

The less regular distribution of masses of light gives to the zone of the southern sky situated between the parallels of 50° and 80° , which is so rich in crowded nebulous spots and starry masses, a peculiar, and, one might almost say, picturesque character, depending on the grouping of the stars of the first and second magnitudes, and their separation by intervals, which appear to the naked eye desert and devoid of radiance. These singular contrasts—the Milky Way, which presents numerous portions more brilliantly illumined than the rest, and the insulated, revolving, rounded Magellanic clouds, and the coal-bags, the larger of which lies close upon a beautiful constellation—all contribute to augment the diversity of the picture of nature, and rivet the attention of the susceptible mind to separate regions on the confines of the southern sky. One of these, the constellation of the Southern Cross, has acquired a peculiar character of importance from the beginning of the sixteenth century, owing to the religious feelings of Christian navigators and missionaries who have visited the tropical and southern seas and both the Indies. The four principal stars of which it is composed are mentioned in the *Almagest*, and, therefore, were regarded in the time of Adrian and Antoninus Pius as parts of the constellation of the Centaur.* It seems singular that, since the figure of this constellation is so striking, and is so remarkably well defined and individualized, in the same way as those of the Greater and Lesser Bear, the Scorpion, Cassiopeia, the Eagle, and the Dolphin, these four stars of the Southern Cross should not have been earlier separated from the large ancient constellation of the Centaur; and this is so much the more remarkable, since the Persian Kazwini, and other Mohammedan astronomers, took pains to discover crosses in the Dolphin and the Dragon. Whether the courtly flattery of the Alexandrian literati, who converted Canopus into a *Ptolemæon*, likewise included the stars of our Southern Cross, for the glorification of Augustus, in a *Cæsaris thronon*, never visible in Italy, is a question that can not now be very readily answered.† At the time of Claudius Ptolemæus, the beautiful star at the base of the Southern Cross had still an altitude of $6^{\circ} 10'$ at its meridian passage at Alexandria, while in the present day it culminates there several degrees below the horizon. In order at this time (1847) to

* Compare the researches of Delambre and Encke with Ideler, *Ursprung der Sternnamen*, s. xlix., 263 und 277; also my *Examen Crit.*, t. iv., p. 319-324; t. v., p. 17-19, 30, and 230-234.

† Plin., ii., 70; Ideler, *Sternnamen*, s. 260 und 295.