

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE.

I CAN not more appropriately introduce the *Cosmos* than by presenting a brief sketch of the life of its illustrious author.* While the name of Alexander von Humboldt is familiar to every one, few, perhaps, are aware of the peculiar circumstances of his scientific career and of the extent of his labors in almost every department of physical knowledge. He was born on the 14th of September, 1769, and is, therefore, now in his 80th year. After going through the ordinary course of education at Göttingen, and having made a rapid tour through Holland, England, and France, he became a pupil of Werner at the mining school of Freyburg, and in his 21st year published an "Essay on the Basalts of the Rhine." Though he soon became officially connected with the mining corps, he was enabled to continue his excursions in foreign countries, for, during the six or seven years succeeding the publication of his first essay, he seems to have visited Austria, Switzerland, Italy, and France. His attention to mining did not, however, prevent him from devoting his attention to other scientific pursuits, among which botany and the then recent discovery of galvanism may be especially noticed. Botany, indeed, we know from his own authority, occupied him almost exclusively for some years; but even at this time he was practicing the use of those astronomical and physical instruments which he afterward turned to so singularly excellent an account.

The political disturbances of the civilized world at the close

* For the following remarks I am mainly indebted to the articles on the *Cosmos* in the two leading Quarterly Reviews.