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Copy of a Letter addressed to the Right Hon. Sir Alexander Johnston, Vice-President of the Royal Asiatic Society, by Brian Houghton Hodgson, Esq., the Hon. East India Company's Political Resident in Nepál

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Copy of a Letter addressed to the Right Hon. Sir ALEXANDER JOHNSTON, Vice-President of the Royal Asiatic Society, by BRIAN HOUGHTON HODGSON, Esq., the Hon. East India Company's Political Resident in Nepál.

MY DEAR SIR,

Nepál Residency, June 20, 1835.

During the many years of my residence in Nepál, I have been gradually accumulating materials to illustrate its "animal kingdom," especially its quadrupeds and birds. My fixed residence in the midst of these mountains, and my representative character, have, together, afforded me great facilities for the collection and continuous observation of subjects; and, I trust, I have not altogether failed to avail myself of my unique opportunities. The existing results of my research consist of a series of drawings (the birds all of the natural size), executed by two native artists, carefully trained to the strict observance and delineation of the significant parts; and of a large quantity of notes relative to the internal structure, the habits, and economy of the beings portrayed by the draughtsmen. It is my wish to publish both drawings and notes, with the patronage of some public body, and the aid of some man of science, selected by such body, and with whom I might co-operate in some such manner as Richardson did with Swainston. It is probable that I may remain here three or four years longer; and, were I speedily put into effectual communication with one of the real "ministers and interpreters of nature," it strikes me that the combined result of my local inquiries (past and to come), and of his scientific knowledge, could scarcely fail to be highly important to zoology.

There has heretofore existed a disconnexion between local facilities, and the knowledge to turn them to the best account, of which (if I mistake not) our first-rate works on natural history exhibit lamentable traces. Our collectors have either been wholly inexpert in science, or else, rapid passengers through the field in which they had to reap; and whether, in the latter case, they have subsequently worked up their own materials in Europe, or, in the former, have transmitted them to scientific individuals or bodies at home, it is obvious that such modes of investigating *animate* nature, are necessarily subject to the most serious drawbacks. The competent local inquirer has wanted time and opportunity to observe manners, to trace internal structure, or even to delineate his subject, whilst it was fresh, and exhibiting its characteristic figure and external attributes. The mere collector has continued to forward dried skins only to Europe, whence chiefly our naturalists have been compelled to draw all the information accessible to them respecting the magnificent riches of the animal kingdom of the East! Our Jacquemonts have been few and far between; and even *they* have been too much hurried to study with effect, or to collect materials for the study of the perishable, varying, and complex peculiarities of living beings; which peculiarities (limiting our view even to the mere externals) change with age, with sex, and with season; and, consequently, require continuous attention and repeated opportunities of observation, such as time only, and local residence, can supply the means of.

Even Cuvier's "Regne Animal" is more like a hortus siccus than an actual garden: — more like a research of *inanimate* than of *animate* nature! Now, without presuming to say I could furnish the ripe and good naturalist of England with a tithe of the information he might desire and need, I *do* venture to say, that I could and would supply him with a store of facts of the highest value, which he might look for in vain from any other quarter, and which I have accumulated, and will, by virtue sheerly of the peculiar circumstances that have made me a fixed resident *for years* at this place, and have afforded me leisure at it. My drawings amount to several hundreds; and almost every subject has been again and again corrected, from fresh specimens, with a view to the mature aspect of the species, in respect both to colour and to figure. Sexual differences, as well as those caused by nonage, have been fixed and portrayed when it seemed advisable; and various characteristic parts, external and internal, have been separately delineated. In regard to the latter, whether given separately, or combined with the general form, the use of the camera has been resorted to, to insure rigid accuracy; and, when it has not been employed, the draughtsmen have been perpetually recalled to the careful exhibition of *characters* by my supervision. Whilst *abundance* of *fresh* specimens have been thus employed by my painters, I have myself continued to draw from the same source notes of the structure of stomachs and intestines; of habits in regard to food, as indicated by the contents of stomachs; and of other habits, of manners, location, and economy, derived either from observation or report. In occasionally making more extensive dissections, I have had, and shall continue to enjoy the assistance of my domestic surgeon, Dr. Campbell, whose professional education renders him sufficiently able to notice and set down the general features of anatomical peculiarity. My drawings are nearly completed, so far as they go: my notes are in daily progression; but they, too, already embrace many particulars relative to almost every quadruped or bird delineated. What has occurred to myself as the best mode of proceeding, with a view to the proper use of my materials, is, to send home the drawings and notes, duly numbered, so as to admit of easy reference between me and any person in England; and, having procured the aid of a co-operator of real knowledge and ability, to cause the drawings and notes to be submitted to him. These to be the *base* of his operations, and he to call on me for such corrections or additions to the materials as *his* science may suggest for their completion, and *my* means and opportunities seem to warrant the expectation of realising within a definite period. The whole to be published under his superintendence, and with such aid from me in working up descriptions as he may desire or need.

