

L I F E  
 OF  
 R E G I N A L D H E B E R.

CHAPTER I.

*Family of Heber—birth of Reginald Heber—Anecdotes—Early education—School—“Prophecy of Ishmael”—Correspondence at Neasdon—Letter on Church stipends and government—Entrance at college—“Carmen Seculare”—All Souls mallard feast—Correspondence at Oxford—Imitation of a poem by Robert Duke of Normandy—Lines on alchemy—Recitation of “Palestine”—Anecdote—“Honour its own reward”—Death of Mr. Heber—Election to All Soul’s college—“Sense of Honour.”*

THE family of Heber, or Hayber, as the word appears from some original papers in Bolton Abbey to have been formerly written, and is still vulgarly pronounced, is of considerable antiquity in the county of York, and is supposed to derive its name from a hill in Craven, called Hayber or Haybergh<sup>1</sup>. The estate of Marton, originally purchased from its ancient owners of that name, by Thomas Heber, was, for many generations, the residence of his descendants, and is still in the possession of Richard Heber, Esq.

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Reginald Heber, second son of Thomas Heber and Elizabeth Atherton, his wife, was born in the year 1728. On his elder bro-

<sup>1</sup> Whitaker’s History of Craven.—In Elizabeth’s reign, an official certificate was granted from the Herald’s College, to Reginald Heber of Marton, of the arms acknowledged to have been previous borne by the family, viz. “party per fess B and G, a lion rampant, Or; in the dexter chief point a cinquefoil A. Crest, out of a ducal coronet, Or, a woman’s head and shoulders proper, in profile, crined Or.”

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ther's death, without heirs male, he succeeded him as lord of the manors, and patron of the rectories of Marton, in Yorkshire, and of Hodnet, in the county of Salop, which last estate had, by intermarriage with the house of Vernon, come into the possession of the family. He married first, Mary, co-heiress of the Rev. Martin Baylie, rector of Wrentham, in Suffolk, who died, leaving one son, Richard, late M.P. for the University of Oxford; secondly, Mary, daughter of Cuthbert Allanson, D.D., by whom he left three children, Reginald, Thomas Cuthbert, and Mary.

Reginald, the lamented subject of this memoir, was born April 21st, 1783, at Malpas, in the county of Chester, of which his father was for many years co-rector. His early childhood was distinguished by mildness of disposition, obedience to his parents, consideration for the feelings of those around him, and by that trust in God's providence which formed, through life, so prominent a part of his character. When little more than two years old, he was dangerously ill with the hooping-cough, for which he was ordered to be bled: his mother took him on her knees, saying, "Dr. Currie wishes you to lose a little blood; I hope you will not object:" his answer was, "I will do whatever you please, mamma." On the nurse screaming out that they were going to murder her child, "Poor ——," Reginald said, "let her go down stairs." The apothecary then took hold of his arm, on which he exclaimed, "Do not hold me;" when assured that if he moved, he would be much more hurt, "I won't stir," he replied, and steadily held out his arm, looking the whole time at the operation.

The following year, when travelling with his parents in a very stormy day, across the mountainous country between Ripon and Craven, his mother was much alarmed, and proposed to leave the carriage and walk. Reginald, sitting on her knee, said, "Do not be afraid mamma, God will take care of us." These words spoken, as she herself expressed it, "by the infant monitor, carried with them conviction to her heart, which forty-three years of joy and sorrow had not effaced." In 1787, he had an attack of inflammation of the lungs, and was very dangerously ill; the severe reme-

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dies to which he was forced to submit, were borne without a murmur, and his patience was so remarkable, that on his father asking the physician whether there was any hope of saving his life, Dr. Currie answered, "If he were not the most tractable child I ever saw there would be none; but I think he will recover." In childhood he suffered much from inflammatory disorders; the hours of convalescence were invariably employed in endeavouring to acquire information; and at six years old, after an attack of typhus fever which again nearly brought him to the grave, the first indulgence for which he pleaded was to learn the Latin grammar, that he might have some employment while lying in bed. He could read the Bible with fluency at five years old, and even then, was remarkable for the avidity with which he studied it, and for his accurate knowledge of its contents. A discussion had one day, about this time, arisen in his absence between his father and some friends as to the book in the Old Testament in which a particular passage was to be found. On Reginald's entering the room, his father referred the question to him, when he at once named both the book and the chapter.

