

**STERNE'S ELIZA; SOME
ACCOUNT OF HER LIFE IN INDIA:
WITH HER LETTERS WRITTEN
BETWEEN 1757 AND 1774**

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by Arnold Wright & William Lutley Sclater

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ARNOLD WRIGHT & WILLIAM LUTLEY SCLATER

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ELIZA, FROM YORICK

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STERNE'S ELIZA

Some Account of her Life in
INDIA: *with her LETTERS*
written between 1757
and 1774

By
ARNOLD WRIGHT
and
WILLIAM LUTLEY SCLATER

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London:
WILLIAM HEINEMANN
1922

Introduction

ELIZA DRAPER, whose life, illustrated by her correspondence, is sketched in the subsequent pages, was born in India in 1744 and died in England in 1778 at the early age of 35. Her fame rests chiefly on her friendship with Laurence Sterne. But, remarkable as that association was in many ways, it was only a brief episode in her not long life, extending over but three months from the opening days of January 1767 to April the 3rd of the same year. The intimacy was broken by Eliza's embarkation for India, and as she did not return to England until 1774 and Sterne died in 1768 the two never met again.

Whether Eliza's friendship with Sterne exceeded the limits of Platonic affection must remain for ever doubtful, but it should be remembered in her favour that at the time of her meeting with the novelist she was only 24, while Sterne, much broken in health and prematurely aged, was even then entering upon the illness which terminated his existence. In such circumstances it is more difficult to imagine guilt than innocence, more especially when we find, as we do from Eliza's sprightly letters, that her impressionable nature was flattered by the attentions of Sterne, who was then at the height of his fame, a literary lion whose company was eagerly sought by those who occupied high social positions.

However this question of moral culpability may be decided, Eliza has a title to consideration quite apart from her intimacy with the author of *The Sentimental Journey*. Her letters—a number of which are printed in full for the first time in these pages, thanks to the courtesy of the late Lord Basing, amongst whose family papers they are preserved—show her to have possessed intellectual attainments of no mean order. She wrote with fluency and charm, and had a gift of graphic description which gives vitality to the scenes from Anglo-Indian life in the far-away days of the mid-eighteenth century in which she lived in Western India.

The period of Eliza's life in India coincided with the epoch-making change which converted the East India

Company from a trading venture into a great administrative body charged with the affairs of an Empire. Her first letter here published was written in the same year as Plassey was fought, and her final letter from India was penned in 1774, the memorable year in which Warren Hastings issued the proclamation announcing that the Company henceforth would directly administer the territories it had conquered. Many interesting sidelights are thrown in Eliza's correspondence on the important events which marked the progress of British domination as, in spite of some notable vicissitudes, it extended westward beyond the limits of Bengal and Madras. We catch vivid glimpses of the critical conflict with Hyder Ali, of Mysore, in the height of his power, and we are given an insight into the causes of the "regrettable incidents" on the British side which checked our arms and postponed the day of final conquest until long after Eliza had passed from the scene. But high as is the historic value of these intensely human documents, their chief interest will probably be found by the reader to centre in the sketches of Anglo-Indian life which Eliza so deftly draws. These, with her own dramatic life story, unfolded with almost painful minuteness in her letters, constitute a record of the manners and habits of expatriated Britons in India a century and a half since, which is equal to anything that the literature of that period furnishes.

July 1922

A.W.
W.L.S.

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Eliza from Yorick Frontispiece

Photographed from a stipple engraving by J. KINGSBURY after a picture by J. HOPPNER, R.A. It has been stated by recent writers that this is really a portrait of Mrs. Hoppner, though there appears to be no reason why Eliza Draper should not have sat to Hoppner.

Sir William James, Bt.

Photographed from the mezzotint engraving by J. R. SMITH after a portrait by SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS, P.R.A.

facing p. 36

Laurence Sterne

Photographed by Messrs. W. A. Mansell & Co. from the mezzotint engraving, after the portrait by SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS, P.R.A., now in the possession of the Marquis of Lansdowne, K.G.

facing p. 56

Guillaume Thomas François Raynal

The Abbé Raynal from an old engraving

facing p. 178



Chapter I

ELIZA'S BIRTHPLACE

“Territory of Anjengo, you are nothing, but you have given birth to Eliza. One day these commercial establishments founded by Europeans on the coast of Asia will exist no more. The grass will cover them, or the avenged Indian will have built over their ruins ; but if my writings have any duration the name of Anjengo will remain in the mind of man. Those who shall read my works, those whom the winds shall waft to thy shores, will say : ‘ It is there that Eliza was born ’ ; and if there is a Briton among them, he will hasten to add with pride : ‘ and she was born of English parents. ’ ” —
ABBÉ RAYNAL'S Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes.

Far down the Malabar Coast, seventy-two miles from Cape Comorin, the southernmost point of India, on a narrow spit of sandy soil, is an insignificant fishing village. A mere cluster of huts, squalid and unkempt, dotted about a misshapen mound of ruins, the settlement to-day is all that represents Anjengo. The massive walls of its once imposing fort are level with the dust; the “capital Government House and commodious square” of an earlier day have utterly vanished and an advancing tide of tropical growth has submerged the pathetic little plot of ground in which the old factors and writers of the eighteenth century, stricken with the rigours of a deadly climate, found their last resting place. In its desolation Anjengo suggests the lines of the Persian poet Sadi :

The spider holds the veil in the palace of Cæsar ;
The owl stands sentinel on the watch towers of Afrasiab.