In the field of illustration, I have been anticipated by Hardwicke and by Gould; but, if there be any truth in the foregone remarks, my drawings will still possess a value independent of novelty. The other field is still almost all my own; and, as the illustrations, even when not new, would be required to complete the text, so the novelty of the text might well be allowed to warrant the publication of the whole of the illustrations, due reference being had to the superior correctness of the latter. I am willing to be the drudge of science, through the medium of one of her true ministers and interpreters; nor do I seek any honour that shall not properly belong to me — any share in the work which *such* a co-operator shall not *seek* and *desire* at my hands. But with any *common* editor

I would not choose to co-operate, it would not serve the purpose I have in view ; and I dread a vulgar reputation in such matters ! Pardon me, sir, but the pride, I hope, is a just one, and, at all events, is an invincible one. With such views and aims, I naturally turn to Sir Alexander Johnston, whose patronage of all sorts of Oriental science does him so much honour, and the Society over which he presides. My notes and drawings have cost me much, in every sense ; and, I am ready to be at the further expense of sending them home, together with any number of specimens that may be required. I am ready, too, to aid the publication with a donation of two or three thousand rupees. But I am told by the expert in such matters, that the publication of coloured drawings is most expensive—the sale very limited—and that, in a word, the thing is impossible, without the efficient patronage of some public body. The drawings, as the work of a native artist ; the notes, as germane to Indian science, may, perchance, seem worthy of your powerful protection, which, whether it were afforded through the Royal Asiatic Society, through intercession with the Honourable Company, or through other channels, might still be very efficiently given ; and, should Sir Alexander Johnston honour the work with his aid, I would beg to refer him to my relative, the Dean of Carlisle, who, as a member of the Zoological Society, I have sought to interest in the matter. Sir Alexander will, I am sure, pardon the seeming liberty of this reference, arising, as it does, out of the obvious necessity of the case. I am a distant stranger, and cannot presume to trouble him with the direct tender of a huge portfolio of drawings.

Some of the drawings have already been sent home ; the rest will follow in December next ; and the notes and specimens but await the promise or prospect of such co-operation as I seek. To any public body capable and willing to furnish me with such a co-operator as I require, and to usher the work into the world, I would offer the inducement of making their museum the ultimate depository of all my collections, actual and future, till I return home myself ; and, whether I advert to the munificence of my honourable masters, or to the abilities of the Curator of their Museum (Dr. Horsfield), I cannot help thinking, that were my purpose* properly stated to the East India Company, I might procure from them both the scientific aid, and the patronage of the work, which I so much need ; and which, I fear, it is out of the way of the Royal Asiatic Society to afford me, even though my purpose seemed worthy of its countenance.

But Sir Alexander Johnston, personally, is able to prop my undertaking by his influence and recommendations ; and, perhaps, it may not seem unworthy of him to interest himself in the matter, in such way as shall appear most fitting to himself, and most likely to effectuate the end in view.—I remain,

My dear Sir,

Your faithful servant,

B. H. HODGSON.

* That purpose is, in a word, to marry opportunity to skill—to effect such a union of local facilities with the ability to turn them to account, as is at once in the highest degree *needful and difficult* in regard to researches into the phenomena of *animate* beings.