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It was by Mr. Heber's direction that the Bible was first put into his hands, in preference to any abridgment of it, in order that he might become more familiar with its beautiful language, and more ready in applying it. The memory with which he was endowed enabled him fully to profit by this system; and its effects were visible in the piety which marked his youth, and was his distinguishing characteristic through life. A trifling anecdote will serve to prove his intimate acquaintance with the Sacred Volume; when he was about seven years old a party of his young companions were amusing themselves with riddles and cross questions in the room where he was reading. His attention was attracted by the question, "Where was Moses when his candle went out?" "On Mount Nebo," was Reginald's immediate reply; "for there he died, and it may well be said that his lamp of life went out."

He very early became sensible of the necessity and importance of prayer, and was frequently overheard praying aloud in his own

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room, when he little thought himself within reach of observation. His sense of his entire dependance upon God, and of thankfulness for the mercies which he received, was deep, and almost an instinct planted in his nature; to his latest hour, in joy as in sorrow, his heart was ever lifted up in thankfulness for the goodness of his Maker, or bowed in resignation under His chastisements; and his first impulse, when afflicted or rejoicing, was to fall on his knees in thanksgiving, or in intercession for himself, and for those he loved, through the mediation of his Saviour.

He had a considerable talent for drawing, especially for architectural designs; and the juvenile sketches, almost entirely from fancy, which have been preserved by his family, bear strong marks of genius, and give promise of the superiority to which, with little or no instruction, he afterwards attained in that art. The study of natural history was also a favourite pursuit; and he was fond of exercising his powers of observation in watching the changes of insects, and the various habits of animals and birds; but the kindness of his heart would never permit him to keep any creatures in confinement, far less to gratify his curiosity at the expense of their sufferings. When his little sister had a squirrel given her, he persuaded her to set it at liberty, taking her to a tree, that she might see the animal's joy at being restored to freedom. His mind seemed never to be at rest; and occasionally, when with his playfellows, he would remain silent, absorbed in his own meditations, and insensible to every thing around him. As his memory retained the information he acquired from every possible source, so, as his understanding strengthened, he corrected the errors into which his almost unassisted researches in various branches of knowledge naturally led him. From a child he was inquisitive, always eager to obtain instruction, and never above asking the opinions of others, but with a modesty of manner, and evident anxiety to acquire knowledge, which prevented his being thought intrusive, and ensured him the attention of those with whom he conversed. To this habit, persevered in through life, he attributed much of the desultory knowledge which he acquired; and the editor has fre-

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quently heard him remark, that he never met with a person, however deficient in general attainments, from whom he could not acquire some instructive information : for he possessed the rare art of inducing people, apparently without design, to converse upon such subjects as they were best acquainted with, and on which they were, consequently, most able to appear with advantage.

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It was a common saying among the servants of the family, that “Master Reginald never was in a passion.” It is not, of course, intended to assert that he was insensible to the natural emotions of anger and disappointment, but that even in childhood he had so completely acquired the habit of subduing the outward expression of these feelings, that he was never heard to raise his voice in anger, or to use an impatient expression. Emotions of a more tender nature he had considerable difficulty in suppressing ; but from the sorrow of the boy on leaving his parents for school, to that of the man on parting from all he had early loved, to embark for a distant and dangerous country, and under all the afflictions with which his life was chequered, such was the command he had obtained over himself, that, save by a glistening of the eye, or an increased paleness, only those who were acquainted with the unbounded tenderness of his heart and the strength of his feelings, could estimate what he was suffering.

Reading was his principal amusement from the time he knew his letters ; his elder brother, to whose affectionate superintendance through life of his graver studies, he justly considered himself much indebted, used to say, “Reginald did more than read books, he devoured them ;” and when thus occupied, it was with difficulty that his attention could be withdrawn. At almost a single glance his eye embraced the contents of a whole page ; and these were so strongly impressed upon his memory, that, years after, he was able to repeat the substance of what he then read ; while such passages as more particularly struck him, were attentively perused once, and remembered through life with verbal accuracy.

