



REGINALD HEBER A LETTER FROM INDIA

'I do not expect that with fair prospects of eminence at home, you should go to the Ganges for a mitre,' wrote Sir Charles Watkin Williams Wynn, President of the Board of Commissioners for Indian Affairs, in 1819 to Reginald Heber at Hodnet in Shropshire, but in vain. Despite a growing reputation as a scholar, a poet and writer of still popular hymns, an artist and authority on Russia, friend of Byron and Scott, given wit and irresistible charm and goodness, Heber could not resist the evangelical call. In 1823, newly consecrated Bishop of Calcutta, he set off, with wife and family, leaving behind a host of friends.

It was to them, and in particular his cousin Harriet Wrightson, that soon after his arrival the Bishop wrote a very long letter, recording his first impressions of India and illuminating its leaves with his own sketches. As a picture of the country and its peoples, depicted by a keen but sympathetic observer, it makes compelling reading, all but two centuries after it was posted home. The landscape and natural history of Bengal, the human figures, both Hindu and Islamic, as well as newcomers from Europe, are all vividly recorded. Heber, creature of his own time, is full of missionary hopes but equally fascinated by the personalities and characters of those he met. The news that he sent was probably the first to reach not just Harriet but his wider circle after his arrival. Everything about it suggests that Heber took particular care with the writing, in both senses, of his letter. For that reason, it has been reproduced in complete facsimile, accompanied by a page by page transcript of the text. Surrounding this is a brief summary of Heber's life before he went to India, and of his family, including his half-brother Richard,

the great book-collector, and his formidable widow, Amelia,

Edited by Nicolas Barker

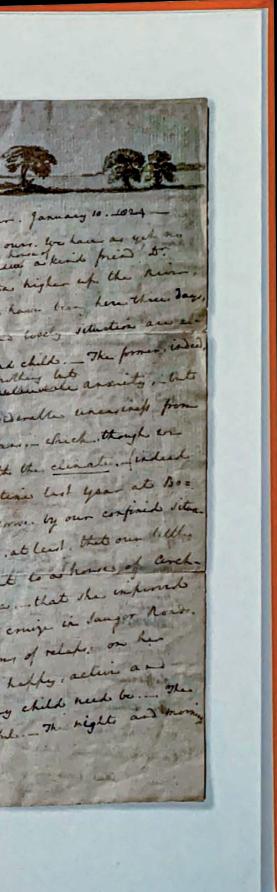
as well as an account of his travels in India up to the moment of his sudden and widely lamented death in 1826. This has been supplemented by material, Heber's commonplace book (containing poems sent him by Byron), editions of his books and books about him, his own beautiful water-colour drawings, and a fine mezzotint after the portrait by Thomas Phillips, gathered from the sales from Hodnet at Christie's in 1967. The apparatus concludes with an account of this by the editor, Nicolas Barker, senior member of the Roxburghe Club and author of *The Roxburghe Club: a Bicentenary History* (2012).

The editorial texts have been set in Monotype Caslon and printed from metal type by Stanley Lane, Gloucester Typesetting. The 'Letter' was photographed by Julian Calder and has been reproduced and offset printed by DLM Creative, Amersham. The paper is Munken Lynx Rough, made by Arctic Paper s.A. The edition is limited to 150 copies of which 40 have been bound in red levant morocco and cloth for the Roxburghe Club and 110 bound in Fedrigoni Tintoretto Ceylon Curry paper by Smith Settle, Yeadon. The design and production are by Phil Cleaver, et al consultants. The format is $11\frac{1}{2}$ x $8\frac{3}{4}$

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My Bear Hamits Tittyghur. January 10. 1024 This pretty place is not ours. We have as you such good fortune - St is the arthe use entre a kind fried Willich !- aint frusteen miles from Calcuttas higher up the rin which he has lest us for six weeks . - we have been here three and the effect of its cost breezes - quick, and lover situation are -really estremely will both in my wife and child ._ The I an hefty to say his necessaries successful while an the letter has at one time , give us considerable uncasing for a leding conflicit of her degestion organi - chick though on Katter ourselies it had alling to do with the climate finded The had something bury like it this time last you at Bor. dryddan of boar syst motoring made some by our confined situa - un to Fut William - It is certain at least , that our little guil gue better as soon as the bre sent to as hours of archdeach comes as few miles from calenter ... that she infunds get more safilly during a tendage emige in Jangor North. on board a field lefter, - shered synthems of relates on he return to the Fort, and is nor again happy, actin and - healthy as she can have been on any child need be ... clinate is at this season bery delightful .- The night and



are colibrating a clough forsty - The dur at nom though I still profe to a said of much exercise excepts in a carriago, is tenfend by a fine holdern breeze , and not more than complette to thous the are screened from it direct rays, and the evenings , from Just three to help put vie are precisely three of an English day The county mind. falentes and while the shale of Rengal is the same der fat, without any thing like a hile on even the least in--dulation of surfaces ... but shere the grapes is there is beauty , and come there ever side of we walk lead us inland , there are. may attractions in the picturesque simplicity of the integrity and their inhabitants and this magnifice to grove which isum and overlang them - Lady anderst says she shall near a considery again, now that she has seen the plants which we see with so much difficulty in pets, growing as helps : not timber : and core those the are most sensible to the beauties of English Jenny may allow that while the people. The lack , and the other now - topped trees will bear no dis scantageons com. . having with our oaks ; class a times ... the manyo and tamering approtedy surpaye is benety our waland & cherry trues, and we have helling at all answerelles to the Banyan. the Bamboo , the different species of Palas, or the plaintains, alocs, and anany by which the estrages are obnormed on the shale my care; · talin's have been much exceeded, and the mar to because the taring clourd hints in Daniel's one I servery quin to sort of when of the training, the riches and care sobri colouring of the

are cool, bracing & almost frosty. The sun at noon, though still too powerful to admit of much exercise except in a carriage, is tempered by a fine Northern breeze, and not more than comfortable to those who are screened from its direct rays, and the evenings from half past three to half past six are precisely those of an English Summer. The country round Calcutta, indeed, the whole of Bengal, is the same dead flat, without any thing like a hill or even the least undulation of surface, but, wherever the Ganges is, there is beauty, and even when our rides or walks lead us inland, there are many attractions in the picturesque simplicity of the villages and their inhabitants, and the magnificent groves which surround and overhang them. Lady Amherst says she shall never endure a conservatory again, now that she has seen the plants which we rear with so much difficulty in pots, growing as hedgerow timber: and even those who are most sensible to the beauties of English Scenery may allow that while the peepul, the teak, and the other larger round-topped trees bear no disadvantageous comparison with our oaks, elms & limes, the mango and tamarind greatly surpass in beauty our walnut & cherry trees, and we have nothing at all answerable to the Banyan, the Bamboo, the different species of Palms, or the plantains, aloes, cactus, and ananas by which the cottages are surrounded. On the whole my expectations have been much exceeded, and the more so because the tawdry coloured prints in Daniel's oriental Scenery give no sort of idea of the variety, the riches and yet the calm sober colouring of the foliage by which we are shaded.