read with the greatest interest and which appears to me to contain by far the most complete and masterly coup-d'oeil of that important subject which I have ever met with. In reading this and other parts of your works on this subject and of the „Physique du globe" in all its departments — that which strikes

me with astonishment in the perfect familiarity and freshness of recollection of every detail which seems to confer on you in some degree the attribute of ubiquity on the surface of this our planet — so vividly present does the picture of its various regions seems to be in your imagination and so completely do you succeed in making it so to that of your readers.

The account of the Auriferous and Platiniferous deposits in the Ural and the zone in 56 lat. has also very much interested me as well as the curious facts respecting the distribution of the Grecians germs in those regions. I could not forbear translating and sending to the „Athenaeum" (the best of our literary and scientific periodicals) the singular account of the „monstre" of Taschkow Targanka — (citing of course your work as the source of the history) — in vol III. p. 597.

The idea of availing ourselves of the information contained in the works of Chinese geographers for the purpose of improving our geographical knowledge of Central Asia, appears to me as happy as it is likely to prove fertile — especially now that the literature of that singular country is becoming more accessible daily by the importation of Chinese books. — What you have stated respecting the magnetic chariots and hodometers of the Emperor Tching-wang — if you can entirely rely an your authority gives a far higher idea of the ancient civilisation of China than any other fact which has yet been produced.

In a word, I must congratulate you on the appearance of this work as on another great achie-

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vement — and if — as fame reports — it is only the forerunner of another on the early discovery of America — it is only another proof that your funds are inexhaustible! May you have many years of health and strength granted you to pour them forth — and may each succeeding contribution to our knowledge afford yourself as much delight in its production as it is due to do your readers in its perusal.

Miss Gibsone writes word that you have more than once enquired of her when my Cape observations will appear. No one can regret more than myself the delay which has taken place, but it has been unavoidable as I have had every part of the reduction to execute myself and the constuction of the various catalogues, chartes, and minute details of every kind consume a world of time quite disproportioned to their apparent extent. However I have great hopes of being able to get the considerable portion in the course of the next year, into the printers hands. — Some of the Nebulae are already in success of engraving. Perhaps the subject which has given me most trouble is that of the photometric estimation of the magnitudes of Southern stars and their companions with the Northern ones. — A curious fact respecting one of them 7 Argus has been communicated to me from a correspondent in India. — Mr. Mackay — viz; that it has again made a further, great and sudden step forward in the scale of magnitude (you may perhaps remember that in 1837. 8 it suddenly increased from 2. 1 m to equal α Centauri) — In March 1843 according to Mr. Mackay it was equal to Canopus. „α Crucis", he says „looked

quite dim beside it.“ — When I first observed it at the Cape it was very decidedly inferior to α Crucis.

Believe me, my dear Sir, ever yours most truly

J. F. W. Herschel.

I must not forget to wish you a „merry christmas and many happy returns of the season“ in English fashion.

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