

which such a work must be presented, if it would aspire to the honor of being regarded as a literary composition. Descriptions of nature ought not to be deficient in a tone of life-like truthfulness, while the mere enumeration of a series of general results is productive of a no less wearying impression than the elaborate accumulation of the individual data of observation. I scarcely venture to hope that I have succeeded in satisfying these various requirements of composition, or that I have myself avoided the shoals and breakers which I have known how to indicate to others. My faint hope of success rests upon the special indulgence which the German public have bestowed upon a small work bearing the title of *Ansichten der Natur*, which I published soon after my return from Mexico. This work treats, under general points of view, of separate branches of physical geography (such as the forms of vegetation, grassy plains, and deserts). The effect produced by this small volume has doubtlessly been more powerfully manifested in the influence it has exercised on the sensitive minds of the young, whose imaginative faculties are so strongly manifested, than by means of any thing which it could itself impart. In the work on the Cosmos on which I am now engaged, I have endeavored to show, as in that entitled *Ansichten der Natur*, that a certain degree of scientific completeness in the treatment of individual facts is not wholly incompatible with a picturesque animation of style.

Since public lectures seemed to me to present an easy and efficient means of testing the more or less successful manner of connecting together the detached branches of any one science, I undertook, for many months consecutively, first in the French language, at Paris, and afterward in my own native German, at Berlin (almost simultaneously at two different places of assembly), to deliver a course of lectures on the physical description of the universe, according to my conception of the science. My lectures were given extemporaneously, both in French and German, and without the aid of written notes, nor have I, in any way, made use, in the present work.