Mr. Heber’s library was small ; and it was one of Reginald’s

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greatest indulgences to visit Dr. Townson, Rector of the lower mediety of Malpas, and look over his books, especially his engravings. This he was never allowed to do in Dr. Townson's absence, for, besides that he then placed little value on books after having once stored his mind with their contents, and was in consequence careless in his treatment of them, Dr. Townson was fond of answering his questions, and of giving him such instruction as was fitted for his age. His father, himself an excellent scholar, taught him the rudiments of classical learning; his application and quickness were such, that at seven years old he had translated Phædrus into English verse. The following year he was placed at the grammar school of Whitchurch under Dr. Kent; and here a singular instance occurred of that perfect power of abstraction of which his mind was capable. He had remained in the school-room one day after the usual school hours, to enjoy a new book which had just been given him, and so completely was he abstracted in it, that he was not the least aware of a "barring out," which, with all its accompanying noise and confusion, had been going on for a couple of hours round him, and of which he became conscious as the increasing darkness forced him to lay down his book.

The diffidence natural to young and ingenuous minds, and usually observed to accompany genius, was conspicuous in his character; his youthful attempts at poetical composition were kept in secret, and discovered by accident. He was fond of reading and reciting poetry, but, as a boy, had no claim to elegance of delivery; in his brother he had, however, an example which he had discernment to value; and he used to listen to his recitations with attention, and endeavour to imitate his tones and manner of repeating verses.

In 1796 he was placed under the care of Mr. Bristow, a clergyman who took about twelve pupils at Neasdon, in the neighbourhood of London. It was here that an intimacy commenced between him and Mr. John Thornton, eldest son of Samuel Thornton, late M.P. for Surry, which soon ripened into a friendship cemented by religious feelings, and by a similarity of



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tastes and pursuits : and, although in after life they were necessarily much separated by the duties of their respective professions, that friendship was preserved and increased by constant correspondence, and ever glowed with undiminished warmth in the breast of him, who, having been early removed from this world, now awaits a reunion with his friend in the mansions of bliss.

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The editor of these volumes has Mr. Thornton's authority for saying, that although Reginald Heber, while at Neasdon, may have been occasionally led into trivial errors, yet was he perfectly free from any serious faults ; and, amid the jarring feelings, and, in some instances, depraved dispositions of his school-fellows, he was the boy to whom all the well-disposed looked with deference, and the tendency of whose example was to give a tone of rectitude to the school, and to command the approbation even of those who could estimate excellence in another, though themselves incapable of imitating it.

His natural benevolence and charitableness were fostered, and, as far as possible, directed by his parents. Though much disliking cards, he would occasionally, when at home, join in a round game with his young companions, because it was the rule of his family to give the winnings to the poor ; and he was always ready to promote every plan which was suggested for such an object. Of his own money he was so liberal, it was found necessary to sew the bank notes given him for his half-year's pocket-money at school, within the lining of his pockets, that he might not give them away in charity on the road. On one occasion, before this precaution had been taken, he gave all the money he possessed to a poor man who stated that he was a clergyman, but that, having lost his sight, he lost his curacy, and his means of subsistence. This person afterwards found his way to Malpas, and from his recognition by the servant who had attended Reginald to school, this act of beneficence was made known to his parents, for of his own deeds he never boasted ; and, as was remarked by the old servant, who mentioned the circumstance, " his left hand knew not what his right hand did."

During the early part of his residence at Neasdon, he had been reading an account of the manner in which one of our African travellers had successfully parried the attack of a wild bull. There happened to be grazing in a field adjoining to Mr. Bristow's garden a bull of no very peaceable disposition. Reginald resolved on making a similar experiment with this animal, and advanced towards it, holding his hat before his face, and acting all the gesticulations of which he had been reading, fully anticipating its instant flight. On the contrary, the bull ran furiously at him, and he only escaped by jumping over some rails into the garden. In this garden was a pool of water, divided from the rails by a narrow gravel walk, into which the bull, not being active enough to turn short round like his adversary, plunged, and after floundering forwards for some time, remained sticking fast in the mud with his head not many feet from an alcove on the opposite side, in which sat, quietly at their tea, Mr. and Miss Bristow, little expecting such a visitor.

