

Standard Passage, Dec. 22, 1884

My dear Sir,

I have this long time forbore writing - not so much because my hands have been very full, tho' that is quite true - as because I thought yours would be so - and I did not know your College address - & had nothing to say interesting enough to call for a forwarded letter. But now that, as I presume, you have returned, and are again enjoying the pleasures of home, I must send a few lines to say how glad I shall be - and Mr. Webb also, to hear something of your progress - how you like the University, what fresh paths of knowledge have opened out before you; - and in fact anything that you like to tell us, for we shall be sure to be interested in it. I wish you could come & tell us viva voce, but of that, I fear, there is no prospect just now. We have been going on much as usual - with a great deal to be thankful for as to health & many temporal comforts - and as usual ~~not~~ also rather more to do than is always convenient. A Confirmation held at my Church, & the marriage of two dear friends from this house, took up much time & attention. In scientific matters there has been some little progress. ~~I had but I forget whether I told you at Bath~~ about Mr. Little's & such specula which I had been testing for him. Mr. Benthon took one, which he has carried with him - on a lovely stand of his own invention, to Malaga, whither he has taken Mrs. B. for her health during the winter - He had, I have been often sorry to think - to sail during miserable weather, & against a tremendous head-wind - & she must have been very unfit for such a trial. I am anxiously expecting to hear from him shortly. - Another of those specula has been sold to an artist amateur near Yarmouth. In the mean time Mr. Little had polished one of 8.75 inches to only 68 inches (I think) focus, which he found beat all previous results - & which as I saw performed admirably upon his test-dials. And this I was to have had over here to test it & use it during the opposition of J, when, as I had been asked by Mr. Lockyer to co-operate in a grand attack upon

that plan. I hoped to find it eminently useful, & to be  
-fore Lockyer & Phillips instrumentally this time, as I <sup>be</sup> was <sup>be</sup> much  
in 1862. But it was unluckily mounted upon the stand of the  
& the purchaser of the latter, a red-hot amateur, would hear of no  
lay, & it was obliged to be dismounted & lie idle for the present  
still hope, however, to make acquaintance with it some day. - There  
had a visit from an amateur achromatic Obj. maker, the Rev. R.  
Crowe of Huddersfield - who came all that long way gladly to see  
good sized Obj. of high character, & who was quite delighted with  
he saw - He had but two or three nights to be here, & the weather  
pitiously unpromising, but one night it cleared off, as if on purpose  
& we had unusually fine definition. He appeared to be a good man  
& we had much interesting talk, not only on that subject. As an op-  
tician he seems to have attained great proficiency, & as far as I can  
make out his work is superior to that of second-rate opticians, if not  
yet up to that of Cooke or Dallmeyer. He has I think he saw  
some 30 pair of tools. He pointed out to me that the centring of  
my Obj. in the tube, which I never considered as more than an ap-  
proximation, was much more "out" than I suspected, & I have to as-  
cribe to that, some botheration of vision which I have thought at-  
spheric or depending on the temperature of the tube. And the next  
thing to be told is, that tho' this was several weeks ago, I have  
(must I tell you?) never centred it to this day! - Then did I  
tell you that Mr. Buckingham very generously made me a present  
of a beautifully made apparatus, something resembling a tangent screw  
on a large scale, for steadying my rickety stand in R.A. and this  
has never been properly fitted on, to this day! I trust your ar-  
rangements, scientific or otherwise, will never be conducted on a  
similar plan! - Then I have had a disappointing letter from Mr.  
Lockyer, whom I regard as the Conspicuous of our Marshall work,  
telling me that through indisposition & over-employment he had  
been able to do hardly anything! - and this

more encouraging notice from Mr. DeLakue, who has very obligingly  
examined Mr. Berthou's little Transit Invention at Somerset House, where  
it was left, & thinks well enough of it to ~~recommence~~ mention it to  
Smith & Breck, tho' I fear it will not prove a paying affair. —  
And one more curious matter has turned up — a young man (who  
or what I do not know) named Herbert Inghall — whose name may be  
seen in the Astron. Register — has written to ask me about the means  
of turning a simple refractor of 6 inches aperture & 6 ft focus with  
which he has been observing, into a Diaphte. I recommended an ex-  
periment on a smaller scale, & gave some hints which he has carried  
out in his own way with very encouraging success, and with fabulously  
little outlay. It is something worth thinking about. His 3 inch Obj.  
actually divides the little star following Ptolemy (1702.VII) — & I am sure  
can be but little behind a good achromatic of that size. And this, but  
the second attempt: & costing him some 50 or 60. — There is something  
about him that leads me to think he will turn out a capital astro-  
nomer some day. — And then Mr. Knott & myself have been chasing  
H's "Extraordinary Phenomenon, 45 H.IV, a nebulous star in Gemini,  
which I perceived ~~both~~ differently from an adjacent star from its  
position as given both by H & Sm — I asked Mr. Knott to look after  
it with his grand Obj & micrometer & capital eye, & the result is  
a change of angle of ~~between~~  $\approx$  about  $7.5^\circ$  in some 30 years. There  
is probably proper motion, rather than rotation — & it ought to be ascer-  
tained whether it is in the nebulous or the clear star — if the former it  
is a very curious & unique case, amounting to demonstration that the  
star is not projected upon the nebulosity, but is the actual centre  
of it — a fresh confirmation of Huggins's discovery from an unexpect-  
ed quarter.

And now I think I have pretty well emptied my budget — & it is well  
if I have not tired you — so with my kind regards to your parents, & our  
united best wishes & compliments of the season I remain, my dear Sir,  
My father desires to add his kind regards Yours affectionately  
to best wishes, & hopes you see sitting on. — J. W. Webb.