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Clements R. Markham

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Major James Rennell and the Rise of Modern English Geography

In this 1895 survey of the life and works of James Rennell (1742–1830), the geographer and historian Clements R. Markham (1830–1916) describes him as ‘the greatest geographer that Great Britain has yet produced’. The book was published in the ‘Century Science Series’, which narrated the lives and works of exemplars in each area of science, and Markham goes on to explain why Rennell should be the chosen representative of geography. ‘He was an explorer both by sea and land, a map compiler, a physical geographer, a critical and comparative geographer, and a hydrographer.’ Rennell is probably best remembered for the surveys of western Asia (also reissued in this series) in which he attempted to match modern to classical sites, but his professional career was spent as an army surveyor in India and Africa. Markham’s account of Rennell’s life concludes with an examination of his geographical legacy.

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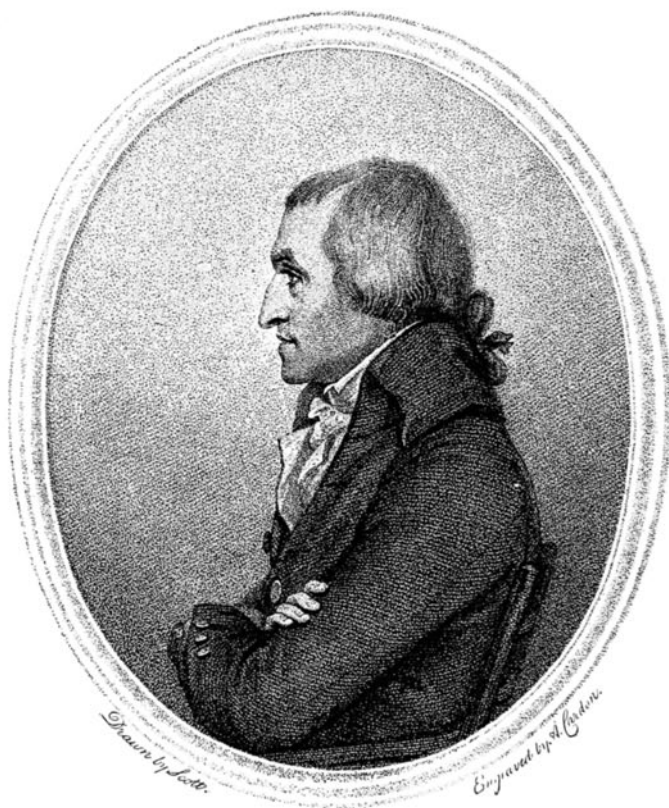
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President of the Royal Geographical Society and

President of the Hakluyt Society



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P R E F A C E.

JAMES RENNELL was the greatest geographer that Great Britain has yet produced. His pre-eminence, as Sir Henry Yule said in 1881, is still undisputed. But this is not the sole reason for selecting him as the representative of geography. He was not only the greatest, he was also the most many-sided devotee of the science. He was an explorer both by sea and land, a map compiler, a physical geographer, a critical and comparative geographer, and a hydrographer.

When the present writer had occasion to prepare a notice of Major Rennell for his "Memoir of the Indian Surveys,"* he had some difficulty in finding materials. He consulted Sir Henry Yule in 1878, who took great interest on general grounds, but especially because Rennell was the most distinguished ornament of the corps to which he himself belonged—the Bengal Engineers. The interest was renewed by the discovery of a porcelain medallion of Major Rennell at the India Office, by Sir George Birdwood. Sir Henry had it photographed, and the result was so successful that the editor of the *Royal Engineers' Journal* proposed to publish it, and requested Sir Henry to furnish a sketch of Rennell's career as an accompaniment. With his usual industry, Sir Henry

* 1871. Second edition, 1878, p. 54.

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Yule set to work to collect materials, and was so successful that he was able to contribute a very brief, but exceptionally valuable and interesting, memoir of sixteen pages to the *Royal Engineers' Journal* in 1881. He entertained a hope of utilising the materials he had brought together at some future time in a memoir on a larger scale; but that time never came.

This fuller "Memoir" is now attempted by an inferior hand; yet I am pleased to have this opportunity of carrying out, to the best of my abilities, an intention of one for whom I feel such warm regard and respect, and with whom I had held friendly and intimate relations during the quarter of a century previous to his death, in 1890. I know that he would have regarded my work with kindness and its shortcomings with considerate allowances, while he would have warmly sympathised with my object of preserving or reviving the memory of him to whom he referred as "among the *Dii majorum gentium* of scientific history."

I have received much kind assistance in my work, without which I could not have undertaken it. Mrs. Rennell Rodd—the widow of Major Rennell's only grandson—placed at my disposal her husband's manuscript volume of family history, containing numerous memoranda of great interest, several letters from India, an important letter from Sir Edward Sabine, the series of letters from Major Rennell to his grandson, and the copy of Baron Walckenaer's *éloge*, originally sent to Lady Rodd. Mrs. Rennell Rodd also lent me the Thackeray family history by Mrs. Bayne, privately printed, and containing the memoirs of Mrs. Rennell's family, with notices of Major Rennell and his children. To Mr.

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F. Edmund Langley, of Chudleigh, I am indebted for ninety-four letters from Rennell, chiefly to his guardian, the Rev. Gilbert Burrington, of Chudleigh, from 1758, when he was a midshipman, aged sixteen, to the year 1785. I have to thank Earl Spencer for allowing me to peruse several letters to his grandfather, preserved among the muniments at Spencer House, and Mr. Morris Beaufort for the use of fourteen letters to his father, Sir Francis Beaufort. Letters to Admiral and Mrs. Smyth were kindly lent me by their daughter-in-law, Lady Warrington Smyth. I am also obliged to Sir William Flower for drawing my attention to a letter from Major Rennell to Dr. John Hunter, and for lending me his copy. Mr. William Foster, of the India Office, Secretary to the Hakluyt Society, has been so obliging as to search and make extracts from the records, wherever Major Rennell's name occurs, from 1778 to 1817; and I have also examined the manuscript maps and field books at the India Office, and all Rennell's charts and plans engraved in the collections of Dalrymple both at the India Office and in the map-room of the Geographical Society.

My other authorities are the works of Rennell himself and of his critics, and the histories and memoirs of the time. Parts of the opening pages of the last chapter, giving an account of the origin of the Raleigh Club, are taken from my "History of the First Fifty Years of the Geographical Society," written in 1880.

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