For the following account of Reginald's habits and pursuits, the editor is indebted to Mr. Thornton, who was his class-fellow during the three years they were together at Neasdon.

“Reginald was endowed by nature with a strong memory and a lively imagination, both of which had been cultivated to an extraordinary degree at the early age of thirteen, by the constant habit of employing a large part of his leisure hours in reading.

“He was not remarkable for quickness of apprehension, neither was he defective in it; but in this respect his class-fellows had sometimes the credit of surpassing him, in consequence of his frequently suffering his mind to wander to other subjects than those immediately before him.

“His superiority was however manifested by his compositions in prose and verse, but especially the latter. In his prose exercises there was a maturity of thought and a display of knowledge greatly beyond his years; and his verses were always spirited and original, or if any of the thoughts or expressions were bor-



rowed, they proceeded from sources little known to ordinary readers, and certainly not to his school-fellows. Spenser was always one of his favourite authors. With his *Faerie Queene*<sup>1</sup> in his pocket, he would sally forth on a long solitary walk, whilst his comrades were occupied with the common sports of school-boys, in which he seldom engaged. Yet he was by no means unpopular on this account. On the contrary, his invulnerable temper, his overflowing kindness of heart, his constant cheerfulness, and his inexhaustible power of entertaining his companions, secured to him the affection of all, whether older or younger than himself. In the long winter evenings, a group of boys was frequently formed round him, whilst he narrated some chivalrous history, or repeated ancient ballads, or told some wild tale, partly derived from books, and partly from his own invention<sup>2</sup>.

“ For the exact sciences, or for critical knowledge, Reginald had no taste. When asked the date of a particular event, he could seldom give it, but he always knew who were alive at the time of its occurrence, by whose agency it was brought about, and what were the important consequences that resulted from it. In like manner the structure of the ancient languages was to him a matter of secondary importance, which he attended to only as far as he was obliged by his school lessons and exercises.

“ The sense of the author was eagerly grasped at by him, but the mere scaffolding of learning he only esteemed as the means of arriving at that sense. Fond, however, as he was of acquiring knowledge for its own sake, he was not insensible to the value of literary reputation; he often spoke with admiration of the distinguished scholars of past times, and used to say, that with such examples before him, idleness was inexcusable. Reginald also

<sup>1</sup> This admiration of the “*Faerie Queene*” he preserved in his maturer years; he seldom travelled without a volume of the same copy which he had at school, to read on the road.—  
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<sup>2</sup> At a much later period he, in a similar manner, attracted his friends round him to listen to a romance of his own composition. “Tell us a story,” from any of the home circle, was immediately followed by long and ingenious histories, which the Editor now laments were not committed to paper, but were forgotten almost as soon as they were told.

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felt the stimulus of emulation in his daily studies; but there was no want of generous feeling when he happened to be surpassed. Generosity was indeed an eminently conspicuous part of his character, not only as a boy, but in every period and relation of after life. Elevated by his intellectual pursuits and pleasures above the ordinary gratifications of school-boys, he had perhaps the less difficulty in resigning his share of them whenever a competition occurred. Self-denial in such matters seemed not to cost him an effort, and I do not recollect an occasion on which that preference of self, which, till subdued by religion, is so common to our nature, was ever evinced by him. Still, though of an unusually mild and yielding disposition, he was capable of being roused by oppression, and of making a vigorous resistance against it; and I well remember an instance, when, though sure of being worsted in the conflict by the superior strength of his adversary, he fought manfully for the purpose, as he said, of teaching his opponent that tyranny should not be practised on him with impunity.

“At this early period of his life, a reverence for every thing sacred, and a remarkable purity of thought, were eminent points in his character.

“Though many of his school-fellows were habitually profane and licentious in their conversation, their example had no influence on him, whilst his own had the most salutary effect on those who, but for him, would have been too weak to resist the torrent of vice to which they were daily exposed.”

Of the progress of Reginald's studies, his letters to his friend, who left the school some little time before his own removal to college, will give the best information. His reading the Bible was not interrupted by his classical pursuits. At the time of Buonaparte's invasion of Egypt, “The Battle of the Nile” was the subject given for a school exercise in the class to which he belonged; and the following are some of the verses which he wrote on that occasion, and which he the following year designated as “The Prophecy of Ishmael.”